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An evaluation of an independent study program in six charter alternative schools

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AN EVALUATION OF AN INDEPENDENT STUDY PROGRAM IN SIX CHARTER ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS

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by

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents: the two most selfless individuals I know.

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VITA

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ABSTRACT

Alternative education programs were designed to meet the needs of at-risk students who were not succeeding in a traditional classroom environment. This mixed-methods study examined a particular type of alternative education program—a secondary independent study program—in six charter alternative schools in Los Angeles County, California. The data included student records, field notes, and semi-structured interviews from 24 current students, their parents, and 12 teachers—selected by a stratified random sample of the population at the six sites. This study examined the participants' perceptions of the purpose of the program, their motivations to be at an alternative school, change in GPA from past to present school, the school's organization, any desired changes to the program, and their satisfaction with the independent study program.

The findings revealed how at-risk students benefit from alternative educational programs. Located at a site different from traditional schools, these schools were small, storefront spaces. They were redesigned with classrooms for these students, catered to different learning styles and interests, operated with small classes, had flexible hours, and provided for high academic requirements. All students reported and data supported that they were doing better at their current school than at their previous school: their mean GPA changed from 2.03 to 3.33. All students interviewed expected to complete a high school diploma, and 68% indicated a desire to continue to college. Due to the low teacher to student ratio of 1:6, both students and parents were able to have a close relationship with the teachers. Ninety-two percent of the students and ninety-six percent of the parents stated that they felt that their current teachers genuinely cared about them.

Students and parents were satisfied with these independent study programs. All parents expressed that they would choose their student's current school as their school of choice.

In addition, these schools focused on engaging the students through various extra-curricular activities. Students, parents, and teachers unanimously agreed that extra-curricular activities, especially student council, were an important component to these programs. Through school academics and extra-curricular activities, these students gained confidence and were motived to perform at a higher level to graduate.

KEY WORDS: alternative education, at-risk, charter school, extra-curricular activities, independent study, small schools.

Chapter 1: Problem and Purpose

Introduction

School dropout rates pose a major educational and national problem in the United States (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Balfanz, 2009; California Department of Education, 2009; Chapman, Laird, Ifill, & KewalRamani 2011; Rumberger, 2011; U.S. Department of Education, 2011, 2013; White House, 2009). A report from the White House (2009) stated that about 7,000 high school students decide to drop out each day. Three out of every ten students fail to finish high school; on average, a student gives up and drops out of school every 26 seconds (Education Week, 2010; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2014a; U.S. Department of Education, 2011). In 2010, 1.3 million students dropped out of school (Education Week, 2010). While there has been a steady decrease in student dropout rates from 7.4% in 2010, 7.1% in 2011, and 6.6% in 2012, it is a growing concern that these high school dropouts may create social concerns within neighborhoods, as they are not sufficiently prepared to become successful workers in the economy (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013a; Rumberger, 2011; White House, 2009). The quality and quantity of education of citizens is related to the economic capital of a nation (Friedman, 2007; Hanushek, Jamison, Jamison, & Woessmann, 2008).

These students may choose to drop out because they do not fit the mold to be successful at a traditional school and require an alternative model of education. Wehlange, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, and Fernandez (1989) suggested that these schools have one message for these students: "If you don't fit in, it is your fault; if you don't like things the way they are, move on" (p. 8). Educational policy has deemed these students who do not graduate from high school are at-risk (The National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). There is a need to serve these potential dropout students in our schools. The responsibility of educators is to create an

environment where students feel successful and inspired (Wehlage & Rutter, 1986). The teaching styles and practices in traditional high schools remain largely unchanged, even as the needs of students are changing (Baptiste, 1991; Young, 1990). Most traditional public high schools operate as college prep programs and have limited programs to serve students who are at-risk (Barr & Parrett, 1995). When asked why they leave school, dropout students state it is because they are not successful in school and that they do not like it (Bjerk, 2012; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986).

Thus, many educators have argued that these at-risk students can benefit from alternative educational programs (Barr & Parrett, 1995; Bucci & Reitzammer, 1992, Dewey, 1897; Hall & Handley, 2004; Morley, 1991; Peterson & Smith, 2002; Raywid, 1983; Tobin & Sprague, 2000; Tyler, 1949; Young, 1990). During the past 20 years, the number of alternative programs servicing at-risk youth has risen (Barr & Parrett, 2001; National Center for Education Statistics, 2013b; Quinn, Poirier, Faller, Gable, & Tonelson, 2006; Raywid, 1999). Due to the diverse definitions of defining alternative education programs, the precise numbers of alternative programs are difficult to ascertain. Barr and Parrett (1995, 2001) estimated that there are over 20,000 alternative programs in the United States. About 6,144 public alternative schools in the United States are recorded (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013b). The National Center for Educational Statistics (2013b) reported that approximately 627,515 students are enrolled in these public alternative education schools.

Barr and Parrett (1995, 2003) argued that alternative education schools are the most effective approach to school restructuring. These schools transform the classroom to meet the needs of at-risk students for those who otherwise would not have graduated in a traditional setting (Casey, McSwain, & Beach, 1993; Gold & Mann, 1984; Hall & Handley, 2004; Raywid,

1983; Young, 1990). Such alternative programs provide various opportunities to learn in a variety of settings as opposed to the traditional classroom setting.

Problem Statement

Alternative schools held promise with innovative options to traditional education, but the American society often views alternative education programs as second rate to the traditional high school (Conrath, 2001; Ho, 2014; Koetke, 1999; Raywid, 1999; Wehlange et al., 1989). Studies reported by Rumberger (2011) have found that at-risk students typically change schools in order to find an environment that is more suitable for their needs before dropping out. For some students, an alternative school may be their first choice in a high school, but for most, enrolling in an alternative school is their last opportunity to receive a high school diploma.

At-risk students enroll in alternative education programs for various reasons. These students did not succeed at a traditional school due to personal and contextual factors (Rumberger, 2011). At-risk students include those who are highly gifted, have health issues or are sick, are pregnant or parenting, work full-time, report being bullied, placed on probation from school or juvenile hall, or reported that the regular classroom was not an appropriate learning setting (California Department of Education, 2000; Hall & Handley, 2004; Manning & Baruth, 1994; Raywid, 1999; Rumberger, 2011).

Alternative education programs must be innovative and flexible in order to meet the various needs of students. Without changing the way alternative programs operate, the students may fail, just as they did in the traditional public school. One type of alternative education program—independent study schools—has become a popular choice in recent years. Independent study schools are designed to meet the academic needs and personal interests of the students through individualized learning plans (Barrat & Berliner, 2009). Initially, independent

study schools' purpose was to serve as a transitional program in which students enrolled to make up credits; then they transferred back to their traditional school and graduated. Observational data from a recent graduation speech by a director of instruction at a large independent study school suggest that this purpose is changing as these schools engage students more broadly (N. Vijeila, personal communication, June 3, 2014). Not only do educators focus more on schoolwork and curriculum at these schools than traditional schools, they also focus on engaging the students through various extra-curricular activities in order for the student to get the full high school experience. As a result, students are continuing to stay enrolled and opting out of transferring back to their traditional schools. Furthermore, there seems to be a shift from students feeling embarrassed that they attend alternative programs to feeling proud that they have remained in school and are on a path that leads to graduation.

Purpose Statement

The State of California's Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) is the second largest school district in the United States. LAUSD graduated 64.69% of their students in 2010, compared to 74.4% of graduates in all of California and 78.2% of graduates throughout the United States (Brown, 2013; California Department of Education, 2011; Education Week, 2013a, 2013b; Taylor, 2012). As a result, alternative schools are growing its presence to fill the needs of students in the greater Los Angeles region, the largest urban area of the state. These schools were designed to service at-risk youth and are concerned about meeting the needs of their clients — at-risk students and their parents. However, according to the Los Angeles Unified School District's *Pupil Service and Attendance Dropout Prevention and Recovery* report (2013), there is only one LAUSD alternative school placement that provides the option of independent study, the focus of this study.

The purpose of this study was to evaluate independent study programs in six charter alternative schools in the Los Angeles County. The study sought perceptions of the current students in this program, their parents, and teachers in the program. This study examined their perceptions of the purpose of the program, their motivations to be at an alternative school, the organization of the program, desired changes to the offered program, and their satisfaction in the independent study program. The researcher had permission to gather data in six charter schools that were affiliated with the Baldwin Park Unified School District. This data may be used to assist policymakers, school administrators, and teachers regarding what works in these independent study programs, as well as suggestions for future revisions.

Theoretical Basis of the Study

This study applied Tyler's (1949) rationale that raised four basic questions to assess the stakeholders' perceptions of a given curriculum:

1. What educational purposes should the school seek to attain?
2. What educational experiences can be provided that are likely to attain these purposes?
3. How can these educational experiences be effectively organized?
4. How can we determine whether these purposes are being attained? (p. 1)

The researcher investigated three groups of stakeholders: the students, their parents, and teachers from the six alternative school programs within the Los Angeles County. These groups were assessed using face-to-face interviews to secure their perceptions of key characteristics of these alternative school programs. The interviews included questions that determined successful elements and areas for program reform according to these three groups. The intent of the study was to provide beneficial information that informed alternative school programs.

Research Questions

Tyler's (1949) notable work in curriculum development provided the foundation for developing the research questions for this study (Table 1). Students, their parents, and teachers were asked questions on their perception of alternative schools.

The following research questions guided this research:

1. According to participants, what is the purpose of the school?
2. According to participants, what factors motivate students to participate at this school?
3. Do respondents perceive that the organization of the school is effective?
4. What changes are desired at this school?
5. How satisfied are students, parents, and teachers with this school?

Table 1

Correlation between Researcher's Questions and Tyler's Questions

Researcher Questions	Tyler's Questions
1	1
2	2
3	3
4	4
5	4

Significance of the Study

The findings from this study may educate society about independent study programs within alternative high schools. Although a body of research has been done regarding the pros and cons of alternative education and dropout prevention programs, little research has been reported regarding independent study programs within alternative schools.

Theoretical significance. This study selected an Outcome-Based Evaluation, and Lange and Sletten's (1995) type of alternative program was used to study the perspectives of students, parents, and teachers at alternative education programs. The researcher chose the Outcome-

Based Evaluation in order to measure the different aspects of the independent study programs in the alternative school. The study applied Tyler's summative method to evaluate the program's value to the students, their parents, and the teachers (Schalock, 2001; Tyler, 1949).

Methodological significance. The researcher developed three interview instruments to measure the students', parents', and teachers' perceptions of the independent study program of the alternative schools. These tools were pilot-tested before being applied.

Practical significance. Increased enrollment numbers in alternative education programs suggest that not all needs of students are met in a traditional high school setting, yet each year, hundreds of alternative education programs in the United States get shut down (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012, 2013b). This study can contribute to the body of research on the effectiveness of alternative education programs. This study will also serve to educate students, parents, and the community that there are other educational options available to students. The findings revealed that alternative education programs should be considered as a top choice school when students and parents are searching for a high school that meets the needs of the student. In addition, findings may be useful to support changes in school reforms, its policies, and its curriculum in school sites and at the district, state, and federal level.

This study illustrated how traditional schools may incorporate different techniques and strategies to cater to the needs of today's students. By understanding how students perceive their school, environment, and the qualities they value in maximizing their investment, we can use this information to refine schools to cater to the needs of all students. The findings from this study may help educational policy makers decipher the effectiveness of alternative education and its presence alongside mainstream education programs.

Delimitations of the Study

The following were the delimitations for this study:

1. This study was confined to six charter alternative schools in the Los Angeles County and may not represent other alternative education schools.
2. These schools used an independent study model and may not represent other independent study schools.
3. The researcher interviewed students, parents, and teachers. School administrators were not studied.
4. The time frame of the study was from November 2014 to December 2014.
5. Four students, four parents, and two teachers from each site were interviewed.

Limitations of the Study

The study had the following limitations:

1. The study was limited to the subjects who volunteered to participate in the study.
2. Perceptions of the students and parents may vary depending on the length of enrollment and involvement in the school.
3. The study was limited to students whose parents were available for face-to-face or phone interviews.
4. The study was limited to teachers who were employed during the time of the study and were employed for more than one year at their current school.
5. Perceptions of the teachers may vary depending on length of employment, location of the school, and school buy-in.
6. Secretaries or teachers selected the students to be interviewed.
7. The study was limited to students who were enrolled at the time of the study.

Assumptions of the Study

The following assumptions were considered throughout the study by the researcher:

1. The sample gathered represented the population under study.
2. Respondents to the interview answered honestly and to the best of their ability.
3. The instruments used to gather data were valid and reliable.

Definition of Terms

In order to understand the certain key terms and their meanings, these definitions were used to guide the research.

Alternative school. A school that is classified outside of the traditional school setting and offers students a different configuration, philosophy of learning, or academic importance to accommodate various student needs, interest, and learning styles (California Department of Education, 2013a)**.**

At-risk students. Students who are not likely to graduate from high school due to several risk factors such as low achievement, grade retention, behavior problems, low socioeconomic status, poor attendance, and are enrolled in a school with a large population of poor students (Slavin, 1989).

Charter schools. Public schools that may provide instruction in any of grades K-12 that are created or organized by a group of teachers, parents, community leaders or a community-based organization (California Department of Education, n.d.).

GPA. The GPA of a student is an unweighted grade point average. This is a point system that is based on grades, which count all classes the same.

Independent study. An alternative instructional approach that offers flexibility in order to meet the student's individual needs, interests, aptitudes, and styles of learning. Students work

independently and follow district-adopted curriculum that meets the district graduation requirements (California Department of Education, 2013c, 2014c).

Net promoter scale. A tool used to gauge customer feelings and satisfaction. Detractors are subtracted from the promoters to generate a number (Reichheld & Markey, 2011). In this study, detractors were scores between 0-6, passives were scores between 7-8, and promoters were scores between 9-10.

Parent. According to the California Education Code section 56028, the term parent includes biological parents, foster parents, or guardians who legally assume the parental role (California Department of Education, 2013b).

School choice. Under the No Child Left Behind Act, parents are allowed to choose other public schools if the school their child attends is not safe. School choices include: public schools, charter schools, supplemental educational services, magnet schools, homeschooling, private education, and DC choice (U.S. Department of Education, 2013).

Teacher. A teacher will be defined as the academic recovery teacher assigned to the student upon enrollment. The teacher is responsible for the student orientation, assigning of appropriate classes, giving the student their grades, and letting them know of any activities the school offers. Teachers who lead specific areas of curriculum (mathematics, English, Spanish, science) in a small group setting (no more than 20 students), will be referred to as Small Group Instructors (SGI).

For the purpose of this research, teachers will need to have their California teaching credential and have been an employee of the school as a full-time teacher for more than one year.

Summary

This research was intended to provide an in-depth study of alternative education schools and education programs, as little is known about students', parents', and teachers' perceptions of these programs. The researcher will use both quantitative and qualitative approaches to gather data.

Organization of the Study

This research was organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 contains the problem and the purpose of the study. Chapter 2 contains a review of related research and literature to provide background for this study. Chapter 3 will provide a description of the methodology used. Chapter 4 includes the data analysis and its findings. Chapter 5 contains a summary of findings, conclusions of the study, and recommendations.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Brief History of Alternative Education

> The alternative school movement in public education is a reform effort that is not supposed to exist. It seemed to come out of nowhere, and for two decades it has been denounced and discounted and often dismissed as a passing education fad. (Young, 1990, p. v)

From the beginning, alternative schools had three objectives: to change the student and their performance, to change the school and its experience, and to change the educational system by innovation (Raywid, 1999). This movement can be dated back to 1749, when Benjamin Franklin's "*Proposals relating to the Education of Youth in Pensilvania*" led to the opening of the Academy of Philadelphia in 1751, an alternative to the comprehensive grammar schools (Conley, 2002; Penn Arts & Science, n.d.).

In the 1960s, "alternatives" surfaced, first within the private, and later within the public sectors. These schools emerged throughout the nation, especially in urban and suburban communities. The main purpose of the urban alternative school was to educate the minority and poor, while the suburban alternatives aimed to innovate programs by creating and adapting new approaches to learning. Both types of alternative schools paved the road for students to receive personal attention and an individualized academic plans to meet the social and academic needs of each of the students. These schools had various purposes, including serving students who had a history of juvenile crime or offense, vandalism, or violence. Alternative schools were also a means of desegregations and dropout prevention. By the mid-1970s, numerous alternative schools were scattered throughout the country (Garibaldi, 1995; Gold, 1978; Quinn et al., 2006; Raywid, 1999).

In the 1970s and 1980s, alternative schools became a solution to many of the nation's problems and were used to carry out different aims. The free school movement gained its popularity in the 1970s and offered Freedom School that focused on student-centered and individualized environments (Aron, 2006). From 1970 to 1975, public alternative schools increased from a few hundred schools to more than a thousand schools (Raywid, 1981; Young, 1990). Both federal and state, along with private initiatives, turned to alternative schools to solve many social problems, including: juvenile crime and negligence, complying to the needs of inner-city minorities, dislike towards public bureaucracies, the abhorrence of institutionalism, school violence and defacement, racial segregation, a decline in school enrollments, unemployment amongst youth, and changes in demographics within a school (Gregg, 1998; Koetke, 1999; Raywid, 1983).

Alternative Education in Present Day

United States. Today, alternative education schools can be seen throughout the nation. Tobin and Sprague (2000) implied that the number of alternative schools in the United States has expanded due to zero-tolerance policies, an increase in violence, school failures, and changes in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Although there are no exact numbers of alternative education programs in the United States, Barr and Parrett (1995, 2001) estimated that there are over 20,000 alternative programs. It is often difficult to count these programs, as each research may view the term *alternative education* differently. While some believe it comprises all educational attempts outside of the K-12 traditional school setting, (i.e. charter schools, magnet schools, home-school, special schools, juvenile detention program, GED programs), others use it to describe programs serving at-risk students who are no longer in traditional schools (Aron, 2006). The United States reports 6,144 alternative public school programs,

compared to 88,663 regular schools (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013b). Most of these schools were developed due to a need in the community. These schools have various philosophies to meet the needs of the students and parents (Barr & Parrett, 1995, 2001).

However, despite the increasing numbers of alternative schools, there is still a negative stigma associated with them (Conrath, 2001; Ho, 2014; Raywid, 1999; Sagor, 1997; Wehlange et al., 1989). School district officials still refer to these schools for means of relocation for students struggling at their traditional schools; thus alternative schools have been stereotyped as places for unsuccessful students who are at risk of dropping out of high school (Aron, 2006; Cox, Davidson, & Bynum, 1995; Gregg, 1998; Ho, 2014; Raywid, 2001).

Alternative education programs in California. While the graduation rates of public schools in the State of California climb, there are continual reports of high student dropouts rates compared to the rest of the United States. The United States Department of Education released a list unfolding the state-by-state graduation rates of students from 2010-2011. Of the reporting states, California came in 32nd place, as 76% of students in California graduated and 74,101 students dropped out of school (California Department of Education, 2013c; National Center for Education Statistics, 2014b). In 2011-2012, California tied for 29th place, as 78% of their students graduated and 66,523 students dropped out of school (California Department of Education, 2013c; Taylor, 2012). New York City and Los Angeles, the largest and second largest school districts in the United States, lead the nation with the most non-graduates, as there are more than 40,000 dropouts from each city each year. This is largely due to likeliness that dropouts generally attend schools in large, urban districts and come from low socioeconomic neighborhoods (Education Week, 2010).

In the Los Angeles Unified School District, 64.69% of students graduated in 2010, compared to 74.4% from the state and 78.2% from the United States (Brown, 2013; California Department of Education, 2011; Education Week, 2013a, 2013b; Taylor, 2012). The Los Angeles Unified School District (2013) offers district alternative placements which include: 41 continuation schools, 11 community day schools, 2 pregnant minor schools, 1 opportunity and alternative school, and 1 independent study school. As the number of students in need of alternative education increases in Los Angeles, there is a need for additional alternative education schools.

Purpose of Alternative Education

For at-risk students, the traditional classroom is not always the best learning environment (Bucci & Reitzammer, 1992; Lehr & Lange, 2003). Morley (1991) commented, "Alternative education is a perspective, not a procedure or program. It is based upon the belief that there are many ways to become educated, as well as many types of environments and structures within which this may occur" (p. 8). Effective alternative education tailors their schools to meet the needs of at-risk students (Barrett & Parrett, 1995; Gold & Mann, 1984; Raywid, 1983; Young, 1990). Before alternative education, we thought all students learned the same way. All schools were alike, and all schools were taught using the same common curriculum in the same teaching style (Baptiste, 1991; Young, 1990). Alternative education has taught us that there is not one learning style that all students benefit from, and that some students may learn best outside of the traditional classroom setting (Young, 1990).

Alternative education programs are primarily designed to serve students who are thinking about dropping out, are at risk of dropping out, or have already dropped out of school (Peterson & Smith, 2002). There are generally three types of students who attend alternative education

programs. The first category consists of quiet dropouts, who typically remain low key and have a lack of accomplishments at school. The second are disruptive dropouts, who have a record of suspensions, disciplinary actions, and expulsions. Lastly, the third group are the high academic achievers. These students are often bored of school and tend to resist authority at school (Kennedy & Morton, 1999; McCall, 2003). While some students will return to their traditional school, many will not. These students may try to continue their education in an alternative school (Potts, Nije, & Detch, 2003).

According to California Department of Education (2013a), the goals for alternative schools are to:

1. Maximize the opportunity for students growth;
2. Generate students who have a longing to learn;
3. Uphold a learning environment that inspires motivation, time management, and pursuable personal interests;
4. Creating continuous learning opportunities for students, parents, and teachers;
5. Maximize opportunities to respond to changes in the world.

Laws and Policies Affecting Alternative Schools

Laws and policies regarding education directly affect alternative schools. From enrollments to safety concerns, these laws and policies were written to protect students and to give them a fulfilling education.

Federal gun-free schools act of 1994. Under this act, there were many zero tolerance policies that were reenacted throughout the United States. Initially, it began as a means to expel students for a minimum of one year from school who were in possession of a firearm (Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, 2012). These zero-policies have evolved and now include

fights, as well as possession of drugs or weapons (National Association of School Psychologists, 2001). According to data from the U.S. Department of Education and the Center for Safe and Responsive Schools, zero tolerance policies led to disciplinary actions, with suspension and expulsion being the most frequent form of reprimand for a possession or use of: firearms, weapons, alcohol, tobacco, or drugs, and physical fighting (National Association of School Psychologists, 2001). Due to the expulsion of these students from their current school, these policies have pushed many students to enroll in alternative education programs (National Center for Education Statistics, 1998).

Policy, politics, and law in California. Many educational reform movements have taken place to ensure quality and high standards for students. With the adoption to the California Content Standards, enactment of the Public Schools Accountability Act (PSAA), and the implementation of Common Core State standards, the state of California hopes to increase student achievement.

The California Content Standards were adopted in 1997 to bring uniformity to curriculum and learning. These content standards were designed to close the inconsistencies between different schools. The goals were to establish high academic expectations for all students at every grade level and in each academic content area by defining the skills, concepts, and knowledge that each student should comprehend (California Department of Education, 2014a; Conley, 2005)

In 1999, the PSAA passed in California. This act became the first step in leading the state to hold the students, school, and district accountable for year-to-year academic growth by requiring schools to implement Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR), which includes the California Standards Test (CST). In addition, the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE)

is used to measure knowledge in English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics for high school students. Test results make up the majority of an academic performance index (API), a numeric scale that ranges from 200 to 1000 that schools receive. Since the purpose of PSAA is to measure academic performance and growth, the API scores are reported by a base score and the growth score for the following year. Schools must meet their annual school-wide target as well as state API growth targets (California Department of Education, 2013d).

In addition to the California State mandates, federal mandates now require schools to measure effectiveness, also through student test scores (Rumberger & Palardy, 2005). Specifically, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 requires annual testing of all students in the United States and a close monitoring of school accountability ratings (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). In 2002, President George W. Bush signed the act to ensure that schools would be held accountable for student achievement in an attempt to close the achievement gap (Callet, 2005).

Although student test scores may provide a direct evaluation of school effectiveness and student learning, two related indicators may also measure school effectiveness and student learning: dropout rates and graduation rates. Alternative schools have been receiving negative feedback due to their school's accountability report. The methodology used to calculate dropout rates does not accurately measure the success of alternative education programs (Losen, 2004; Swanson, 2003). NCLB uses graduation rates as a measure of adequate yearly progress (AYP) in high schools. Traditional high schools tend to have lower dropout rates and higher graduation rates than alternative education programs since they unload at-risk youth to alternative education placements; if the student drops out, it will be attributed to the alternative education program (California Department of Education, 2009).

