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EXPLORING THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN TRADITIONAL AND ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS FOR EDUCATIONALLY DISENGAGED STUDENTS

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By

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EXPLORING THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN TRADITIONAL AND ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS FOR EDUCATIONALLY DISENGAGED STUDENTS

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Abstract

This descriptive case study investigated two alternative education academies designed to serve at-risk students for grades six through twelve. Both alternative academies are located in rural towns in Southwest Oklahoma. One program is a cooperative effort of blended students from five high schools and the other program is an extension of the local high school. The largest alternative academy in the case study has an enrollment of 107 students and the smallest alternative academy has an enrollment of 43 students. Both programs have been perceived successful as an intervention for at-risk students, that have dropped out of high school or are potential dropouts.

Both academies have adopted acronyms for names of their schools. The largest academy is named The E. D. G. E. Academy (Environment Designed to Gain an Education) and the smaller academy is named The F.A.M.E. Academy (Facilitating Alternative Methods in Education). Each academy provides a self-paced, ability level and individualized instructional environment that fosters success. Both programs employ a strong counseling component that provides a combination of academic, group, individual and art therapy counseling.

The intent of both programs is to intervene with students whose academic and social behaviors are indicators of at-risk characteristics for not graduating from high school. The E.D.G.E. and F.A.M.E. Academies are both schools of choice and the decision to attend school is solely the students' decision.

Research was conducted at both academies during site visits and onsite observations. Data were gathered using three qualitative methods. On-site observation provided the researcher a first-hand lived experience as an insider. Document

examination produced contextual information regarding a historical description of the programs and successful interventions for at-risk students. Focused, open-ended interviews with staff revealed descriptive information on how they help students be successful in alternative school and reasons they are not in traditional school. Surveys conducted with students classified, as sophomores through seniors were a source of quantitative data that enhanced and enriched the case study.

Information was recorded, transcribed and analyzed for emerging and recurring themes related to the existence and success of both programs. Data revealed that at-risk students come to the academies with negative labels from home, their traditional school or both. It is the researcher's endeavor to drop the negative label of at-risk students and refer to these students as educationally disengaged.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my earthly father, "Daddy" who is smiling with our Heavenly Father, and both are saying:

"YOU ARE WHAT YOU DREAM YOU CAN BE"

CHAPTER I

Introduction

Everyone loses when a student drops out of school. The school loses a predetermined amount of federal and state monetary aid plus they lose a potential graduate. Dropouts lose needed skills and dramatically reduce their employment opportunities and earnings potential (Polk, 1984). Society, also, loses because of the lowered probability of obtaining a productive tax-paying citizen and the increased probability of committing a crime that leads to incarceration (Thornberry, Moore, and Christian 1985).

In accordance with the Juvenile Justice Reform Act of 1994, Oklahoma schools participated in a statewide assessment of the need for alternative education programming. The 1994 needs assessment indicated that 12,157 students in grades six through twelve were being served through some type of "alternative education program" However, Oklahoma school districts *estimated 22,464* students in these grades were in need of some type of alternative education assistance. Statistics in this particular report revealed that 8,436 students in Oklahoma dropped out of school, 10,233 were retained or did not complete the required credits for the next grade level, 34,894 scored below the 25th percentile on the ITBS/TAP, 38,665 were assigned to an in-school suspension program for some part of the year, 41,675 were absent for more than 20 days and 51,408 students had an average grade point below 2.0 (Oklahoma Technical Assistance Center 1999). Dropping out of high school is a major issue on a school and societal level. Because of the increase of high school dropouts there is a great amount of school-based research to address this concern (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003). In a study by the

National Center for Education Statistics 38 states reported their dropout rates. Twenty-seven of 38 reporting states in 1999-2000 had dropout rates ranging from 4.0 to 6.0 percent. Eight states had a dropout rate lower than 4.0 percent in the 1999-2000 school year: Connecticut, Iowa, Maine, New Jersey, North Dakota, South Dakota, Virginia and Wisconson. In 1998-99, the number of states with dropout rates ranging from 4.0 to 6.0 percent was smaller, only 20 out of the 38. Nine states had a dropout rate lower than 4.0 percent in the 1998-99 school year: Connecticut, Iowa, Maine, Massachusetts, New Jersey, North Dakota, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin.

Much of the research features helpful demographic information and is descriptive in nature (Rumbarger, 1987). Aided with this research, school officials are better able to understand the profile of a potential dropout. Several indicators of potential school dropouts are children from low socioeconomic backgrounds, single-parent families or have parents or siblings who are dropouts (Hartnagel and Krahn, 1989; Fernandez, 1989; Norwood, 1989). These children experience social and/or academic difficulty prior to dropping out (Norwood, 1989). Another study conducted by Alpert and Dunham (1986) indicates that four factors significantly contribute to a student's decision to drop out of school: socioeconomic status, attendance, low achievement test scores or school grades, and misbehavior in school. Consistently identified as the most important correlate of school failure and dropping out is socioeconomic status of students (Coleman, 1989; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Fehrman et al., 1987; Rumberger, 1987). Students from middle or upper socioeconomic backgrounds are less likely to drop out compared to students from lower socioeconomic status. The explanation for why dropping out occurs focuses on the lack of "cultural capital" and "human capital" available to these students (Bennett and LeCompte, 1990).

Cultural capital, a term made popular in the early 90's by Bennett & LeCompte (1990) has been used to describe a variety of family characteristics that influence a child's school success. These characteristics are most commonly found in middle-to upper-class families and are valued by society as well. An example of cultural capital is the ability to read; thus families that provide reading materials are providing the means for learning to read. Students living in low socioeconomic conditions are less likely to have regular access to books, reading materials and technology. These opportunities are often limited or not available at all to lower socioeconomic students.

Bennett and LeCompte (1990) describe human capital as the human resources available to a person as a means to obtaining cultural capital. Parents living in low socioeconomic conditions are less likely to spend time with their children mentoring, helping with homework and placing a value on education. Many of these parents work long hours and do not have the time, or the ability to work with their children, as do their higher socioeconomic counterparts.

Research on at-risk students has also consistently indicated attendance as an important predictor of dropping out of school (Velez, 1989). Maintaining grades is the most obvious connection between students and poor attendance. Many students that experience failure opt to leave school. Poor attendance also contributes to the lack of development of social relationships. Students with poor attendance are less likely to develop relationships with peers, teachers and counselors at school. A feeling of isolation may be followed by poor attendance because of the lack of relationships in these student's lives.

Students who are identified as having academic and/or social problems and are potential dropouts may be labeled "mildly mentally retarded." Of the approximately

250,000 mildly mentally retarded students, a large percentage of them drop out of school. Other dropouts are labeled as learning disabled students. Thirty percent of all school-aged children are learning disabled, and a large percentage of them drop out of school prior to graduation (Strother, 1986). Many students that are neither labeled retarded nor learning disabled but receive failing grades in school are also potential dropouts. These students are often labeled underachievers and are opting out of the educational system. Other potential indicators for dropping out of school are drugs, pregnancy, boredom, or conflict with authorities (Fernandez & Velez, 1989). Recent statistics from the Oklahoma State Department of Education (OSDE), 2001-2002) indicate a 3.9 percent state average high school dropout rate. Furthermore, the 2000 Oklahoma Census Data reveals that 19 percent of Oklahoma's population has less than a 12th grade education. These statistics are indicators of adolescents that melt into the masses of the undereducated. National concern for identifying, predicting and preventing educationally at-risk students was brought to the forefront by the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education [NCEE], 1983). The national report presented data primarily related to deficits of high school students, which possibly account for the term at-risk being viewed frequently as descriptive of adolescents who are not succeeding educationally (Bucci & Reitzammer, 1992; Cage, 1984; Patterson & Bank, 1986; Walker & Sylwester, 1991). More recently, the term educationally at-risk has expanded to include students of varying ages and for a variety of reasons.

Because of the large percentage of dropouts, public education in America is continually challenged by the demands of school reform. Individuals, the media and even educators define school reform differently. A general consensus is that dramatic fundamental school reform requires legislation or structural policy changes. In most instances, fundamental school reform requires legislative or popular initiatives, or the

approval of a governing body for education in a state (Allen, 1996). School reform is a viable means of prevention and alternative strategies to address the dropout crisis. Most prevention-based programs include the identification of students labeled at-risk for dropping out and use intervention strategies in an attempt to terminate the decision to drop out. In a report of the National Association of Secondary School Principals (Dyer, 1996) school reform is defined as "Breaking the Ranks", conveying a recognition that old ways that no longer work must yield to change. Using technology to link schools and communities with global information networks, developing instructional strategies, which engage students in their own learning, and developing an integrated curriculum, which makes connections to real life, are several examples of current reform efforts (Dyer, 1996).

Other school reform initiatives include block scheduling to restructure time for more flexible instruction (Canaday & Rettig, 1996); portfolio development on students to assess academic progress, language development for minority students in order to become literate in English, and individual education plans (IEP) to design a program to meet the needs of special students. Finally, the creation of alternative schools has been an integral part of school reform. Alternative programs focus their reform in public education by trying to meet the needs of students who do not experience success in the traditional school program.

Alternative educational opportunities can be traced to Dewey and the progressives in the 1920s (Kellmayer, 1995). There has been a progression of more alternative schools in existence over the last eighty years. There is now, and has continued to be for the past ten years, a focus on finding successful interventions for the at-risk student (Bell, 1993; Blount & Wells, 1992; Cage, 1984; Koehler, 1988; NCEE, 1983; Placier, 1991; Richardson, Casanova, Placier, & Guilfoyle, 1989; Stevens, 1991). Scherer (1994)

reports, "One of the reasons given for resurgence in popularity of new kinds of schools, especially charter schools is that the new models put decisions about education in the hands of parents." According to Brant (1994), alternative programs were developed in the 1990s to modify traditional approaches to accountability.

The rising number of high school dropouts has forced public educators and legislators to face the challenge of educating students in an alternate method. This paradigm shift is one that takes a proactive approach to intervention early on in the education process, rather than waiting for problems to arise and attempt treatment. The progression of alternative programs has evolved to various types and styles of alternative schools. There are services provided by Type I, Type II, and Type III alternatives. According to (Raywid 1994), Type I alternatives or popular innovations "seek to make school challenging and fulfilling for all involved," in Type II alternative schools or last chance programs, "students are sentenced usually as one last chance prior to expulsion...They have been linked to 'soft jails,' and have nothing to do with options or choice" (p. 23). These programs have been specifically designed for students who have been described by the prefix "dis" – disenchanted, disaffected, disaffiliated, disturbed, and disruptive (Arnove, 1978). These students are characterized by acts of violence, both in and out of school, basic academic skill deficiencies, chronic class cutting, chronic school discipline problems, dysfunctional home situations, probation, suicide attempts, unusual living arrangements and substance abuse (Kellmayer, 1995). Type III alternative schools "are for students who are presumed to need remediation...academic, social/emotional or both" (p. 23).

All three types of alternative schools must have one common thread and that is committed teachers that have the desire to work in these settings. Choosing a staff that wants to work with at-risk students is the first consideration when beginning a new program. Kellmayer (1995) believes, "You can gain more influence over teenagers the less you try to control them...Teachers who do not understand and accept this premise do not belong in an alternative program" (p. 24). Establishing a positive on-going relationship with at-risk students is one of the most effective strategies when working with these students (Schwartz & Howley, 1998). Teachers in alternative school settings are trained to integrate special subject areas such as art, music, and technology to teach core curriculum. The specialty curriculum areas provide students with non-threatening therapeutic environments where the focus is student success. Educators change their teaching methods and alter curriculum to meet the educational needs of at-risk students.

Successful alternative programs for behaviorally disruptive students are characterized by short-term intervention strategies, behavior modification, eventual assimilation of students back into the regular classroom, and a focus on the diverse need of students (Glass, 1995). Young (1990) reviewed several empirical studies of alternative schools and concluded that small school size, a supportive and noncompetitive environment, and a student-centered curriculum where structural characteristics are commonly associated with program success.

In regard to the social aspect of alternative education for at-risk students' alternative education is about a sense of belonging and that someone cares about the student as an individual. A low-teacher-to-student ratio is one avenue for alternative schools to ensure a sense of belonging. However, merely changing the equation of the

ratio is not enough. Merely changing the grouping of students without altering the curriculum and teaching methods is not likely to make a significant difference in the educational experience of at-risk students (Maker 1987).

The problems children are having today are a reflection of our society. They are far different from the problems children faced in the 1960s and 1970s (Glass, 1994). Counselors and social workers need to be readily available to help students understand and make sense of "their world." Diversity of students' needs is an apparent link among alternative education students. This diversity drives the concept of more individual attention, collaboration among the school's staff, involvement of social service agencies, focus on students' families, greater flexibility in curriculum, scheduling and teaching strategies and extensive professional development for staff.

Statement of the Problem

The Oklahoma State legislature has mandated all school districts have an alternative program for students that are at-risk for becoming high-school dropouts. While the legislature insists public education has alternative schools we need to identify the differences between traditional and alternative programs and describe the impact on at-risk student's choice to graduate versus drop out.

If alternative education students are expected to graduate from high school, enter the workforce, attend vocational school, or enroll in college, then public education must equip them with the necessary tools to be successful. While the immediate role of most alternative school programs may be short-term intervention, to be truly successful, they must provide a follow-through function as well (Glass, 1995). In order to provide a follow-through of interventions, the schools must provide school-based research

methods. The research needs to be manageable and able to be conducted in a school-based setting. It should be collected simply, efficiently and quickly. Further the data must be rich and informative and provide practical use for administrators, counselors and teachers. By using this data, alternative schools must endeavor to close the achievement gap for these students as well as enhance social skills.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify critical elements and common themes reported by the study subjects as to their success in an alternative program rather than in a traditional classroom. In order to identify these elements, case studies of administrators, counselor and teachers teaching in alternative programs were conducted in a mid-size rural school district with an enrollment of approximately 3,800 students and a small rural school district with approximately 1,059 students in Southwest Oklahoma. To develop the case studies, data were collected from the students, parents, their teachers, counselor and administrators. Students also completed a survey that asked questions dealing with experiences both in traditional and alternative classrooms. The survey asked questions about the student (age, race, classification in school) family, and peer relationships.

The results of this study will be useful to guide the actions, behaviors and future planning to successfully educate at-risk students. Specific goals and objectives may be developed for alternative education students based on the results of this study. It may also help teachers, counselors, administrators and parents address the varied needs of students experiencing difficulty in traditional education. It could assist teachers in traditional education understand the effects of their behavior on students that are experiencing academic and social problems. It could help educators employ manageable

strategies to address students at-risk for dropping out of school from a preventive focus. The possibility of preventing something is more feasible when one understands clearly.

This study may also be useful to teachers in both traditional and alternative education by understanding and incorporating the following actions to assist students:

1. Teaching students the significance of education.
2. Training students in basic life skills: communication, decision-making, responsibility for one's actions, problem solving and conflict resolution.
3. The belief that students who feel good about themselves and have positive relationships with others achieve more and are more successful in and out of school (Brigman & Earley, 1991).

In order to conduct this study the primary research questions will be investigated:

Research Questions

1. How do alternative schools encourage at-risk students to stay in school?
2. Why do teachers and students believe at-risk students drop out of traditional school settings?
3. What role do teachers, counselors and administrators play in the success or failure in alternative and traditional education programs?
4. What role does parent participation play in the success or failure of students in alternative and traditional education programs?

Description of the Study

In order to identify the critical elements, which allow students to be successful in alternative education versus traditional education, the methodology used was qualitative case studies of teachers, counselor and administrators and quantitative data from a student survey. The survey was given to students classified as sophomore through seniors attending alternative education. Results were compared and data reported accordingly. The qualitative method of data collection was interviews with administrators, teachers, and one counselor. This methodology is appropriate because the interviews and survey will yield a description of success in alternative education. At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experiences of other people and the meaning they make of those experiences (Seidman, 1991). Analysis of the data drawn from the experiences of students, teachers, counselor, and administrators will impact understanding on methods to positively impact students in the future attending alternative settings. Data will also clarify interventions and support students' needs to be successful in public education.

Definition of Terms

At-Risk Student: – At-risk children and youth are individuals whose present or predictable status (economic, social-cultural, academic and/or health) indicates that they may fail to successfully complete their secondary education and acquire basic life skills necessary for higher education and/or employment. Oklahoma Definition, Oklahoma Technical Assistance Center (2000).

Success: In this study success is defined as a student attaining passing grades in all subjects, 90 percent or better attendance in all classes, no suspensions from school for an

entire semester, and if classified as a senior, receiving a high school diploma upon graduation. Interview Intake and Enrollment Forms FAME and EDGE Academies (2003)

School Reform: In this study school reform is defined as public education trying to meet the needs of the individual student. Meeting students' needs may be accomplished through a variety of methods.

Traditional Education: In this study, traditional education will be defined as a regular high school where students attend classes on a traditional or block schedule. Students are not leveled according to ability and most classes are "one size fits all."