Alternative education requirements in California. California state law under the California Education Code (EC) alternative schools must meet these requirements (California Department of Education, 2013a, para. 1):

- Both the teachers and the students must be volunteers;
- Alternative schools of choice must be maintained and funded at the same level of support as other educational programs;
- Alternative schools and programs of choice must meet the same standards for curriculum, instruction, and student performance as traditional schools;
- The school district must annually evaluate such schools and programs.

State codes. Each state has laws and codes to regulate to protect the people. Under the California Law – Education Code (EDC), alternative schools are also represented (EDC 58500-58512).

EDC 58507. Alternative schools will serve the purpose of improving school curriculum by creating innovative techniques to improve education. Alternative schools will receive the same amount of support and funding from the district as similar schools (California Legislative Information, n.d.).

EDC 58509. An annual evaluation from the district is required. The evaluation will include testing of basic skills, barriers to student academic achievement, and input from the students, parents, and teachers (California Legislative Information, n.d.).

Positive Effects of Alternative Education

Studies have concluded that alternative education schools have positive effects on students (Kirkpatrick, McCartan, McKeown, & Gallagher, 2007; Lange & Sletten, 2002). Alternative education is effective especially to the illiterate, underachieving, disruptive, and

potential dropouts (Young, 1990). Positive outcomes of alternative programs focus on three areas: academic achievement, choice and flexibility, and changes in students towards themselves and school (Lange & Sletten, 2002).

Academic achievement. There has been a shift in academic urgency among students in alternative education schools. They now feel differently towards school and have fewer absences, their learning has improved, and most of all, they feel that their needs are being better met (Cox et al., 1995; Gettys & Wheelock, 1994; Martin, Tobin, & Sugai, 2003; Young, 1990). They are in a setting where they finally feel successful (Barr & Parrett, 1995).

Alternative education schools are "often the most effective approach to keeping students in school and helping them catch up academically and achieve high standards" (Barr & Parrett, 2003, p. 118). Alternative education provides a more positive learning environment through individualized instruction, and students feel more successful at these schools than traditional schools (Barr & Parrett, 2003; Raywid, 1983). This may be due to the noncompetitive environment that allows students to be individuals and not be compared to other students. This allows students to progress at their pace and ability level in their rate (Cox et al., 1995).

Changes in student. Students in alternative education change from within. These students are more confident, less violent and disruptive, and have a more democratic attitude (Young, 1990). They have also shown improvement in school attendance, improved attitudes, reduction of dropouts, and increased academic achievement (Barr & Parrett, 2001).

Nicols and Utesch (1998) made key correlations with motivation and self-esteem in alternative education programs. They found that students who enrolled in alternative education programs encompassed increased extrinsic motivation in the areas of peers, home, school self-

esteem, in addition to perseverance in learning. In addition, students thought that they could be successful after attending alternative education programs.

School choice. Miron and Welner (2012) stated that school choice can present matters regarding integration, innovation, and accountability. First, school choice can either diminish the separation between class, race, or special needs condition, or have the repercussions to accelerate the process of resegregation in the public school system. Second, it can allow parents to choose from innovative school choice options or a stratified, non-innovative option that is familiar, yet exclusive. Lastly, school choice reforms can promote accountability or assist in the evading of oversight.

Alternative education gives parents and students a choice to attend a school or program that best meets their needs through voluntary and involuntary participation (Barr & Parrett, 1995, 2003; Hall & Handley, 2004; Morley, 1991). Barr and Parrett (2001) wrote, "Voluntary participation seems to evoke a powerful personal commitment. Students and teachers who choose to participate in an educational alternative become personally invested in the program and protective of their environment" (p. 75). Since participation is voluntary for students and teachers, alternative education does not need to adhere to regulations of curriculum, methods of instruction, school placement based on residence, selective tracking, and assignment of teachers. Students, parents, and teachers choose to be a part of the program (Barr & Parrett, 2001; Lehr & Lange, 2003). Also, alternative education provides flexible, highly individualized programs that are designed to meet the needs of at-risk students (Aron, 2006; Barr & Parrett, 1995, 2003; Gold & Mann, 1984; Lange & Sletten, 2002).

Types of Alternative Schools

Alternative schools encompass an array of programs, settings, and structures. Alternative schools serve the purpose to meet the needs of at-risk students in an environment that is advantageous. These factors should be considered when exploring alternative education programs.

Conceptions. According to Raywid (1983), there are two conceptions of alternative education. These generalizations seem true for most alternative schools.

Formal. Under the formal definition, the author suggests:

1. Be a school or administrative cluster with its own program and members;
2. Be open to all students in the district as a school choice;
3. Be an entity that accommodates the learner's needs, interests, or parental preferences.

Substantive. Under the substantive definition, the author suggests:

1. They emphasize interpersonal relationship within the school;
2. A variety of different courses are offered that integrate themes in several fields;
3. Learning through participation or observation is stressed;
4. They may have different formats and evaluation systems for students;
5. Students are involved in decision making and are set to fewer rules and regulations of conduct.

Categories. Raywid (1994) stated that all alternative schools can be classified into three categories based on the program's goals: type 1, type 2, and type 3. Type 1 schools offer a more challenging rigor than traditional schools for all students, while type 2 and type 3 schools are means to resolve issues. Type 2 schools are generally mandatory for "forced choice" students

and type 3 schools are for socially and emotionally challenged students. Lange and Sletten (1995) created a fourth type that combined elements of Raywid's (1994) classification.

Type 1. According to Raywid (1994), these alternative schools implement innovation and creativity. The mission of these schools is to create a school with content and instructional strategies that are engaging, challenging, and fulfilling. Type 1 alternatives are extremely popular and are usually the schools of choice. These schools are likely to emphasize themes in content and/or instructional strategy and resemble magnet schools (Raywid, 1994, 1995).

Type 2. According to Raywid (1994), these alternative schools are often programs that focus on behavior modification and are often the last chance before expulsion. They are the disciplinary alternative education programs. Students are sentenced to these temporary placements. They include cool-out rooms, a longer-term placement for frequently disruptive students, and suspension programs. In most circumstances, curriculum remains the same and students are required to perform the same tasks as regular classes, with assignments designed for individual completion (Raywid, 1994, 1995).

Type 3. According to Raywid (1994), these alternatives programs are centered on remediation or rehabilitation with high-structure tasks to help mainstream students. These programs are therapeutic programs and are geared towards students who need extra help academically and/or socially/emotionally. The purpose of these programs is to help implement behavioral modifications, by teaching them compliance skills. Remedial work, along with social and emotional growth, is often emphasized (Gold, 1995; Raywid, 1994, 1995).

Type 4. Raywid's (1994) three tiered category systems is a general classification of alternative education based on literature, and not all alternative schools will fit into one of these three categories. While the needs of students are changing and the structure of alternative

education is transforming, many students and programs may fit into none or more than one of these categories. Lange and Sletten (1995) determined there was another category. These programs combine the elements with Raywid's (1994) type 1 schools, the supportive learning environment, with the remediation for students who have had behavioral difficulties. These are often looked to as second chance schools as opposed to last chance schools, as it gives students the choice to enroll in these schools.

Types of public alternatives. Not only is there a difference in the types of schools that serve these particular students, there are also an array of structural models. Since alternative education programs and schools develop in response to the need of the communities, each school may look differently. These are the common types of public alternatives:

Schools without walls. These schools offer community-based learning experiences (Raywid, 1999). Individuals within a community are incorporated in the learning, as they serve as teachers. These community-based teachers inform their students about the role they play in their community and teach them the necessary skills to accomplish their jobs (Morley, 1991; Raywid, 1999; Young, 1990).

Schools within a school. These schools are popular in the secondary level. The purpose of these schools is to provide students a smaller sized learning environment (Morley, 1991; Young, 1990). The goals of the school are to improve basic skills, improve student self-image, increase attendance, increase student individualization, improve relations, and enhance morale (Hefner-Packer, 1991). Students in this setting are able to access the resources from the parent school such as physical education programs, fine arts, vocation, and other elective classes (Chalker, 1996). Hefner-Packer (1991) described these programs as

> The school-within-a-school is semi-autonomous, non-traditional, or specialized educational program housed within a traditional school or in a separate facility that has strong organizational ties to the parent school. Students usually attend the program for a portion of the day and return to the traditional school for electives or special courses. Students who may benefit from the school-within-a- school environment include those who are poorly motivated, low achievers, behind in graduation credits, and unable to adjust to traditional structure and teaching methods. (p. 10)

Multicultural schools. Multicultural schools are aimed to serve students of various ethnic and racial backgrounds. Curriculum in these schools is tailored to emphasize cultural diversity, language, and practices. These schools are customized to meet the needs of a specific ethnic group or the cultures of many subgroups (Morley, 1991; Raywid, 1999; Young, 1990).

Continuation schools. Continuation schools are designed to provide a more individualized way of learning in a less competitive environment. Their main targets are students who are potential dropouts, students who have already dropped out, and students who are pregnant or parenting (Morley, 1991; Raywid, 1999; Young, 1990). Options for either attending day, evening, or summer classes allow students who are not attending traditional school or those who are attending traditional school but need additional coursework an option to earn units. Continuation schools include programs that cater to: dropout prevention, dropout intervention, pregnant and parenting teens, adult education, and grade acceleration (Chalker, 1996).

Fundamental schools. These schools follow strict discipline and strongly emphasize academic learning, using a “back to the basics” approach. Teachers follow a direct instruction approach (Morley, 1991; Raywid, 1999; Young, 1990).

Learning centers. Most learning centers at the secondary levels are technical or vocational and focus on career awareness or preparation. They contain different resources that meet the needs of certain students (Morley, 1991; Raywid, 1999; Young, 1990).

Magnet schools. Magnet schools were developed to focus on a theme or area of interest. Initially as a response to school desegregation, the purpose of these schools was to attract students from all racial groups. This gave students a choice to attend school based on interest and not by where they lived (Morley, 1991; Raywid, 1999; Young, 1990).

Independent study schools. Independent study is an educational alternative that responds to the educational needs, aptitudes, abilities, and interests of students (California Department of Education, 2000). This type of program tends to serve students who have difficulties attending classes (Velasco et al., 2008). Independent learning and teaching consist of three elements: the learner, the teacher, and form of communication through education. These communication devices may be in the form of print, electronic transmission, or in a different form (Moore, 1973). Moore (1973) individualized what was required from the learner: time commitment, secession of materials, and rate of learning. He classified the term of independent learning and teaching by distance and autonomy. Charles Wedemeyer described characteristics of autonomous learners that can still be applied to independent learners today (Moore, 1973):

- They like to plan ahead;
- They usually stick to a plan, modifying it as they go along;
- They organize their time to make the best possible use of time;
- They realize they can't start a new activity (learning) without giving up something else that formerly took the time now set aside for study;
- They enjoy reading, writing, listening, and discussing;

- They have open minds to learning new things;
- They enjoy questioning, testing, and analyzing;
- They are not afraid of being different;
- They like to form generalizations, look for principles, and find the basic structural ideas;
- They have developed skills in note taking, remembering, and relating;
- They work cooperatively with others, but enjoy being "on their own" in learning. (p. 668)

According to the California Department of Education (2000), independent study allows students to:

- Study at their own pace;
- Link school and to the community;
- Excel in their area of special interest and abilities;
- Achieve proficiency/mastery in basic skills;
- Be educated at home;
- Take ownership of their education;
- Have flexibility in the design of the program;
- Offer school choice**;**
- Have individualized instruction.

Characteristics of High Quality Alternative Schools

As alternative education evolves, promising positive characteristics are examined. Aron (2006) believed that there are eight key attributes of high quality alternative programs: academic instruction, instructional staff, professional development, size, facility, relationship/building a sense of community, leadership/governance/administration/oversight, and student support.

Academic instruction. It is important for alternative schools to maintain high standards and expectations for their students (Lehr & Lange, 2003; Tobin & Sprague, 2000). Kraemer and Ruzzi (2001) wrote, "There should be no question that alternative education students be asked to meet the same high standards set for students in traditional schools" (p. 43). When they are taught using an aligned curriculum with individualized instruction and optimistic teachers, students can progress. If they are grouped into slower learning tracks with low expectations from teachers, they will often show low achievement (Barr & Parrett, 2003).

Successful alternative programs have a clear vision. Their goal is to combine high academic standards with engaging and creative instruction with learning that is relevant and applicable to their life outside of school (Aron, 2006; Glasser, 1993; Lehr & Lange, 2003; Mills & McGregor, 2010). Raywid (1989) recommended that these schools should provide higher levels of thinking and innovation and be modeled after magnet schools.

Like teaching styles, students also have different ways they learn (Barr & Parrett, 2001; Dewey, 1897; Morley, 1991; Young, 1990). Instruction should be differentiated in a design that is conducive to meeting the needs of students, while applying applicable knowledge to their future (Arnove & Strout, 1980). Alternative education must be flexible to meet the needs of students (Gold & Mann, 1984; Lange & Sletten, 2002).

Instructional staff. The keys to a good education are quality teachers, as it is the most instrumental factor in student achievement (Barr & Parrett, 1995, 2001, 2003; Bridgeland et al., 2009; Hall & Handly, 2004). The teachers must believe that these students can learn and hold students to high standards (Barr & Parrett, 1995; Lange & Sletten, 2002). Hall and Handley (2004) believed effective teachers have: knowledge and love of the subject matter, verbal skills, a love for students that is empathetic, and personal integrity. The relationship between a student

and teacher "sets the stage for co-construction of the knowledge" (Branco & Valsiner, 2004, p. 114).

Effective teachers create a climate that is engaging in order for students to pursue academic achievement in addition to positive attitudes towards the school and themselves (Pierce, 1994). They not only show respect to their students, they require the students to reciprocate respect back to them and their peers (Barr & Parrett, 2003; Stronge, 2002; Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006). Teachers must probe students to ask challenging questions to meet individual achievement. Teachers who portray this level of enthusiasm when students succeed are genuinely satisfied, as they know that they have been the underlying force in student achievement (Hiatt-Michael, 2008).

Students in alternative education schools stated that the most important characteristic of a teacher is that they care for their students, and the most powerful encouragement to staying in school is when they receive friendly attention (Morley, 1991). Effective alternative schools encompass teachers who support, care for, and challenge students to achieve higher expectations (Barr & Parrett, 2003). Research suggest that at-risk students are more successful when they have motivated and caring teachers who are well trained (Barr & Parrett, 2001). Teachers who work at alternative education schools choose to out of personal concern for the youth. They want to work in a smaller environment and use a collaborative approach (Barr & Parrett, 1995).

Professional development. As experienced teachers retire, new teachers will begin their teaching careers. Whether one has had abundant formal preparation through a teacher education program or has switched careers and is teaching with an emergency permit, one thing is clear: they may not be well prepared to teach our children (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2007). Comprehensive induction programs are crucial for new teachers. These programs should

integrate collaboration with master teachers and teachers from other schools, similarly set planning times, and ongoing professional development (Bridgeland et al., 2009).

Schools need to strive to become learning organizations, not primarily for student growth but also for teacher and staff growth. Teachers need to feel supported and have opportunities to develop skills and innovative strategies to bring into the classroom (Smink & Reimer, 2005). A learning community within a school is a place where "people continue to expand their capacity to create results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of people are continually learning how to learn together" (Senge, 2006, p. 14). The learning community bridges the organization (mission, expectations, roles, structures/resources) with the individual (personal values, needs, characteristics, activities) to create the desired outcome (See Figure 1; Hiatt-Michael, 2008).

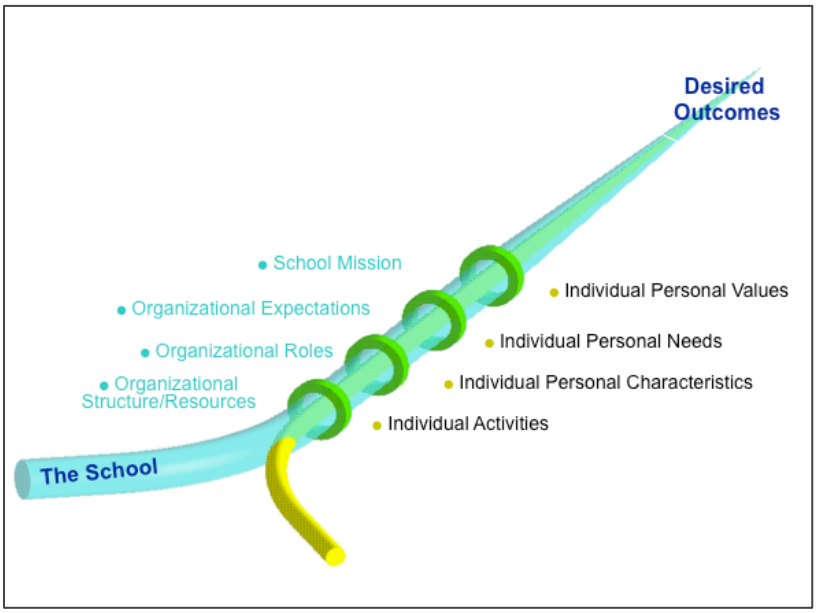


Figure 1. Hiatt-Michael model. The Learning Community. Reprinted from "Teaching, Curriculum, and Community Involvement," by D. B. Hiatt-Michael, 2008, p. 73, Charlotte, NC: Information Age. Copyright 2008 by D. B. Hiatt-Michael. Reprinted with permission.

In order to create learning communities, professional development is crucial for all teachers in order to sustain high academic standards, develop and enhance teaching methods, and

to learn about essential elements that will help one develop (Aron, 2006; Barr & Parrett, 2003; Senge, 2006). Effective professional development is ongoing, is centered around learning and teaching academic content, connects to practice, and builds working relationships among other teachers. Studies have shown that there is a correlation between substantial professional development hours (30 to 100 hours stretched over six months to a year) and student achievement gains (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009).

Size. Although alternative schools vary in size, successful alternative education programs are smaller than traditional, conventional schools (Arnove & Stout, 1980; Aron, 2006; Barr & Parrett, 1995, 2003; Hall & Handley, 2004; Lange & Sletten, 2002; Morley, 1991; Raywid, 1984, 1994, 2001; Tobin & Sprague, 2000; Young, 1990). Morley (1991) wrote, "Smallness is necessary to establish and maintain a sense of family and belonging or a sense of community" (p. 16). They provide fewer disruptions, and the feeling of isolation and alienation are reduced (Barr & Parrett, 2003). Smaller schools provide an atmosphere of educational support and function as a surrogate family for these students (Barr & Parrett, 1995).

Small classes provide low student to teacher ratio, which can foster a caring relationship. Teachers are able to know their students better and can make sure that the students understand what is being taught. Students are able to work closely with their teacher for a more personalized learning environment than if enrolled in a traditional setting (Aron, 2006; Barr & Parrett, 1995; Hall & Handley, 2004; Koetke, 1999; Lange & Sletten, 2002; Tobin & Sprague, 2000).

Facility. An important factor to consider for a school is the ambiance and atmosphere, as a positive and supportive school climate is essential (Barr & Parrett, 2001; Hall & Handly, 2004). Students need an environment where they feel safe, cared for, supported, and challenged.

They must be actively engaged and able to focus their attention on learning (Barr & Parrett, 2001).

According to Quinn et al. (2006), effective alternative programs create a personalized climate in which rules are fair, valid, and equitably enforced. The environment is favorable, as teachers and administrators support student interpersonal, social, and academic success while displaying dignity and respect for them. Students contribute to the environment by participating in school planning and decision making while staff are open to problem solving and change.

Relationship/building a sense of community. Student engagement is critical to building relationships and a sense of community. Engagement includes behavior and psychological aspects (Fredericks, Blumfeld, & Paris, 2004). These include active participation at the school, both inside and outside of the classroom, avoiding disciplinary actions, and building meaningful relationships (Fredericks et al., 2004; National Research Council, 2004). Students who have continual relationship with adults feel more engaged and are more involved and attached to the school (Wehlage et al., 1989).

All students, teachers, and parents are neighbors to their community. Hall and Handley (2004) said, "While striving to eliminate alienation and nurture positive relationships at school, it is important to acknowledge this and to recognize students as unique individuals with lives outside of school" (p. 51). Effective teachers show an interest in their students both in and out of the classroom (Gayle, Preiss, Burrell, & Allen, 2006).

Alternative education has been acclaimed to be models of reform. They were able to "restore the allegedly cold and indifferent bureaucracies which schools had become, to the humane, caring environments necessary for helping the young learn" (Raywid, 1983, p. 191). The relationship between a student and teacher serves as the basis to the learning process. Not

only do these relationships play a role in student learning and achievement but also they foster student self-esteem as students sense a feeling of belonging (Stronge, 2002). The typical student-teacher role relationship in an alternative education school is replaced with a warmer, informal personal relationship (Gold & Mann, 1984; Hall & Handley, 2004; Lange & Sletten, 2002).

Leadership, governance, administration, and oversight. Leadership is an essential component in building and maintaining an effective school. School leaders, staff, students, and parents need to be involved in different facets of the school (Aron, 2006). Since alternative schools involve staff, students, and parents, they are able to unite through a common philosophy and vision to collectively govern the school (Barr & Parrett, 2003).

Alternative school leaders need specific skills, abilities, and knowledge to create a learning environment that will meet the needs of both students and staff (Aron, 2006; Lange & Sletten, 1995; Raywid, 1994). They must have engaging, continuous, strong, and competent leadership qualities (Aron, 2006). Alternative school leaders need to be able to lead changes by inspiring others around them. Transformational leaders base their leadership on personal values, beliefs, and the qualities they posses (Daft, 2008). They lead by example and encourage and inspire others (Burns, 2010). They have three main goals: to help staff cultivate and maintain a collaborative school culture, foster the development in teachers, and improve group problem solving (Leithwood, 1992).

Student supports/extra-curricular activities. Alternative education provides students the support needed to be successful. Programs must have clear rules of behavior and high expectations for their students. They must have opportunities to participate in and have a say when it comes school matters (Aron, 2006).

Involvement through school academics and activities create a sense of belonging to at-risk students. Social aspects are especially important to students who are at-risk of dropping out of school, as peer rejection is a leading factor of leaving school (Farrell, 1990; Lange & Sletten, 2002). Wehlage (1991) wrote, "The strength of school membership and educational engagement for students is due primarily to the way in which the schools interact with them" (p. 15). Positive and engaging extra-curricular activities for students may provide higher academic and social achievement (National Center for Education Statistics, 1995; Wehlage et al., 1989). Studies have linked extra-curricular activities with increased school engagement, decreasing the likelihood of dropping out of school (Finn, 1993).

At-risk Students

The term *at-risk* has evolved over the decades. The report, *A Nation at Risk*, from the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983), described the American education system as underachieving, as the structure had many deficiencies and were behind many other nations. Our students were not adequately prepared for the workplace or for life. The term evolved to encompass schools. The Phi Delta Kappa study of students at-risk assumed early on that "children are at risk if they are likely to fail – either in school or in life" (Frymier & Gansneder, 1989, p. 142). Lehr and Harris (1988) described being at-risk as "one who is not working up to potential" (p. 11),

In the late 1980s the term was used to describe students who were unlikely to graduate from high school (Slavin, 1989). Combining the areas of academics and lifestyle, Sagor and Cox (2004) defined at-risk as "any child who is unlikely to graduate on schedule, with both the skills and self-esteem necessary to exercise meaningful options in the areas of work, leisure, culture, civic affairs, and inter/intra personal relationships" (p. 1).

Traditionally, at-risk students have been pre-identified by background, family characteristics, and conditions (Dougherty, 1989). Frymier and Gansneder (1989) subsequently stated that all children are at risk and suggested that there are different degrees of being at-risk. Regardless of gender, ethnicity, economics, or family structure, students may begin to start performing marginally or poorly (Barr & Parret, 1995; Manning & Baruth, 1994).

Walker (1991) stated, "Every student is at-risk for some reason. We cannot wait until a student is labeled as such to intervene; rather, we must plan for the success of all students" (p. 112). Educators must carefully determine when a student is and is not at risk (Manning & Baruth, 1994). While some indicators signify temporary conditions where students are not working towards their potential such as shyness or lack of motivation, for others, the conditions may be more serious. Educators must be able to determine if and when they should address these issues and how they should go about helping students (Manning & Baruth, 1994).

Not only are these at-risk youth in danger of failing and dropping out of school, they are linked to many adverse traits that affect themselves and society. These are traits that can be avoided. They include: adulthood illiteracy, dependency on drugs and alcohol, unemployment or underemployment, dependency on welfare, teenage pregnancy or parenting, and time in the criminal justice system (Barr & Parrett, 1995; Manning & Baruth, 1994).

Factors that Promote Dropping Out of School

According to the National Center for Education Statistics' report, *Subsequent Educational Attainment of High School Dropouts,* students also dropout due to failing grades, dislike of school, not getting along with students or teachers, or due to safety reasons (Hall & Handley, 2004). In addition, juvenile delinquency, hate crimes, and gangs affect school

attendance (Manning & Baruth, 1994). Most students who drop out of school could have succeeded (Bridgeland et al., 2009).

While it is often difficult to accurately predict who will drop out, we can predict who is most likely to drop out (Burrus & Roberts, 2012). Students who drop out exhibit warning signs one to three years before they actually drop out (Burrus & Roberts, 2012; Neild & Balfanz, 2006; Rumberger, 2004). When they do drop out, most students do so in the early high school years (Burrus & Roberts, 2012). The underlying reasons of why students drop out is nearly impossible to pinpoint, as they are influenced by a combination of individual and contextual factors (Rumberger, 2011) (Table 2).

Table 2

Factors Associated with Dropping Out of High School

Individual Factors	Contextual Factors
Motivation	Family
Attitudes and behaviors	School
Mobility	Community/Peer Group
School performance	

Individual. There are numerous individual factors that contribute to students dropping out of school. These factors stem from within the student, making it difficult for these students to continue pursing their education. These factors uphold the idea that social and academic experiences influence students (Rumberger, 2011).

Motivation. Stipek and Seal (2001) wrote, "Every child is born with a desire to learn" (p. 2), yet research has shown that their motivation for learning declines from third to ninth grade (Stipek & Seal, 2001). Motivation is a necessary element in success. Students who have low

educational or occupational aspirations have a higher dropout rate than those who are motivated (Rumberger, 2011).

Attitudes and behaviors. Students today may seem different. There has been a shift in attitude towards school, education, and teachers. The readiness and preparation students walk into school with has transformed over the years (Hiatt-Michael, 2008).

Students who are often absent from school or are misbehaving in school tend to drop out of school (Rumberger, 2011). When students cut class or are truant, they fall behind in their schoolwork. For some, dropping out is easier than catching up (Hall & Handley, 2004). Many want to earn money right away or need to work in order to help their family (Manning & Baruth, 1994).

Students who are at-risk of dropping out of school exhibit high health risk behaviors. These behaviors include unprotected sex, teenage pregnancy, suicide attempts, alcohol, drunk driving, or drug use, which can interfere with school (Barr & Parrett, 2001; Grunbaum et al., 2000; Hall & Handley, 2004; Manning & Baruth, 1994). These actions can have a direct correlation with learning, as these behaviors inhibit school attendance, motivation, and concentration in school (Grunbaum et al., 2000).

Student satisfaction. Student perceptions and experiences in school influence the student's evolvement in self-esteem, self-awareness, and health (Samdal, Nutbeam, Wold, & Kannas, 1998). There have been many researchers who link students' perception of satisfaction with school with academic achievement. Students who have a positive view of the school achieve more than those who are not satisfied (Fraser, 1994; Voelkl, 1995). When students are dissatisfied with their school, students may become depressed, display unhealthy behaviors, and

perform low in academics. These factors may result in students dropping out of school (Samdal, et al., 1998).

Mobility. Changing residences and schools increases the chances of students dropping out of high school (Gasper, DeLuca, & Estacion, 2012; Rumberger, 2011). Over 30% of students between first and eighth grade change schools, and 25% of students between eight and twelfth grade change schools. These do not include normal promotion transition points from elementary to middle school or from middle school to high school (Gasper et al., 2012; Rumberger & Larson, 1998; Smith, 1995). Changing schools during the school year is difficult, as there may be a discontinuity in learning not only in curriculum, but also in classroom routines and school planning (Kerbow, Azcoitia, & Buell, 2003).

Family life is linked to mobility. Students from poor minorities are more likely to change schools. Studies show that 60% to 70% of students from these background change schools at least once in the elementary grade levels and 20% of these students change schools twice or more (Temple & Reynolds, 1999). Students who switch schools often come from single-parent families (Gasper et al., 2012). A lack of low-incoming housing options and family stability lead to moving residences (Kerbow et al., 2003).

There are other reasons as to why mobility affects the students. This may be due to the fact that students are less engaged or have a sense of withdrawal from the school (Coleman, 1988; Rumberger, 2011). Students need to rebuild connections and relationships with peers and teachers and may not have opportunities to participate in extra-curricular activities (Kerbow et al., 2003). In addition, the bond between the parent and new school are nonexistent, as they are less likely to know the teachers and other parents at that school (Coleman, 1990).

Contextual. Family, school, and the community influence how successful a student will be in school (Epstein, 2011; Hiatt-Michael, 2008; Rumberger, 2004, 2011; See Figure 2). This partnership can help improve school climate and programs, offer family support and services, expand parents' abilities and leadership, and unite families with other individuals in the school and community (Epstein, 2001). This also allows students to be engaged, guided, energized, and motivated in order to be successful. The assumption behind this collaboration is that if a student feels cared for and encouraged, they will be more likely try harder to do their best to read, write, compute, and foster other skills and talents in order to stay in school (Epstein, 2011).

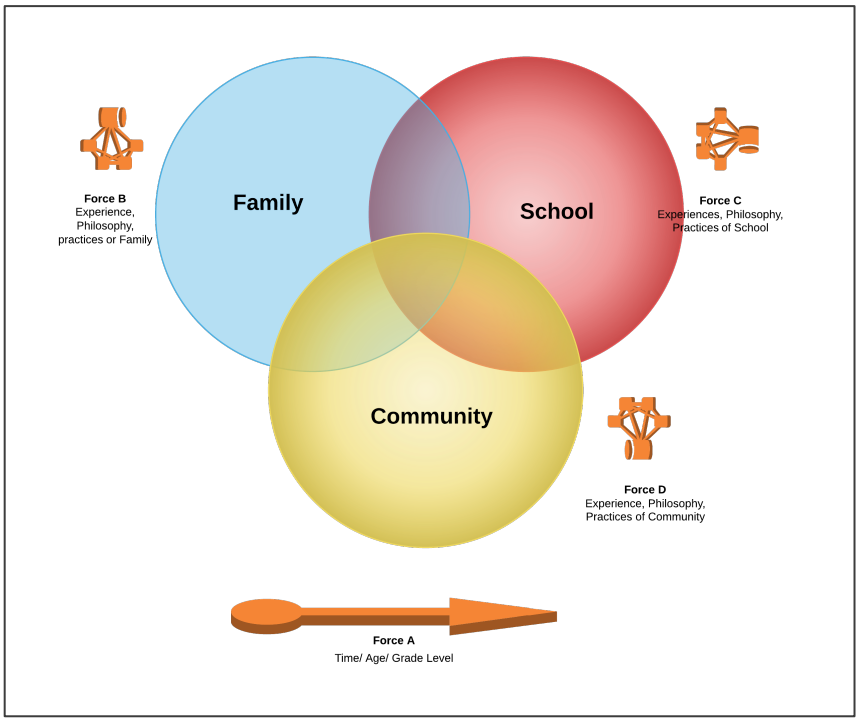


Figure 2. Overlapping spheres of influence of family, school, and community on children's learning (external structure of theoretical model). Reprinted from "Schools, Family, and Community Partnerships: Preparing Educators and Improving Schools," by J. L. Epstein, 2011, Boulder, CO. Copyright 2011 by J. L. Epstein. Westview Press. Reprinted with permission.

Family life. Family and family background are the most critical contributors to how successful a student will be in school (Bridgeland et al., 2009; Rumberger, 2011; See Figure 3).

Jimerson, Egeland, Sroufe, and Carlson (2000) found a correlation between the quality of parenting and family environment with school achievement. Low expectations from parents towards school achievement are strongly associated with students dropping out of school (Chapman, Laird, Ifill, & KewalRamani, 2011). Students who have parents who provide emotional support and are involved in their education are less likely to drop out of school (Bridgeland et al., 2009; Rumberger, 2011).

Socioeconomic status (SES), commonly measured by household income and parental educational level, is one of the main predicators of how a student will do in school (Cardon & Cristensen, 1998; Rumberger, 2011). Those with higher SES often are aspired by parental education levels and educational support, and have access to better educational resources (Rumberger, 2011). Poverty is one of the strongest predictors of dropping out of school (Balfanz & Letgers, 2004). Lower SES has been connected to at-risk factors such as poor health, low ability, and lack of motivation (Manning & Baruth, 1994). In 2009, the dropout rates for students in a lower SES were five times greater than their peers from a higher SES (Chapman et al., 2011).

Studies have shown that parent involvement benefits not only the students; they assist the teachers and improve the school, as well as strengthen the family (Epstein, 2011). Parents are powerful, as they can be involved in school reforms. Their perspectives affect the implementation of changes to the program or practice (Dodd & Konzal, 2002).

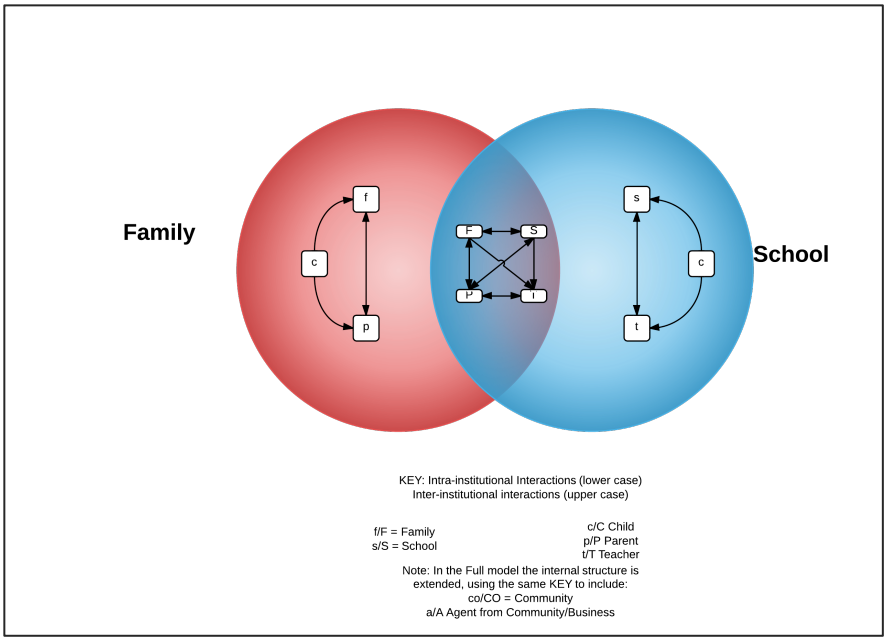


Figure 3. Overlapping spheres of influence of family, school, and community on children's learning (internal structure of theoretical model). Reprinted from "Schools, Family, and Community Partnerships: Preparing Educators and Improving Schools," by J. L. Epstein, 2011, Boulder, CO. Westview Press. Copyright 2011 by J. L. Epstein. Reprinted with permission.

The parents' perception of alternative schools can be negative, as they are often associated with the failures of the student in their previous schools (Barr & Parrett, 2003; Meier, 2002). Parents of students who are at-risk have often experienced long-term off-putting relationships with the public school system and are apprehensive about collaborating with the schools (Barr & Parrett, 2003). They may have had many unsuccessful attempts at working with the school or blame the school. In addition, they themselves may have had a painful experience in school when they were younger, which discourages them from getting involved (Dodd & Konzal, 2002).

School. Schools play an instrumental role in the lives of students. Since students spend many hours at school, the school plays a crucial part in the student's personal and social development (Fortin, Marcotte, Potvin, Royer, & Joly, 2006). School culture fosters learning

(Deal & Peterson, 1999). Good schools can teach students to learn effectively, while holding them to high standards of achievement (Barr & Parrett, 2001). Waxman (1991) and Wehlage and Rutter (1986) believed students are at-risk because the schools are setting students up for failure. According to Rumberger (2011), there are four indicators of a school that influence the student's performance.

School factors such as student composition, structure, resources, and policies and practices have a direct impact on students, especially those at-risk. These factors can influence if a student will succeed in school. Peer groups and the community can also have an influence towards schooling (Rumberger, 2004).

School composition. The characteristics of the school, in particular the socioeconomic composition of the students attending the school, impact the students (Rumberger, 2011). Violence and vandalism, alcohol and drug related issues, and problems of disruption and discipline are at an all-time high in public schools (Barr & Parrett, 1995). Each month, approximately 28,200 students in the United States are physically attacked in secondary schools. Many middle and high school students are often absent because they are afraid to go to school (Manning & Baruth, 1994).

Structural characteristics. The size, location, and the type of school (public traditional, private, public charter) affect how well a student will or will not do in school (Hall & Handley, 2004; Mills & McGregor, 2010; Rumberger, 2011). Students and parents need consider what type of environment the student will best learn.

School resources. School resources such as funding, the quality of teachers, and the student-teacher relationship play an integral role (Rumberger, 2011). At-risk students need teachers and administrators who are willing to take risks and enhance education through

innovational programs (Waxman, 1991). Studies have found that the quality of teachers play an integral role in how the students perceive school. Many classroom teachers do not put in the effort to teach at-risk youth (Barr & Parrett, 1995).

Policies and practices. Schools may not engage the students, which lead to boredom, low achievement, poor attendance, and eventually to students voluntarily withdrawing themselves from school (Rumberger, 2011).

Policies and rules may also affect a student to stay in school. Poor attendance, low grades, and misbehavior are grounds for involuntary withdrawal from the school (Rumberger, 2011). In addition, some schools and districts institute an exit exam to complete high school. While the objective of these exams is to improve instruction and raise the bar for graduation, many do not pass the exam. Failure to pass this exam forfeits the chances to receive a high school diploma (Callet, 2005; Rumberger, 2011).

Retention policies. Due to a stricter eye over accountability, policies to end social promotion have been formed. Schools will no longer promote students to the next grade level unless they raise their achievement (McCombs, Kirby, & Mariano, 2010; Rumberger, 2011). The rationale for holding a student back is that retention gives the students another opportunity to learn the content and skills of that grade level, making the students less likely for failure in the next grade level (McCombs et al., 2010). Retaining a student also compels them to work harder to solidify skills so that they are not retained (Hartke, 1999). Although there may be some positive short-term effects to being held back a grade, many studies have found that holding a student back predicts the likelihood that students will drop out of school (Barr & Parrett, 2001; Chalker, 1996; Jimerson, Woehr, & Kaufman, 2007; McCombs et al., 2010; Rumberger, 2011).

If the child is held back twice, the chance that they will graduate high school is near zero (Barr & Parrett, 2001; Hartke, 1999).

Opponents argue that grade retention affects minority and low income children. These children who do not do well in elementary experience low-confidence and self-concept, and they develop behavioral problems (Barr & Parrett, 2001; McCombs et al., 2010). A lack of academic achievement in elementary and middle school greatly increases the chances that they will not succeed in high school (Rumberger, 2011). Children get recommended for retention for various reasons. These include: being socially immature, beginning to learn English, displaying behavior difficulties, mobility, or missing too many days due to illness (Jimerson et al., 2007). If they are behind a grade level or are older than their classmates, that is also an indicator for dropping out (Manning & Baruth, 1994).

Communities and peer groups. Communities and peer groups play an integral role in academic success. Whether near or far from the school, geography, diversity, economics, and social characteristics influence student learning. The term *community* comprises of all individuals and establishments inside and outside of the school. This may include: schools, neighborhoods, families, business, parks, and local governments (Epstein, 2011).

Educational communities are important because they provide the social, emotional, and intellectual support for students to succeed (Hall & Handley, 2004). Despite where they live, communities must be able to share the responsibility to invest in the future of the youth and provide valuable resources for these students, family, and the schools (Epstein, 2011). The need of belonging to a community is important, especially in the lives of young adults (Hall & Handley, 2004). Disadvantaged communities along with peer groups can influence a student to drop out of school (Rumberger, 2011).

Bullying amongst peers has become a serious problem in the United States. Studies have shown that bullies and victims of bullying may face academic difficulties, including dropping out of school (Cornell, Gregory, Huang, & Fan, 2013; Swearer Napolitano, Espelage, Vaillancount, & Hymel, 2010). This is due to the fact that bullying may contribute to low self-esteem, anxiety or depression, or avoidance of school (Esbensen & Carson, 2009). Studies have shown that certain characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, family SES, and disabilities can heighten the risk for being a victim (Peguero & Williams, 2013; Swearer Napolitano et al., 2010).

Disabilities. In 1975, the Education for All Handicapped Children (EAHCA) passed. In 1990, EAHCA was renamed to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Under IDEA, students with disabilities have the right to services and education to meet their needs in order to complete school. This gave this these students an option to be placed in the least restrictive environment for learning (President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education, 2002).

Although these acts are in place, students with disabilities such as behavioral, emotional, and learning are still largely at risk for dropping out of school (Lange & Sletten, 2002; Lehr, 2004; President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education, 2002). In 2012, only 60% of special education students in California graduated, as 9,823 dropped out of school (California Department of Education, 2013c). Large classrooms and high student to teacher ratios are not favorable to these students (Tobin & Sprague, 2000). Although some succeed, many do not due to the lack of support teachers receive in order for these students to be successful in regular classroom placements (U.S. Department of Education, 1998).

Students who have emotional or behavioral disorders are likely to experience academic failure, retention, suspension, or expulsion (Wagner & Cameto, 2004). They are twice as likely

to drop out of school compared to their peers. In the 1999-2000 school year, 19,032 students (51.9%) who were emotionally disturbed, and 48,490 students (27.6%) who had specific learning disabilities dropped out of high school (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). Students with disabilities are also less likely to attend college (Murray, Goldstein, Nourse, & Edgar, 2000).

Students with disabilities often enroll in alternative education programs (Nelson, Rutherford, & Wolford, 1987). This is largely due to the 1997 amendments to the IDEA, which allows a student with an IEP to be placed in an "appropriate interim alternative setting" for up to 45 days (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). These individuals require effective services such as academic and behavioral support in a least restrictive environment (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Atkins, Hohnstein, and Roche (2008) studied students with and without disabilities in alternative or charter schools. Based on this study, they found that students with disabilities benefited the most from attending these schools. Notably, those with IEPs in these schools were more likely to have a better academic attitude than those without a disability.

Dropout Prevention

Students' not finishing high school is a major concern for the nation. Students are at-risk because they do not take full advantage of the educational opportunities offered (Waxman, 1991). In addition, high schools with extremely high dropout rates can be identified (Burrus & Roberts, 2012). The National Conference of State Legislatures (2011) issued a report, *A Path to Graduation for Every Child*. This report recommended actions that state legislatures can tackle to reduce student dropout:

- Establish an urgency to improve high school graduation rates;
- Require high expectations and a rigorous curriculum;
- Provide options to engage all students;

- Provide quality staff;
- Identify and support struggling students.
- Develop dropout recovery programs;
- Restore low graduation-rate schools;
- Review policies and provide incentives for collaboration;
- Keep schools/districts accountable for graduation rates.

To reduce dropouts in the State of California, Rumberger (2011) established the California Dropout Research Project. The three goals of this project were to (1) bring awareness to the policy makers, educators, and the community about the dropout crisis in California, (2) address the problem by developing profound policy agendas, and (3) broadcast project findings through different resources.

Advantages for High School Graduates

The United States will benefit from an increase in students graduation from quality high school programs, especially from alternative schools. Graduating from high school benefits both the individual and society (Wehlage & Rutter, 1986). High school graduates are more likely to continue their education and training. Many competitive jobs have educational and skill requirements which continue to increase over time (Rumberger & Lamb, 2003). Studies have shown that there is a correlation between education level and earning. On average, students who do not graduate high school earn nearly 30% less money and in addition to having a higher unemployment rate than those who graduate (Burrus & Roberts, 2012; Chapman et al., 2011; Education Atlas, 2006; Gasper et al., 2012; Manning & Baruth, 1994; Rumberger, 1995; Rumberger, 2011). Over a lifetime, the earnings will amount to approximately $630,000 (Chapman et al., 2011).

Dropouts will have a harder time surviving economically. They are three times more likely to be unemployed than those who graduated from college (Burrus & Roberts, 2012). In the past, determination and hard work paved the way to those with little education. Today, low-skilled jobs are declining, as there is no longer a large need for them in the United States (Barr & Parrett, 1995, 2001; Rumberger, 1995, 2011). These jobs are now being filled with technologically skilled and educated individuals who can compete in the global market (Baptiste, 1991; Zhao, 2009). Zhao (2009) said, "Developing countries are taking jobs away from developed nations" (p. 168). In addition, many jobs in the United States are now being outsourced to other countries where labor is cheaper (Friedman, 2007; Rumberger, 1995).

In today's economy most students will need some sort of postsecondary education to earn a decent wage. On average, college graduates earn one million more dollars over a lifetime than those who did not graduate from high school (Burrus & Roberts, 2012; Bridgeland et al., 2009). There is an estimate that 90 percent of the fastest growing and best paying jobs require postsecondary education (Wagner, 2008).

Social Cost

The social cost for dropout students in a year can cost a city nearly $3.2 billion in lost earnings and $400 million in social services, with the cost inclining every year (Rumberger, 1995). In addition to an unpromising, financially rewarding future, dropouts face other setbacks such as lack of self-satisfaction, self-esteem, health risks, higher rate of death, and a sense of failure (Lleras-Muney, 2005; Manning & Baruth, 1994; Rumberger, 2011).

Students who do not graduate from high school can be linked to negative outcomes for society which include: becoming dependent on welfare and other government services, forgoing national income and tax revenues, engagement in crime, increased demand for social services,

increased antisocial behavior, and reduced political participation (Baptiste, 1991; Barr & Parrett, 2001; Hayes, Nelson, Tabin, Pearson, & Worthy, 2002; Rumberger, 1995, 2011). They are eight times more likely to be put in jail than those who graduate from high school, as nearly two thirds of inmates have not graduated (Bridgeland et al., 2009; Gasper et al., 2012). These are expenses that can be prevented.

Bridging the Achievement Gap

The phrase "achievement gap" is used to refer to many disparities amongst our students throughout the nation and compared to other countries. Most commonly, it is used to signify the performance gap between minorities, particularly Hispanic and African American students, and socioeconomic levels in academic achievement, standardized test scores, graduation rates, and dropout rates (Education Week, 2011; Zhao, 2009). These gaps need to be closed.

There is a gap in our school system. At-risk students are falling through the cracks and have dropped out of school or are in danger of dropping out of school. These students have been disregarded in the planning and intervention in the efforts to improve education, hence widening the gap even further (Lehr & Harris, 1988). Barr and Parret (2001) wrote, "At risk youth arrive at school far from ready to learn, and public school programs tend to isolate them, stigmatize them, and place them in programs that widen the academic gap between them and their better achieving peers" (p. 47). In an effort to rescue these students, alternative education schools have been devised to give students additional opportunities to graduate.

Verdugo and Glenn (2006) have linked race and ethnicity to alternative education schools. Skiba, Michale, Nardo, and Peterson (2000) found that minorities, mainly Blacks and Hispanic students from low-income backgrounds have a higher rate of school discipline and are more likely than White students to be suspended or expelled. There has been a spike in

minorities in alternative education programs, as school districts are referring more minorities than non-minorities into these schools (Verdugo & Glenn, 2006)

While alternative education programs meet the needs of some at-risk youth, there are many other students in traditional schools who are disengaged from learning at their schools (Mills & McGregor, 2010). Alternative education schools are sought to be an effective solution for at-risk students. Before traditional schools and other alternative education schools emulate successes found in alternative programs, they must be evaluated.

Need for an Evaluation of Independent Study Programs

The small number of studies limits current analysis of the effectiveness of independent study programs. There are even fewer studies of independent study schools, as they are smaller and less common than traditional schools and other alternative schools. Most research on alternative education programs describe the characteristics of the school or the students who enrolled in these schools, and few studies query the students themselves (De la Ossa, 2005; De la Rosa, 1998; Foley & Pang, 2006; Invernizzi, Rosemary, Juel, & Richards, 1997; Lehr & Lange, 2003; Nichols & Utesch, 1998). Even fewer studies examine independent study programs from the perspective of the students, parents, and teachers. Voices of these stakeholders can be used as a key component in school reform.