Alternative Education: In this study alternative education will be defined as a reform effort where there are structural, organizational and governance changes to establish the school norms and interpersonal relations for learning. Curriculum and instructional innovations to give individual students the necessary time and help for success in a high standards program and teacher support systems that provide opportunities for faculty input and continuous backing required to implement ambitious changes (Jordan, McPartland, Legters, & Balfanz, 2000). In this study alternative education may be referred to as alternative academy, alternative school or alternative program.

Special Education: In this study special education will be defined as students that have taken a standardized test of cognitive ability and because of the discrepancy between their aptitude and achievement level have been placed on an Individual Education Plan (IEP). These students may attend special classes for a portion of the day or all day according to their IEP and they receive modifications to their work on a daily basis.

Resilience: The ability of at-risk students to thrive, mature and increase competence in the face of adversity. "A child that is oriented toward the future, is living ahead, with hope" (Brown, 2001 p. 101).

Limitations

This project was part of a yearlong study occurring in cooperation with two school districts. It was limited to students and schools in two small cities in the State of Oklahoma. The demographics of the cities are reflective of demographics across the nation. However, this study will not attempt to generalize to all school districts in the State of Oklahoma, nor will it serve to generalize to all schools in the United States.

The following limitations are placed on the findings of this study and their application to other areas:

1. Students who participated in this study were limited to two small school districts in Southwest Oklahoma. As a case study, no generalizations will be drawn and applied to other school districts.
2. Limitation of study involving only two alternative schools.
3. Limitation of response on surveys.

The study was an opportunity for teachers, administrators and counselor to talk about their experiences, express their ideas, and convey feelings. Students had the opportunity to express their feelings and beliefs based on a multiple question survey. If the story of these participants has relevance for other alternative schools in other school districts then they will have benefited, if not, their story is still worth sharing.

Chapter II

Review of Related Literature

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the literature related to alternative educational experiences for at-risk students. This chapter includes four sections of related literature. Section one offers a historical perspective of student expulsion, high school dropouts and high school graduation. Section two presents definitions of at-risk students, factors outside the control of school leaders and how these factors impact at-risk students' education. Section three further discusses the factors that relate to the successes or failure inside the control of school leaders of at-risk students in traditional versus alternative settings. Lastly section four includes resilience education and how students thrive and overcome the odds of even the worst of life's conditions.

Introduction

In 1983 the National Commission on Excellence in Education (NCEE), presented the publication *A Nation at Risk* that caused a national focus on deficits in public education in the United States. In the publication, American student's achievement was compared with the achievement of students of other industrialized nations. The report stated that American students' achievement was not adequate, and it further stated that some 23 million American adults are functionally illiterate and 13 percent of 17 year olds can be considered functionally illiterate. "Disturbing inadequacies" (p. 18) was a term used in the areas of math and science. It revealed that in 35 states high school students taking only one year of mathematics and only a single year of science attained graduation. Academic achievement was minimal due to reduced standards and lowered

expectations. As a result of *A Nation at Risk* there has been increased focus on students termed at-risk, as well as, efforts have been increased to meet the educational needs of at-risk students (Bell, 1993).

What does the term at-risk mean? What type students are at risk? What are the factors outside an educator's control that affect at-risk students? What factors are in an educator's control that positively or negative affect at-risk students? What factors facilitate resilience in vulnerable populations of at-risk students? The literature review will endeavor to answer these questions and lay a foundation in which to examine the research questions.

Section One

Historical Perspective of Student Expulsion, High School Dropouts and Graduation

Students who do not thrive in an academic setting have been prevalent throughout educational history. The average American did not graduate from high school prior to World War II. Many teenagers left school to work in unskilled or semi-skilled jobs; and some teenagers obtained highly skilled jobs without a high school diploma. In the early years of World War II the average American had attended school for only nine years and 12 percent had attended for fewer than five. An alarming fact that impacted black teens the most is that in most Southern communities only 10 to 20 percent of teenagers attended school. The term "dropout" is a relatively new term given the fact that most teens had not "dropped in" before the 1940s. Students were labeled "subnormal" long before the special education laws required the education of all students. Very few students were offered an academic track that equipped them for college. Students bound for college were labeled "talented." To enhance this problem school attendance was not

valued and deemed only a mark of diligence in which employers placed little value. In the "good old days" a diploma stood for dutifulness, not academic achievement (Meier, 1995, p. 70). Only the talented students in the 1940s stayed in school and most of them rarely took more than two years of high school math, science or history and virtually none took calculus. Most low performers had already left the school system to enter the world of work.

The nation first acknowledged an obligation to educate all students to equally high standards in the early 1960s (Kozol, 1992). Educating all students, because it was fair and our nation's health depended on it, required huge financial resources. It also required a revolution in the way we organized teaching and learning. Beginning in the 1960's educators were expected to create good schools, and students were expected to stay in school and succeed by graduating from high school.

What appears to be an oxymoron in the 1960s to educating all students and encouraging them to stay in school is the much-publicized case *Tinker v. Des Moines School District.* In December 1965 a group of adults and students in Des Moines, Iowa, held a meeting in a private home. The group determined to publicize their objections to the hostilities in Vietnam and their support for a new truce by wearing black armbands during holiday season and by fasting on December 16 and New Year's Eve. Students decided to wear black armbands to school in protest of the Vietnam activity. The principals of the Des Moines schools became aware of the plan to wear armbands. On December 14, 1965, they met and adopted a policy that any student wearing an armband to school would be asked to remove it, and if he refused would be suspended until he returned without the armband. Even though the U. S. Supreme Court on February 24,

1969, recognized that the wearing of an armband for the purpose of expressing certain views is the type of symbolic act that is within the Free Speech Clause of the First Amendment and students were unrightfully suspended, the administrator's decision to suspend three students was in direct contradiction to keeping students in school.

While the 1970s were an era where public education was sorely neglected, the 1980s brought a flurry of rediscovery by policy makers. Their message was one of declining standards in education, which led to economic and moral consequences. The get-tough response by legislators, minimum competency tests for students and teachers and higher teaching salaries are several examples of a wave of reform for public schools. Major think tank leaders of the National Alliance of Business, the Carnegie Corporation and the Education Commission of the States endorsed a second wave of reform to invent new standards and involve teachers and parents to bring about fundamental change. These ideas were prepared for reports, discussed at conferences and educational gatherings but were rarely translated into practice. Change in educational outcomes, it appeared, was not going to happen as fast as the leading thing tanks and educational gurus had hoped (Meier, 1995).

In the early 1990s, there was yet another major reform initiative for public education. This initiative increased on the state and federal levels the power of professional experts. The experts' charge was to institute a uniform national curriculum (or standards) backed by national high-stakes test. In addition, local and public control was diminished in order to bring about school reform. This reform is in favor of school becoming a market place, an arena of competition where school vouchers and privatization schemes are employed. Meier (1995) says, "Privatization has emerged as

not merely the latest fad but one of the most tenacious of the reform ideas and a powerful threat to public education" (p. 76).

While all these so-called school reforms have been discussed, reported on or put into action, in the early 2000s, students are still dropping out of high school in alarming numbers. In a series of 13 reports from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) the reports on high school dropout and completion rates in 2000 are as follows:

High School Dropout Rates

- Five out of every 100 young adults enrolled in high school in October 1999 left school before October 2000 without successfully completing a high school program. The percentage of young adults who left school each year without successfully completing a high school program decreased from 1972 through 1987. Despite year-to-year fluctuations, the percentage of students dropping out of school each year has stayed relatively unchanged since 1987.
- In 2000, young adults living in families with incomes in the lowest 20 percent of all family incomes were six times as likely as their peers from families in the top 20 percent of the income distribution to drop out of high school.
- In 2000, about three-fourths (75.8 percent) of the current-year dropouts were ages 15 through 18; moreover, about two-fifths (42.0 percent) of the dropouts were ages 15 through 17.

- Over the last decade, between 347,000 and 544,000 10th-12th grade students left school each year without successfully completing a high school program.
- In October 2000, some 3.8 million young adults were not enrolled in a high school program and had not completed high school. These youths accounted for 10.9 percent of the 34.6 million 16 through 24 year olds in the United States in 2000.
- The status dropout rate for Whites in 2000 remained lower than the rate for Blacks, but over the past three decades the difference between the rates for Whites and Blacks has narrowed. However, this narrowing of the gap occurred during the 1970s and 1980s. Since 1990, the gap has remained fairly constant. In addition, Hispanic young adults in the United States continued to have a relatively high status dropout rate when compared to Asian/Pacific Islanders, Whites or Blacks.
- In 2000, the status dropout rate for Asian/Pacific Islander young adults was lower than for young adults from all other racial/ethnic groups. The status rate for Asian/Pacific Islanders was 3.8 percent compared with 27.8 percent for Hispanics, 13.1 percent for Blacks, and 6.9 percent for Whites.
- In 2000, 44.2 percent of Hispanic young adults born outside of the United States were high school dropouts. Hispanic young adults born within the United States were much less likely to be dropouts. However, when looking at just those young adults born within the United States, Hispanic youths were still more likely to be dropouts than other young adults.

The Oklahoma Department of Education provides information via an annual dropout report for school districts in the State of Oklahoma. Following in Table 2.0 are statistics gleaned from the 2001-2002 Oklahoma Dropout Report:

Table 1

2001-2002 Oklahoma Dropout Report

State Totals:	Dropout Rate:	Females:	Males:
175,124	4.1%	3,844	4536

State Totals by Age	Less than 13	13	14	15	16	17	18	19-22	Greater than 22
	240	385	559	1172	1926	2214	1485	389	0

State Totals by Race	Black	American Indian	Hispanic	Asian	White/Other
	1307	1245	944	95	4789

High School Completion Rates

High school completion rates represent the proportion of 18-through 24 year-olds, not currently enrolled in high school or below, who have completed a high school diploma or an equivalent credential, including a General Educational Development (GED) credential.

- In 2000, 86.5 percent of all 18-through 24-year olds not enrolled in high school had completed high school. Completion rates rose slightly from the early 1970s to the late 1980s but have remained fairly constant during the 1990s.
- High school completion rates increased for White and Black young adults between the early 1970s and late 1980s but have remained relatively constant in

the 1990s. By 2000, 91.8 percent of White and 83.7 percent of Black 18-through 24-year olds had completed high school.

- White and Asian/Pacific Islander young adults in 2000 were more likely than their Black and Hispanic peers to have completed high school.

Another relevant factor that links directly to education and is significantly impacted by educational attainment is annual income. The more educated a person becomes the greater his or her annual income is likely to be. Conversely, the less educated the person becomes the less his or her income is likely to be. Following are median earning statistics of adults age 25 or over by educational attainment provided by the Colorado Literacy Research Institute (2001).

Table 2

Earning Statistics according to Educational Attainment

Education Attainment for Adults Age 25 and Over	Median Earnings, 2000
Less than 9th grade	$15,241
9th-12th grade, no diploma	$17,337
High school graduate	$25,264
Some college	$27,696
Associate degree	$30,773
Bachelors degree or more	$43,683

According to Pearce (2000), at the income levels of those who do not reach high school and those who do not earn diplomas have little hope of achieving financial self-sufficiency. At the turn of the century, it was hardly important to have a high school degree to go to work. At the turn of the next century, lack of a high school diploma may

relegate one to impacted poverty. If students who are dropping out continue at the current rate, they not only will be underemployed, which is a personal tragedy, but they will also pay a great deal less in taxes over the course of a life time, which is a significant loss to society (Kronick, 1994). Dealing with dropouts is an urgent problem and should serve as a wake-up call to society. Dropping out of school should not be simplified to a notion of blaming the victim and it is their fault if they fail in school attitude. Today, failure in school is too complex to simply relegate the cause to an individualistic explanation. Consequences of dropping out require extensive study in order to provide intervention to this crisis.

Section Two

Definition of At-Risk Students, Factors Outside School Leaders Control and Effects of Adverse Factors on At-Risk Students

The term at-risk has evolved to include constructs from the medical, psychological, social and finally the educational field. The medical and mental health arenas used the term "at-risk" early on to describe those in society who had mental or physical handicap conditions. The definition later encompasses the fields of special education and social work (Placier, 1991). Special education was also deemed as a handicapping condition. Society also heightened the awareness of at-risk based on poverty level income, minority and ethnic background. These persons or families in these categories were at-risk for adequate productivity in society. Today society is labeling students at-risk who are failing to complete their education and achieve marketable skills.

Almost 500,000 young people drop out of public schools each year and the number is greater among minority groups in urban schools and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Griffin, 1993). In the state of Oklahoma the number of black students who dropped out of school for the 2001-2002 school year was 1,307, American Indian 1,245, Hispanic 944, Asian 95 and White 4,789. The Oklahoma state total of economically disadvantaged dropouts was 3,428 students in grades 7-12 (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2002). These half-million youngsters who leave school early every year, including youth in the State of Oklahoma, are part of an estimated seven million youngsters who engage in high risk behaviors that include delinquency, use of illegal substances, teenage sex, that might lead to pregnancy and lagging behind in school (Wehlage, et. al., 1989).

Urban educators are often faced with the challenges of educating children living in poverty (U. S. Department of Education, 1990). Students living in poverty often experience physical and emotional handicaps, lack of health care, poor nutrition, difficult family conditions and inner city neighborhoods (Dubow & Luster, 1990). Poverty distracts from school time and school work. Many students living in poverty have to perform a myriad of duties that takes time away from their studies. They may have to become employed to help the family financially, they may become the family caretaker either emotionally, financially or both. Often students who live in poverty experience a lack of power to get out of their situation. Feelings of helplessness and hopelessness are prevalent among poverty stricken youth thus leading to a lack of interest or who cares attitudes toward school. Other factors that go hand in hand with poverty are the lack of resources, such as, medical care and poor nutrition. Many educators consider these

children to be poorly motivated and inattentive, when in reality they may be hungry or have a physical ailment that hinders their ability to stay on task and pay attention. Students living in poverty are sometimes labeled as slow learners and placed in low-level classes. In spite of these labels, teachers attempt to educate classrooms of students with a variety of abilities and problems. Even homogenously grouping of students has uncontrolled variables such as minority status, poverty level incomes and familial conditions. The classroom teacher often experiences a variety of problems based on these student characteristics.

"Home is the most unequal environment in education, and school should be an arena of equity" (Conrath, 2001, p. 82). However, the national prejudice against poor people, including poor children, is a cultural ethic. Rarely do we find students in advance placement courses that live in poverty conditions, just as dropout prevention classes rarely house students of wealth. Conrath (2001) clearly states, "Of all the measurable differences between successful and unsuccessful students, in my experience, family income trumps all others" (p.82).

In addition to poverty two more outside factors that adversely affect the at-risk student's education is poor attendance and low self-esteem. Non-attendance was cited as the most prominent behavioral outcome related to the academic deficiencies of these students (Westheimer, Kahne, & Gerstein, 1992). The Control Theory: Hirschi (1969) posits that truancy and delinquency will be delimited by keeping the child bonded with the school. The school is seen as a central, socializing agent of appropriate norms and values. Kronick and Hargis (1990) state that delinquency and truancy is a response to the adolescent's perceived failure to satisfy social and emotional needs or to achieve a

meaningful position within a social context, such as the school. Motivation theory and research suggests that students are more likely to attend school if they believe that attending school will satisfy their needs or benefit them in the future (Wood, 1991). Students who feel good about themselves in school and who believe the courses they are enrolled in are relevant to their future, in terms of preparing them for the world of work, are more likely to attend school and remain in school than those who lack this belief (McCabe, 1992).

Students at-risk for dropping out of school have a significant absence in their life. They have an absence of an adult that will give them the time, attention, care and direction needed to nurture and help them flourish. Individuals (females and males) perceived acceptance by their mothers during childhood is closely correlated with a sense of love worthiness in adulthood rather than a variety of personality variables such as ego-strength and neuroticism/extroversion (Epstein 1983). Many of these children experience an environment that has very little or no structure, lack of nurturing and chaos. Educators are guilty of enhancing the chaotic lifestyles of these students by accusing them of not taking responsibility for their life. In reality these students have never been taught the concept of making responsible choices and how choices have a direct effect on their future. These students fail to make the connection between external factors such as poor attendance or not turning in homework have a direct correlation to low performance in school. This negative cycle leads to frustration, unsuccessful experiences and bad attitudes toward school. At-risk students have to be taught by flexible and consistent educators to develop an authentic sense of responsibility because these tendencies and habits do not come naturally.

Another barrier that adversely affects children and causes them to be at-risk for dropping out of school is racial and ethnic backgrounds. Class, culture and race have influenced the educational experiences of children for centuries. Children that grow up in racial discrimination often experience segregation thus leading to anxiety. Coupled with poverty, race and ethnicity can become a heavy burden for children trying to attend school. Minority status should not be a sole predictor of school failure but rather a basis for intervention and remediation when achievement falls below norms. A grave fallacy in the racial and ethnic arena, according to Bennet (1995), is the values American life have stressed that everyone can do better if they try, if they work hard and save their money. Thus race, ethnicity and poverty have been explained as a consequence of the personal inadequacy and inferiority of individuals and groups. Because these children are viewed as culturally and racially different, they are considered to hold marginal positions in American society. The tragedy is that negative effects are being passed on from generation to generation through the language and value systems of families.