While the existence of these schools is to provide alternative placement for at-risk students, they may have different goals and objectives. Although school effectiveness is generally measured by school attendance and academic achievement, there are many other factors that should be considered. Schools should provide adequate academic, critical, social skills in an environment where students feel motivated, inspired, and satisfied. Such characteristics are generally not evaluated, although they are equally important. Thus, many

aspects of the schools need to be assessed in order to ensure that the programs are effective learning environments. Therefore, there is a need to evaluate multiple independent study programs.

Outcome-Based Evaluation and Education

Evaluating educational programs is a necessary process to further develop the needs of the program while measuring the outcomes. Outcome-Based Evaluations is a popular choice amongst educational programs and schools. There are many benefits with using Outcome-Based Evaluations. Schalock (2001) stated that these include:

- Understanding the roles these programs;
- Helping stakeholders make education choices based the effectiveness and impact;
- Improving education programs based on data;
- Meeting the needs of program accountability and receptiveness;
- Escaladed community support through reputable outcomes and services.

This study will use an Outcome-Based Evaluation to study the students, parents, and teachers of selected alternative school programs. It is a useful tool, as it determines if the program has achieved the results desired. In this case, we will be measuring the program's success through behavior changes, impact, and satisfaction in the program. It will also identify opportunities for program improvement. The goal of using Outcome-Based Evaluations in education is to determine if the actual outcome is the goal envisioned by the school.

Summary

The research on alternative education programs and at-risk students has detailed many characteristics that promote academic achievement. Alternative education programs have been a popular choice among youths who were not successful in a traditional school setting. These

students who have dropped out of school or are thinking about dropping out of school need an alternative setting to be successful, both academically and in life.

From literature, we can infer some characteristics of alternative education, but not much is known about independent study programs. There is a need to study independent study programs to evaluate the effectiveness of the program from the perspective of the stakeholders– the students, parents, and teachers. This study will analyze many aspects of independent study programs in order to provide evidence of its effectiveness.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Overview of the Study's Design

The purpose of this study was to explore students', parents', and teacher's perspectives of independent study programs at six alternative charter schools in order to better understand which elements meet the needs of at-risk students. The researcher used both quantitative and qualitative approaches to gather data. This chapter will present the qualifications of the researcher, populations of the study, the study's site descriptions, research design, data collection instruments, data collection procedures, and the protection of human subjects.

Qualification of Researcher

The researcher for this study is qualified to examine alternative schools. She holds a California teaching credential and a Certificate of Eligibility for an administrative service credential, and has obtained a master's degree in education and educational leadership. She has taught at two alternative schools that catered to at-risk youth, and has also been a mentor teacher to new and veteran teachers at these schools. In addition, she has been involved in numerous committees, both school and statewide, to improve school effectiveness.

Code of ethics. As outlined by the code of ethics in the American Psychological Association Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct (2014) and the American Educational Research Association Ethical Standards of the American Education Research Association (2011), the researcher abided by these ethical standards. The goal of the researcher was to ensure research integrity while protecting research participants (Israel & Hay, 2006). This study did not discriminate against the participant's age, gender, ethnicity, social class, disability, or sexual orientation, and throughout this study, the researcher remained honest and open (Joyner, Rouse, & Glatthorn, 2013).

Description of Population

Students, parents, and teachers at these schools were invited to participate in the study. The researcher gathered data from a diverse population that was representative of the at-risk students that were attending an independent study alternative education school in the San Fernando Valley of Southern California. These schools were given pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality. Alternative schools in the following cities were targeted: Arleta, Chatsworth, Encino, Northridge, and Studio City.

Study site description. The researcher selected schools within a district that had a diverse population. These schools were all located in a small, suburban community in the Los Angeles County, within the San Fernando Valley. These schools were open to students who resided in and around the Los Angeles County. Most of these schools were storefronts on major streets or in small plazas. The study looked at six independent study alternative schools that obtained their charters through the Baldwin Park Unified School District. For the purpose of this study, the schools were referred to as: School Site A, School Site B, School Site C, School Site D, School Site E, and School Site F (Table 3).

Table 3

School Sites According to Location

Location of School	
Arleta	School Site A
Chatsworth	School Site B
Encino	School Site C
Northridge	School Site D
Northridge	School Site E
Studio City	School Site F

Each school had an approximate enrollment number of 150-250 students, approximately 73.59% of whom are considered socioeconomically disadvantaged. Each school site had approximately three to six teachers depending on the size of the student population and simple projected monthly average daily attendance (ADA) numbers (Table 4). The teacher's role was to enroll students, register them for required classes, and to guide them through high school. These schools functioned as academic recovery programs and catered to at-risk youth who may be: one or more semesters behind in credits; pregnant or parenting; on probation or have exited from the juvenile justice system; need to work in order to support their families; or are in need of a safe learning environment.

Table 4

Monthly Average Simple Projected Numbers for 2014-2015

School Sites	Total # of teachers	ADA/month
School Site A	4	158.33
School Site B	3	87.78
School Site C	4	126.67
School Site D	3.5	102.78
School Site E	3	90
School Site F	3	99.44

These schools serve at-risk youth through an independent study modality. The goal of the school is to provide a safe, rigorous, and accessible option to earn a high school diploma. Curriculum has been aligned with the state standards and state testing has been a priority at these school sites. Through this academic recovery program, students are required to attend appointments with their teachers one to four times each week. Students are obligated by the master agreement to complete at least one unit per week. If the students are truant, absent, or do not complete the minimum units required per week, they will need to withdraw themselves from this program and enroll in their district home school.

Description of the district. These school sites were granted accreditation through Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) through the Baldwin Park Unified School District. A charter petition agreement between the school district and these school sites were made, as these school sites use the same requirements for a high school diploma as their authorizing district.

Baldwin Park Unified School District site schools. There are 13 similar school sites from this charter. The 13 site locations are in Long Beach, San Gabriel Valley, and the San Fernando Valley. During the 2011-2012 school year, these school sites served 2,042 at-risk students in the year-round calendar. The school sites in this charter were granted initial accreditation from WASC in 2001. In the 2007-2008 school year, the API score was 615. In 2012-2013, the API scores for these schools rose to 726. In the 2012-2013 school year, these schools earned a Similar School Ranking (SSR) of 10, the highest score possible. This was the fourth consecutive year these Baldwin Park charter schools were given a score of 10. In the 2011-2012 school year, the student ethnic breakdown of all school sites within this district were as follows: Hispanic or Latino – 67.6%, White (not Hispanic) – 16.7%, African American – 9.1%, Asian – 1.7%, American Indian – 0.6%, Pacific Islander – 0.6%, two or more – 2.6%, and no response – 0.2%. In the 2009-2010 school year, 1,382 females enrolled and 1,120 males enrolled. Parent education levels were (a) not a high school graduate – 21%, (b) high school graduate – 16%, (c) some college – 15%, (d) college graduate – 6%, (e) graduate school – 2%, (f) declined to state – 40%. In the 2009-2010 school year, 43.2% of teachers were White and 33% of the teachers were Hispanic.

Research Design

The researcher used a quantitative and qualitative approach for data collection. Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) stated that mixed methods research is valuable, as the two counterbalance the weaknesses inherent in both quantitative and qualitative research. Combined, the research provides substantial evidence and a more complete understanding of the research problem than with either the quantitative or qualitative approach alone (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

McCraken (1988) wrote, "The quantitative goal is to isolate and define categories as precisely as possible before the study is undertaken, and then to determine the relationship between them" (p. 16). The quantitative measures consisted of demographic information of the students, their parents, and the teachers. In addition, the researcher gathered internal and external GPA's, enrollment dates, and previous school type attended from the student records at the school.

The qualitative goal was to separate and classify categories during the course of the research (McCraken, 1988). For the qualitative data collection, the researcher used three instruments to interview the students, their parents, and the teachers at each of the six school sites to determine the impressions of alternative education. In addition, the researcher took extensive field notes.

Instrumental tools. The researcher interviewed students, parents, and teachers at alternative education programs. The researchers also took field notes after conducting interviews. These instruments were used to collect data in order to answer the following research questions:

1. According to participants, what is the purpose of the school?
2. According to participants, what factors motivate students to participate at this school?

3. Do respondents perceive that the organization of the school is effective?
4. What changes are desired at this school?
5. How satisfied are students, parents, and teachers with this school?

These questions aligned with Tyler's (1949, p. 1) rationale on curriculum development (see Table 5):

1. What educational purposes should the school seek to attain?
2. What educational experiences can be provided that are likely to attain these purposes?
3. How can these educational experiences be effectively organized?
4. How can we determine whether these purposes are being attained?

Table 5

Correlation between Interview Questions, Research Questions, and Tyler's (1949) Questions

Interview Questions	Research Question	Tyler's Questions
Question 1	1	1
Question 2	1	1
Question 3	1	1
Question 4	2	2
Question 5	2	2
Question 6	2	2
Question 7	3	3
Question 8	3	3
Question 9	3	3
Question 10	4	4
Question 11	4	4
Question 12	4	4
Question 13	5	4
Question 14	5	4
Question 15	5	4

Student and parent interviews. In order to gain more in-depth data, in-person interviews were conducted with four students – males and females – at each of the six school sites. If face-to-face interviews were not possible, a phone interview was arranged. The head school secretary

(or equivalent) or teachers selected four students to participate in this study. They handed the students a packet that contained the interview questions and the consent forms (See Appendix E, Appendix F, Appendix G, Appendix H, and Appendix I). The students were able to return their consent forms to the school or given the option of bringing the forms with them on the day of the interview. If students or parents turned in their consent forms before the day of the interview, the head school secretary (or equivalent) or teachers collected them. Interviews were not conducted unless these forms were signed and present.

Staff interviews. The researcher printed and hand delivered voluntary participation consent forms to the teachers (as shown in Appendix L) before she collected data. The teachers turned in their consent form on the day of the interview. The researcher had additional forms available on the day of the interviews.

Field notes. Observations were made during the time the researcher was at the school. Observations were made in and around the school by the researcher. Some of the items the researcher looked for included: school climate, interactions between the students and teachers, relationships between staff, the organization of the school, and the school structure.

Table 6 presents the final numbers of data gathered. The researcher's goal was to target four students, four parents, and two teachers at each school site.

Table 6

Final Numbers for Data Gathering

School Sites	Student Interviews	Parent Interviews	Teacher Interviews	Field Notes
School Site A	4	4	2	Yes
School Site B	4	4	2	Yes
School Site C	4	4	2	Yes
School Site D	4	4	2	Yes
School Site E	4	4	2	Yes
School Site F	4	4	2	Yes

Validity and reliability. In order to validate the data, the researcher must ensure that the quality, results, and the interpretation of the data are accurate (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The researcher used methodological triangulation in order to ensure validity. Methodological triangulation involved gathering data through one or more methods (Denzin, 1970). In this study, the researcher collected data through student records, interviews, and field notes.

Quantitative validity and reliability. In a quantitative study, the accuracy and completeness of the data, quality of the output from the instruments, and the quality of the conclusions, are crucial. For a study to be valid, the results from the participants must portray significant statistics of the construct being studied (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). A pilot study was conducted for readability and accuracy by a group of voluntary panel of experts before the actual study. These participants did not participate in the actual study. These individuals included: administrative staff of the schools, veteran teachers who have been teaching for two or more years, and students who have been enrolled for more than one year. Only student questions were used, as parent and teacher questions stemmed from the student questions.

In order for the scores to be reliable, they must be consistent and unwavering over time. Scores need to be checked for reliability through statistical processes of internal consistency (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). In order to verify reliability and accuracy of quantitative data gathered, the researcher asked the school how often cumulative folder data is obtained and maintained. The school stated that records are updated per school semester.

Qualitative validity and reliability. In qualitative research, validity is important, as there is an emphasis on whether the explanation of the participants and researchers are accurate,

dependable, and trustworthy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Checking for validity requires assessing the information for accuracy (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

While reliability plays a minimal role in qualitative research, it is important. Reliable coders are necessary, as they must agree on codes for the study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Upon data collection and individual coding, coders united to determine whether the codes and themes were consistent (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Data collection procedures. The researcher used the following steps to gather data for this study:

Steps leading towards data gathering.

1. A letter to the schools was sent to request participation in the research (see Appendix A).
2. Upon approval from the schools (see Appendix B) and Pepperdine University's Graduate and Professional School's IRB (see Appendix C), the researcher started contacting the schools under study. The researcher contacted the head secretary (or equivalent) and teachers of that school via work email or telephone to decide on a day and time the researcher could visit the school to explain her research.
3. The researcher arrived at the school on the dates and times previously arranged with the school. During this meeting, the researcher briefly explained her research and asked the staff to help recruit students and parents for the interviews. The researcher delivered six pre-printed and stapled packets to give to potential students and parents participants. These packets included: an introduction letter to student and parent (See Appendix E), interview questions for students and parents (See Appendix F), student informed consent for participation in research activities (See Appendix G), student interview assent form (See Appendix H), and a parent informed consent for participation in research activities

(See Appendix I). The researcher also gave each site a universal serial bus (USB) drive, which contained an electronic version of the Microsoft Word documents, in the event that additional copies need to be printed.

4. The researcher asked for two veteran teachers to participate in this study. Teachers needed to have worked at their current school site for more than one year to participate. The researcher gave them a copy of the staff informed consent form for participation in research activities (See Appendix L). The researcher told the teacher participants to read over the consent form and to bring it with them to the interview.
5. The researcher and the school decided on the days and times for the student, parent, and teacher interviews. The researcher suggested that the interviews fall on the days the students attended school so that the researcher could interview them after their appointment. This also allowed the researcher to interview the parents that dropped-off and picked-up their child.
6. The researcher called or emailed the secretary or teacher in charge of the interviews two days prior to the start of the interview time period to confirm interview appointments and to asked if a translator would be needed for any of the interviews. If a translator was needed, the researcher asked the secretary or teachers (who spoke that language) if they would be able to volunteer 10-15 minutes of their time to translate the interview. The researcher was bilingual in English and Korean and had limited Spanish speaking and listening skills.

The day of data gathering.

1. The researcher arrived at the school on the days and times previously set by the staff of the schools.

2. When the researcher arrived at the school site, she greeted the students and staff and asked the staff if they had any questions or concerns.
3. The researcher asked the secretary or teachers to collect data from the cumulative record folders of the students being interviewed (see Appendix J). The interviewer asked about the accuracy of this data (i.e. how often they were updated). While they were accessing student information, the researcher set up two comfortable chairs around a table in an available, quiet classroom.
4. At the designated interview time, students, parents, and teachers were taken into the classroom, and the door remained open. These classrooms were equipped with air conditioning. The researcher conducted the interviews, and the interview consisted of only the researcher and one participant.
5. The researcher confirmed that all consent and assent forms were signed prior to interviewing the participant. The researcher had additional copies of all forms, in case extra forms were needed.
6. The researcher spoke using a friendly tone. The researcher was familiar with independent study, as she had worked nine years with students, parents, and staff of alternative education programs. The assent and/or consent letters were read to each participant, and a signature and date were required to continue. The interviewer reiterated that this was a voluntary interview, it would take 10-15 minutes, and if for any reason the participant wished to decline, take a break, or reschedule, she or he may do so.
7. Copies of the interview questions were available to the participants during the interview (See Appendix F). The researcher conducted the interview using semi-structured interview forms (see Appendix J, Appendix K, and Appendix M).

8. When the students and parents concluded the interview, they were each given one movie ticket voucher in appreciation for their time. Within one month of the staff interview date, the researcher sent personalized thank you note to the staff's workplace.

No shows. For participants who did not show up for their interview, the researcher asked the teacher or head secretary to call the absent participants for permission to release their phone number and/or email address to the researcher. If the information was not released, the researcher understood that the participant no longer wished to participate in the study. If the information was released, the researcher attempted to contact the participant five times (once each day) via phone and/or email in attempt to reschedule the interview. After the fifth day, the researcher understood that the participant no longer wished to participate and found additional participants for the study.

Field notes. The researcher took field notes in her car for 30 minutes after she left the school site. Field notes were taken in a spiral notebook with a pen. Notes were labeled with the school site code and the date of the observation.

Protection of Human Subjects

The researcher was aware of humane considerations and reassured participates that this study would not require or result in any physical or emotional pain to the participants (Joyner et al., 2013). The interviewer informed the participants about the purpose of the study and answered any questions they had. To eliminate any possible risks, the interviewer followed the research data collection procedures stated above.

The data coding in this study was handled confidentially. The names of the participants remained anonymous and were used for data collection purposes only. The names were removed, and interview notes were pre-identified. Each student was identified by the school site code (A-

F), followed by "S" and a number code (numbers will start at 1; e.g., AS1). Each parent was identified by the school site code (A-F), followed by "P" and a number code (numbers will start at 1; e.g., AP1). Each student and parent had the same site code and number. Staff participants were identified by their school site code (A-F), followed by a letter code (letters will start at A; e.g., AA, AB). These codes helped the researcher classify the data.

Once the data was analyzed and the study was completed, the researcher kept all forms of documentation related to this study in a locked filing cabinet at the researcher's home office. Paper documents were put into a file folder, and electronic records were stored in a USB drive. Only the researcher had the key to the filing cabinet. After a span of five years, paper documents will be shredded using a document shredding service, and all electronic records will be deleted.

Participant's consent. The Letter of Consent and Letter of Assent, as shown in Appendix G, Appendix H, Appendix I, and Appendix L informed all participants of their rights. These consents introduced the researcher, purpose of the study, and stated that participation was voluntary.

Submission to internal review board. The proposed study was sent to the Pepperdine University Graduate and Professional School's IRB to ensure that proper steps were taken to protect the rights and welfare of human subjects. In preparation for the IRB process, the researcher passed the NIH Web-based training course, *Protecting Human Research Participants* (See Appendix D).

Summary

This chapter explained the mixed methods research design that was used in this study, along with the description of the population and the process of gathering data. The data collection included interviews of the students who were enrolled in alternative education schools,

parents of these students, and staff who worked in alternative schools. Field notes from observations were also noted.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to examine independent study schools in the Los Angeles County. Six charter schools were targeted in the San Fernando Valley to explore student, parent, and teacher perspectives. The data was gathered by conducting interviews and through extensive field notes from November 2014 through December 2014.

This chapter presents an analysis of the study's findings and is arranged into sections based on the data analysis process, demographic data, field notes, and major findings by research questions. The following research questions guided the study:

- Research Question 1: According to participants, what is the purpose of the school?
- Research Question 2: According to participants, what factors motivate students to participate at this school?
- Research Question 3: Do respondents perceive that the organization of the school is effective?
- Research Question 4: What changes are desired at this school?
- Research Question 5: How satisfied are students, parents, and teachers with this school?

Data Analysis Process

The researcher used several steps to retrieve and analyze the data.

Quantitative data analysis. The researcher checked that all of the data had accurately been recorded onto a master document. The researcher prepared figures to best represent the findings. The researcher wrote out verbally and objectively the description of the findings.

Qualitative data analysis. Interviews were recorded using semi-structured interview forms (see Appendix J, Appendix K, and Appendix M). The researcher gathered a group of

doctoral students to help code the data. Directions were given on how to code responses via in person. The doctoral students helped classify interview responses into categories. The researcher presented findings using discussions, figures, and tables. Comparisons were then made with literature. The researcher also incorporated field notes and her personal experiences to draw personal assessments of the findings.

Findings Regarding Demographics of Survey Participants

Data was gathered from six independent study schools. At each school, four students (two males and two females) and their parents were interviewed. The grade levels of the 24 students were as follows: 3 freshman, 4 sophomores, 10 juniors, and 7 seniors. In addition, two teachers from each school participated in the study.

Parent's education level. The education level of the most educated parent with whom the student lived with varied. Six out of twenty-four (25%) parents did not graduate from high school, and the same number (25%) of parents had at least their high school diploma. Five out of twenty-four (20.8%) parents had some college credits, while seven out of twenty-four (29.1%) parents were college graduates. None of the parents interviewed had a graduate degree (see Figure 4).

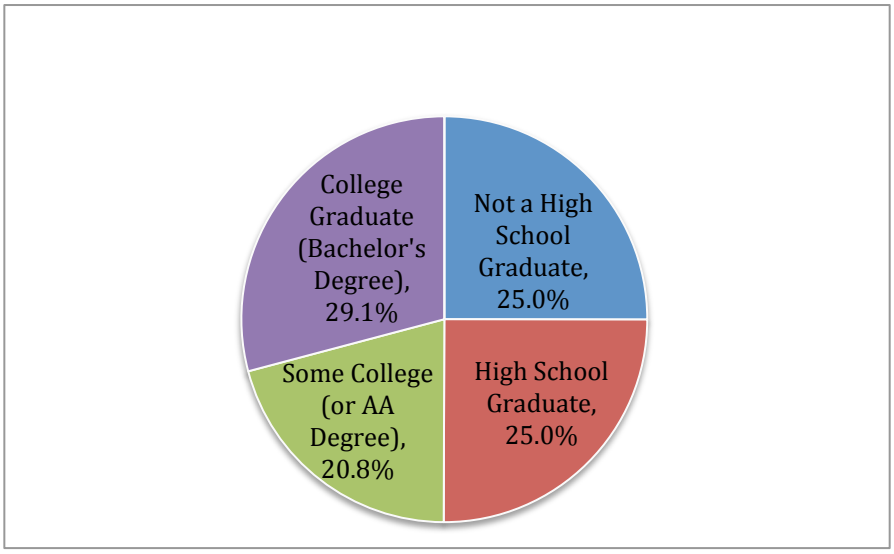


Figure 4. Percentages of parent's highest level of education.

Household income. The household income survey takes into consideration the household annual income combined with the number of people living in a house. Households whose income falls below certain levels are eligible for free and reduced-priced meals from the state (see Figure 5). The California Department of Education (2014b) updates income eligibility guidelines for each school year.

Figure 5. Free and reduced-price meal plan eligibility scale for the 2014-2015 school year.

Fourteen out of twenty-four (58.8%) families interviewed qualified for free and reduced-price meal plans, while ten out of twenty-four (41.7%) families did not (see Figure 6).

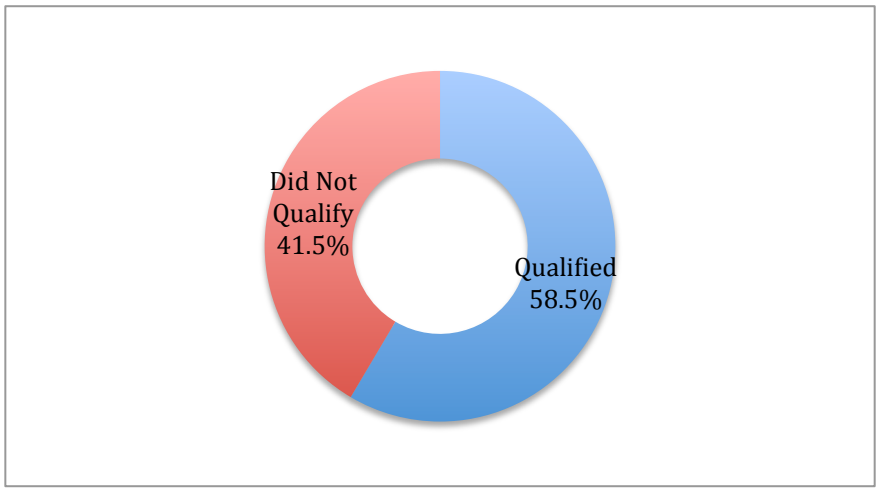


Figure 6. Families who qualified for free and reduced meal plans.

Ethnic background. The White group represented half (50%) of the student participants interviewed. Eight out of twenty-four (33.3%) students were of Hispanic/Latino decent. American Indian/Alaskan Native (4.2%), Filipino (4.2%), and two or more ethnicities (8.3%) represented a smaller percentage of the students interviewed. From observation, a small percentage of students were of African-American/Black descent, but none participated in the study, as it was beyond the researchers control (see Figure 7).