A growing body of research suggests that when parents and school personnel collaborate effectively, students are more likely to behave and perform better in school (Epstein, 1995). Conversely, when students are reared in environments where there is little or no value placed on education they often experience difficulty in learning how to learn. Children in this situation are faced with challenges, such as, no help with homework, no tools for studying and certainly no culture of education. This condition perpetuates the achievement gap between privileged and underprivileged students. It is more prevalent in low-income, working-class individuals than any other category. Motivational problems are caused by systemic, contextual or relationship problems that

involve parent and child. Students that experience motivational problems in school usually are not getting a balanced level of adult help and control. Chances for failure in a regular education classroom are enhanced when parental and home support are lacking.

School is challenging for students born in a different country and immigrates to the United States. Adjusting to a new culture sometimes creates conflicting values when trying to reconcile the differences between their native culture and their new one. When students have to learn a new language, adapt to a new culture and find their identity all at once, this creates problems for them understanding their value system and what role they should play in school. Stress caused by linguistic and cultural adjustments uses up students' much needed energy. Students repeatedly feel unwelcome and have an acute awareness of changing places.

A child's development of self-esteem and self-image is closely tied to the emotional environment of the family. In the emotionally healthy family, the child feels loved and wanted. They experience approval, acceptance and encouragement, thus forming a secure attachment with each parent. Children will develop a positive self-esteem when he/she is a good and valued member of the family (Romeo, 2000). However, in the emotionally abusive family the child feels unloved and unwanted. Abusive parents consistently practice ridicule and rejection. Children experience a cold environment where physical affection is rarely expressed and emotional support is lacking. Emotional abuse becomes a systematic diminishment of the victim rather than a single event. The continuous behavior by the abuser reduces a child's self-concept and enhances a feeling of unworthiness of love, respect, friendship and affection. Physical and emotional torture creates conflict between home and school for at-risk students.

Energy is spent on simply surviving emotionally, and schoolwork goes wanting for students who experience any kind of abuse. Children who are victims of abuse live a stressful day-in and day-out psychological trauma that takes a toll on their daily existence.

Physical problems are additional barriers that place students at-risk. Students that experience long-term health problems or a sudden onset of physical ailments make school difficult and intensify the probability of being at-risk of dropping out of school. Students with learning problems, due to specific learning disabilities or mild mental retardation, are particularly at-risk for stress and adjustment problems in school. As the complexity of the learning environment increases both academically and socially so do the already existing difficulties increase with each school year. Students with learning problems come to the middle school period with a history of academic and social problems (Center & Wascom, 1986; LeGreca & Stone, 1990). While the difficulties that students with learning problems may not be new, these difficulties become more stressful as students seek to develop greater autonomy, more intimate peer relationships and a sense of identity (Wenz-Gross, & Seperstein, 1997).

Fear and anxiety are common obstacles students experience when different forms of hardship affect them. A climate of social injustice is what one feels when an individual is surrounded by indifference or prejudice against a class of people. Fearful and anxious students may be described as loners and isolate themselves; this is a form of survival and taking care of oneself. Absenteeism is prevalent in students who are fearful and anxious about attending school. It is easier to stay home rather than be thrown in an atmosphere where they feel they are out of their element.

Garbarino, Dubrown, Kostolny, & Pardo (1992), (Luthar & Ziglar 1991), (Safyer 1994) report that children who are able to generate effective solutions to interpersonal dilemmas are more likely to succeed academically as a result of getting along with the teacher, learning from classmates and dealing with classroom situations independently. A valued quality in American society today are social skills, however, fear and anxiety are inhibiting factors in this important component of human development. Achievement in school is hindered because of poor social skills thus affecting study habits, curiosity and the ability to express oneself. Anxiety may also manifest itself in more serious forms of behavior such as anorexia and bulimia.

Resentment is a common feeling that students experience when they experience the adversity of fear and anxiety. When a student is rejected in school based on factors such as the color of their skin or cultural differences, they may become bitter and threatened by a system that considers them inferior. An outcome that stems from this resentment is that educators often label these students as having an attitude. When students are feeling resentment, they need to be given the opportunity to express their fear and anxiety in a non-threatening environment. Quite the contrary, they are beaten down, provoked and made to feel an even greater sense of injustice. This tends to lead to feelings of helplessness and hopelessness.

Students who experience adversity during the formative years tend to internalize negative feelings about themselves. Some become convinced that they are not capable of beating the odds against them, and their self-worth is virtually non-existent. Others believe that being perfect will gain them favor with their peers, teachers and even parents. According to Aronson (2001), many at-risk students become adults that struggle with an

inferior subconscious psychological process. Trust is a factor lacking in these students' life, which ultimately spills into their adult life; thus leading to difficulty in relationships with others. Another way students internalize feelings of not belonging is through shame. Shame may be a result of poverty, being made fun of and feelings of being socially inept compared to peers. Students that internalize shame are self-conscious and easily intimidated by others.

Undue burdens of responsibility placed on children causes them to grow up faster than most. Many at-risk students testify they had responsibilities placed on them as early as five years of age. A high level of maturity is expected when in reality these children are the ones supposed to be taken care of not taking care of others. These children are faced with decisions that deal with protecting themselves or often time's younger siblings. They also assume a parental role much too soon in their own formative years. These children experience so much hardship and despair; they tend to create a wall around themselves to protect their vulnerability and feelings.

All of these adversities and barriers represent major obstacles in a highly competitive educational system for low-income, at-risk students. Because of these hardships, they become less motivated in school. Some may become either invisible or disruptive students. Poverty is at the forefront for students that are at-risk for academic failure. This condition negatively impacts a productive life in adulthood.

Section Three

Factors Inside School Leaders Control That Affect At-Risk Students

More recently thousands of youth in danger of dropping out of school or being excluded from school involuntarily are being described by a popular phrase "at-risk." By

definition these students are described as those that fail to make satisfactory academic progress, do not do as they are told, do not behave well in class, or refuse to play the school game as dictated (Gibson, 1997). Many educators have other names for these students: the special needs kid, the disruptive kid, the emotionally disturbed kid, the absent more than present kid, the talk-back-to-the teacher kid, the pregnant kid, the second-language kid and even the passive and quiet kid. These kids are potential dropouts and these kids have many labels and names, however, a commonality for most is the absence of a significant attachment-either at home or at school-to a caring adult in their lives (Gibson, 1997). Absent is an adult who will give them the time, attention, care and direction needed to help them become successful adults.

Twelve-thousand teenagers were interviewed in a landmark study of adolescent behavior and the medical researchers came up with startling, yet welcome news, "children that were least likely to have problems or engage in high-risk behaviors were those that had strong emotional ties to the adults in their lives, particularly parents, furthermore, feeling that at least one teacher or adult at school treats them fairly also protected teenagers against every health risk measured except pregnancy-this factor was more important than class size or any particular curriculum" (Foreman, 1997, p. 11). In a 1994 study by Jordan and McPartland, of John Hopkins University's Center for Research on Effective Schooling for Disadvantaged Students, described kids' decisions to drop out as "Across all racial/ethnic and gender groups, the pattern was consistent: Most frequently students cited within school factors such as poor relationships with teachers, less frequently they cited out of school factors such as needing a job" (p. 10). Rather than being that one adult, many educators blame the plight of at-risk students on school

policies, legislature, school board decisions or what the parents are not doing. These excuses are reasons why students are pushed away from any type of learning environment. So what can educators do to enhance the learning environment for these children? They cannot ignore their responsibilities to them, and change must take place in order to meet these students' needs.

Many young students enter preschool and kindergarten with a thirst for learning. Most tackle complex tasks and are unafraid of failure, however, observations of these children several years later reveal a very different picture. For many, motivation is now a problem (Kagan, 1990). Their attention spans are short and their minds wander; they require extrinsic incentives and sometimes sanctions to motivate them and many become behavior problems. Much of school is centered on a hidden curriculum of social control and classroom management (Seeman, 1975). There are negative factors within classrooms that transform at-risk students into a discrete subculture, which is functionally incompatible with school success. The result is alienation, a feeling of isolation and estrangement (Seeman, 1975). Children spend many hours in crowded classrooms waiting, in transition from one classroom to another, and in passive observation of the teacher's interactions with other students (Dreeban, 1968; Winnett & Winkler, 1972). As a result of this, our public school system is one of standardized learning that impacts education in such a manner that little or no creativity is required. Harter (1981) suggests that negative effects may be cumulative over the years.

Many of the so-called at-risk students need mentoring, structure and an opportunity to see their own potential (Coie, et. al, 1993; Richman & Bowen 1997). When an alternative school is established on the premise of compassion and empathy that

seeks to focus on both the content and character of the educational process, then at-risk students have a better chance for success than in a punitive environment. Empathy from teachers and administrators toward at-risk students fosters the process of self-awareness. Teachers that strive to foster and nurture students help them believe in themselves and be attuned to their own environment.

Assessment of student performances must include a broad array of domains that aligns with curriculum goals of the program. These include outcomes related to personal development, school responsibility, behaviors and attendance. The empathetic dimension is one of the mechanisms by which moral and critical reflections are fostered (Goleman, 1995). Through empathy, a commitment to care, believe in and to uphold the other as a person of unique value is essential in educating at-risk students.

Coping strategies are the ways in which one copes with daily living: the disappointments, the tragedies the triumphs. Coping strategies are ways to think about things, attitudes, self-talk, strategies for resolving conflicts, problem-solving techniques and the avoidance of needless conflicts. Payne (1998) says, "Coping strategies are also ways of approaching tasks; setting priorities and determining what one can live with and what one can live without" (p. 90). Many at-risk students have never been taught or fail to realize that support systems are family, friends and backup resources that you should turn to in times of need. Teachers working with at-risk students are a key support system when helping students develop coping skills. School staffs have to be willing to work authentically with students as a whole person. Authenticity is the ability to express with clarity what one is, what one stands for and why one is committed to the mission and task at hand (Sikes, 1989).

Educators involved with at-risk students need to be in partnership with their students building a foundation based on hope. Hope should be built on concrete skills, abilities and realistic assessments. Educators should help at-risk students consider realistic goals and not lead them on a path that may ultimately lead to disappointment. These goals should be realistic and attainable in order to avoid feelings of disappointment and defeat. Freire (1994) says that we need to begin from pedagogy of hope. Therefore, teachers have to walk a fine line with students in helping them establish goals and objectives that are attainable rather than establishing illusions that may never be obtained.

The year 2000 has brought complexities very different from previous times, thus requiring educators to shift to another level of thinking about the everyday lives of at-risk students. Listening patiently and attentively to what at-risk students say is an integral part of alternative education for these students. When teachers seek to respond to students, they engage with students in a collaborative process of change. As adults we tend to prescribe and construct images, frames and scripts and expect the students to respond to them and participate in them (Goleman, 1985). Through collaboration comes a discovery of resources, answers and alternatives that bring hope to students. Many at-risk students experience a chaotic existence that hinders their communication and collaboration skills. According to Wheatley (1992) within chaos and disorder there is a source of order. This idea enables alternative educators to view students' circumstances, their behaviors and their issues as small deviations that affect learning. Thus enabling educators into a new way of thinking and helping students make sense of their chaotic lifestyles. Educators are being challenged to find the relationships that exist outside the normal and rigid academic standards of the regular classroom environment.

Teachers are finding that the greatest successes they are experiencing in their teaching is to look at the deterrent factors that affect students and their academic gaps and turn them into areas of self-development. Farson (1996) calls these solutions and techniques as the "invisible obvious that allows for creative transformational results in teaching and learning" (p. 25). Effective teachers are frequently seeking to take students' so-called deficiencies and greatest difficulties and turn them into opportunities for learning.

Educators that teach in both traditional and alternative settings must realize that what they expect is what they will get from students. Teacher expectations are the starting place in working with all students. By having expectations, teachers are in essence empowering students to be committed to improving themselves and increasing their knowledge and skills. In 1987, Rosenthal wrote about the "Pygmalion Effect," in which researchers studied the effects of teacher expectations on student achievement. The results were simply, *what you expect you will get.* Although this is quite simplistic, the negative effects are proof in almost every school system in the country. The labels teachers assign to students affect how the teachers perceived classroom events and how they respond to students. Once a label is firmly attached to a student, a teacher tends to adjust his or her recollections and anticipations of the student's behavior so they are consistent with the label (Hargreaves et al., 1975). When we call students underachievers, unteachable, unruly or discipline problems, bad students or potential dropouts, *what you expect is what you will get.* The power of labeling and naming students is awesome and should never be taken lightly by educators. What is expected of students from teachers and schools helps define who they are. As Perrone (1991) has observed:

> Moreover, and possibly more important, life in classrooms is shaped by the expectations that are held for children. No matter how good a school might appear physically or how many books and computers exist, if teachers don't believe firmly that all children can learn and all children have important interests, intentions and strengths that need to be seen as starting points for ongoing learning, they are failing children, their families and communities. And when children are seen as failures or deemed not capable of full participation in the best that schools provide, their education possibilities are stunted (p. 33).

Social support is often less present in the lives of children and youths who are at-risk of school failure (Coie, et.al, 1993; Richman & Bowen, 1997). Young people that come to school with negative labels from home are already at a disadvantage for a positive start. What teachers do with these negative labels can either reinforce them or help students change. School personnel have a responsibility to develop strategies to raise the expectations for these students rather than buy-into the theory that these students are already damaged. Many of these students resort to nonlearning as a response to families, school curriculum, teachers and communities that have disrespected them as students and learners. Kohl (1991) concludes that learning how to not-learn is an intellectual and social challenge; sometimes it requires hard work. It consists of an active, often ingenious, willful rejection of even the most compassionate and well-designed teaching. It subverts attempts at redemption as much as it rejects learning in the first place. For many non-learners intelligence is not an issue, their grades are not

indicative of their intelligence they are an indication and response to labels and living up to those labels. Educators, community members and parents all have a profound impact on how students define themselves.

Alternative schools serve at-risk students that are in need of an educational process incorporating appropriate structure, curriculum, interaction and reinforcement strategies designed to provide effective instruction for those students in whose needs are not best served within the traditional educational setting (Oklahoma Alternative Education Association, 1999). Alternative schools that have a vision of shared leadership are more likely to be successful with at-risk students than one with unnecessary rules and regulations. Their key to working with at-risk students is to avoid conflict. This can be accomplished by invoking very few rules but have strong and sensible parameters that allow students to feel secure. Allowing students to be a part of the shared vision, from decisions about rules and regulations, to curriculum creates a climate of openness and trust.

Ethical values actively taught in schools can ensure the unspoken curriculum of safety, respect and responsibility. As educators we are expected to model ethical behaviors on a daily basis. This task may sound simple, yet it is complex and takes time and patience to cultivate an ethical environment. Teachers have to take the time to develop a process for shared reflection and a willingness to act and react differently from which we are accustomed. When administrators and teachers want students to change their behavior and attitudes, it is imperative they start by modifying their own behavior and attitudes. Students learn to act in the ways we have taught them to act. Once again, *what you expect is what you get.* Adults through their own behavior show students the

meaning of abstract terms such as respect, responsibility, truthfulness and courage. According to Freire (1970), how teachers and administrators manage the school directly contributes to a lack of problems.

Wehlage and Rutter (1986) conducted a national study of 30,000 tenth graders and found that grades, achievement test scores, expected school attainment and socioeconomic status were the most powerful variables in a student's decision to drop out or remain in school. Other variables that held significance in this study were attendance and behavior and were described as the social context of schooling. Stemming from these variables is disengagement from school. When students disengage from school because of school related or personal issues or both, they are at-risk for becoming potential dropouts. The reasons for disengagement may be categorized in three broad areas shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Reasons for Student Disengagement In School

LIFE/FAMILY	***PERSONAL***	***SCHOOL BASED***
Low socioeconomic level	Legal problems	History of grade retention
Nontraditional structure	Learning disabilities	History of high family school delinquency
Lack of parent high school completion	Teenage sex and or pregnancy issues	Course failures
Race/Ethnicity issues	Substance abuse problems	Low grade point average
Unstable home life	Students' lack of internal locus of control	Truancy, suspensions and behavioral problems
Trauma from divorce or death in family	Mental/physical health problems	Feelings of alienation from school authorities
Primary language non-English	Low self-esteem	Ability grouping

Educators have a responsibility to students that are disengaged because of school related issues. It is a professional responsibility to incorporate creative interventions to

address this growing dilemma. Educators need to blend research with best practices in order to make quality decisions that affect at-risk students. An emphasis placed on program evaluation is crucial in order to review data and make adjustments to programs to ensure the quality and effectiveness of an alternative program.

Students that continually experience defeat in school develop patterns that enhance failure such as low self-esteem and alienation. Decisions made by educators must be evaluated, with the student in mind, in order to aid the academically and emotionally fragile student be successful. Old patterns of failure, low self esteem and alienation should be replaced by new habits, attitudes, skills and knowledge.

Students who have been alienated from school have gone through the process of engagement then disengagement; it is an educator's obligation to help students turn-around by a process of reengagement. An atmosphere existing in a school that fosters the idea that all students can learn is more likely to breed success than failure. Most important in this idea is that all students can learn, some just need more time or a different approach.

Numerous studies have found a positive relationship between a teacher's sense of efficacy and students' classroom achievement. Lee and Burkham (2000), conducted a study of relationships among educators and students and they contend their most important finding was "students from poor disadvantaged families and neighborhoods are likely to stay in school when they perceive their interactions with teachers and administrators as positive" (p. 25). Research indicates that teacher efficacy is the single most powerful explanatory variable in student performance.

It should be no surprise that high-efficacy teachers typically tend to produce high-achieving students, and low-efficacy teachers tend to produce lower-achieving students

(Weber & Omotani, 1994). One reason for this is that teachers with a low sense of efficacy place responsibility for learning on students. They begin to play the blame-game on ability, lack of motivation and family background. However, teachers with a high sense of efficacy take responsibility for students' learning. When teachers feel a strong sense of responsibility the less likely they will give up on students and convey the message to them they are inadequate or incapable of learning. When students fail, these teachers examine their own performance and look for ways they might be more effective. Ancess and Wichterle (2001) discovered "Making school completion integral to each school's purpose and design. Staff and students see graduation as a significant rite of passage and an important gateway to the future" (p.8). Teachers who believe they can make a difference in students performance and help students graduate have a high sense of self-efficacy (Weber & Omotani, 1994). For the low achieving student it is a self-fulfilling prophecy, good students get better and poor students get worse (Weber & Omotani, 1994).

High stakes testing is becoming a factor that pushes students out of school (Jacob, 2001). Jacobs recently determined that mandatory high-school graduation exams increase the probability that low-achieving students will drop out. Students in states that use these mandatory tests are 25 percent more likely to drop out of high school than comparable peers in no test states. Even stronger evidence indicates in the two years between eighth and tenth grade, that the odds of dropping out are 39 percent greater, on average, for students in schools with high stakes test regimes than for those in schools without such tests Reardon and Galindo (2002).

Tests or no tests, the responsibility for dropouts does and should fall on the shoulders of the school. The message from a large-scale study of high school dropouts

conducted by University of Michigan researchers Lee and Burkham (2000) found that schools systematically ignore the many ways high schools influence students to drop out. The question asked by these two researchers, "Who should be responsible when a student drops out of high school?" (p.2). Their research leaves no doubt, that to a great extent, schools are responsible. The researchers found that such factors as the school's size, academic curriculum, and social organizations are related to students' decision to stay in school or drop out. After accounting for many of the traditional risk factors, they found that schools with more than 1,500 students, a curriculum that lacks academic rigor for all students and negative teacher-student relationships can actually push students out.

Widespread acceptance of the notion that students and their families are largely responsible for dropouts tends to let schools off the hook, but they argue, "Blaming the victim for the dropout problem, is a serious mistake that keeps educators from working on the causal factors that is under their control" (Lee and Burkham, 2000, p.5).

Lee and Burkham (2000) suggest organizing large high schools into smaller units to improve school culture, to build trust and increase interpersonal contact between staff and students. Reiterating research findings on school size, they conclude that schools should be small, but not so small that they cannot provide a reasonable academic curriculum for all students. However, their most important finding was that students from poor, disadvantaged families and neighborhoods are likely to stay in school when they perceive their interactions with teachers and administrators as positive. Half of the dropouts indicated they decided to leave schools because they did not get along with teachers and other students. Many said their teachers did not care about them, were not

interested in whether they succeeded or failed in school and were not willing to provide extra help when asked.

Northwestern University researchers DeLuca and Rosenbaum (2000) found that socially isolated students, especially those routinely subjected to peer threats and lacking friends often became the brunt of "teacher disparagement" (p. 9). Rather than counteracting isolation, bullying and threats the researchers found, teachers tend to reinforce them. Teachers who deride and scorned isolated students further increased their susceptibility to peer threats, added to their alienation and ultimately contributed to their decision to drop out. The most important factors that influence students success are: small school size, which supports more teacher-student relationships; small class size, enabling teachers to provide a challenging curriculum for all students; intellectual habits of mind that mark the school as an intellectual community; portfolio assessments that allow students to demonstrate their learning in multiple and complex ways; and staff members chosen for their commitment to the school's mission about teaching and learning.

Ancess and Wichterle (2001) identified other characteristics of these schools including: trusting, personal bonds between students and faculty; faculty affiliation with the school's educational vision; alignment of curriculum, instruction and graduation requirements that are linked to a common set of intellectual habits of mind; academic support to help students complete high school; dedication to preparing students for a future beyond high school; and persistent attention to continuous improvement and reform. Ancess and Wichterle (2001) conclude, "Keeping kids in school should begin by expecting more from kids rather than less" (p.15).

Section Four

Resilience Education

Resilience is defined as the ability to recoil, rebound, to spring back into shape or position (Webster, 2002). Students who are able to overcome many of life's fiercest challenges and thrive in the face of adversity are described as resilient. Research indicates that ethnicity; social class and geographic location need not impede their thriving. Although environmental disadvantage and stress can lead to behavioral and psychological difficulties among children (Luthar & Zigler, 1991), many children are able to overcome adverse influences and mature into well-adapted individuals (Garbarino, Dubrown, Kostolny, & Pardo, 1992; Luthar and Zigler, 1991; Safyer, 1994). To help define the factors that contribute to amazing results in these children, researchers have studied students' resilience.

Resilience education is a lifelong process for learning supported by the acquisition of knowledge for students. Resilience education is a paradigm shift that focuses on a developmental approach focusing on students' strengths and takes a positive view rather negative one of how we educate them. Educators build on students' unique talents, interests and goals by acknowledging and emphasizing these competencies. Resilience also fosters a positive sense of self while allowing students to work on weaker areas of their development. Students who are supported during the development of the learning process and throughout their education journey will have lifetime benefits. Those that play a vital role in the support of students and foster resilience are: mentors, support providers, friends, teachers, counselors, neighbors, parents, grandparents or other relatives.

Educators play a vital role in students' lives and are frequently described as mentors who have fostered consistent care and support to young persons. Resilience educators gain the trust of students by holding them accountable through caring support and high expectations for achievement. The process of nurturing young people also enhances a resilience educator's development. This is a reciprocal relationship where both parties benefit through a mutual learning relationship. Based on research and many years of experience, "We can now say with confidence that relationships are *the* medium for nurturing human beings that thrive" (Brown, 2001, p. x).

Empowerment is not a cliché in the resilience education arena. It serves to describe resilience education as a specific means to empower. Educators are energized and allowed to take reasonable risks with creativity that nurture their own dreams, goals and aspirations, while students are empowered to make decisions about their strengths within a learning environment where they are supported not penalized. Although 70 percent of youth make it and find the support they need to graduate, 30 percent of American youth are falling through the cracks. Educators that actively seek answers to help this 30 percent are those that are desperately trying to make a difference in the lives of these students.

The focus in resilience education is on the development of young people's identity and the development of their interests and strengths. Although these are intrinsic motivators, resilience education does involve the use of extrinsic motivators as well. Rather than labeling students at-risk and focusing on their problems, resilience education emphasizes opportunities for young people to be actively engaged in their learning, receive high expectation messages and experience caring youth-adult relationships.

The medical model has identified the risk factor of chronic high cholesterol as a precursor to heart disease; just as educators have identified risk factors contributing to students' failures in response to educational expectations. Educational leaders have focused on predictors that help identify at-risk students and these predictors have in turn been the impetus for programs aimed specifically for at-risk students. One example of a nation wide program in public education is Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and the Drug Free Schools and Communities Act of 1986 (Office for Substance Abuse Prevention, 1989). Educators have become overwhelmingly focused on students who may not be successful in the educational system and often label them at-risk, long before they actually demonstrate failure.

A significant amount of federal dollars is spent on students that are predisposed to the risk orientation factor. Given this fact it would be reasonable to expect that academic and health issues would show improvement. However, there has not been significant data to support gains in health and safety nor academic achievement in the United States for more than twenty years. For example, the United States was among the lowest performing countries on both the mathematics and science general knowledge assessments (Forgione, 1998). Furthermore, across the country, young people drug use nearly doubled by 1993, from its low point in the mid 1980s (Johnston, O'Malley, & Bachman, 1999). With findings like these, researchers began to question the risk orientation's effectiveness (Baizerman & Compton, 1992). The use of this model has allowed educators to absolve themselves of the responsibility of educating young people. Instead, the model has suggested that students are both the problem and its cause for being at-risk. By taking the risk orientation focus, it centers the problem on the student

and the student's family rather than on the school, which in reality have a great deal to do with the student's navigation through adversity.

"Invulnerable" was a term coined by Hinkle a researcher who brought this concept to our attention in 1974. Through his research Hinkle arrived at five descriptions of people he called "invulnerables."

- First there is the "invulnerable" who has a "sociopathic," uninvolved approach to the world and is strategically estranged from it.
- There is also the "invulnerable" who leads a charmed life because of the over protectiveness of the mother...because he [she] is left unchallenged by the actualities of life.
- Another group of "invulnerables" [who thrived despite adversity] turned out to be accident-prone from the endless risks that they take, especially when an audience is around.
- The true "invulnerables" are also true heroes who tend to leave the scene of heroism. Instead of breaking down when the going gets rough, they perform better than ever. These invulnerables display a high degree of competence, in spite of, (or sometimes because of) stressful environments and experiences.
- A special subgroup of "invulnerables" comprises those who have bounced back and continue to rebound from high risk to vulnerability. Their creative activity relieves their overwhelming sense of vulnerability; but as it abates, they become susceptible to breakdown. It is a lifelong struggle by often very miserable people, but society benefits from it (pp. 42-45).

Based on early research, there are types of naturally invulnerable people. Research later indicates that most people can be resilient, and it is available to more than a select few. Research also shows that the environmental factor of human support for others is what most often helps to facilitate resilience. Several researchers have since explored the possibilities of how invulnerables develop and thrive (Heider, 1996; Moriarity, 1961; Murphy, 1956, 1962; Murphy & Moriarty, 1976). Their first focus was on the how of resilience and second they linked resilience to the context of the whole child. In 1987, Moriarty concluded:

> Resilience as I have conceived of it, in terms of recovery over a shorter or longer time, involves global aspects of the whole child-growth and growth drive...Resilience, like competence and adaptation as outcomes of coping, is an evaluative concept, not a unitary trait. The resilient child is oriented toward the future, is living ahead, with hope (p. 101).

Two pioneers in resilience research are Rutter and Werner. Rutter's first research was based on institutionalized children, and from this emerged a focus from invulnerability to resilience to specific protective factors that we see evolving over the lives of these children. Rutter (1979) "Found that in the face of great adversity, such as poverty, poor housing, and family difficulties, nearly half of these children are well-adjusted, one in seven has some kind of outstanding ability and one in eleven shows above average attainment in mathematics" (p. 49). Rutter (1979) asserted that resilience could be explained by several constructs:

> When the findings are all in, the explanation will probably include the patterning of stresses, individual differences caused by both

> constitutional and experiential factors, compensating experiences outside the home, the development of self-esteem, the scope and range of available opportunities, an appropriate degree of environmental structure and control, the availability, of personal bonds and intimate relationships and the acquisition of coping skills (p. 71).

Rutter's work holds meaning for educators for two reasons. First, he was one of the first to call attention to the idea of developing resilience as a useful way of promoting the well being of all, rather than targeting specific deficiencies found in an at-risk population (Rutter, 1979, 1981, 1987). Second his work has a significant implication that adults can be most effective in helping youth by promoting their well-being.

By 1985, Rutter moved beyond the description of the resilience phenomena and went on to explain the psychological process by which resilience occurred. The processes are as follows:

1. To begin with, a person's response to any stressor will be influenced by his appraisal of the situation and by his capacity to process the experience, attaches meaning to it, and incorporates it into his belief system...
2. It matters greatly how people deal with adversities and life stressors-perhaps not so much in the particular coping strategy employed but in the fact that they do act and not simply react...
3. People's ability to act positively is a function of their self-esteem and feelings of self-efficacy as much as their range of problem solving skills...
4. Such a cognitive set seems to be fostered by features as varied as secure stable affectational relationships and success, achievement and positive experiences, as well as by temperamental attributes...

5. Such personal qualities seem to be operative as much in their effects on interactions with and responses from other people, as in their role in regulating individual responses to life events…
6. Coping successfully with stress situations can be strengthening: throughout life, it is normal to have to meet challenges and overcome difficulties. The promotion of resilience does not lie in an avoidance of stress, but rather in encountering stress at a time and in a way that allows self-confidence and social competence to increase through mastery and appropriate responsibility…
7. All the evidence points to the importance of developmental links. Protection does not primarily lie in the buffering effect of some supportive factor, operating at one point in time, or even over a prolonged time. Rather, the quality of resilience resides in how people deal with life changes and what they do about their situations (p. 608).

Emmy Werner, also a pioneer in the study of resilience, has provided research that is important for two reasons. First, it provides researchers with evidence of the relationship between extreme high-risk environments and future psychosocial adaptation. Second, along with her colleagues, Werner explains why those who did not go on to have future coping difficulties were resilient, that is, the factors that predict adolescent success. An important observation made by Werner and her team in this longitudinal study of disadvantaged infants and families from the Hawaiian island of Kauai is as follows:

> Yet there were others, also vulnerable-exposed to poverty, biological risks, and family instability, and reared by parents with little

education or serious mental health problems-who remained invincible and developed into competent and autonomous young adults (Werner & Smith, 1982, p. 3).

In addition to Werner's extensive research came three protective factors that helped vulnerable children develop well into adulthood:

1. Dispositional attributes of the individual, such as activity level and sociability, at least average intelligence, competence in communication skills (language, reading) and an internal locus of control.
2. Affectional ties within the family that provides emotional support in times of stress, whether from the parent, sibling, spouse or mate.
3. External support systems, whether in school, at work, or church, that reward the individual's competencies and determination and that provide a belief system by which to live (Werner, 1989, p. 80).

Werner's nearly 40 years of research shows that approximately 70 percent of young people living in even the worst conditions thrive in the midst of adversity because of being emotionally connected with adults and people in the community. The word *connectedness* may be used to summarize the support of others as key parts of developing or facilitating resilience. This research has strong implications for educators. If 70 percent of children living in the worst conditions can benefit then the remaining 30 percent can be worked with more effectively through the resiliency approach.

Noddings (1992) noted that, "Students may learn better how to learn and may have greater confidence in their capacity to learn if they are encouraged to make well informed decisions about their own education" (p. 286). Taking this into consideration,

given the proper information, young people are able to make coherent and informed decisions.

When students are motivated to learn by intrinsic factors such as interest and strengths the learning is more meaningful and connected to their life. A positive attitude toward learning may be developed by tapping into the intrinsic motivation of a student. Bringing the curriculum to life by tapping into students' interest is an example of a skilled educator understanding why and how young people are motivated. The resilience approach often means that educators must rediscover the intrinsic drive within students to learn. Educators can help students strengthen their interests and rekindle their efforts in school by practicing the *Principles of Resilience Education* shown in Table 4 Brown (2001).

Table 4

Principals of Resilience Education

1. Use strategies that engage students' intrinsic motivations
2. Allow young people to safely experiment with making decisions.
3. Help create life goals, "a dream" that the learner endorses.
4. Create a "healthy, democratic, educational community."
5. Encourage the exploration of emotions related to adversity young people face.

These principles are focused on an educational system that allows a student to grow and thrive. Students are afforded the opportunity in a non-threatening environment to make connections with the curriculum and how it relates to their world. Students are encouraged to use their imagination and engage in a developmental process that is

intrinsically motivated. "Young people need to make connections with other people so they feel like they belong" (Brown, 2001, p. 92).

Summary

The impact of school failure has consequences for society as well as for the individual. These include a waste of human capital, loss of national income, loss of tax revenues, higher risk of sexually transmitted disease, increased use and demand for social services, increased crime, reduced political participation and high health costs (Carnahan, 1994). Critical steps toward promoting more component adult role performance are supporting students and enhancing their academic success. These steps have significant implications for the individual, the family system, the economy and the general well being of society.

The foundation for better classroom management thus leading to a more successful school environment can become a reality through careful, intentional relationship building. Teachers who develop relationships with their students have a powerful sense of guiding behavior and that positively affects the overall climate of the classroom. Teachers must become coaches for their students. The job of the coach-teacher is not to decide whether the student has the basic ability for challenges of the curriculum but to unlock the process of development to meet those challenges.

Alternative schools that successfully help at-risk students become productive citizens must be founded on a new underlying premise. There has to be a paradigm shift that is gentle and allows subtle and small-scale changes to occur and thrive within a larger system. One such change is to not change the school itself but the adults that work in schools. Adults involved in school reform need to have a shift of mind in order to

bring about a shift of form. This shift views all involved in school as integral parts of one whole. The stance of the change agent in this approach is one of "listening to what is wanting to emerge and then gently offering it as an option for those who resonate to it" (Jaworski, 1996, p. 182).

The Federal Government in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 is focusing on educational reform that is comprehensive and calls for an overhaul of curriculum, reading and math instruction, governance, family-school relationships and inclusion of special education students. While we are faced with the challenge to ensure that all children learn, we must be mindful that the resilience of each student needs to be developed. All young people need the opportunity to develop their capacities to meet challenges with problem-solving attitudes.