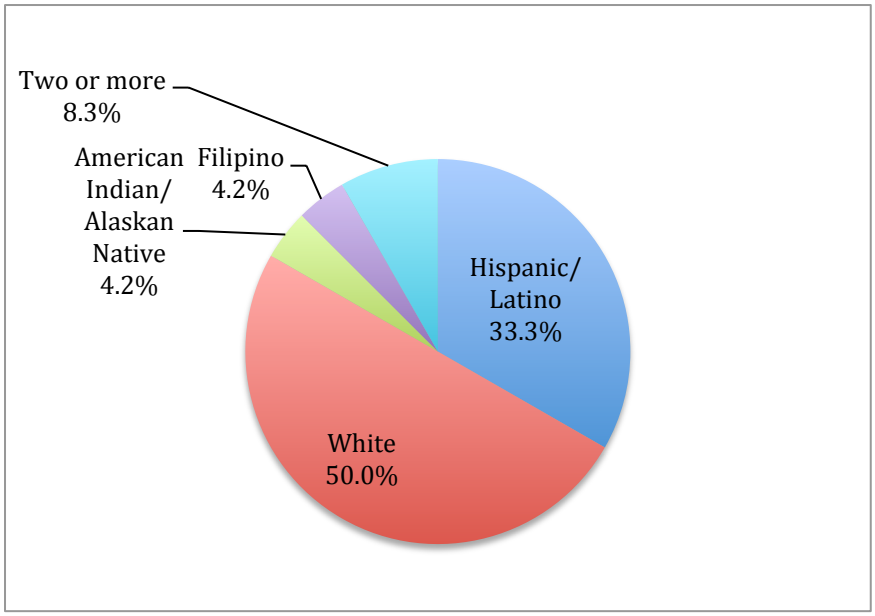


Figure 7. Student ethnicity background.

Previous school type. The largest type of schools the students previously attended was a public school (87.5%). A small percentage of students came from private schools (8.3%) or out of state schools (4.2%) (see Figure 8).

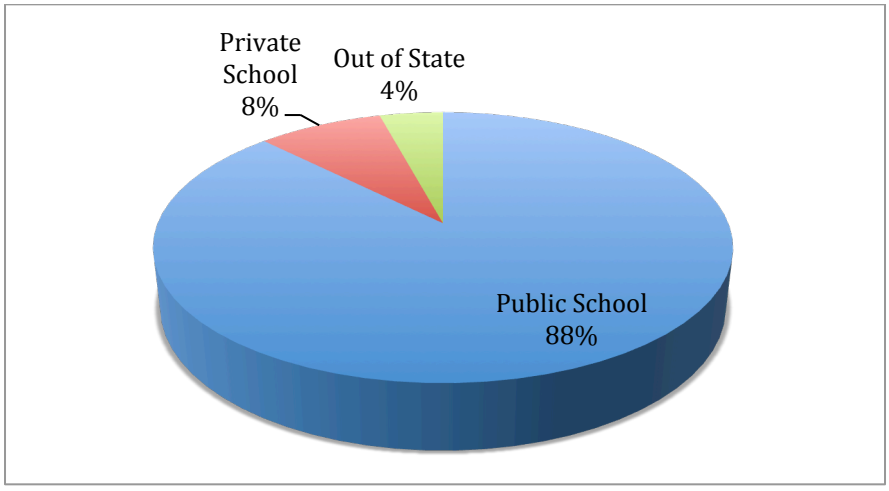
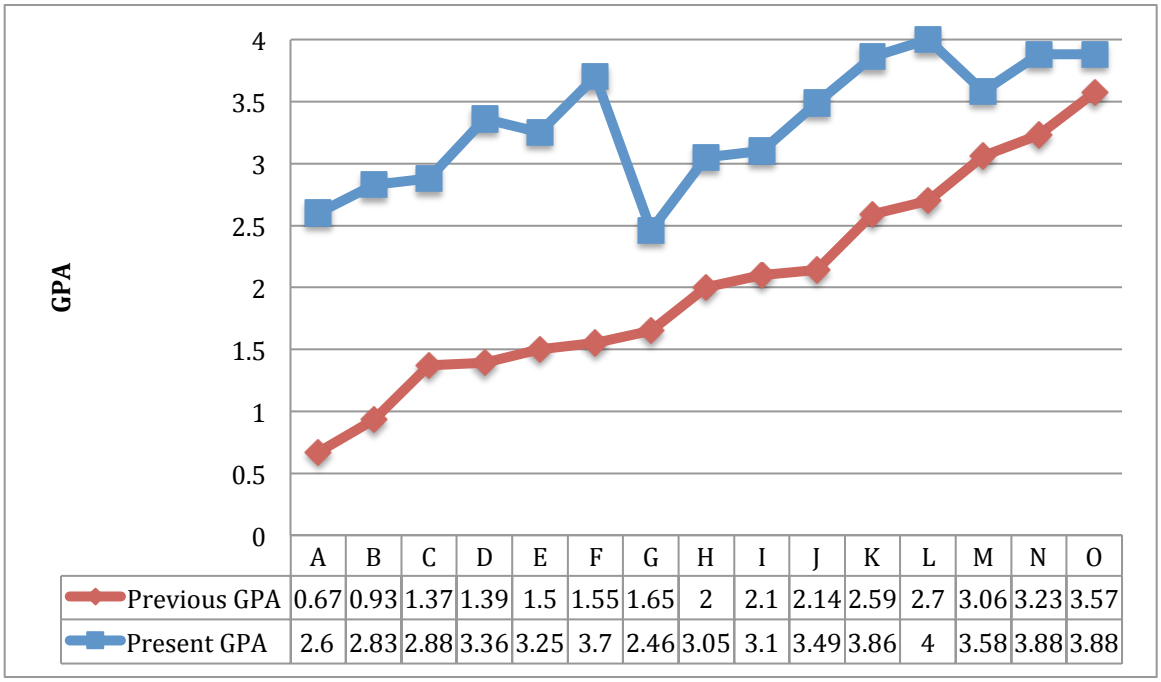


Figure 8. Previous school type.

Student GPA. Student GPA's fluctuated from their previous school to their present school. All students (100%) who transferred from a previous high school had a higher GPA at

their present school than at their previous school (see Figure 9). The mean of their previous school's GPA was a 2.03, and the mean of their present GPA was 3.33. A small percentage (33.3%) of students did not attend a previous high school and enrolled at their present school after attending middle school. The average GPA for these students at their current school was a 3.07 (see Figure 10).



	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O
Previous GPA	0.67	0.93	1.37	1.39	1.5	1.55	1.65	2	2.1	2.14	2.59	2.7	3.06	3.23	3.57
Present GPA	2.6	2.83	2.88	3.36	3.25	3.7	2.46	3.05	3.1	3.49	3.86	4	3.58	3.88	3.88

Figure 9. Comparison of GPA's of 15 alternative education students between their previous school and present school.

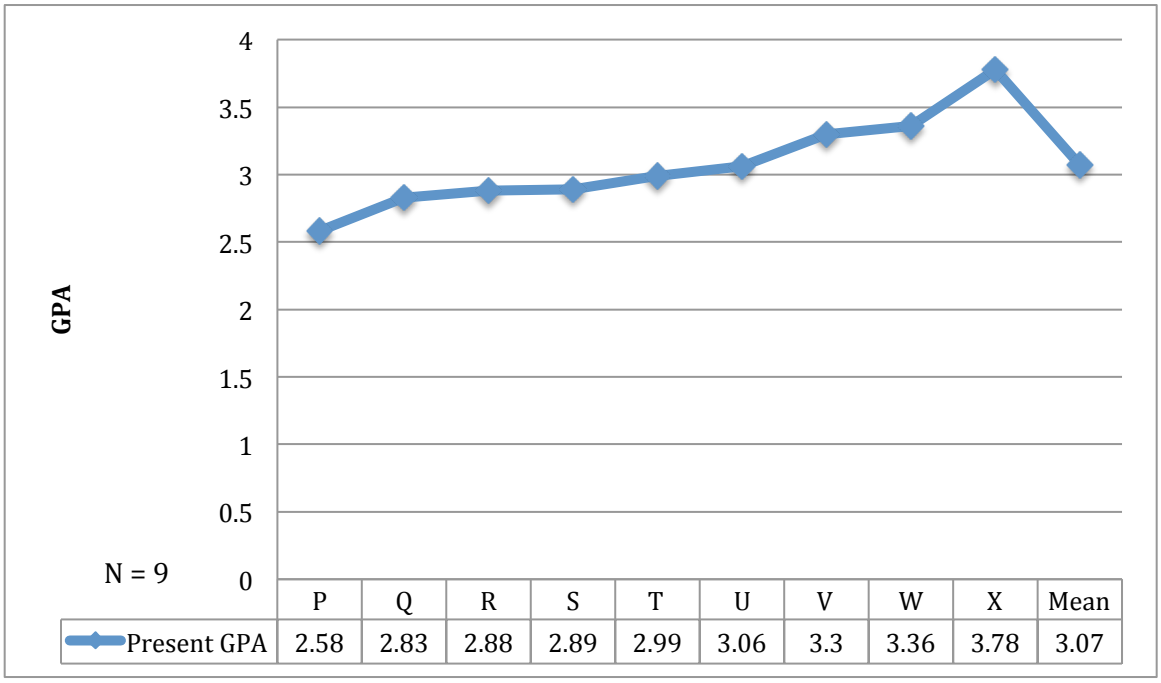


Figure 10. Present GPA for alternative education students with no previous high school records.

Teacher. The teacher's age and years employed varied (see Figure 11). The youngest teacher interviewed was 30 years old, and the oldest teacher interviewed was 59 years old. Six years was the average length these teachers taught at their current school.

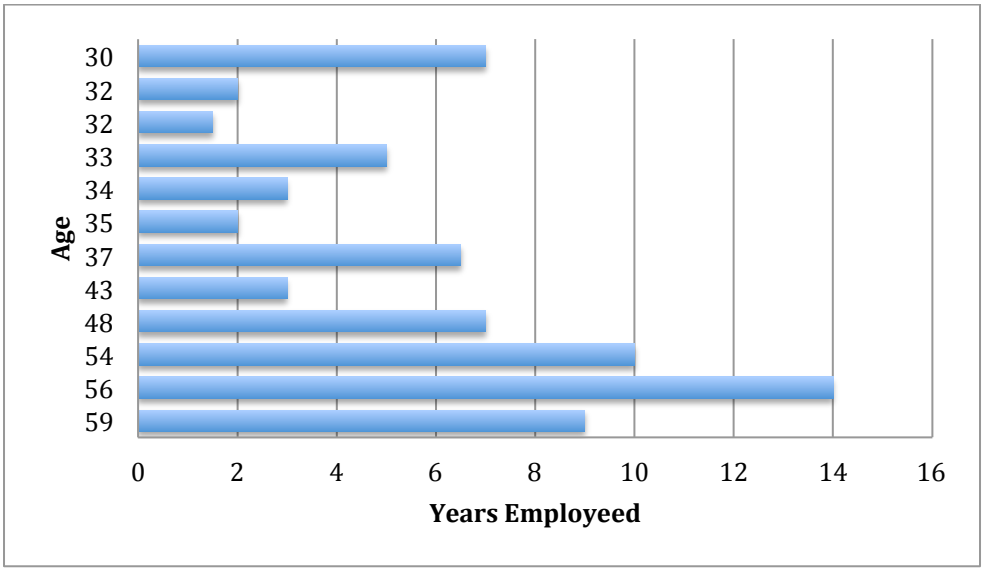


Figure 11. Age of teachers and years of employment.

All of the teachers interviewed had at least their bachelor's degree and teaching credential. Half (50%) of the teachers interviewed had or were pursuing their master's degree. One of the twelve (8.3%) teachers interviewed had or were pursuing a doctorate degree (see Figure 12).

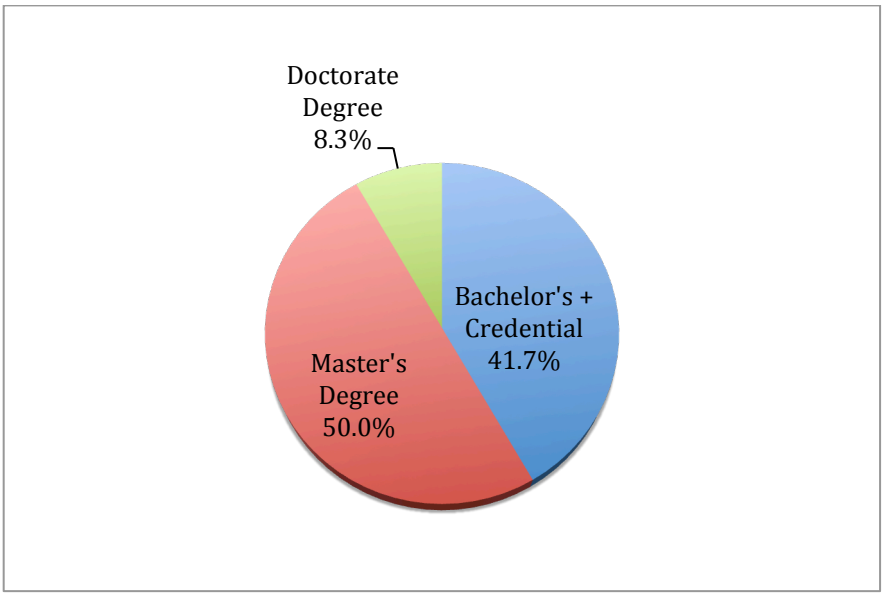


Figure 12. Teacher's highest level of education.

Summary of Observations

Site A observation. This school was located in a large shopping plaza with ample parking. As soon as the researcher stepped inside of the school, she was impressed with its size. The space included one spacious room and three small adjoining rooms. The school was reconfigured from two office spaces. At this school, there were four teachers, two SGIs, a math tutor, and three support staff. This school appeared very clean, well-organized, and aesthetically pleasing, with a college theme. The majority of the students and staff were Hispanic/Latino. This site was located in a quiet location, and the attending students worked independently, with little conversation. The staff was working with small groups of students.

At the time of the researcher's visit, a college counselor who was employed by the school had 30-minute one-on-one appointments with the students throughout the day. She would ask the questions such as, "What do you want to do?" and "Where do you want to apply?" She went over the planning guides with each student, helped them with their college applications, calculated GPA's, and read over personal statements.

Site B observation. This school was located in a smaller shopping plaza with a parking lot that was crowded. Once inside, the school was very narrow, with tables and desks along the walls. Near the back of the school, there was one smaller room where an SGI class was taking place. The majority of the students and staff there were White. The teachers were wearing shirts from different colleges and the teachers would make announcements to ask other teachers about their college shirt. These informal discussions promoted college awareness.

The students at this school seemed to have a close relationship with the school secretary. They would go to her to ask questions they had in their units or to seek personal advice. One student brought a laptop and asked, "Can you help me with this college application? I don't know what it's asking me." They spent the next twenty minutes looking over the application. The climate of this school was very friendly.

Student respondent BS3 stated,

> I like this school because of its flexible schedule and it offers all the classes to go to a 4-year university. I wasn't going to go to college, but my teachers and college counselor told me I should. I need to go to different centers to take the Biology and Physics class because they don't have them here, but that's okay.

Site C observation. This school was the easiest to find. There was ample parking, and once inside, the space was adequate. This school had the most adjoining rooms, which were used for SGI classes. The students at this center were diverse (Hispanic/Latino, White, and Middle Eastern), and the majority of the teachers here were White.

Towards the end of the day, they had a student orientation for incoming students. During this time, the students and parents filled out enrollment paperwork and met their teachers. Their teachers went over what classes they would be taking. They also discussed short and long-term educational goals. When the teacher asked incoming students how they found out about the school, one student responded, “I have a lot of friends that go there. They told me about it.” Another student responded, “My counselor told me I should enroll here to make up credits.”

Site D observation. This location was much smaller than the other school sites the researcher visited. It consisted of one small room that accommodated three teachers, and an attached smaller room that was divided into two sections. In one of the sections, it was an open classroom for the SGIs. The other one-third of the room was a small office. There were no backdoors. The researcher felt that the space was too small to accommodate all of the students this school had. The researcher felt crammed and had to conduct her interviews in the small office that barely fit herself and the interviewee.

All of the teachers at this location were Hispanic/Latino, and the student population consisted of Hispanic/Latinos and White. The teachers at this site were very friendly and seemed to care about their students. As the students came in for their appointment, the teachers would greet the students and ask how they were doing. If the students did not do their homework and were not ready to test, they got a small lecture on how important it was to complete their units.

Site E observation. When the researcher arrived at this school, the center coordinator greeted her. This is when the researcher realized that there was a familiar look to all of the school sites. They had the same furniture, textbooks on display, and the tables were arranged in a way that the teachers could have an informal and close knit relationship with the students. The

researcher noticed that the school changed their math and English textbooks to common core books. This school had the most ethnically diverse group of students and staff members.

This location was one of the bigger locations and had math, English, science, and Spanish classes in the smaller rooms. In each class, there were 10-13 students. The students seemed engaged, and there was consistent communication between the students and the teacher.

During lunch, their student council, which comprised of 13 students, ate lunch and discussed future events in the math classroom. While there was a staff to oversee the group, the students took charge and ran the meeting. After the meeting, they began to create posters to advertise these events.

Student respondent ES2 shared a story about how she got bullied at her previous school. When asked if her school should get rid of extra-curricular activities, she said, “No, these activities further us as an individual. I was on the volleyball team last year. It was my first time playing and I was scared. My teammates and coaches pushed me, and I’m glad I played.” She went on to express how it has helped her with her social skills, since she is usually quiet.

Site F observation. This school site was hard to find, as it was amongst a row of stores on a busy street. There was no parking available, only metered parking. Once inside, the school was very small and narrow. Desks were arranged awkwardly, and students were crammed into this location. The student population was comprised of Armenians, Hispanic/Latinos, and White.

Student respondent FS2 stood out. She expressed how she did not like her peers at her previous school and got bullied. She stated, “I went to school, but didn’t want to go. I like this school because I am able to be more independent and I have more time to focus on school.” When asked whether she would choose to attend her previous school or her current school, she chose her current school. She said, “I enjoy going to school now.”

Overall similarities and differences. All of the schools were located within shopping plazas or on major streets. For the most part, they were difficult to find, as the school signs were small or non-existent (some sites only had the school's sticker on their doors). These school sites resembled learning or tutoring centers. These schools varied in size. Site A, C, and E were considerably larger and were approximately two to three times larger than sites B, D, and F.

Once inside, the schools were clean, lively, and full of students. The climate felt intimate and safe. There was a pleasant tone to the schools. While the school was not entirely quiet, the sound was productive, not noisy. Students and teachers were conversing, and the phones were ringing. All but one of the schools (Site F) had a "college wall" that promoted post-secondary education with college banners and posters. Textbooks were in good condition, and the English Language Arts and math books were aligned to the Common Core standards. Each school also had an area that advertised current and future school activities.

The first thing I noticed about all of the schools was the low student to teacher ratio. At any given time, there were only 2-6 students per one-hour appointment. The teachers worked individually with students during their appointments. In the math, science, and English classes, the average class contained 10 to 13 students. Many of the students wore school shirts and sweaters with the mascot on it.

Findings and Summary Related to Research Questions

The researcher developed interview questions that aligned with the five research questions related to alternative education programs. The following sections discuss the findings of each research question, with subdivisions to address the participants' experience.

Findings for Research Question 1: What is the purpose of the school? Research Question 1 asked what the purpose of the school was. Interview questions #1, 2, and 3 were

designed to gather data about factors influencing enrollment, future plans, and characteristics of the school.

Table 7 lists responses students gave as to why they of enrolled at their current school. The most frequent reply from students (62.5%), parents (62.5%), and teachers (83.3%) was due to academic recovery. The students were one or more classes behind. The second most common answer was that they were bullied or felt that their previous school was not safe.

Table 7

Frequencies of Students', Parents', and Teachers' Responses to Factors Influencing Student Enrollment

Factors	Students	Parents	Teachers
Academic Recovery	15	15	10
Other – Bullying/Safer Environment	6	5	9
Accelerated Progress	4	3	2
Medical Reasons	0	0	4
Other – Flexible Schedule	1	1	2
Other – Pregnant/Parenting	0	0	3
Other – Sibling attended/attending	0	2	1
Probation/Out of Juvenile Hall	0	0	2
Other – Didn't like traditional school	0	1	1
Other – Family obligations	0	1	1
Need to Work	0	0	1

Table 8 represents what participants perceived were the short-term future plans for students. Students (87.5%), parents (91.7%), and teachers (100%) stated that the student planned to graduate from their current school. A small percentage of students (12.5%) wanted to transfer back to a traditional school, while a smaller percentage of parents (9.0%) wanted their child to transfer back to a traditional school. All (100%) students interviewed planned to pursue a high school diploma and not a Certificate of High School equivalency such as the General Educational Development (GED) or California High School Proficiency Exam (CHSPE).

Table 8

Frequencies of Students', Parents', and Teachers' Responses to Student's Future Plans

	Students	Parents	Teachers
Graduate from current school	21	22	12
Transfer back to traditional school	3	2	3

Table 9 represents what the participants liked about their school. Students (66.7%) and parents (66.7%) enjoyed having a relationship with their teachers, and 75% of the teachers stated that they enjoyed getting to know the students. Another common response from the students and parents was that they enjoyed the extra-curricular activities the school offered and felt that the independent study model was working for them.

Table 9

Frequencies of Students', Parents', and Teachers' Responses to What Characteristics of the School They Enjoy

	Students	Parents	Teachers
Relationship with teacher(s)	16	16	5
Other – Independent Study/Own pace	10	4	2
Extra-curricular activities	4	6	3
Individual attention	2	3	4
Getting to know students	0	0	9
Safety	2	2	2
Other – Teachers responsibility	2	3	1
Small group instruction	2	3	0
Curriculum offered	2	1	1
Administrators	0	0	3
Other – Tutoring	3	0	0
Other – Opportunities to do better	0	2	0
Other – Not compliant/always changing	0	0	2

Findings for Research Question 2: What factors motivate students to participate at this school? Research Question 2 identified factors that motivated students to participate at their current school. Interview questions #4, 5, and 6, were designed to ask what they liked most about

the school, if extra-curricular activities was an integral part of their high school experience, and who motivated them to continue their education.

Table 10 presents the interview responses as to which extra-curricular activities students and teachers most often participated in. Over half (54.2%) of the students interviewed were in their school's student council. One-third (33.3%) of the students interviewed did not participate in an extra-curricular activity. Findings show that it was not because the school did not offer anything the students were interested in. All (100%) of the teachers have participated in an extra-curricular activity in the past year. Eleven out of twelve (91.7%) teachers have participated in a field trip.

Table 10

Frequencies of Students' and Teachers' Responses to Extra-curricular Activity Participation

Factors	Students	Teachers
Student Council	13	5
Field trips	6	11
Dances	5	5
Pathways Trip	3	6
No participation	8	0
Sports Team	2	4
College Tour	4	0
Other – College cohort	0	3
Girl Talk/Peaceful Warriors	2	0
Other – 5k marathon	2	0
Other - Workshops	1	1
Other – Audio class	1	0
Other – Community service	1	0

Question 5 presents the answer related to whether the schools should get rid of extra-curricular activities and their reasoning behind it. There is consensus on this question, as all of the students (100%), parents (100%), teachers (100%) believe that the schools should keep the extra-curricular activities. Students (58.3%), parents (75%), and teachers (83.3%) agreed that

these extra-curricular activities provided students an opportunity to socialize and meet other students.

Table 11 presents reasons students gave for their motivation to complete their units and to come to school. The most frequent response from students (62.5%) and parents (79.1%) was that the student wanted to graduate and go to college. Most teachers (91.7%) believed they were the reason why students completed their units and came to school. Half (50.0%) of the teachers also believed that the student's family impacted how well a student did.

Table 11

Frequencies of Students, Parents, and Teachers Responses to Who Motivates Students

Factors	Students	Parents	Teachers
Student wants to graduate and go to college	15	19	2
Their teachers	8	5	11
Family wants students to graduate	8	5	6
Student wants to graduate to have a better future	9	4	4
Other – Other students/friends	0	0	3
Other – Significant other	1	0	0

Findings for Research Question 3: Do respondents perceive the organization of the school is effective? Interview questions # 7, 8, and 9 identified information about what they liked about the structure of the school, if the students felt successful at their school, and if any enrollment process changes should be made.

Table 12 represents what the participants liked about the structure of the program. Students (54.2%) and parents (50.0%) enjoyed the flexible school hours. Students also liked their teachers (41.7%), the classes offered (29.2%), and the learning style (29.2%). Parents (45.8%) also liked the teachers at these schools. Teachers enjoyed the learning style (50%), flexible school hours (33.3%), classes offered (33.3%), and the size of the classes (33.3%).