CHAPTER III

The Research Process

The Case Study Method

Qualitative research is empirical, that allows the researcher to study qualities or entities and seek to understand them in a particular context. As Dabbs (1982) wrote, "Quality is the essential characters or nature of something; quantity is the amount. Quality is the what; quantity is the how much. Qualitative refers to the meaning...while quantitative assumes the meaning and refers to a measure of it" (p. 32). The belief that the particular physical, historical, material and social environment in which people find themselves has a great bearing on what they think and how they act are the qualities that clearly set qualitative research apart from other forms of research. It is incumbent upon the researcher to become personally involved in the subject's natural setting and study. He/She should study firsthand for a prolonged period of time, the object of interest and the various contextual features that influence it.

Qualitative designs are naturalistic to the extent that the evaluator does not attempt to manipulate the program or its participants for purposes of the evaluation (Patton, 1987). Although an abundance of literature exists on at-risk students and alternative programs, the researcher endeavors to heighten awareness and bracket preconceived ideas. By bracketing out our preconceived ideas Shapiro (1983) says, "Only then can we transcend the taken-for-granted aspects of everyday experiences, only then can we see them in a new way and explore the tacit understanding from which the social and educational world is constructed" (p. 131).

Merriam (1998) states, "A qualitative study is an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit" (p. 21). Wolcott (1992)

also sees it as "An end-product of field-oriented research, rather than a strategy method" (p. 36). The phenomenon under study may be described as heuristic if the reader gains understanding of the case study, if the reader's experience has been extended or confirms what is already known or the discovery of new meaning.

This was a descriptive case study utilizing a multimethods approach that integrated the use of documents, interviews, surveys and observations. The researcher employed a survey that produced descriptive statistics, but relied predominately on qualitative design procedures. Quantitative measures were used to enrich and enhance the research questions. Data were analyzed and themes emerged from the interviews, observations, documents and surveys. The findings were triangulated across the various sources.

Data were collected from four sources for triangulation (Borg & Gall, 1989; Goetz & LeCompte, 1984 ; Lincoln & Guba, 1985 ; Merriam, 1988). This type of analysis refers to the strategy of using multiple sources of data collected for analysis. The use of multiple sources establishes certainty of findings and conclusions by establishing the trustworthiness of the data and of the entire study also referred to as "confirmability" (Langenbach, Vaughn, Aagard, 1994, p. 89).

Data Collection Methods and Sources

This case study employed the following research methods: focused interviews with seven teachers, one counselor and two administrators, surveys with students, ages 15-20 and document analysis. It also included on-site observations of students, teachers, counselor and administrators.

Two secondary alternative schools located in Dublin and Terry, Oklahoma were the selected sites for this research. Both alternative schools are cooperative efforts between the State Department of Education and local school districts. Both schools are referred to as alternative academies respectively.

The focus of this study was the teachers, counselor, administrators and students who teach, counsel, administer or attend the alternative programs. This study relied upon data from four sources for analysis by triangulation. One of the sources was a collection of perspectives by formal interviews. The researcher conducted ten audio taped interviews with seven teachers, one counselor and two administrators who have a vested interest in these two programs. Teachers, counselor and administrators were interviewed because of their rich experiences with at-risk students, their ability to compare and contrast their experiences in traditional and alternative education and their immediate and relevant interaction with at-risk students and their families. Representatives from each alternative school were selected for interviews in order to provide a comprehensive picture of the program and perspectives related to the research questions. A face-to-face encounter with each representative took place by the researcher in order to ascertain his or her willingness to be interviewed. The interview protocol was thoroughly explained and the interviewee was granted the opportunity to make a decision on whether or not they wished to be interviewed. Each interview was approximately 45-60 minutes in length. Upon completion of the interview, the audiotapes were transcribed and coded to help the researcher identify emerging and recurring themes.

The researcher administered surveys to all tenth-twelfth-grade students attending the EDGE and FAME Academies. The students that participated in the survey were

between15-20 years of age. These particular age groups of students were selected because of their grade classification in the school but more importantly their maturity level. The interviews and surveys were an attempt to collect a broad variety of perceptions that addressed the research questions. The study focused on data collected from interviews and surveys in a perspective-seeking manner. There was an unavoidable close connection between the data and researcher. The researcher however, kept in mind that all data are merely representations of the slice of life that a researcher chooses to study, and his or her research project is an isolation of a particular event, feeling or occurrence. Thus, a research project can never perfectly capture every aspect of whatever is being studied. This does not mean that research is futile, but that it must always be conducted and read carefully and critically (Langenbach, Vaughn, & Aagard, 1994).

Documents regarding the Oklahoma state statute that mandated alternative schools in the state of Oklahoma were obtained to provide a history and support for alternative schools in this state. The researcher also examined documents of the history of each alternative academy in the study and the local school board's position on the start-up of these schools. Administrators at both academies provided the researcher with documents that outlined both past and present policies and procedures. In addition each administrator produced documents that outlined the academies student expectations in regard to attendance, progress, behavior and dress. Parent/legal guardian expectations were also included in these documents.

The researcher attended four faculty meetings, two at each academy, conducted numerous on-site observations and observed two intake interviews with students and

parents/legal guardians. The role of the researcher was to observe, although at times became an active participant during the on-site observations.

These multiple methods were used to enhance our understanding of the variables that influence students who are at-risk. A matrix of findings and sources for data triangulation was used to organize the data into six categories of major findings, (see Appendix A).

Community Context of the Research

Selected sites for this research are two alternative schools located in rural Southwestern Oklahoma. According to the 2000 census data, Dublin had a population of 22,000, and Terry had a population of approximately 4,000 people.

The public school district of Dublin has seven elementary schools (grades Pre-K-5), one middle school (grades 6-8), one high school (grades 9-12) and one alternative academy (grades 6-12), with a total enrollment of approximately 3,800 students. The overall poverty count for the Dublin school district is 42 percent defined by the federal free and reduced lunch program (Office of Accountability, Profiles 2002 District Report). The total enrollment for the alternative academy in Dublin is 107 students with eleven students in grades 6-8 and 96 students in grades 9-12.

The public school district of Terry has one elementary school (grades Pre-K-5, one middle school (grades 6-8), one high school (grades 9-12) and one alternative academy (grades 6-12) with a total enrollment of approximately 1,059 students. The overall poverty count for the Terry school district is 56 percent defined by the federal free and reduced lunch program (Office of Accountability, Profiles 2002 District Report). The total enrollment for the alternative academy in Terry is 43 students with three in

grades 6-8 and 40 students in grades 9-12. The alternative school in Terry is a cooperative effort of five schools combined: Terry, Tampa, Watta, Varsity, and Rian, Oklahoma. Students are bussed to Terry for attendance in this alternative program.

Dublin Public Schools employees 250 certified staff. Of these 250 employees one administrator, one counselor and six certified teachers are employed at the alternative academy. Terry Public Schools employees 85 certified staff. One administrator, one contract counselor and 2.5 certified teachers are employed at the alternative academy. The alternative school in Dublin was established in 1996 and the Terry alternative school was established in 1999. Both academies have the same administrators upon inception of the program and Dublin has retained the same counselor. Both academies have community members that volunteer on a regular basis to work with at-risk students and the communities support the efforts of the alternative educators and students as well. Each of these alternative schools adopted acronyms for names of their schools. The Dublin alternative school is named the EDGE Academy; the acronym EDGE stands for Environment Designed to Gain an Education. The Terry alternative school is named the FAME Academy; the acronym FAME stands for Facilitating Alternative Methods in Education. Each local education agency receives state and local funds for operation of the school to provide equal education opportunities for at-risk students.

All students attending these alternative academies undergo an interview process prior to acceptance into the school. Both schools require a parent/legal guardian be present during the entire interview process. All students are required to complete the application prior to the actual interview in both schools. Each school is a school of choice and neither is a punitive environment for at-risk students. Parental involvement is

encouraged at each academy with both requiring parents to pick up their child's progress report on the first day of each month. These progress reports are not based on grades such as A, B, C, D and F, but the student's unit progress within the program; both are self-paced environments. All students attending alternative schools in the State of Oklahoma are required by law to have two high school credits of art.

Alternative schools in the state of Oklahoma must undergo an annual evaluation where the program is evaluated according to 17 criteria mandated by law. The ratings are in accordance with the evaluation rubric developed by the Oklahoma Technical Assistance Center. The evaluation rubric and evidence of the rubric for the EDGE Academy and FAME Academy are reflected in Appendix B.

Document Analysis

Documentary information from two alternative schools was relevant to this case study. Documents analyzed proved to be a rich source of information about the alternative schools, however, they were not complete sources to be used for the entire case study. Despite limitations, documents are a good source of data for numerous reasons (Merriam, 1998). For starters, they often meet Dexter's (1970) criteria for selecting a particular data collection strategy, "That is documents should be used when it appears they will yield *better* data or *more* data...than other tactics" (p. 11). Riley (1963) notes that documents are crucial to an investigation when studies of intimate personal relationships cannot be observed and people are often reluctant to discuss.

In this study the documents provided insight into the expectations of each alternative school, the measurable goals and objectives and the policies of each school. They were easily attained by the researcher and aided in gaining insight into the climate

of each school. They also provided information that was valuable in constructing the surveys administered and interviews conducted in this case study.

Documents were obtained from surveys, interviews, site visits and meetings with teachers, counselor, administrators and students. The first documents reviewed by the researcher included an annual evaluation at each school required by the State of Oklahoma and conducted by the Oklahoma Technical Assistance Center. The second documents were policy and procedures regarding alternative schools set forth by the local school boards of education. Another document examined the expectations set forth by each alternative school in regard to attendance, dress, behavior and grades. These documents provided an important source of background information and valuable insight into the constructs of the interviews and surveys conducted.

A set of documents scrutinized were the first proposals for alternative schools within each district voted on by the local school boards of education. These records indicated a five in favor of and zero against vote to institute alternative schools as part of the local education agency (LEA). Also, reviewed as part of these records were policies, procedures and budgets that were relevant to the start-up of these new schools. These documents provided a positive perspective on the position of each existing school board member because of the unanimous vote.

Another set of documents analyzed were the enrollment forms used at each school site in order to obtain admission into the school. These forms asked questions that provided insight into the survey questions asked by the researcher. The content of the questions influenced some of the questions on the survey and interviews the researcher used to obtain information for this case study.

Documents that provided valuable insight were those provided by the Oklahoma Technical Assistance Center for Alternative Education Programs in the State of Oklahoma. These documents were an important component of data analysis because they helped identify key elements and research for successful programs for at-risk youth. The researcher was attentive to the seven essential components for at-risk programs during observations and site visits. The seven essential components are: comprehensive approach, improving self-concept, high expectations, social skill instruction, agreement of expectations, parent/family involvement and learner responsibility. "Documentary data are particularly good sources for qualitative case studies because they can ground an investigation in the context of the problem being investigated. Analysis of this data source lends contextual richness and helps to ground an inquiry in the milieu of the writer. This grounding in real-world issues and day-to-day concerns is ultimately what the naturalistic inquiry is working toward" (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, p. 234).

In this case study, documents were an essential data source that provided critical insight into alternative schools. These documents were helpful in providing a background for alternative schools and the why and how Oklahoma State Law mandated them. They were also a rich source of information that provided evidence that both schools were an important element of the overall educational program of both LEA's.

Observations

Direct firsthand eyewitness accounts of everyday social action have always been regarded as essential to answering the classic fieldwork question, "What's going on here?" (Schwandt, 2001, p. 179). Langenbach, Vaughn and Aagard (1994) regarded

observation as fundamental in research, for it produces one of the basic elements of science: facts.

For this study, students, teachers, counselor and administrators at two alternative sites were observed primarily in a classroom setting. Schwandt (2001) stresses these elements are important to observation:

1. Events, actions, meanings, norms, are viewed from the perspective of people being studied.
2. Premium is placed on attention to detail.
3. Events and actions can only be understood when they are set within a particular social and historical context.
4. Efforts are made by the observer to avoid premature imposition of theoretical notions on participants' perspectives (p. 181).

The FAME Alternative Academy in Terry, Oklahoma was chosen because it is a school that functions in cooperation with four other school sites. The fact that students are blended from five school districts and attend one alternative site was of interest to the researcher. The intent in selecting this school was to sharpen the researcher's skills in confronting, if any, the similarities and differences encountered when students from other school sites attended one alternative academy even though this is not their home school district. The researcher endeavored to look for any distinct differences in these students and ones that attended an academy that was in their respective school district.

The EDGE Alternative Academy was chosen because it is a site that is an extension from the high school in Dublin, Oklahoma. Most students at this academy have dropped out of Dublin High School or are potential dropouts. On Oklahoma State

Department of Education (OSDE) accrediting reports students at EDGE Academy are listed under Dublin High School. This particular site was also chosen because of the longevity of their alternative program and the amount of students declared on their average daily membership report to the OSDE. Also, a point of interest for the EDGE Academy is they have graduated 306 students since their inception in 1996.

The researcher's role in the field was coupled with being an observer and at times a participant. Participation existed through surveys and interviews with subjects throughout the research project. Most students, teachers, counselor and administrators knew the researcher and all were fully aware of the intent of the study. In several of the observations the researcher's role was interactive and participative.

The researcher attended four faculty meetings total; two each at both alternative schools. Most of their meetings focused on students' behavior, progress and attendance. Some meetings also reviewed student applications for admittance to the alternative schools. Interaction, comments and body language spoke volumes about how teachers, counselor and administrators viewed the students attending the alternative schools. Researcher took notes during the meetings and transcribed them into text immediately to better ensure accuracy of what really transpired during these faculty meetings.

The researcher had the opportunity to attend several intake interviews with students and their parents that were making application to get into the alternative school. During these interviews the researcher was not a participant but was introduced as an observer that was interested in the success of students attending an alternative education program. The administrator, counselor and teacher all took active roles during the interviews. Students and parents were active participants as well. One valuable

observation made was that it was impressed upon students and parents that both alternative schools were schools of choice and neither one was a punitive environment. Students were informed of expectations and how the schools held their attendees accountable for attendance, behavior and progress. Attending faculty meetings and student/parent interviews provided valuable insights and firsthand information for this research project.

Interviews

Interviews range from the formal, the less structured and the completely informal to the non-directive interviews (Langenbach, Vaughn, Aagard, 1994). They further state:

> Any type of interview can focus on the interviewee's views or knowledge about a particular topic or the entire story of her of his life. This all depends whether the information he or she gives describes another person or topic under investigation or contains variables that the researcher wishes to analyze or measure. In short, it depends on the question to be answered in the research (p. 210).

In this study, a focused interview style was used. Interviews lasted from 45 to 60 minutes and followed a less-structured protocol. Other data sources provided information that influenced the interview process and participants. Interviews were conducted with seven teachers, two administrators and one counselor to ensure a comprehensive sampling. There were none that declined to be interviewed. The first interviews were conducted with seven teachers. Four teachers were selected from the EDGE Academy and three were selected from the FAME Academy. These teachers were selected because of their affiliation with alternative education at the present time and past teaching

experience in traditional education. Their ability to compare and contrast their experiences provided information that produced an enhanced questioning technique on behalf of the researcher. It allowed the researcher to probe with further questions that provided a natural and comfortable flow to the interview. These teachers were also selected because of their willingness to share with others their successes as well as challenges of working with students in an alternative setting. Next, the counselor from the EDGE Academy was interviewed based on her experience of working with at-risk students. The experiences of counseling students in both traditional and alternative schools enhanced the interviews and provided a rich description of the emotional encounters with at-risk students more than traditional students. She was able to vividly compare and contrast the differences of counseling students where most are going to graduate from high in a traditional school versus some just surviving on a daily basis in alternative school. To conclude the interviews, the researcher interviewed each administrator at the two alternative academies. The researcher purposefully saved the administrative interviews for last. Administrators grapple with a varied level of responsibilities than teachers and even counselor, therefore, it was important to note whether or not any extraordinary differences in attitudes existed among teachers, counselor and administrators. It was important for the researcher to note the type atmosphere administrators cultivated at their respective school. Interviewing administrators lastly provided insight into how they perceive the teachers felt about the leadership in their school, and leadership qualities teachers' value.

All interviews were conducted during the spring semester of the 2003-04 school year. Data from transcribed interviews and field notes were kept in retrievable files on

computer disc to increase reliability and support construct validity (Yin, 1989). Permission to refer to the title of the programs, and their general locations were secured using informed consent forms (Appendix C). No other proper names from interviews, documents and observation records were used to protect, as much as possible, the confidentiality of the teachers, counselor and administrators. All interviewees signed an informed consent form.

Prior to the interviews, the researcher designed, used and refined questions related to this study (Appendix D). Informants' responses guided further questions for clarification and refocusing. The interview questions explored the research questions by soliciting the informants' perceptions of the following: the vision or intent of the alternative academies leading to the program inception; the benefits, as well as detriment; of the program for students, teachers, parents and the informant; the identification of the significant components of the program; the components related to student success and/or failure; and the definition of success for students in the program.

These groups were interviewed because of their roles within each alternative school. The interviews provided a better understanding of their attitudes and beliefs about accountability, and the why some students thrive in an alternative setting versus a traditional one.

Some of the questions were altered according to each interview group. Teachers' interview questions were focused on how they address the different learning styles of their students and how these affect their academics. They also focused on the why they chose to teach in an alternative school versus a traditional classroom. Some questions asked about students' coping skills with everyday life. Several of the questions were to

gain information about the challenges and differences of teaching in an alternative school rather in a traditional school.

The interview process with the counselor was to elicit responses in the form of authentic feelings and meanings of the interviewee (Schwandt, 2001). Because counselors often deal with the affective side of students, their interview questions were geared toward the how do you help students attending alternative schools differently than you help students in traditional education? Counselors are trained to negotiate and intervene with the feelings and emotions of students; therefore, much of the interview was focused on the challenges of helping students emotionally rather than academically.

The approach used when interviewing the administrators in the alternative schools was slightly varied from the teacher and counselor interviews. Because the administrator is responsible for the big picture of the school some of the questions were geared toward the administrative aspect of managing an alternative school. Several of the questions dealt with funding sources as well as policy and procedural issues of the school. A majority of the questions were devoted to the challenges and differences of being an administrator in an alternative setting versus a traditional one. The researcher ensured that all interviewees were asked one common question in every interview conducted, "What approaches do alternative schools take to encourage students to stay in school?"

The interviews were recorded on audiotape and transcribed verbatim immediately into typewritten text. All interviews were conducted face-to-face with a predetermined set of questions for each group. Interviews were an integral piece to this study. Participants provided insight and attitudes that were invaluable and could not be observed or perceived during observations or document analysis.

Surveys

The sample population to conduct this survey included tenth-twelfth grade students attending both alternative academies. Surveys were administered to these students at both schools. In order to provide a content validity check of the survey, the researcher sought input from the experts in the field before creating the original document. Such experts for this study were teachers, counselor, and administrators presently working with at-risk students. Their advice was sought not only to help create the final survey instrument (Appendix E) but to look for unclear statements or questions.

The questions on the surveys were comprised of efforts from the teachers, counselor and administrators that work with at-risk students in alternative schools on a daily basis. These participants helped develop questions that were relevant to these particular students. The researcher also employed some of Don Dillman's self-administered multiple choice answer question methods as well. Dillman, (2000) and Sudman and Bradburn (1982) suggest that by administering questions in a forced-choice format, as is normally done in interview surveys, may improve the quality of responses.

The survey was administered to all tenth-twelfth-grade students who were under the age of 18, had obtained parental permission and were willing to participate (Appendix F). Also, included in the survey were eleven 19-year-old students and two 20-year-old students that were not required because of their age to obtain parental permission but were willing to complete the survey. All students signed a child/student assent form indicating their consent to participate in the study (Appendix G). To ensure confidentiality, the students were not allowed to place their name on their survey and were instructed to place them in a blank envelope upon completion. The researcher

administered the survey and was available throughout the entire process in the event students had difficulty reading the questions. The teacher was also present during this process.

The return rate for surveys administered was 100 percent because only students, who were present, had parental permission and wanted to participate did so. The logic of sampling in this research project is based on the participants' relevance to the research question and not the representativeness. The researcher did not endeavor to pilot test this survey in the event that students' answers would be based on a first time to see the survey and answer honestly based on gut reactions to the questions rather than pondering the questions for an extended length of time.

The researcher will employee construct validity by using the survey scores as an instrument to measure what it is they are intended to measure and establish that it can involve variants of general validity (Messick, 1988). The extent to which the precision of sample survey estimates is limited by the number of persons (or other units) surveyed is described by the term *sampling error* (Dillman, 2000). A slight concern for sampling error in this case study is noticeable due to surveying only some, and not all, of the units in the survey population. However, sampling error is only one of four sources of error, which form the cornerstones for conducting a quality survey (Groves, 1989; Salant and Dillman, 1994). *Coverage error* is a second source of error that should be minimized when conducting a good survey. Coverage error occurs when all elements of a population known are not included in a survey. In this particular case study, coverage error is minimal because the only students that did not participate in the survey were sixth-ninth grade students attending alternative school, students who did not have

parental permission or students who did not want to participate. A third type of error in a survey is *measurement error.* Poor question wording and questionnaire construction are the two contributing factors that cause measurement error. Each question was carefully considered and scrutinized before being placed on the actual survey. Also, teachers, counselor and administrators had an opportunity to read and edit the survey prior to the actual administration to the students. The *nonresponse error* will be significantly reduced because tenth-twelfth grade at-risk students will be taking the survey during class time and will not be permitted to take them out of the classroom for any reason. They will be taken up the same day, in the same classroom during a single class period. "A great deal can usually be done to address measurement and nonresponse issues through careful design of questions, questionnaires and implementation methods" (Dillman, 2000, p. 10).

Data Analysis

Data analysis is what researchers do to answer their particular research question(s), (Langenbach, Vaughn, & Aagard, 1994). Data alone do not yield much information; therefore, analysis of Data are a necessary step in providing rich information about the study. The purpose of this qualitative research is to analyze, consolidate, organize and produce a study based on words, texts, expressions, statements, thoughts, feelings and beliefs of people the researcher has observed, interviewed and surveyed. The data collected from the variety of sources were used to describe and generate concepts related to the existence and persistence of the EDGE and FAME programs. The teachers, counselor and administrators that worked directly with the alternative education students created the greater portion of these documents. A majority of the documents, such as the policies on attendance and behavior, were created upon the school's

inception. However, most are revised on an annual basis to best fit the student and school's ever-changing population and needs.

Distribution numbers of interviewees, their positions, the emerging themes and the frequency responses were summarized using a table of frequency of responses found in Appendix H. Verbatim responses from transcriptions were used to validate the convergence of concepts and themes. Yin (1994) discussed design as "The logic that links the data to be collected (and the conclusions to be drawn) to the initial questions of the study" (p. 18). To properly analyze the data the researcher developed codes that referred to specific research questions. Interview questions should be designed for cross-reference with the study's research questions. The utilization of a matrix of coding research to interview questions helps ensure that the right questions are asked, at least questions that address the study's main question(s) (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002).

Distribution numbers of survey results and the frequency responses were summarized using a table of frequency of responses found in Appendix I to also validate convergence of concepts and themes. The researcher used paper and pencil to code and analyze the data. The analysis of this data did not lend itself to using a computerized program for this procedure.

Because most researchers regard text as an object suitable for analysis then it is their responsibility to determine the method they will use to analyze data. Because the researcher was primarily concerned with content then she endeavored to analyze the data through content analysis and objectivist hermeneutics. The researcher was concerned with making sense of *what* was said during the interviews with teachers, counselor and administrators and *how* students answered their surveys. Also, during the analysis of

collected documents the researcher detected an emerging commonality that existed at both alternative schools.

Trustworthiness and Transferability

Becker calls the assumptions, on which their validity rests, *theories of epistemology* (Becker, 1993). The researcher acknowledged that this study might have shortcomings in the data used. The researcher was a perspective seeker and was concerned with the trustworthiness in terms of the data and the interpretation in accordance with what the source of the data actually thought, sensed or believed. When the researcher documented themes emerged, then it was incumbent upon the researcher to ensure a credible job had been done in data analysis. The themes that emerged should actually have some congruence with the reality of the phenomenon studied. It was the researcher's responsibility to produce evidence that triangulation did occur in the study. The researcher used a matrix and developed a coding system that aided in the management of data by careful cataloging, cross-referencing and tabulation methods.

Triangulation proved to be an important organization tool in helping the researcher use numerous sources to confirm the findings as they evolved. It was not the intent of this study to ensure replication but to rate the same data at different times as an intraobserver striving to maintain transferability. In this study, intraobserver reliability was utilized in analyzing the data for emerging themes related to the research questions. The researcher analyzed the data two times with an approximate two-week time period between the first analysis and second analysis. This process also enhanced the trustworthiness of analysis.

Creswell and Miller (2000) identified eight verification procedures often referred to in the literature and make the point that different procedures may be more appropriate for different traditions within qualitative research. These eight procedures include:

(a) prolonged engagement and persistent observation

(b) triangulation

(c) peer review or debriefing

(d) negative case analysis

(e) clarifying researcher bias

(f) member checks

(g) thick description

(h) external audits (p. 126-127)

Creswell (1998) recommends that qualitative researchers engage in at least two of the eight verification procedures in any given study.

The use of triangulation to analyze the data strengthened the internal and construct validity of this study. A holistic view and understanding were provided through the use of multiple sources, which provided accurate descriptions, explanations and conclusions to be drawn. Construct validity was also increased because all data were collected in the same semester, which limited the time frame for data collection. By using triangulation it made this research possible because it was a process of discovery in which the genuine meaning residing within an action or event was best uncovered by viewing it from different vantage points; these vantage points added to the richness and thick description within the study. Hammersly and Atkinson (1983) believe the notion about qualitative data can be summed up in the following:

> One not adopt a naively "optimistic" view that the aggregation of data from different sources will unproblematically add up to produce a more complete picture...*differences* between sets or types of data may be just as important and illuminating...[W]hat is involved in triangulation is not just a matter of checking whether inferences are valid, but have discovering which inferences are valid (pp. 199-200).

Dependability is a controversial criterion among researchers when analyzing qualitative data. Some researchers contend that an account is judged to be reliable if another inquirer is capable of replicating the study. Social scientists assume that although not all repeatable or replicable observations or accounts are necessarily valid, all valid accounts are (at least in principle) replicable (Schwandt, 2001). Other researchers argue that reliability must be addressed in fieldwork using a conventional method of analyzing transcripts, recording field notes and coding and categorizing procedures and results. Still others have called for establishing *dependability*-an analog to reliability-through careful documentation of procedures for generating and interpreting data. Here, reliability is a matter of assembling dependable evidence, and the methods used to assemble this evidence matter. Making a claim about the meaning of this evidence is a validity issue (Schwandt, 2001). Ratcliffe (1983) stated, "Data do not speak for themselves; there is always an interpreter, or translator" (p. 149). One method of interpreting and translating data resulted from the interviews with teachers, counselor and administrators.

Locating the Researcher

Because most conventional educational researchers insist that research questions deal with variables that can be observed and measured then these criteria make sense only when one is confined to quantitative methods (Langenbach, Vaughn & Aagard, 1994). However, in a qualitative case study the investigator is the primary instrument for gathering and analyzing data (Merriam, 1998). Because of the imperfection of this instrument, it is critical the researcher's beliefs and biases are clear, in order to create awareness for the reader through analysis.

The researcher began working with at-risk students as a school counselor in 1993 and at that time the school system did not have an alternative education setting in their school system. However, it was evident that students, who had difficulty in a traditional education setting, struggled either academically or emotionally, or had poor attendance, rarely had other school choices in the public school system. By the first semester of the 1996-1997 school year, the State of Oklahoma mandated alternative education for at-risk youth. Because of this State law and the seven-year phase-in of alternative education, the researcher began to explore some options for these students and worked closely with the school's superintendent to develop an alternative program.

As an educator, interest in alternative education and concern for at-risk students has grown steadily over a seventeen-year professional career. The researcher counseled many at-risk students as a counseling professional and continued to counsel them as an administrator in the same school district. Not only did the researcher counsel students but also counseled their families. Through these experiences and opportunities the researcher has grown to personally experience the satisfaction that comes with being able

to help someone out of a bad or even dangerous situation. The fact that many at-risk students experience feelings of helplessness and hopelessness, have weighed heavily on the researcher through the years. A passion for, but most of all belief in these students, has been the cornerstone of the researcher's eagerness to explore ways to help these students become successful adults.

Assumptions of the Study

1. Interview participants understood questions and answered questions honestly. It is also assumed that the answers were related to knowledge and personal perceptions.
2. Archival and administrative documents presented for perusal were complete and accurate representation of the available relevant information such as program descriptors, printed literature, student records and demographic information.
3. Survey questions were understood and answered honestly.

Limitations of the Study

1. The results from this study are not generalized beyond the population studied by the nature of the case study methodology.
2. The study's population was limited to currently participating, available administrators, teachers, counselor and students from two contributing alternative academies in two different school districts.
3. This research project is based on only one year of data.

Chapter IV

Overview

This chapter provides an overview of the two communities, districts and alternative academies, which served as the case sites for this study. It further provides an overview of the survey conducted with at-risk students and site visits and interviews involving the teachers, counselor and administrators. The historical perspective and current demographics are pertinent to the development of the programs being investigated.

The historical information was obtained from the examination of historical documents and interview data. A description of the current educational programs at both alternative academies is reported using data from program documents, site visits, observations and interviews. Descriptions provide a view of funding resources, the at-risk student identification processes in each district, selection procedures for school participation as well as the parental involvement component for attendance in these alternative schools.

View of the Dublin Community

William Dublin was born August 27, 1843, in McDuff, Scotland. In his early twenties he came to America and settled in Sebastian County, Arkansas, where he married Martha Hall. Between 1870 and 1873 the Dublin family moved to Stonewall, Indian Territory. There Martha Hall Dublin died in 1878. In 1879 William Dublin married Sally Fraker Johnson, a quarter blood Chickasaw Indian. Soon after this marriage, the family moved to Fort Sill, Oklahoma where William Dublin worked as a

tailor. In 1881 he formed a partnership with Christopher Link to build a Chickasaw Nation store on Cow Creek where the Chisholm Trail, the stagecoaches and freight wagons from Fort Sill to Fort Arbuckle forged the creek. Soon after the store was established William Dublin bought Link's interest. In addition to running the store he was appointed postmaster of Dublin, Chickasaw Nation, in 1884.

In 1891, in preparation for establishing a town, William Dublin had a plot of land stepped off, and plowed a furrow around it with a turning plow. That furrow was the first city limits. Lots were laid out and leased to newcomers and the town of Dublin was born. Before the first train arrived, June 17, 1892, the population had grown to 300. Dublin was incorporated in 1908 under the laws of Arkansas and the federal government. The town of Dublin, Oklahoma, has enjoyed prosperity since 1908. The town has been home to a worldwide oil well servicing company that has gained considerable growth economically and demographically for a rural town in Southwest Oklahoma. In 2004, Dublin's average household income is $41,814. Table 5 reflects 2000 census data for Dublin, Oklahoma generated by the Office of Accountability.

Table 5

2000 Census Data/Community Characteristics of Dublin, Oklahoma

District Population	22,455
Ethnic Makeup Based on Fall Enrollment (1990)	
Caucasian	76%
Black	7%
Asian	1%
Hispanic	11%
Native American	4%
Students Eligible for Free/Reduced Lunch (2002)	46.5%
Average Household Income/Dublin, Oklahoma	$41,814
Average Household Income/State of Oklahoma	$40,605
Unemployment Rate	7%

Table 5 (continued)

2000 Census Data/Community Characteristics of Dublin, Oklahoma

Poverty Rate	15%
Mobility Rate (Incoming Students)	9.1%
Single-Parent Families	27%
Highest Educational Level for Adults Age 25+	
College Degree	23%
H. S. Diploma w/o College Degree	54%
Less than 12th Grade Education	24%

View of the Dublin Public School District

The first school was started in 1893 in an old, abandoned beer hall on what is now North 7th Street. It had about 75 pupils and two teachers. Mae Dublin, a great niece of William Dublin, was one of the first teachers. The high school was organized three years later in a small frame structure. The building was destroyed by a tornado and a new two-story, eight-room structure was built between 1902 and 1904 on North 8th Street and Ash Avenue. By 1935, Dublin High School had outgrown its building and bonds were voted to build on North 9th Street. In 1937, a new bond issue was voted to construct a gymnasium and auditorium. In 1948 a new Junior High School was built on North 8th Street on the site of the old building. In 1960, the new $1,300,000 high school was built west of Fuqua Park.

In the late 1940s as the war baby boom began pushing the school walls outward, a building program was begun. Three new elementary schools were constructed, Lee, Irving and Emerson Elementary. Will Rogers Elementary was built and opened in 1949 at a cost of $88,000 as compared with the $25,000 each of the original three elementary schools.

The 1950s brought a spurt of building to keep up with the growing population of Dublin. Woodrow Wilson Elementary was completed in 1953 at a cost of $135,000 and three years later in 1956 was added on to at a cost of $89,977.

Mark Twain Elementary was completed in 1952 at a cost of $112,500 with an addition in 1956 for $73,000. Northwest Dublin had begun to grow; while additions were being made to two buildings, a new one, Horace Mann Elementary, was built in 1956 at a cost of $147,748 with an addition necessary in 1962 at a cost of $69,250.

In 1959 a new Dublin Senior High School was completed at a cost of $1,426,974. Also, a cafeteria and auditorium were added. In 1958 the first vocational building was built and the Vo-Tech building completed in 1965.

The 1960s and 1970s saw other construction such as added classroom space was provided at Lee, Will Rogers, Horace Mann, Irving and the newly annexed Plato. The last of the original elementary schools, Emerson Elementary, gave way to a new building in 1963-64.