Table 12

Frequencies of Students, Parents, and Teachers Responses to What they Like about the School

Factors	Students	Parents	Teachers
Flexible school hours	13	12	4
Teachers	10	11	0
Learning style	7	2	6
Classes offered	7	2	4
Size of classes	3	3	4
Online program classes	1	1	0
Other – Seeing students grow/graduate	0	0	2
Length of appointment	1	0	0
Other – support for SPED students	0	0	1

Interview question 8 asked the question of if the independent study model was working for the students. All (100%) 24 students stated that they were doing better at their current school than at their previous school. Twenty-three out of twenty-four (95.8%) of the parents thought that the students were doing better at their current school than at their previous school. One parent (4.2%) thought that his/her student was going at a slower pace than at their previous school. On the contrary, by looking at the student's previous schools' transcripts, only 41.7% of the teachers thought the students were doing better at their current school, while 58.3% thought that the students were going at a slower rate than their previous school.

Interview question 9 asked about how they felt about the enrollment process to enroll at their current school. All of the students (100%) and parents (100%) stated that their current school made the transition smooth. Eleven out of twelve teachers (91.7%) believed that their schools made the transition to enroll smooth. One out of eleven teachers (8.3%) believed it was acceptable and was neither smooth nor difficult for students to enroll.

Findings for Research Question 4: What changes are desired at these schools?

Interview questions # 10, 11, and 12 sought to discover what changes were desired at these schools.

Table 13 describes how the students and parents felt about their attendance at their previous school compared to their current school. Students (70.8%) and parents (79.2%) believed that they had better attendance at their current school than at their previous school. A smaller percentage of students (29.2%) and parents (26.3%) stated that they had excellent attendance record at both schools.

Table 13

Frequencies of Students', Parents', and Teachers' Responses to Comparing Attendance from Previous School to Current School

Factors	Students	Parents
Student has better attendance at current school	17	19
Student had excellent attendance at both schools	7	5

Table 14 describes what changes participants would like to see at their school. Half (50%) of the students and seventeen out of twenty-four (70.8%) parents were satisfied and thought that no change needed to be made. Nine out of twenty-four (37.5%) students thought the facilities needed to be improved. The most common answer from teachers included: better facilities, more individualized attention, and more support.

Table 14

Frequencies of Students', Parents', and Teachers' Responses to Changes to the School

Factors	Students	Parents	Teachers
Other - None	12	17	0
Better facilities	9	1	4
More support	5	2	4
More extra-curricular activities	2	1	2
Other – Courses offered	2	3	0
More individualize attention	0	0	4
Other – Better communication from school	0	4	0
Evening/weekend appointments/classes	0	1	2
Better teachers	1	0	0

Table 15 describes whether student would graduate from high school if alternative education did not exist. Fifteen out of twenty-four (62.5%) students believed they would graduate at a traditional school if alternative education did not exist, while eight out of twenty-four (33.3%) students said they would not have be able to graduate at a traditional school. The parent's views were split, with eleven out of twenty-four (45.8%) parents stating that they believed their child would be able to graduate from a traditional, and half (50%) of the parents expressing that their child would not have succeeded at a traditional school. All (100%) of the teachers interviewed stated that most of their students would not graduate from high school if alternative education did not exist.

Table 15

Frequencies of Students', Parents', and Teachers' Responses to Graduation

Factors	Students	Parents	Teachers
Student would not be able to graduate at a traditional public school	8	12	12
Students would be able to graduate at a traditional public school	15	11	0
I don't know	1	1	0

Findings for Research Question 5: How satisfied are students, teachers, and parents with this school? Interview questions # 13, 14, and 15 described the satisfaction levels of the schools and teachers.

Question 13 compared the students' previous teachers to their current teachers. When comparing previous teachers the students have had in the past to their current teachers, 91.7% of the students said they felt that their current teachers genuinely care about them, and 95.8% of the parents said that they felt that their current teachers genuinely care about the students. Two of the twenty-four (8.3%) students stated that their previous and current teachers felt the same way. Only one (4.2%) parent could not comment, since his/her child was previously enrolled at an online school.

Table 16 describes the responses to which school they would rather attend. Twenty-two out of twenty-four (91.7%) students stated that they would like to stay enrolled at their current school. If given the option, two (8.3%) of the students would like to have attended their previous school due to the social aspects of traditional schools. All twenty-four (100%) parents would choose the student's current school as their school of choice. They also saw that the students were more motivated and were doing better than at their previous school. Eleven out of twelve (91.7%) teachers said they would like to continue teaching at their current school. One (8.3%) teacher stated that he or she would prefer to teach at a private school, as the rigor and parent involvement was lacking at their current school.

Table 16

Frequencies of Students', Parents', and Teachers' Responses to Choosing Schools

Factors	Students	Parents	Teachers
Current School	22	24	11
Previous School	2	0	0
Why – Doing better/motivated	5	11	0
Why – Opportunities for growth	1	3	7
Why – Relationship with students	0	0	8
Why – More time for other obligations	1	0	6
Why – Individualized attention	4	2	0
Why – Safe	2	4	0
Why – Able to go straight into 4 year university	3	1	1
Why – Easier to participant in school activities	5	0	0
Why – Good teachers	1	3	0
Why (Private school) – Rigor, Parent involvement	1	0	0

Students, parents, and teachers were asked to rank how satisfied they were, on a scale from one to ten, with the school. The Net Promoter Score (NPS) was used to generate percentages depending on their answers. The detractors were subtracted from the promoters (see Figure 13). The NPS can be used to gauge customer feelings and attitudes about the organization

(Reichheld & Markey, 2011). The NPS were as followed: Students gave a 87.5% rating, parents gave a 95.8% rating, and teachers gave a -8.4% rating (see Figure 14).

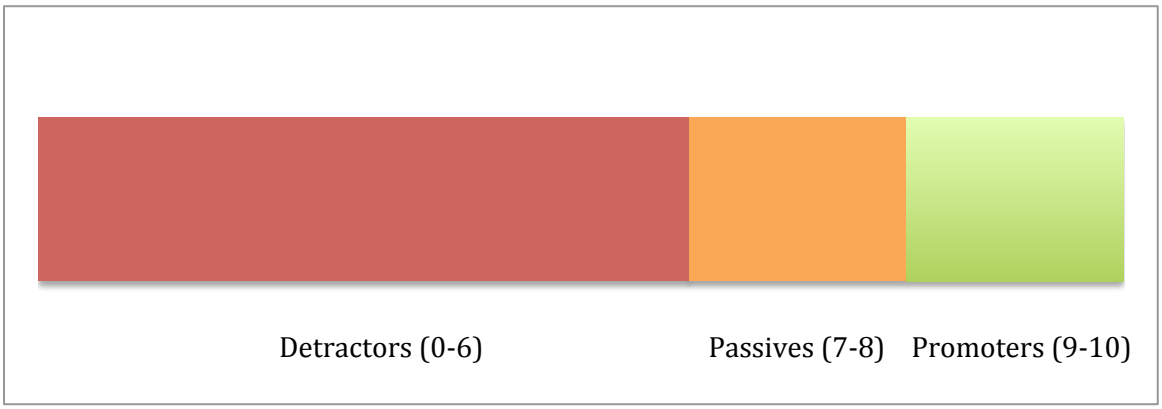


Figure 13. Categories of detractors, passives, and promoters.

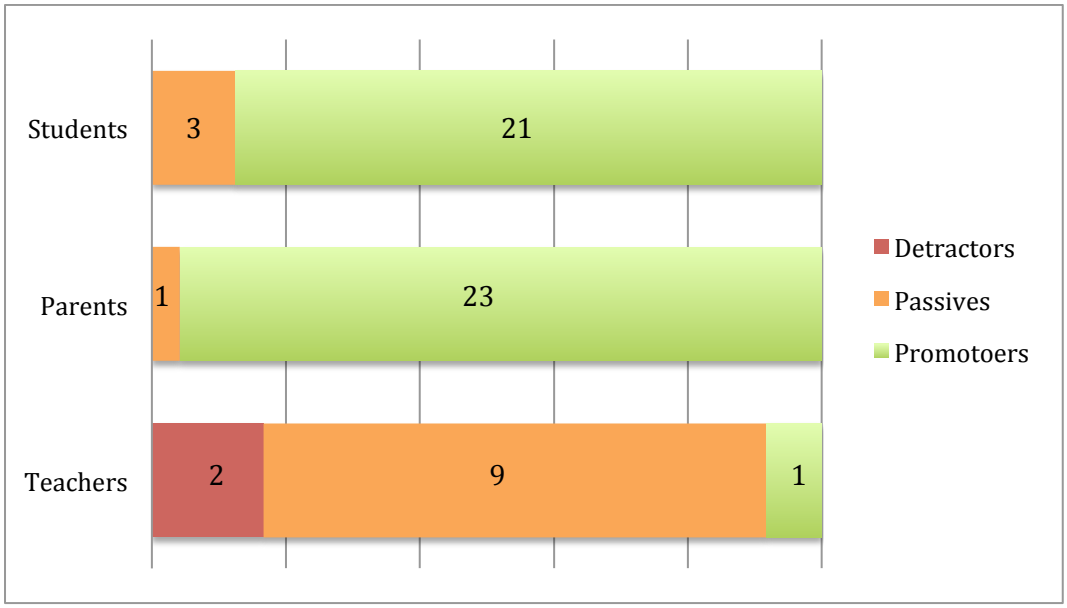


Figure 14. Net promoter score for satisfaction.

Summary of Findings By Research Question

Summary of findings for research question 1: According to participants, what is the purpose of the school? When asked why students enrolled at their current school, the most frequent reply from students (62.5%), parents (62.5%), and teachers (83.3%) was due to academic recovery. The students were credit deficient and needed to make up one or more

classes. Another reason pointed to the safe environment these schools provided. Six out of twenty-four (25%) students, five out of twenty-four (20.8%) parents, and nine out of twelve (75%) said the reason why students enrolled was due to unsafe environments, including being bullied at their previous school. Other motives for enrollment included: being able to finish high school quicker/accelerated progress, being able to complete courses at their own pace, and because of medical reasons.

It is unknown whether at the time of enrollment, if students enrolled with the intention of making up credits to transfer back to their previous school or to graduate at these schools. Once enrolled, 87.5% of students interviewed stated that they wanted to graduate at their current school. The parents were content with the schools, as 91.7% of the parents wanted their child to graduate from their current school. All twelve (100%) teachers interviewed stated that once a student is enrolled at their school, most of their students graduate at their schools.

Students and parents liked these schools primarily because of the teachers. Sixteen out of twenty-four (66.7%) students and sixteen out of twenty-four (66.7%) parents stated that the teachers were what they liked most about the school they attended. Due to the low student to teacher ratio, both students and parents are able to have a bond with the teachers. Nine out of twelve (75%) teachers said they stay at these schools because they genuinely care about the students and want them to succeed. Another reason students stayed is because they liked the independent study aspect of the school. Ten out of twenty-four (41.7%) students said they enjoyed being able to work at their own pace. The students were able to enjoy the social aspects of a traditional school by participating in extra-curricular activities such as sports, student council, and field trips.

Summary of findings for research question 2: According to participants, what factors motivate students to participate at this school? Of the twenty-four students interviewed, sixteen (66.7%) of them have participated in an extra-curricular activity at their current school within the year. Thirteen (54.2%) of the students interviewed were a part of their school's student council. Other popular extra-curricular activities included field trips, dances, and college tours. The school also did a great job promoting these activities as each of these schools had an area designated to promote upcoming events.

Students, parents, and teachers unanimously agreed that extra-curricular activities were important, and that the schools should not get rid of them. They provided students with the social aspect of attending a school, while furthering personal growth. It also gave students something to look forward to.

When asked what or who motivates students to complete their work and to come to school, 62.5% of the students and 79.1% of the parents stated that the students motived themselves because they wanted to go to college. When the teachers were asked what or who motivates the students, eleven out of twelve (91.7%) teachers believed that student success was due to the teachers' quality of their professional performance. Other reasons for why students continued their education was to have a better future or because a family member or friend wanted them to succeed.

Summary of findings for research question 3: Do respondents perceive that the organization of the school is effective? When asked what they liked about the school, students (54.2%) and parents (50.0%) enjoyed the flexible school hours. The students (41.7%) and parents (45.8%) also liked their teachers. Students (29.2%) were glad that they enrolled at these schools because it fit their learning style better than the traditional classroom model. Twenty-

nine percent of the students also enjoyed the classes and curriculum offered. By being able to get the classes they needed, they were able to graduate. Some of the students were able to apply to four-year universities because they were allowed to take classes without having to wait for the semester to start. Teachers enjoyed the learning style (50%), flexible school hours (33.3%), classes offered (33.3%), and size of the classes (33.3%).

All 24 students (100%) stated that they were doing better at their current school than at their previous school. Twenty-three out of twenty-four (95.8%) of the parents thought that the students were doing better at their current school than at their previous school. On the other hand, only 41.7% of the teachers thought the students were doing better at their current school, while 58.3% thought that the students were going at a slower rate than from their previous school.

All of the students (100%) and parents (100%) stated that their current school made the enrollment process smooth. Students and parents had an easy time withdrawing from their previous school and enrolling the student to their current school. Eleven out of twelve teachers (91.7%) believed that their schools made the transition as easy and as uncomplicated as possible.

Summary of findings for research question 4: What changes are desired at these schools? Students (70.8%) and parents (79.2%) believed that the students had better attendance at their current school than at their previous school. A smaller percentage of students (29.2%) and parents (26.3%) stated that they had excellent attendance record at both schools.

Half (50%) of the students and seventeen out of twenty-four (70.8%) of the parents were satisfied with the school and thought that no change needed to be made. Nine out of twenty-four (37.5%) students thought the facilities needed to be improved. The most common answer from teachers included: better facilities, more individualize attention, and more support.

When asked if students would graduate from high school if alternative education did not exist, 62.5% of the students believed they would graduate at a traditional school if alternative education did not exist, while 33.3% students said they would not have been able to graduate at a traditional school. The parents' responses were mixed, as about half of them believed their child would graduate at a traditional school, while the other half believed that they would not be able to graduate. The teachers unanimously agreed that most of these students would not graduate from high school if alternative education did not exist.

Summary of findings for research question 5: How satisfied are students, teachers, and parents with this school? Students and parents believed that their teachers genuinely cared about the students. When comparing previous teachers the students have had in the past to their current teachers, 91.7% of the students say they felt that their current teachers genuinely cared about them, and 95.8% of the parents say that they felt that their current teachers genuinely cared about their child. Two of the twenty-four (8.3%) students stated that their previous and current teachers felt the same way.

If given the option to attend their current school or their previous school, twenty-two out of twenty-four (91.7%) students stated that they would like to stay enrolled at their current school. All twenty-four (100%) parents would choose the student's current school as their school of choice. Eleven out of twelve (91.7%) teachers said they would like to continue teaching at their current school.

Students and parents were satisfied at the current school the student was attending. On the NPS, students gave a 87.5% rating, and parents gave a 95.8% rating. The teacher satisfaction level was lower, as teachers gave a -8.4% rating.

Chapter 5: Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Summary

Alternative schools held promise with innovative options to traditional education, but American society often views alternative education programs as second rate to the traditional high school (Conrath, 2001; Ho, 2014; Koetke, 1999; Raywid, 1999; Wehlange et al., 1989). Studies reported by Rumberger (2011) have found that at-risk students typically change schools in order to find an environment that is more suitable for their needs before dropping out. For some students, an alternative school may be their first choice in a high school, but for most, enrolling in an alternative school is their last opportunity to receive a high school diploma.

At-risk students may enroll in alternative education programs for various reasons. These students did not succeed at a traditional school due to personal and contextual factors (Rumberger, 2011). The literature indicated that at-risk students include those who are highly gifted, have health issues or are sick, are pregnant or parenting, work full-time, report being bullied, placed on probation from school or juvenile hall, or reported that the regular classroom was not an appropriate learning setting (California Department of Education, 2000; Hall & Handley, 2004; Manning & Baruth, 1994; Raywid, 1999; Rumberger, 2011).

Thus, alternative education programs must be innovative and flexible in order to meet the various needs of students. Without changing the way alternative programs operate, the students may fail, just as they did in the traditional public school. One type of alternative education program—independent study schools—has become a popular choice in the recent years. Independent study schools are designed to meet the academic needs and personal interests of the students through individualized learning plans (Barrat & Berliner, 2009). Initially, independent study schools' purpose was to serve as a transitional program in which students enrolled to make

up credits; then they transferred back to their traditional school and graduated. Observational data from a recent graduation speech by a director of instruction at a large independent study school suggest that this purpose is changing as these schools engage students more broadly (N. Vijeila, personal communication, June 3, 2014). Not only do educators focus more on schoolwork and curriculum at these schools than traditional schools, they also focus on engaging the students through various extra-curricular activities in order for the student to get the full high school experience. As a result, students are continuing to stay enrolled and opting out of transferring back to their traditional schools. Furthermore, there seems to be a shift from students feeling embarrassed that they attend alternative programs to feeling proud that they have remained in school and are on a path that leads to graduation.

Statement of purpose. The purpose of this study was to evaluate independent study programs in six charter alternative schools in the Los Angeles County. The study sought perceptions of the current students, their parents, and teachers in these programs. This study examined their perceptions of the purpose of the program, their motivations to be at an alternative school, the organization of the program, desired changes to the offered program, and their satisfaction in the independent study program. The researcher had permission to gather data in six charter schools that were affiliated with the Baldwin Park Unified School District. This data gathered may be used to assist policymakers, school administrators, and teachers regarding what works in these independent study programs, as well as suggestions for future revisions.

The following research questions guided the study:

- Research Question 1: According to participants, what is the purpose of the school?
- Research Question 2: According to participants, what factors motivate students to participate at this school?

- Research Question 3: Do respondents perceive that the organization of the school is effective?
- Research Question 4: What changes are desired at this school?
- Research Question 5: How satisfied are students, parents, and teachers with this school?

Research methodology. The researcher used a quantitative and qualitative approach for data collection. The quantitative measures consisted of demographic information of the students, their parents, and the teachers. In addition, the researcher gathered internal and external GPA's, enrollment dates, and previous school type attended from the student records at the school. For the qualitative data collection, the researcher used three instruments to interview students, parents, and teachers at each of the six school sites, to determine the impressions of alternative education. In addition, the researcher took extensive field notes at each site.

Summary of Findings

Mission. When asked why students enrolled at their current school, the most frequent reply from students (62.5%), parents (62.5%), and teachers (83.3%) was due to academic recovery. The students were credit deficient and needed to make up one or more classes. Another reason pointed to the safe environment that these schools provided. Other motives for enrollment included: being able to finish high school quicker/accelerated progress, being able to complete courses at their own pace, and because of medical reasons.

Sixteen out of twenty-four (66.7%) students and sixteen out of twenty-four (66.7%) parents stated that the teachers were what they liked most about the school they attended. Due to the low student to teacher ratio, both students and parents were able to have a bond with the teachers. Students and parents believed that their teachers genuinely cared about the students. When comparing previous teachers the students have had in the past to their current teachers,

91.7% of the students said they felt that their current teachers genuinely cared about them, and 95.8% of the parents said that they felt that their current teachers genuinely cared about their child. Nine out of twelve (75%) teachers said they continued to teach at these schools because they genuinely cared about the students and want them to succeed.

Motivation. Of the twenty-four students interviewed, sixteen (66.7%) of them have participated in an extra-curricular activity at their current school within the past year. Students, parents, and teachers unanimously agreed that extra-curricular activities were important. It provided students with the social aspects of attending a school, while furthering personal growth.

When asked what or who motivates students to complete their work and to come to school, 62.5% of the students and 79.1% of the parents stated that the students motived themselves because they wanted to go to college. When the teachers were asked what or who motivates the students, 11 out of 12 teachers believed they motivated the students. Other reasons for why students continued their education were to have a better future or because a family member or friend wanted them to succeed.

Progress. When asked what they liked about the school, students (54.2%) and parents (50.0%) enjoyed the flexible school hours. Students (29.2%) were glad that they enrolled at this school because it fit their learning style better than the traditional classroom model. Twenty-nine percent of the students also enjoyed the classes and curriculum offered. By being able to get the classes they needed, they were able to graduate.

All 24 students stated that they were doing better at their current school than at their previous school. Twenty-three out of twenty-four (95.8%) of the parents thought that the students were doing better at their current school than at their previous school. Student GPA's fluctuated from their previous school to their current school. All students who transferred from

their previous high school had a higher GPA at their current school than at their previous school. Also, students (70.8%) and parents (79.2%) believed that they had better attendance at their current school than at their previous school.

Satisfaction. Students and parents were satisfied with the current school the students were attending. On the NPS, students gave a 87.5% rating and parents gave a 95.8% rating. If given the option to attend their current school or their previous school, 22 out of 24 students stated that they would like to stay enrolled at their current school. All twenty-four parents would choose the student's current school as their school of choice. Eleven out of twelve (91.7%) teachers said they would like to continue teaching at their current school.

Most students and parents interviewed were satisfied with their current school. Half (50%) of the students and 17 out of 24 (70.8%) of the parents were satisfied with the school and thought that no change needed to be made. If given the option of transferring back to their previous school, most students and all of the parents would choose to stay at their current school.

Once enrolled, 87.5% of students interviewed stated that they wanted to graduate at their current school. The parents were content with the schools, as 91.7% of the parents wanted their child to graduate from their current school. All 12 teachers interviewed stated that once a student is enrolled at their school, most of their students continue to stay enrolled and graduate there.

Conclusions

Based upon the results of this study, the researcher drew the following six conclusions:

Conclusion 1. Students and parents perceive that the public schools are not adequately serving the needs of these students. For at-risk students, the traditional classroom may not always be the best learning environment for them (Bucci & Reitzammer, 1992; Lehr & Lange, 2003). The most frequent reply from students (62.5%) and parents (62.5%) as to why

they enrolled at their current school was due to academic recovery. The students were one or more classes behind. The second most common answer was that they had been bullied or felt that their previous school was not safe.

Students were likely to be more successful at these alternative schools due to the composition, structural characteristics, and resources that these schools offered (Rumberger, 2004). These schools provided an environment where the students felt safe, cared for, supported, and challenged (Barr & Parrett, 2001). The small classes provided a low student to teacher ratio, which allowed for a more personal learning environment than at a traditional school (Aron, 2006; Barr & Parrett, 1995; Hall & Handley, 2004; Koetke, 1999; Lange & Sletten, 2002; Tobin & Sprague, 2000). At these schools, there were only up to six students per appointment, and the students received individual attention. The SGI classes were also small, as they were generally comprised of only five to thirteen students.

Fifteen out of twenty-four (62.5%) students believed they would graduate at a traditional school if alternative education did not exist, while eight out of twenty-four (33.3%) students said they would not be able to graduate at a traditional school. Of those 15 students who believed they would graduate at a traditional school, student respondents BS2, BS3, CS3, and FS1 stated that they would be able graduate at a traditional school "eventually."

Parents of students who are at-risk have often experienced long-term, off-putting relationships with the public school system (Barr & Parrett, 2003). Half of the parents interviewed expressed that their child would not have been able to graduate at a traditional school. These parents had unsuccessful attempts at working with the student's previous schools (Dodd & Konzal, 2002). For example, parent respondent CP1 said that her daughter was being bullied at her previous school and the school did nothing about it. Her daughter did not want to

go to school and often stayed home. Studies have shown that bullies and victims of bullies may face academic difficulties as it can contribute to low self-esteem, anxiety or depressions, or avoidance of school (Cornell et al., 2013; Swearer Napolitano et al., 2010).

Student respondent FS2 stood out. She expressed that she did not like her peers at her previous school and also got bullied. She stated, "I went to school but didn't want to go. I like this school because I am able to be more independent and I have more time to focus on school." When asked whether she would choose to attend her previous school or her current school, she chose her current school. She said, "I enjoy going to school now."

Conclusion 2. Students believe that they are successful and more satisfied with these alternative education schools. All students stated that they were doing better at their current school than at their previous school. Student GPA's improved from their previous school to their current school. All students who transferred from their previous high school had a higher GPA at their current school than at their previous school. The mean of their previous school's GPA was a 2.03, and the mean of their GPA at their current school was a 3.33. Seventy-one percent of students believed that they had better attendance at their current school than at their previous school. A few students stated they went to their previous school, but did not want to go or only went to socialize.