Along with the changing physical plants, there came a gradual change in subject matter and philosophy, influenced of course, by the advent of television and computers and the sophisticated. Away from the basic to expanded curricula, then to emphasis on science and math as the space programs and national defense grabbed the attention of the people. Emphasis in these years changed from basic formal education to educating the whole person, allowing individuality to have its day. Based on data from the 2002 Profiles District report Dublin High School has an 83.9 percent graduation rate.

From 1964 until January 2001, the town of Dublin did not experience any new construction of educational facilities. In 1998 a bond referendum was passed by a 76

percent vote of the people to construct a new middle school to house sixth grade students as Phase I of the project. In January 2001, Phase I of this building project was complete and students were in a new educational facility in Dublin, Oklahoma. In October 2001 a second bond referendum was passed to complete Phase II of the new middle school in order to house seventh and eighth graders along with sixth grade students. In August 2002, Phase II of the middle school project was complete and all sixth, seventh and eighth grade students attended a new facility under one roof. Table 6 reflects demographic data for the Dublin School District:

Table 6

Demographic Statistics for Dublin School District

District Average Enrollment 1998/1999	3,725.8
District Average Enrollment 1999/2000	3,706.4
Students in Gifted & Talented	12.9%
Students in Special Education	9.9%
Students per Regular Classroom Teacher	17.4
Regular Classroom Teachers	212.8
Avg. Salary of Reg. Clrm. Tchrs.(fringe benefits)	$34,096
Avg. Years of Exp. Reg. Clrm. Teachers	14.2
Special Education Teachers	16.0
School & District Administrators	19.0
Average Salary of Administrators	$63,694
Local & County Revenues	32.5%
State Revenues	57.0%
Federal Revenues	10.5%
Dropout Rate	6.0%
Graduation Rate	83.9%
Average GPA of H.S. Seniors	3.0
Vo-Tech Participation Rate	32.1%
Vo-Tech Completion Rate	88.1%
Average ACT Scores (Class of 2000)	20.8%

View of the EDGE Alternative Academy

As more attention was focused on the growing numbers of high school dropouts, the EDGE Alternative Academy was opened in December 1996. The acronym EDGE stands for Environment Designed to Gain an Education. Their school name was also their mission statement.

They were housed in a rented office facility totally separate from any other school in the district. The quarters were cramped with 23 students, two certified teachers, one counselor and one administrator. Students ranged in ages 15-19 years and most were classified as sophomores-seniors. By May 1997 the academy had grown to 53 students making the facility too small to house all the students in need of an alternative form of education. The EDGE Academy began school in August 1997 at an elementary site that had been closed due to declining enrollment in the district. The reopening of this facility enabled the community to have an education presence that had been lost on the south side of town, but it also allowed the alternative students to have a facility of their own. With the opening of this facility the enrollment in the academy soared to 125 students. In August 2000, the academy began accepting students in grades 6-8 because of a growing concern for middle-level students' poor attendance and desire to drop out of school. The enrollment has increased each year except for one according to the following statistics:

1996-97 – 53 students

1997-98 – 125 students

1998-99 – 160 students

1999-00 – 170 students

2000-01 – 221 students

2001-02 – 198 students

2002-03 – 204 students

By May of 2003 the EDGE Academy had served 1,131 at-risk students and to date they have graduated a total of 258 students. According to the Oklahoma Technical Assistance Center (1996) calculations indicate that every child who graduates from high school will pay taxes of a minimum of $81,000 over their lifetime.

Monies provided by the Oklahoma State Department of Education (OSDE) supports a portion of funding for the EDGE Academy. This academy received $121,946 from the OSDE in 2002-2003 and the local school district provided support to supplement salaries in the amount of approximately $200,000.

The EDGE Academy has cultivated partnerships with several retired and working volunteers from the community who contribute on a daily basis. These volunteers are dedicated mentors that provide support both academically and emotionally to at-risk students. The core curriculum components are based on the Oklahoma State Priority Academic Student Skills (PASS) objectives, which are minimum state standards for students in the state of Oklahoma. The academy is a self-paced program, which allows students to work at their individual pace, and fosters an environment where individual needs are met. The teachers at the EDGE Academy are committed to emphasizing the relevancy of the core curriculum, which reinforces the merit of learning identified objectives. An elective Life Skills class is offered which focuses on independent living skills and all EDGE students are expected to participate in this class at least one semester.

The EDGE Academy is fortunate to have a full-time art teacher who provides varied and full-range art instruction. This teacher is also trained in art therapy allowing her to add a therapeutic variable, which enhances the counseling component of the program. The teachers at EDGE Academy use art as a means for students to demonstrate

art in modalities other than paper and pencil, and the art teacher works closely with these teachers to develop interdisciplinary units.

Counseling at the EDGE Academy is a viable component at this alternative site. Students are provided counseling opportunities on a daily basis and have access to a full-time counselor consistently throughout the day. Some of the counseling provided at the academy are: on-going topical groups, crisis intervention, individual sessions, and family counseling. Partnerships with several outside counseling agencies are also involved in providing aid in both student's academic progress and mental health. All members of the staff including the principal are active participants in each student's progress.

EDGE Academy Faculty

The teaching staff of the EDGE Academy in Dublin, Oklahoma, is comprised of six full-time certified teachers, one full-time certified counselor and one full-time certified administrator. Interviews were conducted with the English teacher, math teacher, middle school teacher, art teacher, counselor and administrator.

Table 7 indicates the level of teaching experience according to years experience in both traditional and alternative education of the certified staff of EDGE Academy.

Table 7

Teaching Experience for Certified Staff of EDGE Academy

EDUCATORS	TRADITIONAL EDUCATION EXPERIENCE	ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION EXPERIENCE
English Teacher	30 years	5 years
Math Teacher	18 years	7 years
Art Teacher	8 years	6 years
Middle School Teacher	29 years	5 years
Counselor	10 years	7 years
Administrator	24 years	7 years

Based on the data from these six interviews with the EDGE Academy certified staff, the combined total of years teaching, counseling or administrative experience in alternative education is 37 years experience and a combined total of teaching, counseling or administrative experience in traditional education is 119 years.

All of the teachers interviewed are certified to teach in their core curriculum area that they are presently teaching at the EDGE Academy. The counselor and administrator are also certified in their areas. Following in Table 8 reflects their certification and highest degree attained in the field of education:

Table 8

Certification and Degrees of Certified Staff at EDGE Academy

Curriculum or Grade Taught	**Certification**	**Degrees Conferred**
Art Teacher	Elementary Education/School Counselor	Bachelor of Science Master of Education
English Teacher	Business English, English Literature, News-Paper, Yearbook, Democracy, Phys. Ed, American Lit., Grammar & Comp. World Lit., American Hist., Okla. Hist., Secondary Principal	Bachelor of Science Master of Education
Math Teacher	Algebra, Gen. Math, Trigonometry, Democracy, Geography, Sociology/Anthro., World Hist., Calculus, Geometry, American Hist., Economics, Okla. Hist., U. S. Gov., Psychology	Bachelor of Science
Middle School Teacher Grades 6-8	Elementary Education, Lang. Arts/Middle School, Soc. Studies Middle School	Bachelor of Science
Counselor	Elementary Counselor, Secondary Counselor, Elementary Principal, Secondary Principal, Elementary Education, Home Eco., Adult Family Living, Textiles/Clothing, Chemistry, Science Middle School, Social St. Middle School, Voc. Home Economics	Bachelor of Science Master of Education
Administrator	Secondary Principal, Biology, Chemistry, Gen. Agriculture, Voc, Agriculture, Botany, Zoology	Bachelor of Science Master of Education

EDGE Academy Students

Students attending the EDGE Academy range in ages 13-20 years old. The lowest grade in attendance is sixth grade and twelfth grade is the highest grade attainable in this alternative school. In attendance in the middle school are 3 sixth grade students, 3 seventh grade students, and 5 eighth grade students for a total of 11 students. The ratio of middle school students to teacher is 11:1.

The high school students consist of 18 ninth grade students, 23 tenth grade students, 13 eleventh grade students, and 52 twelfth grade students. The average class size of high school students is 21 students per class. Table 9 reflects a six-year history of the number of students that have earned a high school diploma while attending the EDGE Academy.

Table 9

Number of Students Attending and Graduating from EDGE Academy

Year	Number of Students Attending	Number of Students Graduating
1996-97	53	5
1997-98	125	28
1998-99	160	46
1999-00	170	48
2000-01	221	55
2001-02	198	60
2002-03	204	64
TOTAL	1,131	306

The number of students earning a high school diploma has increased each year with the highest increase between the years of 1997-98 through 1998-99. The major

reason for this growth in numbers was moving to a larger facility and being able to increase the enrollment due to more building space.

View of the Terry Community

In 1887, when the Rock Island railroad was granted a right of way through Indian Territory, the government stipulated that a railroad switch must be built every 10 miles. Terry came within the radius, and her founder, J. D. (Johnnie) Wilson, made a contract with the railroad that a town would be laid out on his land, which gave Terry her present site.

Terry is located in what was once part of the famous Louisiana Purchase, acquired by the United States from France, who had acquired it from the Spanish. About 1855, a large part of this area was designated Indian Territory.

Many Indians owned land in the area so they leased to settlers. Before 1900, Terry and its trade territory were populated with Indians and settlers from many other states, especially from Arkansas and Kansas. Many of these were ranchers; later the cotton farmers arrived.

The famous Chisholm Trail named for the colorful Jesse Chisholm (scout, trader, and guide of Scotch-Cherokee descent) ran a mile and one half east of Terry. Its purpose was to get cattle to a shipping point in Kansas.

The small rural town of Terry, Oklahoma, has consistently grown in population and prosperity, and its average household income is $36,158. It still boasts of its plentiful land of wildlife and rich farming communities. Table 10 reflects 2000 census data for Terry, Oklahoma generated by the Office of Accountability.

Table 10

2000 Census Data/Community Characteristics of Terry, Oklahoma

District Population	4,930
Ethnic Makeup Based on Fall Enrollment(1990)	
Caucasian	80%
Black	0%
Asian	2%
Hispanic	2%
Native American	16%
Students Eligible for Free & Reduced Lunch	56.1%
Average Household Income/Terry, Oklahoma	$36,158
Average Household Income/State of Oklahoma	$40,605
Unemployment Rate	5%
Poverty Rate	14%
Mobility Rate (Incoming Students)	8.7%
Single-Parent Families	24%
Highest Educational Level for Adults Age 25+	
College Degree	14%
H. S. Diploma w/o College Degree	63%
Less than 12th Grade Education	23%

View of the Terry Public School District

From the town's inception, Terry, Oklahoma boasted education as a top priority. Before any formal or structured system was possible, parents often exchanged the teaching of special skills that they had with each other's children. Vacant buildings or people's homes were used. Even some white students attended nearby Indian schools. Some mention is made of makeshift schools with such intriguing names as Slickskillet, Possum, Trot and Old Red. According to H. B. Bennett, long-time Stephens County teacher, a school was opened in 1892. Thirty students who paid from one to two dollars each month were enrolled.

As early as 1895, organization began to form with a school board consisting of five members. Sometimes the children attended school only two months in the summer and two months in the winter-or any other length of term that could be managed with the money and teachers available. A two-story frame building was built in the northwest part of the town, which borders 81 Highway. The downstairs was divided into schoolrooms, but the upstairs, which had an outside stairway, was one large room used by the Masons. Mr. G. A. Witt, who later was county superintendent, was the first superintendent; Myrtle Upham Gardner was the first primary teacher. Jed Johnston, who later was a Sixth District U. S. Congressman, was a student.

Since Territorial government provided no legal avenue to fund schools, and the educationally-minded school board and residents saw the need for more permanent buildings and organizations, they set about to raise money by subscription. Subscribers were assured that their money would be refunded when it became legal to vote bonds. In just a few days $13,500 was raised and the first permanent structure was begun. It was a handsome three-story brick building designed and built by contractor Henry Jobett. It stood tall and proud on a high red hill and was considered by many to be the best building in Oklahoma. Mr. A. W. Reynolds was superintendent. Bonds were later voted and the $13,500 was returned to the far-sighted subscribers. The first noted class of graduates was in 1904 made up of students from the tenth grade. In 1909 the first four-year high school was formed and students attended classes in the Woodrow Wilson Building complete with a basement. In the 1909-1910 school year there were three high school teachers, two of which were also superintendent and principal. Eight grade school teachers were employed in grades Kindergarten through seven. A school of fine arts was

established with three teachers offering piano, harmony, voice culture, elocution and essays. Recitals and athletic events were scheduled as part of normal school activities. Noted under the heading of "Hours of Work" were these amazing words: "School will be taught five days each week Tuesday through Saturday...The second bell will ring at 8:40...will assemble...for morning exercises...will be religious and moral in their nature." Pupils were expected to "deport" themselves as ladies and gentlemen.

Athletics has always been important to Terry patrons. The first football and basketball teams were listed in 1901 and the girls' basketball team was formed in 1922.

Terry schools progressed and grew throughout the years, and bus routes were established. In 1929 the assessed value of Terry School District was $1,116,000, the district took 1-½ cents on the dollar ($15,066) to operate the school system, and they received $12,387 from Federal and State aid giving a total of $27,453 for school purposes and $250 worth of shop equipment was purchased.

In 1929 a new high school building was built along South 81 Highway. The old high school building had been cut down from a three story to a two-story structure, a new roof and new plaster were applied and the interior was kalsomined. This building was used for a junior high school until it was torn down in 1964.

During the depression years, many teachers had to accept drastically cut paychecks, shortened terms or no checks at all. The local bank bought some of the worthless warrants at a discount. Married women were not hired during this period so no family could dominate two coveted paychecks. Despite the tight money, an addition to the high school was completed in 1936. In 1946, the school board voted to purchase a 40-acre site on the west side of Terry and began an ambitious school plan undertaking. The

first thing built on the new site was the Harley Stadium-Barnett Field. The stadium was named for A. N. Harley, long-time resident who contributed to the cause, the field was named for the Barnett's, a Choctaw Indian family (roll no. 7186) who formerly owned the land.

Not until 1956 did further expansion take place. The high school building that is still in use opened then. A band room addition that is still in use was added in 1958 and an agriculture addition in 1959. In 1964, the present junior high school building was opened; in 1972 a new elementary building, partly underground was built and 1996 another new elementary building was constructed.

Terry School district has expanded during the past years to include much of the surrounding areas. It serves 155.8 square miles in the district. Three other schools are part of the Terry School District No. 1, and they are Grandview, Meridian and Liberty. Demographic Data are shown in Table 11.

Table 11

Demographic Statistics for Terry School District

District Average Enrollment 1998/1999	1,000.0
District Average Enrollment 1999/2000	975.1
Students in Gifted & Talented	16.5%
Students in Special Education	16.2%
Students per Regular Classroom Teacher	15.0
Regular Classroom Teachers	64.9
Avg. Salary of Reg. Clrm. Tchrs.(fringe benefits)	$33,890
Avg. Years of Exp. Reg. Clrm. Teachers	14.6
Special Education Teachers	7.4
School & District Administrators	6.0
Average Salary of Administrators	$58,406
Local & County Revenues	34.5%
State Revenues	552. %
Federal Revenues	10.3%
Dropout Rate	4.9%
Graduation Rate	87.1%
Average GPA of H.S. Seniors	3.0
Vo-Tech Participation Rate	49.6%
Vo-Tech Completion Rate	85.3%
Average ACT Scores (Class of 2000)	19.8

View of the FAME Alternative Academy

FAME Academy began as a tri-county cooperative with seven area school districts participating. Its mission was to recover former dropouts and serve other students who were considered high-risk, including those who had been suspended and those who did not pass the state criterion-reference tests. Following is the FAME Academy mission statement:

The mission of FAME Academy is to empower students to be become responsible, enthusiastic, and successful learners achieving their fullest potential, to accept the challenge for development and implementing plans leading to high school graduation, and to reintegrate into the community in a positive and constructive manner.

The program operated all day, Monday-Friday and emphasized core academic courses. Instruction was based on the individual education plan that was developed for each student at the time of intake.

The program began serving students in a self-contained classroom on January 6, 1997. The school was planned as a full-day program; students could enroll for a half-day or for only one class. Students could also attend other classes, such as band, physical education, band or choir at the traditional high school. The students were allowed to participate in regular school activities such as graduation, prom, yearbook, class trips, class meetings and assemblies, and had regular access to traditional campus facilities such as the library, gymnasium and cafeteria.

Art education, which focus is hands-on and direct participation rather than simply awareness, has been a major emphasis in Terry during recent years. A local artist-in-residence spends time each week with the students in visual art and design.

Under the leadership of the Terry school district, the co-op underwent a transformation during 1999-2000. A full-day, voluntary program, with a thorough intake process was implemented, with all academics, Life Skills, arts and counseling fully in place. This transformation was expensive. Terry was awarded a $65,800 alternative education grant during FY '00, which enabled the Local Education Agency (LEA) to make an easier transition, providing funds for a counselor, equipment, materials and professional development. This major transformation included at-risk students in grades 6-12.