All students believed that they themselves were the motivating factor to graduating from high school, as they wanted to pursue a high school diploma and not a certificate of high school equivalency. When asked who motivated them to complete their work and to come to school, 62.5% of the students stated that they felt self-motived because they wanted to go to college, and the remaining 37.5% stated they wanted to graduate to have a better future.

Students who have a positive view of the school achieve more than those who are not satisfied (Fraser, 1994; Voelkl, 1995). In this current study, on the Net Promoter Scale, students gave a 87.5% rating. Twenty-two out of twenty-four (91.7%) students stated that they would like to stay enrolled at their current school. All of the students interviewed stated that their current school made the enrollment process smooth. When asked what changes participants would like to see at their school, half (50%) of the students were satisfied and thought that no changes needed to be made.

The students in this alternative education program asserted that they were more satisfied with their school experience. This may be attributed to the size of the program. In smaller settings, students have more opportunities to speak and ask questions. The students mentioned that they liked the structure of the program and the individual attention teachers provided. Student respondent AS3 stated, "I like this school because I can walk up to my teacher and let her know what's going on." From conducting the interview, the researcher could tell that student AS3 was shy and most likely would not have spoken up in a large classroom environment. Thus, in this more intimate setting, the student sensed he was responsible and in control of his learning.

The student's record displayed increased GPA, fewer absences, and completion of courses, as their needs were being better met at these alternative school settings (Cox et al., 1995; Gettys & Wheelock, 1994; Martin et al., 2003; Young, 1990). Alternative education provided a more positive learning environment through individualized instruction, and students felt more successful at these schools than traditional schools (Barr & Parrett, 2003; Raywid, 1983). Motivation was a necessary element in success (Rumberger, 2011). Positive outcomes of alternative programs focused on three areas: academic achievement, choice and flexibility, and changes in students towards themselves and the school (Lange & Sletten, 2002).

Conclusion 3. Parents express high satisfaction with these alternative education programs. All 24 parents would choose the student's current school as the school of choice for their child. They saw that the students were more motivated and were doing better than at their previous school. Parents were genuinely satisfied with the school, and they all stated that their current school made the transition smooth. On the Net Promoter Scale, parents gave a 95.8% rating. Some parents have enrolled other children in the past or had other children currently enrolled at these schools.

Ninety-six percent of the parents thought that their student was doing better at their current school than at their previous school, and ninety-two percent of the parents stated that they wanted their child to graduate from his or her current school. Parent respondent EP4 stated, "This is the first time I saw him try and do work. He didn't do any work the last two years at his other school. I'm so proud of him." Parent respondent DP1 liked how she was able to be involved in her child's academic endeavors. She enjoyed how she was able to monitor her child carefully since she only had to report to one teacher. Seventy-nine percent of the parents believed the students were motivated to complete their units and to come to school because the student wanted to graduate and go to college. Studies have shown that parent involvement benefits not only the students; they assist the teachers and improve the school, as well as strengthens the family (Epstein, 2011).

Seventy-nine percent of parents believed that their child had better attendance at their current school. When asked what changes participants would like to see at their school, the parent group was the most satisfied group, as 17 out of 24 (70.8%) of the parents thought that no change needed to be made.

Conclusion 4. Students and parents at these schools report that teachers genuinely care about their students and the students' academic progress. Students in alternative education schools stated that the most important characteristic of their teachers is that they cared for them. When comparing previous teachers the students have had in the past to their current teachers, 91.7% of the students said they felt that their current teachers genuinely cared about them, and 95.8% of the parents say that they felt their current teachers genuinely cared about their child. Morley (1991) stated that the most important characteristic of teachers is that they care for their students. Effective alternative schools encompass teachers who support, care for, and challenge students to achieve higher expectations (Barr & Parrett, 2003).

Due to the low student to teacher ratio and the size of these schools, the culture of these schools is relaxed and informal. When asked what they liked most about the school, student respondent ES3 said that the teachers really cared about him and really pushed him to do his best. Each student and teacher was able to build a strong relationship, as they work towards the same goals. Student respondent FS3 stated, "It was hard to get to know the teachers at the other school, and none of them liked me there. But here, the teachers are cool. They talk to you. They ask how you are doing, and they help you." When the students first enrolled, the parents and students were required to have an orientation with the teacher. This is when they were able to talk about their concerns and to get acquainted with each other. Students (66.7%) and parents (66.7%) at these schools enjoyed having a relationship with their teachers.

Conclusion 5. Teachers believe that this alternative education program best serves the needs of this population of at-risk students. All of the teachers interviewed stated that most of their students would not be able to graduate from high school if alternative education did not exist. Eighty-three percent of teachers stated that their students enroll at their schools because

they are behind in graduation credits. They also said that most of their students generally graduated from their schools.

The structure of the programs made it easier for any student to enroll at any time of the school year. Students did not have to wait until the beginning of the semester to enroll.

Teacher respondent EB stated:

> I had a student whose caseworker suggested this school because no other schools would take him in the middle of the semester. We also have a lot of students who are in treatments centers and need temporary school placement. Some of the students stay enrolled with us for a few weeks to a few months until they are out.

Students who are missing credits may have consecutive core classes that they have not taken or completed. For example, a student may have failed three years of math. At a traditional school, the student would not be able to take multiple math classes concurrently. At these schools, the students complete each class at their pace. They are able to complete one semester of a class in two weeks.

While these schools may lack aspects such as rigorous advanced placement (AP) classes and an array of electives, they offer students with the classes needed to graduate high school. Recently, they have added all of the A-G approved classes that are required to apply to a 4-year university, along with a few new AP classes. By looking at the walls of each school, the researcher observed that there is a big push for students to go straight to a university. The structure of the program made it possible for students to take the correct classes to apply to these universities, as curriculum was individualized to the needs of each student.

Teacher respondent FB stated:

> We've become a launchpad school and are sending students straight to a 4-year university. These are students who probably wouldn't have even graduated high school at their previous school, and here they are, graduating and becoming the first ones in their families to go to a university.

Although these teachers expressed high satisfaction with their work, their NPS indicated moderate ratings. Their NPS was the lowest out of all participant groups, as nine out of twelve teachers gave a score of a seven or eight, and two teachers gave a score of six or below. Only one teacher gave a score of nine or above. While they enjoyed working at their current school and the relationships that they built, their interview comments indicated they perceived room for improvement.

Teacher respondent DA best stated the possible reason behind this moderate score:

> We need larger facilities and more tutors. If the students are not in a math SGI class, they/re struggle trying to learn math on their own. Also, the new Common Core English is a lot more difficult, and the students aren't doing well in that class. They need someone to help them.

Conclusion 6. Extra-curricular activities at these schools provide an additional means to engage many of these students. There was consensus among students, parents, and teachers—all three registering 100%— that the schools should retain extra-curricular activities. All of the teachers and two-thirds of the students interviewed participated in an extra-curricular activity that the school sponsored. Over half of the students interviewed were involved in student council. Student council gave these students an opportunity for personal growth, while feeling valued at their school. These students were able to hold high officer positions such as president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer – positions that they most likely would not have held at a traditional public school. Student respondents AS1, AS4, and DS2 stated that their school should not get rid of extra-curricular activities because it is something they could put on their resume or college application.

Involvement through school academics and activities created a sense of belonging for these students. Social aspects are especially important to students who are at-risk of dropping out of school (Farrell, 1990; Lange & Sletten, 2002). Students (58.3%), parents (75%), and teachers

(83.3%) agreed that these extra-curricular activities provided students an opportunity to socialize and meet other students.

Parent respondent CP3 talked about how grateful they were that their child had been chosen for a two week Colorado trip that the school paid for, and when he came back, he had changed for the better. That student, CS3, stated, "It was a trip of a lifetime. We got to take care of the ranch, went on hikes, and had to work in groups."

Studies have linked extra-curricular activities with increased school engagement, decreasing the likelihood of dropping out of school (Finn, 1993). Due to the competitiveness to make these schools stand out and for student retention, extra-curricular activities have been a big push. Teacher respondent EA stated, "Most of the students who participate in extra-curricular activities stay and graduate with us. It also helps them to be well-rounded." Teacher respondent DA stated, "It develops self-confidence and social skills and motivates students to stay in school." Extra-curricular activities such as student council, sports, school dances, and field trips have given opportunities to students who normally would not have participated in these school events. Teacher respondent FB stated:

> They are able to join extra-curricular activities that they normally would not have been able to join–due to competitiveness. Here, if they want to join student council, they can. If they want to join the soccer team, they can. I've seen our coaches purchase shin guards and cleats for the students if they couldn't afford it.

Recommendations for Practical Application

Recommendation 1: Superintendents, with the support of the board of education, should create an independent study alternative school within the district or contract with a nearby district. Additional Type 4 schools need to open to give at-risk students other options than the traditional public schools. Generally, school districts refer these students to their continuation school, as a final effort to give these students a last chance at a high school diploma.

These rooms or building are generally run-down and do not provide these students the adequate supplies and support they need.

School districts need to create high quality alternative education programs to meet the needs of the students who cannot succeed in a traditional school. These programs should be well developed and have the necessary resources, so that they will become the school of choice and not a last chance school. If districts are not able to create an alternative education school within the district, they need to contract with a nearby district. By collaborating with an independent program, the school districts will also decrease their dropout rates.

Recommendation 2: These programs should continue to be offered within the district and expand to other districts. These programs serve a group of students who were not successful in a traditional school. Some of these schools should be renovated to meet a larger audience. While some of the schools observed were quite large, many were not optimal learning environments. Nine out of twenty-four (37.5%) students thought the facilities needed to be improved. Of the six schools visited, three of the schools needed to be moved into a bigger facility. In five out of six schools, new furniture was purchased for the entire school. A few complaints from the students included uncomfortable furniture in the SGI rooms. While the rational behind small swivel tables stuck to individual chairs with wheels was to ease maneuvering for CCSS activities, students found the seats uncomfortable. When considering new furniture and equipment, the schools need to consider the students' comfort, as well as the functionality.

More school sites in more districts need to be created to meet the needs of students, as they are sound solutions to students dropping out of school. The findings of this study should be shared with local districts and especially with the district through which these schools are

chartered. If possible, findings should be shared during a board meeting. Not only will this improve the relationship between the schools and the authorizing district, such presentations will showcase the achievements at these schools and the need for more school sites. Also, when these alternative education programs are up for WASC renewal, the authorizing district will be able to support these programs.

Recommendation 3: These programs should be marketed to counselors and parents of traditional schools. These schools have very little marketing, and referrals are usually by word of mouth or through the district counselors. These programs need to create a marketing plan. Recommendations include: billboards, bus stop advertisements, and booths at various school and career fairs. These schools must build a relationship with their surrounding schools so that counselors are able to refer students. Personnel at alternative education programs must also work closely with child services and other departments to provide students with temporary or permanent educational placement for youths.

Recommendation 4: These programs should continue to maintain high standards for teachers, add instructional support, and provide continuous staff development. Teachers at these schools were educated and knowledgeable. The ages of the teachers varied, and of the teachers interviewed, many had been teaching at their current school for over five years. All of the teachers interviewed had their bachelor's degree and a California teaching credential. Half (50%) of the teachers interviewed had or were pursuing their master's degree, and one of the twelve teachers (8.3%) had or was pursuing a doctorate degree.

Based on the researcher's observation, it seemed they spent most of their days helping students on their units or grading tests and packets. They had very little down time from the beginning of their day to when they left. More support in the form of tutoring was necessary to

support students and teachers. As curricula are changing, teachers need more training to be prepared to teach certain curricula, especially if they are expected to be the experts in all of the subject matter. Many of the teachers interviewed had their multiple subject credentials. In order to be highly qualified in all subject matter, there needs to be a push for teachers to get single subject credentials, or to add additional credentials. The schools also need to focus on staff development and opportunities for teachers to prepare lessons. These may include internal professional development seminars or hiring third party vendors to further professional growth for teachers.

Recommendation 5: These programs should offer additional extra-curricular activities. These schools need to continue to offer a variety of extra-curricular activities that will engage students. These schools should look into adding activities that do not take up much space such as yoga, table tennis, arts and crafts, computer gaming, music, or a weight lifting, as space is limited.

These programs need to work with the district office to gain access to local public high school property for activities and sports for these youth. These schools can also rent out space at their local parks and recreation centers for sports such as soccer, volleyball, basketball, and cheer. In the future, in order to cut down the cost of renting space for sports practices and games, these schools need to move to a facility where these extra-curricular activities are able to occur on-site. They also need to work an agreement with California Interscholastic Federation so that these students can participate in sports at a local high school.

Recommendations for Further Study

The researcher recommends utilizing the same questions and design to study other types of alternative programs such as schools within a school, schools without walls, and continuation

schools. Comparisons between these independent study programs located in shopping plazas and other alternative programs will allow students, parents, teachers, and school district administrators to understand the importance to choosing and maintaining high standards for all types of educational programs.

Extra-curricular activities, specifically student council, were prominent at these schools. Over half of the students interviewed participated in their school's student council. On this population, the researcher recommends a study on the effects of student council on the students in these schools.

The reason most students enroll at these alternative education schools relate to academic recovery. Students are given the option to make up credits at a quicker pace in order to transfer back to their previous school or to graduate at these schools. As the rigor of the curriculum increases, the students will not able to complete units as quickly as they once could have. The researcher also recommends a longitudinal study to track how enrollment, retention, and graduation rates in alternative education schools will be affected by the challenges of the Common Core State Standards.

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Appendix A

Request Letter to Conduct Study

June 6, 2014

To Whom It May Concern:

I am currently a doctoral student at Pepperdine University, working on my dissertation in Organizational Leadership. The purpose of my study to understand the characteristics necessary to build an alternative education school that meets the needs of most students. I am requesting your permission to conduct my study on alternative education programs at your San Fernando Valley schools.

In order to gather evidence to answer the formulated research questions for the study, I am requesting your permission to contact the students, parents/guardians, and teachers at your schools to complete an interview regarding the topic of alternative education. All written instruments, individual names, school names, and information received will be kept confidential, and pseudonyms will be used for each participant and school.

I am available to answer any questions that you may have pertaining to this study. Please feel free to contact me by email at: [redacted] or by phone at: [redacted].

If you agree to my request to contact students, parents/guardians, and staff members, a written permission would be greatly appreciated.

Thank you for your consideration to this request, and look forward to hearing from you soon.

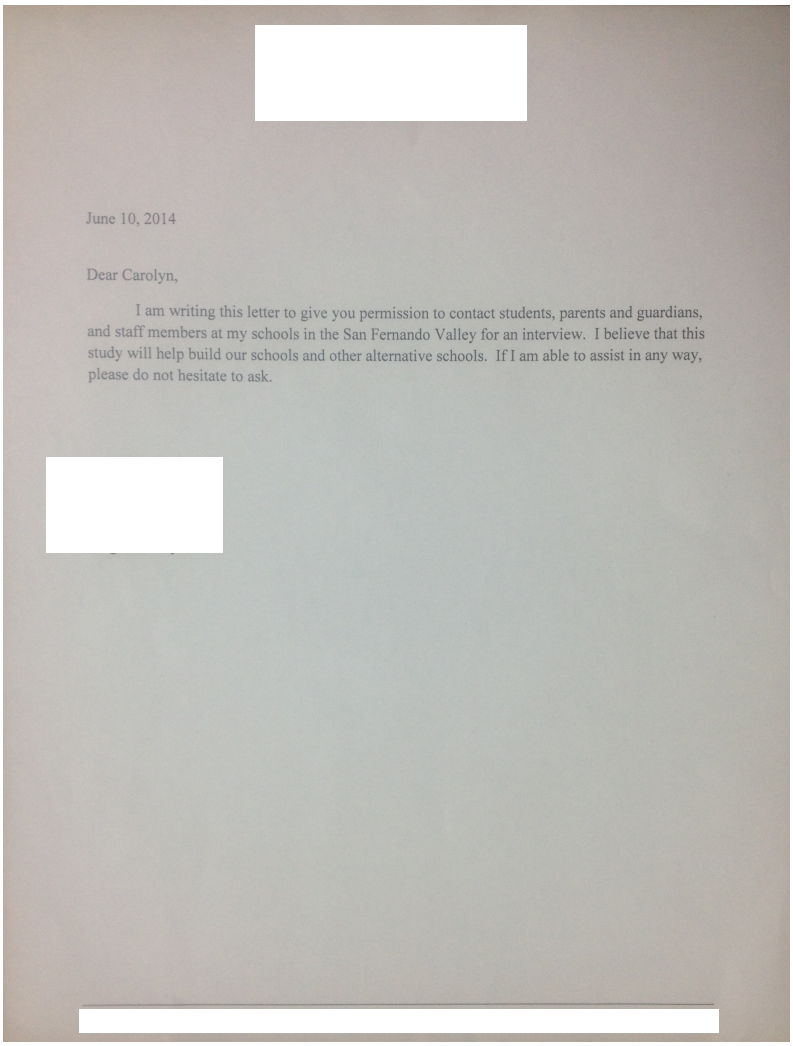
Sincerely,

Carolyn Jun

Carolyn Jun
Doctoral student at Pepperdine University

Appendix B

Letter of Agreement to Start Research



[redacted]

June 10, 2014

Dear Carolyn,

I am writing this letter to give you permission to contact students, parents and guardians, and staff members at my schools in the San Fernando Valley for an interview. I believe that this study will help build our schools and other alternative schools. If I am able to assist in any way, please do not hesitate to ask.

[redacted]

[redacted]

Appendix C

IRB Approval Letter

PEPPERDINE UNIVERSITY

Graduate & Professional Schools Institutional Review Board

October 27, 2014

Carolyn Jun

Protocol #: E0714D06
Project Title: An Evaluation of an Independent Study Program in Six Charter Alternative Schools

Dear Ms. Jun:

Thank you for submitting your application, *An Evaluation of an Independent Study Program in Six Charter Alternative Schools*, for expedited review to Pepperdine University's Graduate and Professional Schools Institutional Review Board (GPS IRB). The IRB appreciates the work you and your advisor, Dr. Hiatt-Michael, completed on the proposal. The IRB has reviewed your submitted IRB application and all ancillary materials. As the nature of the research met the requirements for expedited review under provision Title 45 CFR 46.110 (Research Category 7) of the federal Protection of Human Subjects Act, the IRB conducted a formal, but expedited, review of your application materials.

I am pleased to inform you that your application for your study was granted **Full Approval.** The IRB approval begins today, October 27, 2014**,** and terminates on October 27, 2015.

Your final consent form has been stamped by the IRB to indicate the expiration date of study approval. One copy of the consent form is enclosed with this letter and one copy will be retained for our records**. You can only use copies of the consent that have been stamped with the GPS IRB expiration date to obtain consent from your participants.**

Please note that your research must be conducted according to the proposal that was submitted to the GPS IRB. If changes to the approved protocol occur, a revised protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before implementation. For ***any*** proposed changes in your research protocol, please submit a Request for Modification form to the GPS IRB. Please be aware that changes to your protocol may prevent the research from qualifying for expedited review and require submission of a new IRB application or other materials to the GPS IRB. If contact with subjects will extend beyond **[DATE]**, a **Continuation or Completion of Review Form** must be submitted at least one month prior to the expiration date of study approval to avoid a lapse in approval.

A goal of the IRB is to prevent negative occurrences during any research study. However, despite our best intent, unforeseen circumstances or events may arise during the research. If an unexpected situation or adverse event happens during your investigation, please notify the GPS IRB as soon as possible. We will ask for a complete explanation of the event and your response. Other actions also may be required depending on the nature of the event. Details regarding the timeframe in which adverse events must be reported to the GPS IRB and the appropriate form to be used to report this information can be found in the *Pepperdine University Protection of Human Participants in Research: Policies and Procedures Manual* (see link to "policy material" at http://www.pepperdine.edu/irb/graduate/).

Please refer to the protocol number denoted above in all further communication or correspondence related to this approval. Should you have additional questions, please contact me. On behalf of the GPS IRB, I wish you success in this scholarly pursuit.

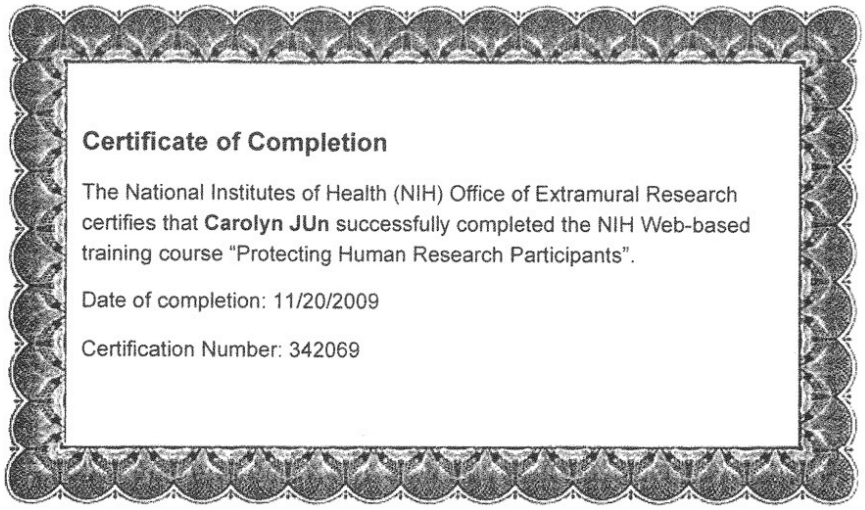
Sincerely,

Thema Bryant-Davis, Ph.D.
Chair, Graduate and Professional Schools IRB
Pepperdine University

cc: Dr. Lee Kats, Vice Provost for Research and Strategic Initiatives
Mr. Brett Leach, Compliance Attorney
Dr. Diana Hiatt-Michael, Faculty Advisor

Appendix D

National Institutes of Health (NIH) Certificate of Completion



Certificate of Completion

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certifies that **Carolyn JUn** successfully completed the NIH Web-based training course "Protecting Human Research Participants".

Date of completion: 11/20/2009

Certification Number: 342069

Appendix E

Introduction Letter to Students and Parents

Dear Student and Parent,

My name is Carolyn Jun, and I am working on my doctoral dissertation on alternative education programs. I am very interesting in learning about your experiences as a student/parent of a student in an independent study program.

You teacher has highly recommended you, as they feel that you would be a valuable resource.

I am asking for 10-15 minutes of your time for a brief, 15-question interview. The responses will be used to better understand alternative education programs. Your identity will remain anonymous, and the interview will not affect your enrollment at your current school.

I have attached:

- Interview questions for student and parent
- Student assent and consent forms
- Parent consent form

I will be at your school on: _____

*If you are not able to meet for an in-person interview, a phone interview can be arranged.

Please email me at: [redacted] to confirm a time that is best for you both.

Thank you in advance!
I look forward to meeting you.

Sincerely,
Carolyn Jun

Appendix F

Interview Questions for Students and Parents

Students:

1. What factors influenced you to enroll at your school?
2. What are your goals for high school?
3. What do you like about your school?
4. How many extra-curricular activities from school do you participate in in a school year?
   Follow-up: Which one(s) were they?
5. Do you think your school should get rid of extra-curricular activities? Why or why not?
6. Who motivates you to complete your units and to come to school?
7. What do you like about the structure of the program?
8. Do you feel the independent study model is working for you?
9. How did you feel about the enrollment process to attend your school?
10. Compare your attendance from your previous school to your current school.
11. If you could change your school, what would you suggest?
12. Do you think you would graduate from high school if alternative education programs, such as your school did not exist?
13. Compare your teachers from your previous school to this school.
14. If you had a choice to attend this school or a previous school, which would you choose and why?
15. On a scale of 1-10 with 1 being the least and 10 being the highest score, how satisfied are you with your school?

Parents:

1. What factors influenced you to enroll your child at their school?
2. What are your child's goals for high school?
3. What does your child like about their school?
4. How many extra-curricular activities from school does your child participate in in a school year?
   Follow-up: Which one(s) were they?
5. Do you think the school should get rid of extra-curricular activities? Why or why not?
6. Who motivates your child to complete their units and to come to school?
7. What do you like about the structure of the program?
8. Do you feel the independent study model is working for your child?
9. How did you feel about the enrollment process to attend the school?
10. Compare your child's attendance from their previous school to their current school.
11. If you could change your child's school, what would you suggest?
12. Do you think your child would graduate from high school if alternative education programs, such as your child's school did not exist?
13. Compare your child's teachers from their previous school to this school.
14. If you had a choice to send your child to this school or their previous school, which would you choose and why?
15. On a scale of 1-10 with 1 being the least and 10 being the highest score, how satisfied are you with your child's school?

In addition to these questions, this information will be extracted from your enrollment paperwork:

Gender: ____Male ____Female
Grade (by credits): ____
Enrollment date: _____
Ethnicity: _____
Highest level of parent education: _____
Income: _____
Previous school (type): _____
External GPA (unweighted): _____
Internal GPA (unweighted) - taken on the day of the interview/not taking into account open classes: _____

Appendix G

Student Informed Consent for Participation in Research Activities

Participant: _____
Principal Investigator: Carolyn Jun
Title of Project: An Evaluation of an Independent Study Program in Six Charter Alternative Schools

I, _____, agree to participate in the research study being conducted by Carolyn Jun, a doctoral student in the Organizational Leadership program at Pepperdine University's Graduate School of Education and Psychology, under the direction of Dr. Diana Hiatt-Michael.

The overall purpose of this research is to evaluate the independent study curriculum offered at alternative schools.

My participation will involve the following a face-to-face interview, where I will answer 15 questions about alternative education. I understand that if necessary, and over the phone interview can be arranged instead of a face-to-face interview.

My participation in the study will last approximately 10-15 minutes. I acknowledge that I have been asked to participate in this study because I am a student in an alternative education program or school. The study shall be conducted at my school.

I understand that the possible benefits to myself or society from this research may include: (1) understanding the reasons why students and parents enroll in alternative education programs/schools; (2) are their purposes being met.

I understand that there are certain risks and discomforts that might be associated with this research. There is a low risk of loss of privacy. My identity (name) will be removed, and a code will be assigned to me. If I offer sensitive personal information, I may request that it be removed. I understand that my interview will be paper recorded, and the documents will be used for research purposes only. I understand that once the study is completed, the documents of the interview will be stored in a locked file cabinet at the researcher's home office. The documents will be destroyed and shredded after five years from the creation date.

I understand that my estimated expected recovery time after the experiment will be minimal. In the event that I do experience fatigue or need to take a short break, one will be granted to me and the participation in the interview may be scheduled or arranged for a later time.

I understand that I may choose not to participate in this research.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may refuse to participate and/or withdraw my consent and discontinue participation in the project or activity at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.

To compensate for my time, I understand that I will receive one movie ticket voucher at the end of the interview.

I understand that the investigator(s) will take all reasonable measures to protect the confidentiality of my records and my identity will not be revealed in any publication that may result from this project. The confidentiality of my records will be maintained in accordance with applicable state and federal laws. Under California law, there are exceptions to confidentiality, including suspicion that a child, elder, or dependent adults is being abused, or if an individual discloses an intent to harm him/herself or others. I understand there is a possibility that my medical record, including identifying information, may be inspected and/or photocopied by official of the Food and Drug Administration or other federal or state government agencies during the ordinary course of carrying out their functions. If I participate in a sponsored research project, a representative of the sponsor may inspect my research records.

I understand that the investigator is willing to answer any inquiries I may have concerning the research herein described. I understand that I may contact [redacted] at [redacted] or [redacted] if I have other questions or concerns about this research. If I have questions about my rights as a research participant, I understand that I can contact [redacted], Manager of Institutional Review Board, Pepperdine University, at [redacted] or [redacted].

I will be informed of any significant new findings developed during the course of my participation in this research, which may have a bearing on my willingness to continue in this study.

I understand that in the event of a physical injury resulting from the research procedures in which I am to participate, no form of compensation is available. Medical treatments may be provided at my own expense or at the expense of my health care insurer, which may or may not provide coverage. If I have questions, I should contact my insurer.

I understand to my satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have received a copy of this informed consent form, which I have read and understand. I hereby consent to participate in the research described above.

_____	_____	_____	_____
Parent or legal guardian's signature on participants behalf if participant is less than 18 years of age or not legally competent.	Date	Participant's Signature	Date
		_____	_____
		Witness	Date

I have explained and defined in detail the research procedure in which the subject has consented to participate. Having explained this and answered any questions, I am cosigning this form and accepting this person's consent.

_____	_____
Carolyn Jun, Principal Investigator	Date

Appendix H

Student Interview Assent Form

An Evaluation of an Independent Study Program in Six Charter Alternative Schools

My name is Carolyn Jun, and I am a doctoral student in the Organizational Leadership program at Pepperdine University's School of Education and Psychology. Your parents have given me their permission to speak with you about a study I am conducting on alternative education. I would like to invite you to participate in this study if you are interested. Before I explain more about the study, I want you to know that the choice to participate is completely up to you. No one is going to force you to do something you are not interested in doing. Even if you start the study and decide that you are no longer interested in continuing, just let me know and we will discontinue the study.

Let me tell you about what you will be asked to do if you decide to participate in this study. I will be asking a series of questions to understand what students want in an alternative education school, and you will be able to give me your thoughts. This will take about 10-15 minutes of your time.

If you get bored or tired during our meeting, just let me know, and we can take a break. If you are bothered by some of the things we talk about, let me know so we can talk about what is bothering you. Most of the time what you say to me will not be repeated to your parents unless you wish for me to do so. The only exception would be if I am convinced your parents might be helpful to you if they knew what was going on. If such information comes up, we will talk about it before I speak with your parents.

Your participation in this study may not provide information that will be helpful to you, but what is hoped is that what I find out from you may be of help in the future to others who are undergoing a similar experience.

To compensate for your time, at the end of this interview, you will receive one movie ticket voucher.

When the results of this study are published or presented to professional audiences, the names of the people who participated in the study will not be revealed.

If you have any questions, you may contact me at [redacted]

You may keep a copy of this form if you wish.

_____	_____	_____
Youth's name (printed)	Youth's signature	Date

_____	_____
Researcher's signature	Date assent obtained

Appendix I

Parent Informed Consent for Participation in Research Activities

Participant: _____
Principal Investigator: Carolyn Jun
Title of Project: An Evaluation of an Independent Study Program in Six Charter Alternative Schools

I, _____, agree to participate in the research study being conducted by Carolyn Jun, a doctoral student in the Organizational Leadership program at Pepperdine University's Graduate School of Education and Psychology, under the direction of Dr. Diana Hiatt-Michael.

The overall purpose of this research is to evaluate the independent study curriculum offered at alternative schools.

My participation will involve the following a face-to-face interview, where I will answer 15 questions about alternative education. I understand that if necessary, and over the phone interview can be arranged instead of a face-to-face interview.

My participation in the study will last approximately 10-15 minutes. I acknowledge that I have been asked to participate in this study because I am a parent of a student in an alternative education program or school. The study shall be conducted at my child's school.

I understand that the possible benefits to myself or society from this research may include: (1) understanding the reasons why students and parents enroll in alternative education programs/schools; (2) are their purposes being met.

I understand that there are certain risks and discomforts that might be associated with this research. There is a low risk of loss of privacy. My identity (name) will be removed, and a code will be assigned to me. If I offer sensitive personal information, I may request that it be removed. I understand that my interview will be paper recorded, and the documents will be used for research purposes only. I understand that once the study is completed, the documents of the interview will be stored in a locked file cabinet at the researcher's home office. The documents will be destroyed and shredded after five years from the creation date.

I understand that my estimated expected recovery time after the experiment will be minimal. In the event that I do experience fatigue or need to take a short break, one will be granted to me and the participation in the interview may be scheduled or arranged for a later time.

I understand that I may choose not to participate in this research.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may refuse to participate and/or withdraw my consent and discontinue participation in the project or activity at any time without

penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. To compensate for my time, I understand that I will receive one movie ticket voucher at the end of the interview.

I understand that the investigator(s) will take all reasonable measures to protect the confidentiality of my records and my identity will not be revealed in any publication that may result from this project. The confidentiality of my records will be maintained in accordance with applicable state and federal laws. Under California law, there are exceptions to confidentiality, including suspicion that a child, elder, or dependent adults is being abused, or if an individual discloses an intent to harm him/herself or others. I understand there is a possibility that my medical record, including identifying information, may be inspected and/or photocopied by official of the Food and Drug Administration or other federal or state government agencies during the ordinary course of carrying out their functions. If I participate in a sponsored research project, a representative of the sponsor may inspect my research records.

I understand that the investigator is willing to answer any inquiries I may have concerning the research herein described. I understand that I may contact [redacted] at [redacted] or [redacted] if I have other questions or concerns about this research. If I have questions about my rights as a research participant, I understand that I can contact [redacted], Manager of Institutional Review Board, Pepperdine University, at [redacted] or [redacted].

I will be informed of any significant new findings developed during the course of my participation in this research, which may have a bearing on my willingness to continue in this study.

I understand that in the event of a physical injury resulting from the research procedures in which I am to participate, no form of compensation is available. Medical treatments may be provided at my own expense or at the expense of my health care insurer, which may or may not provide coverage. If I have questions, I should contact my insurer.

I understand to my satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have received a copy of this informed consent form, which I have read and understand. I hereby consent to participate in the research described above.

_____ _____

Participant's Signature Date

_____ _____

Witness Date

I have explained and defined in detail the research procedure in which the subject has consented to participate. Having explained this and answered any questions, I am cosigning this form and accepting this person's consent.

_____ _____

Carolyn Jun, Principal Investigator Date

Appendix J

Student Interview Questions Regarding Alternative Education

CODE: _____

Introduction:
"Hello. My name is Carolyn and I am working on my doctoral dissertation on alternative education. Thank you for participating in my study. Your responses will be used to better understand independent study programs. As summarized in the consent forms, this is voluntary, and you may stop at any time.

I will be asking 15 questions. You do not need to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable."

Information from Cumulative Folder:

Name of Student _____
Gender: ____Male ____Female
Grade (by credits): ____
Enrollment date: _____
Ethnicity: _____
Highest level of parent education: _____
Income: _____
Previous school (type): _____
External GPA (unweighted): _____
Internal GPA (unweighted) - taken on the day of the interview/not taking into account open classes: _____

Interview Questions:
Icebreaker: Please tell me about yourself.

1. What factors influenced you to enroll at your school?
   - ___Academic recovery/behind in credits
   - ___Suspended/expelled
   - ___Probation/out of Juvenile hall
   - ___Accelerated progress/wanted to graduate quicker
   - ___Need to work
   - ___Medical reasons
   - ___Other _____

2. What are your goals for high school?
   - ___ Graduate from my current school
   - ___Transfer back to a traditional high school
   - ___Take the GED/CHSPE
   - ___Stay in school until I find a job
   - ___I don't know
   - ___Other _____

3. What do you like about your school?
___Relationship with teacher(s)
___Administrators
___Individual attention
___Proximity to home
___Curriculum offered
___Getting to know other students
___Small group instruction (math, English, science, Spanish)
___Extra-curricular activities
___I feel safe
___I don't like anything about my school
___Other_____

4. How many extra-curricular activities from school do you participate in in a school year?
__
Follow-up: Which one(s) were they?
___Field Trips
___Dances
___Sports team
___Student Council
___College Tour
___Pathways trip (Colorado, Big Bear, Blackbird Farm)
___Girl Talk or Peaceful Warrior Brotherhood
___I have not participated in any extra-curricular activities
___They do not offer anything that I am interested in
___Other _____

5. Do you think your school should get rid of extra-curricular activities? Why or why not?
___Yes, get rid of it.
___No, do not get rid of it.
___Why _____

6. Who motivates you to complete your units and to come to school?
___I want to graduate and go to college.
___I want to graduate to have a better future.
___My family wants me to graduate.
___My teacher
___Other _____

7. What do you like about the structure of the program?
___Flexible school hours
___Assignment of teachers
___Classes offered
___Online Programs classes
___Learning style
___Size of classes
___Length of appointment and/or SGI classes
___Other _____

8. Do you feel the independent study model is working for you?
___Yes, I am doing better here than I was at my previous school.
___No, I feel that I am going slower than my previous school.
___I feel that I would be successful at either school.
___I feel that I haven't worked to my potential at either school.
___I don't know.
___Other_____

9. How did you feel about the enrollment process to attend your school?
___My current school made the transition smooth.
___My current school made the transition difficult.
Please explain: _____
___It was acceptable (neither smooth or difficult).
___Other _____

10. Compare your attendance from your previous school to your current school.
___I've had an excellent attendance record at both schools and am hardly absent.
___I've had an excellent attendance record at my previous school, but am often absent at my current school.
___I've had a poor attendance record at my previous school, but have an excellent attendance record at my current school.
___I have poor attendance at both schools (missed 50% or more of scheduled class time).
___Other _____

11. If you could change your school, what would you suggest?
___Better facilities (structure/location)
___Better teachers
___More individualized attention
___More extra-curricular activities
___Evening/weekend appointments/classes
___More support
___Other _____

12. Do you think you would graduate from high school if alternative education programs, such as your school did not exist?
___Yes, I would have graduated at a traditional public school.
___No, I would not have been able to graduate at a traditional public school.
___I don't know.

13. Compare your teachers from your previous school to this school.
___I feel my teachers at my current school genuinely care about me and my future.
___I feel that my teachers at my current school feel the same way that my previous teachers felt.
___I feel that my current teachers care less about me than my previous teachers.
___Other _____

14. If you had a choice to attend this school or a previous school, which would you choose and why?
___Previous school
___Current school
___Why_____

15. On a scale of 1-10 with 1 being the least and 10 being the highest score, how satisfied are you with your school?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Closing:

"Thank you for taking time out of your busy day to participate in my research. If you have any questions or concerns, please email me directly. In exchange for your time, I would like to offer you one movie ticket voucher."

Appendix K

Parent Interview Questions Regarding Alternative Education

CODE: _____

Parent of: _____

Introduction:
"Hello. My name is Carolyn and I am working on my doctoral dissertation on alternative education. Thank you for participating in my study. Your responses will be used to better understand independent study programs. As summarized in the consent forms, this is voluntary, and you may stop at any time.

I will be asking 15 questions. You do not need to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable."

1. What factors influenced you to enroll your child at their school?
   - ___Academic recovery/behind in credits
   - ___Suspended/expelled
   - ___Probation/out of Juvenile hall
   - ___Accelerated progress/wanted to graduate quicker
   - ___Need to work
   - ___Medical reasons
   - ___Other _____

2. What are your child's goals for high school?
   - ___ Graduate from their current school
   - ___Transfer back to a traditional high school
   - ___Take the GED/CHSPE
   - ___Stay in school until they find a job
   - ___I don't know
   - ___Other _____

3. What does your child like about their school?
   - ___Relationship with teacher(s)
   - ___Administrators
   - ___Individual attention
   - ___Proximity to home
   - ___Curriculum offered
   - ___Getting to know other students
   - ___Small group instruction (math, English, science, Spanish)
   - ___Extra-curricular activities
   - ___I feel safe
   - ___I don't like anything about their school
   - ___Other_____

4. How many extra-curricular activities from school does your child participate in in a school year? __

If so, which one(s) were they?

___Field Trips
___Dances
___Sports team
___Student Council
___College Tour
___Pathways trip (Colorado, Big Bear, Blackbird Farm)
___Girl Talk or Peaceful Warrior Brotherhood
___I don't know
___They have not participated in any extra-curricular activities
___They do not offer anything that my child is interested in
___Other _____

5. Do you think the school should get rid of extra-curricular activities? Why or why not?

___Yes, get rid of it.
___No, do not get rid of it.
___Why _____

6. Who motivates your child to complete their units and to come to school?

___They want to graduate and go to college.
___They want to graduate to have a better future.
___We want them to graduate.
___Their teacher
___Other _____

7. What do you like about the structure of the program?

___Flexible school hours
___Assignment of teachers
___Classes offered
___Online Programs classes
___Learning style
___Size of classes
___Length of appointment and/or SGI classes
___Nothing

8. Do you feel the independent study model is working for your child?

___Yes, they doing better here than they were at their previous school.
___No, I feel that they are going slower than their previous school.
___I feel that they would be successful at either school.
___I feel that they haven't worked to their potential at either school.
___I don't know.
___Other_____

9. How did you feel about the enrollment process to attend the school?

___The school made the transition smooth.
___The school made the transition difficult.
Please explain: _____
___It was acceptable (neither smooth or difficult).

10. Compare your child's attendance from their previous school to their current school.
    ___They've had an excellent attendance record at both schools and are hardly absent.
    ___They've had an excellent attendance record at their previous school, but is often absent at their current school.
    ___They've had a poor attendance record at their previous school, but have an excellent attendance record at their current school.
    ___They have poor attendance at both schools (missed 50% or more of scheduled class time).

11. If you could change your child's school, what would you suggest?
    ___Better facilities (structure/location)
    ___Better teachers
    ___More individualized attention
    ___More extra-curricular activities
    ___Evening/weekend appointments/classes
    ___More support
    ___Other _____

12. Do you think your child would graduate from high school if alternative education programs, such as your child's school did not exist?
    ___Yes, they would have graduated at a traditional public school.
    ___No, they would not have been able to graduate at a traditional public school.
    ___I don't know.

13. Compare your child's teachers from their previous school to this school.
    ___I feel my child's teachers at their current school genuinely care about them and their future.
    ___I feel that my child's teachers at their current school feel the same way that their previous teachers felt.
    ___I feel that my child's current teachers care less about them than their previous teachers.
    ___I don't know.
    ___Other _____

14. If you had a choice to send your child to this school or their previous school, which would you choose and why?
    ___Previous school
    ___Current school
    ___Why_____

15. On a scale of 1-10 with 1 being the least and 10 being the highest score, how satisfied are you with your child's school?
    1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Closing:
"Thank you for taking time out of your busy day to participate in my research. If you have any questions or concerns, please email me directly. In exchange for your time, I would like to offer you one movie ticket voucher."

Appendix L

Teacher Informed Consent for Participation in Research Activities

Participant: _____
Principal Investigator: Carolyn Jun
Title of Project: An Evaluation of an Independent Study Program in Six Charter Alternative Schools

I, _____, agree to participate in the research study being conducted by Carolyn Jun, a doctoral student in the Organizational Leadership program at Pepperdine University's Graduate School of Education and Psychology, under the direction of Dr. Diana Hiatt-Michael.

The overall purpose of this research is to evaluate the independent study curriculum offered at alternative schools.

My participation will involve the following a face-to-face interview, where I will answer 13 questions about alternative education. I understand that if necessary, and over the phone interview can be arranged instead of a face-to-face interview.

My participation in the study will last approximately 10-15 minutes. I acknowledge that I have been asked to participate in this study because I am a teacher in an alternative education program or school. The study shall be conducted at my school.

I understand that the possible benefits to myself or society from this research may include: (1) understanding the reasons why students and parents enroll in alternative education programs/schools; (2) are their purposes being met.

I understand that there are certain risks and discomforts that might be associated with this research. There is a low risk of loss of privacy. My identity (name) will be removed, and a code will be assigned to me. If I offer sensitive personal information, I may request that it be removed. I understand that my interview will be paper recorded, and the documents will be used for research purposes only. I understand that once the study is completed, the documents of the interview will be stored in a locked file cabinet at the researcher's home office. The documents will be destroyed and shredded after five years from the creation date.

I understand that my estimated expected recovery time after the experiment will be minimal. In the event that I do experience fatigue or need to take a short break, one will be granted to me and the participation in the interview may be scheduled or arranged for a later time.

I understand that I may choose not to participate in this research.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may refuse to participate and/or withdraw my consent and discontinue participation in the project or activity at any time without

penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. I understand that there will be no monetary compensation.

I understand that the investigator(s) will take all reasonable measures to protect the confidentiality of my records and my identity will not be revealed in any publication that may result from this project. The confidentiality of my records will be maintained in accordance with applicable state and federal laws. Under California law, there are exceptions to confidentiality, including suspicion that a child, elder, or dependent adults is being abused, or if an individual discloses an intent to harm him/herself or others. I understand there is a possibility that my medical record, including identifying information, may be inspected and/or photocopied by official of the Food and Drug Administration or other federal or state government agencies during the ordinary course of carrying out their functions. If I participate in a sponsored research project, a representative of the sponsor may inspect my research records.

I understand that the investigator is willing to answer any inquiries I may have concerning the research herein described. I understand that I may contact [redacted] at [redacted] or [redacted] if I have other questions or concerns about this research. If I have questions about my rights as a research participant, I understand that I can contact [redacted], Manager of Institutional Review Board, Pepperdine University, at [redacted] or [redacted].

I will be informed of any significant new findings developed during the course of my participation in this research, which may have a bearing on my willingness to continue in this study.

I understand that in the event of a physical injury resulting from the research procedures in which I am to participate, no form of compensation is available. Medical treatments may be provided at my own expense or at the expense of my health care insurer, which may or may not provide coverage. If I have questions, I should contact my insurer.

I understand to my satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have received a copy of this informed consent form, which I have read and understand. I hereby consent to participate in the research described above.

_____ _____

Participant's Signature Date

_____ _____

Witness Date

I have explained and defined in detail the research procedure in which the subject has consented to participate. Having explained this and answered any questions, I am cosigning this form and accepting this person's consent.

_____ _____

Carolyn Jun, Principal Investigator Date

Appendix M

Teacher Interview Questions Regarding Alternative Education

CODE: _____

Introduction:
"Hello. My name is Carolyn and I am working on my doctoral dissertation on alternative education. Thank you for participating in my study. Your responses will be used to better understand independent study programs. As summarized in the consent forms, this is voluntary, and you may stop at any time.

I will be asking 13 questions. You do not need to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable."

Interview Questions:
How long have you been an employee at this school? _____
What is your age? _____
What is your highest level of education: _____

1. What factors influence your students to enroll at your school?
   - ___Academic recovery/behind in credits
   - ___Suspended/expelled
   - ___Probation/out of Juvenile hall
   - ___Accelerated progress/wanted to graduate quicker
   - ___Need to work
   - ___Medical reasons
   - ___Other _____

2. What are your student's goals for high school?
   - ___ Graduate from their current school
   - ___Transfer back to a traditional high school
   - ___Take the GED/CHSPE
   - ___Stay in school until they find a job
   - ___I don't know
   - ___Other _____

3. What do you like about your school?
   - ___Relationship with teacher(s)
   - ___Administrators
   - ___Individual attention
   - ___Proximity to home
   - ___Curriculum offered
   - ___Getting to know the students
   - ___Small group instruction (math, English, science, Spanish)
   - ___Extra-curricular activities
   - ___I feel safe
   - ___I don't like anything about my school
   - ___Other_____

4. How many extra-curricular activities from school do you participate in in a school year?
__

If so, which one(s) were they?

___Field Trips
___Dances
___Sports team
___Student Council
___College Tour
___Pathways trip (Colorado, Big Bear, Blackbird Farm)
___Girl Talk or Peaceful Warrior Brotherhood
___I have not participated in any extra-curricular activities
___They do not offer anything that I am interested in
___Other _____

5. Do you think your school should get rid of extra-curricular activities? Why or why not?

___Yes, get rid of it.
___No, do not get rid of it.
___Why _____

6. Who motivates your students to complete their units and to come to school?

___They want to graduate and go to college.
___They want to graduate to have a better future.
___Their family wants them to graduate.
___Their teacher
___Other _____

7. What do you like about the structure of the program?

___Flexible school hours
___Assignment of teachers
___Classes offered
___Online Programs classes
___Learning style
___Size of classes
___Length of appointment and/or SGI classes
___Other _____

8. Do you feel the independent study model is working for most of your students?

___From their transcripts, I feel that most are doing better here than at their previous school.
___From their transcripts, I feel that most are going slower than their previous school.
___I feel that they would be successful at either school.
___I feel that they haven't worked to their potential at either school.
___I don't know
___Other_____

9. How do you feel about the enrollment process to attend your school?
___My school makes the transition process as smooth as possible for parents to enroll their student.
___My school makes the transition process more difficult than it should be.
Please explain: _____
___My school does an acceptable job enrolling students (neither smooth or difficult).
___Other _____

10. N/A

11. If you could change your school, what would you suggest?
___Better facilities (structure/location)
___Better teachers
___More individualized attention
___More extra-curricular activities
___Evening/weekend appointments/classes
___More support
___Other _____

12. Do you think most of your students would graduate from high school if alternative education programs, such as your school, did not exist?
___Yes, they would have graduated at a traditional public school.
___No, they would not have been able to graduate at a traditional public school.
___I don't know.

13. N/A

14. If you had a choice to teach at this school or a traditional school, which would you choose and why?
___Previous school
___Current school
___Don't know
___Why_____

15. On a scale of 1-10 with 1 being the least and 10 being the highest score, how satisfied are you with your school?
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10