During 1999-2000, the program extended into a neighboring district building with three classrooms, office, lounge and meeting room. A major improvement during 1999-2000 was the expansion of counseling services. Group counseling sessions were held regularly and segregated by grade, maturity and issue oriented need. Topics in these sessions included general/specific school-related problems and issues, vocational and avocational goals, emotions, self-esteem, substance abuse, "Dealing with Past Hurts," making good choices, "Developing Healthy Relationships," self-confidence, "True Meaning of Success," integrity, divorce, acceptance, "Learning to Dream," short and long term goals, stress, family problems, peer pressure and being positive.

Service learning projects are an integral factor that affects students positively at the FAME Academy. The projects in which students participate are ones that allow the students to experience hands-on activities as well as benefits to the community.

In 2000-2001 a five-station computer lab was implemented in the high school classroom. Also, two additional classrooms were opened during this school year, providing areas for creative arts and media technology. These two classes provide a tactile learning environment, which allows for creativity through written, verbal and art expression. Because of goals and initiatives set by the principal and staff of FAME Academy, communication among FAME staff, participating schools' principals, counselor, and parents improved greatly during 2000-2001.

Another important aspect of FAME Academy is their intake process upon enrollment into the academy. Students and parents/legal guardians are interviewed and required to sign a student/parent/guardian/contract. Following is an example of the agreement between the parent/legal guardian and student with the school:

1. I agree to work toward my personal educational goals and will not interfere with the attainment of these goals or with the goals of other students or faculty members in this school.
2. I agree to attend all activities, including group-counseling sessions.
3. I agree to take all required entrance tests upon entering FAME Academy.
4. I understand that regular attendance is expected.
5. I understand that the privileges and responsibilities of the FAME Academy and am aware that I may be dropped from the program for any of the following reasons:
    - Excessive absences
    - Bringing drugs, including tobacco or weapons to the campus
    - Continually displaying disruptive behavior in school

- Failure to respect the staff and other students
- Abusing internet access

6. I agree to abide by all the responsibilities of FAME Academy.
7. I understand this signed contract will be placed in my file.

Because FAME is a school of choice and a non-punitive environment the school does not invoke many rules and regulations. However, attainable expectations are placed on every student yet set high enough to have integrity. Several specific expectations for students are as follows:

- Behavioral Expectations
- Student Appearance (which includes dress code)
- Vehicles and Use Of
- Closed Campus
- Leaving School
- Absences
- Parent Conferences
- Extracurricular Activities and Eligibility
- Intake and Screening
- TABE (Test of Adult Basic Education) students are tested upon entry and exit into program
- Discipline

Students at the FAME Academy are allowed to work at their specific ability level and pace. Attendances at the academy for a majority of the students are to make-up credits or improve grades. Some students have gotten in some form of trouble and were

sent to the program as a last chance effort to stay in school. However, FAME Academy does not invoke punishment upon arrival of these students, but rather they work with them individually to earn trust and allow students to experience success through an alternative method.

The FAME Academy has the support of the community of Terry, Oklahoma as well as the local school district and cooperating districts. The FAME Academy staff, community and school districts are committed to alternative education since its addition to the Oklahoma education system.

FAME Academy Faculty

The teaching staff of the FAME Academy in Terry, Oklahoma, is comprised of two full-time certified teachers, one ½ time certified teacher, one contract counselor and one certified administrator. Interviews were conducted with the English teacher, ½ time math teacher, middle school teacher and administrator. Table 12 indicates the level of teaching experience according to years experience in both traditional and alternative education of the certified staff of FAME Academy.

Table 12

Teaching Experience for Certified Staff of FAME Academy

EDUCATORS	TRADITIONAL EDUCATION EXPERIENCE	ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION EXPERIENCE
Full-Time Teacher	7 years	1 years
Middle School Teacher	18 years	5 years
½ Time Teacher	56 years	1 years
Administrator	26 years	6 years

Based on data from four interviews with the FAME Academy certified staff, the combined total years of teaching and administrative experience in alternative education is 13 years and a combined total of teaching or administrative experience in traditional education is 107 years. Based on budget constraints in the last three years, the FAME Academy has been forced to contract their counseling services. They no longer enjoy the services of a full-time counselor on staff.

All of the teachers and administrators that were interviewed are qualified to teach in their core curriculum area they are presently teaching or administering at the FAME Academy. Table 13 reflects their certification and highest degree attained in the field of education.

Table 13

Certification and Degrees of Certified Staff at FAME Academy

Curriculum or Grade Taught	**Certification**	**Degrees Conferred**
High School Teacher	English Literature, Newspaper, Yearbook, Grammar and Composition, World Literature	Bachelor of Science
½ Time High School Teacher	Certificate Issued in 1949/All Subjects Inclusive Grades 7-12/Life Certificate	Bachelor of Science
Middle School Teacher Grades 6-8	Elementary Education, Language Arts Middle School, American Hist., Economics, Okla. Hist., World Hist., General Business, Science Middle School, Democracy, Geography, Sociology/Anthropology	Bachelor of Science Master of Education
Administrator	Elementary Principal, Elementary Education, Social Studies Middle School	Bachelor of Science Master of Education

FAME Academy Students

Students attending the FAME Academy range in ages 13-20 years old. The lowest grade in attendance is sixth grade and twelfth grade is the highest grade attainable in this alternative school. In attendance in the middle school are 1 sixth grade student, 1 seventh grade student and 1 eighth grade student. The middle school teacher works with middle school and high school students due to the low enrollment number of middle school students.

The high school students consist of 3 ninth grade students, 7 tenth grade students, 12 eleventh grade students and 18 twelfth grade students. The average class size of high school students is 20 students per class. The school year, number of students attending and number of students graduating from the FAME Academy are reflected in Table 14.

Table 14

Number of Students Attending and Graduating from the FAME Academy

Year	Number of Students Attending	Number of Students Graduating
1998-99	15	7
1999-00	40	22
2000-01	42	24
2001-02	38	19
2002-03	43	17
TOTAL	178	89

There was a significant increase in the number of students graduating from the FAME Academy during the two-year period of 1998-1999 through 1999-2000. After the 1998-1999 school year the academy became what is known now as the FAME Academy. This is the year the school district of Terry began working in cooperation with four other

schools for a coop alternative program. This merger significantly increased the enrollment numbers. The number of students graduating took a slight decline between the years of 2000-2001 and 2002-2003, however the enrollment has remained constant at the academy.

Survey Conducted with Students attending EDGE Academy and FAME Academy

A total of 79 students enrolled in grades 10-12 at the EDGE Academy and FAME Academy completed the survey in February 2004 out of a total population of 150 students. The primary focus of the survey was to understand student perceptions and experiences at the traditional and alternative schools, compare and contrast the grades students were making while attending traditional education and the grades they are making now while attending an alternative school; specific questions included: how many times they had been truant in a year's time from school while attending a traditional high school, and the number of days they had been truant while attending alternative school; how relevant and meaningful the work is in traditional school versus alternative school; their enjoyment level of school in traditional school versus alternative school; their level of contact with teachers, counselor and administrators in traditional high school versus alternative school; if they had noticed an improvement in relationships with parents and friends since they had been attending alternative school, and because they have a choice, would they return to their traditional school setting.

There were 10 fifteen-year-old students, 9 sixteen-year-old students, 27 seventeen-year-old students, 20 eighteen-year-old students, 11 nineteen-year-old students and 2 twenty-year-old students that participated in the survey. Only 13 of these students did not have to have parental permission to take the survey because of legal age limits.

There were 36 female students and 43 male students that participated. The ethnic background of these students is as follows: White; 55 students, Black; 3 students, American Indian/Native American, Eskimo or Aleut; 8 students, Spanish, Hispanic, Latino; 9 students, Asian or Pacific Islander; 0 students, and mixed; 4 students.

The students' grades at both academies had improved since they had been attending alternative school. A majority of the 79 students were making grades below a C in traditional education while the majority in alternative school was making A's and B's. Zero students reported on their survey that they were making F's while in either alternative academy.

The survey revealed that school attendance was a problem for students while they were enrolled in the traditional high school. Thirty-six students skipped 11 or more whole school days while attending the traditional high school while only three had skipped 11 or more days while attending the alternative school.

There was a strong indication from students on this survey about the relevance of schoolwork in relation to the school they are attending. While attending traditional high school, 33 students said their assignments were not meaningful and important, 37 students said they were somewhat meaningful and important and only 9 students report assignments as being very meaningful and important. While attending the alternative academy 56 students said that assignments were very meaningful and important, 22 students said somewhat meaningful and important and zero students stated not meaningful and important. Sixty three students went on to indicate that what they were learning in alternative school would be very important to quite important for the future.

The enjoyment level while attendance in traditional high school was quite low, 46 of the students indicated that they never or seldom enjoyed school, and 48 students said they often or almost always hated being in school and 26 said they never or seldom tried to do their best in school. While in alternative school 62 students said they almost always or often enjoy being in school, 56 said they never or seldom hate being in school and one said he/she never or seldom try to do their best in alternative school, but 75 said they almost always and often try to do their best.

Sixty six percent of the students said that the teachers in traditional schools never or seldom noticed when they did a good job. The students at both academies felt strongly that teachers in alternative school notice when they do a good job, 82 percent of the students indicated that a teacher almost always or often notice them.

The survey questions of how do teachers; counselors and administrators encourage students to stay in alternative school and what role they play with these students is supported by the responses on this portion of the survey. Providing opportunities for students to talk with a teacher at a traditional high school were very limited. Only seven students indicated they could almost always talk with a teacher and eight students said they often could talk with a teacher. In alternative schools they were provided more opportunities to talk with a teacher, 56 students said that they almost always could talk with a teacher and 13 indicated that they often could talk one-on-one with a teacher. The indicators remained constant in regard to not a great deal of contact when students were asked if they were able to visit with a teacher, counselor or administrator in traditional high school about personal problems. The opportunities were slim in traditional education settings and high in alternative settings.

The parental support of the students attending both alternative schools was not as strong as other indicators on this survey. Thirty-nine students said their parents almost always let them know if they are doing a good job and 28 students said their parents tell them almost always they are proud of them. Thirteen students said their parents never or seldom indicate they are doing a good job and 15 students said their parents never or seldom tell them they are proud of them. However, 59 percent of the students indicated that their relationship had improved with their parents since they were attending alternative school. From this survey the researcher notes that these questions and answers regarding parents are related to the research question of how parents view traditional and alternative education.

Seventy three percent of the respondents said their overall life had improved since they had enrolled in the alternative school. I would rather be attending a traditional high school rather than an alternative school was answered with 91 percent of the students said no they did not want to attend a traditional high school and 8 percent of the students indicated they would like to return to a traditional high school.

In summary, this survey gave details about students' grades while in a traditional school and alternative school, how students feel about attending the alternative school, how relevant and useful their education is to their future and their overall satisfaction with school while attending an alternative program.

Site Visits and Interviews/The Students

The researcher has been in many traditional high schools as well as these two alternative schools. Students attending the academies look and act like students in traditional education. They dress the same, mostly wore jeans and t-shirts and some type

of tennis shoes. Their hair was basically the same as students in traditional classrooms and most of them did not have a lot of body piercing. They appeared to be happy, talkative and comfortable with one another. The camaraderie among students was evident. They were pleasant to one other and supportive of each other as well. The observer witnessed them making eye contact with each other, they were physical with each other but not aggressive and they laughed a lot. They tended to be loud but not rude. When they interacted with each other they just wanted to be heard.

Another encouraging aspect of the site visits was that students were always respectful and polite to the researcher. The researcher was often greeted at the door and students held the door open because the researcher usually was carrying a load of materials.

Students enjoyed freedom in the building and classroom to move and speak without restraint. Many times students would leave the classroom and return within minutes. Most of the time, they did not ask the teacher for permission to leave the classroom they just left, but they always came back. The researcher inquired about this freedom and one teacher stated, "The students know that when I am teaching a lesson they are not to leave if I am talking, but when we are working individually then they have the freedom to go to the restroom or get a drink without asking. They know I expect them to come back within a reasonable time and they always do. I think it is because they know what I expect." Observing a high expectation level from teachers and watching students rise to the occasion was rewarding and satisfying for the researcher.

The Teachers

The researcher's site visits to EDGE Academy and FAME Academy were enjoyable and informative. All teachers volunteered to be interviewed by the researcher

and signed documents agreeing to be audio taped and consented to participate in the study. Each teacher's classroom was equipped with computers and both alternative schools had a computer lab. The technology engaged the students and aided them at working at their own pace. Even though students were working on the computer, teachers were conscientious about monitoring their students' progress, encouraging them and offering assistance when needed. The researcher was impressed with the level of interaction that was customary between the students and teachers. There was rich dialogue between the student and teacher that was exchanged and observed by the researcher. Students seldom seemed intimidated or afraid to ask for help, yet there was an element of self-control on the student's behalf. Students were respectful of each other when someone else was asking the teacher questions, and they politely waited their turn until the teacher could answer their question or help them individually.

Teachers expressed a commitment to educating at-risk students and made statements such as "this is more than a job to me, it's a challenge and I think I get more out of this than the kids do." Every teacher exhibited an enthusiasm for their teaching and was frequently searching for techniques and best practices to help them become better teachers. It was common for teachers to question themselves on how they could have done something better. It was noted that these teachers were pretty hard on themselves and their own teaching expectations were high.

Observations at both schools revealed a nurturing atmosphere that fostered a safe environment. Interaction between teachers and students was easy and comfortable. The classrooms were student-centered rather than teacher centered. The teachers allowed

students to be involved in their own learning through observable methods such as cooperative learning and peer/buddy tutoring.

The Counselor

The EDGE Academy in Dublin was the only alternative school that had a full-time counselor; therefore only one counselor was interviewed in this study. The counselor at the EDGE Academy has been at this particular school since 1997. She has seen many changes in the physical building of the alternative school but she clearly states, "The kids are the same. They have been coming to us for a long time and they are still coming to us for help. We see a lot of the same problems year-after-year some are just more intense than others." Students were continually in and out of her office; to the observer it often seemed like a revolving door. The students interacted with the counselor in a positive and respectful manner. Most students came in for help regarding their schedule, their credits earned and their progress. However, several times the researcher left the room in order to give the students privacy because they were distressed, visibly upset and sometimes crying.

During intake interviews with the parents/legal guardian and students the counselor was candid about what was expected of the student upon enrollment in the alternative school. She made expectations clear to all parties involved and although she was kind and gentle when she told the parents about expectations, she was also firm and straightforward. She had an easy demeanor and parents responded to her sincerity by opening up and asking questions about the school and how their child would benefit.

The researcher also noted during observations that the counselor was an integral part of the team with teachers and the administrator. The administrator at the EDGE

looked to the counselor for professional guidance and advice many times during the researcher's site visits. Her thoughtful and wise counsel was sought on what seemed like a minute-by-minute basis. This counselor was up beat and did not seem easily frustrated; she was easy-going and took things in stride. The only time the researcher perceived her to be upset was when she felt like she had failed with a student. Her definition of failing students was "not being able to reach kids and they drop out of high school or end up in some trouble with the law." To give up on a student was failure to this counselor.

The Administrators

The administrator at the EDGE Academy was a male and the administrator at the FAME Academy was female. The gender differences provided an interesting contrast to how they individually interacted with students, teachers and parents/legal guardians. The commonality both administrators shared was their commitment to their students' success and their teachers' well-being. Both administrators valued their staff, and it was evident in their dialogue with one another. There was a high level of respect for their staff, including support personnel. Both academies appeared to have a family-like atmosphere and neither wreaked of an institutional atmosphere.

The teachers at both schools spoke highly of their administrators and one teacher made the statement, "our administrator is wonderful, without her we wouldn't be where we are today." Another teacher remarked, "If our students realized a tenth of what he does for them they would be so grateful. He is the best person I have ever worked for and I can't imagine working for anyone else."

During the site visits it was interesting to note how much the students and teachers depended on their administrators. There was persistent dialogue between the

administrators and teachers and it was typically about students. The focus of the conversations was how to help students and how they can improve as a staff. The researcher noted a high level of concern and commitment on the part of the administrators. Both of these administrators expressed genuine concern for students and sometimes frustration. However, their frustration was not aimed at students, as they searched for ways to encourage, cajole and lift-up their students to stay in school and graduate.

It made the researcher feel good to talk to these people because when they were talking about their schools their eyes lit up, their zeal raised a notch and they had a smile on their face. Their enthusiasm for the career path they had chosen was contagious.

CHAPTER V

Analysis

Introduction

Data from interviews, surveys, informal observations and document analysis of the EDGE and FAME Academies were compared and contrasted to cross-check the accuracy of descriptive information and for emerging and recurring themes or categories (Strauss, 1987; van Manen, 1990). The qualitative methods assisted the researcher in seeking to reveal how educators encourage students to stay in alternative school, why teachers and students believe at-risk students drop out of traditional school settings, what role educators play in the success or failure of students in alternative and traditional education, and how parents view alternative and traditional education. The quantitative findings of the survey established relevance for each of the program's existence. Information presented in this chapter presents a synthesis of the data that were gathered.

Organization of the Presentation of Findings

The discussion of research findings from the data was organized for presentation in themes as they relate to interviews, survey data, on-site observations and document analysis. The existence of both alternative programs are described by themes that emerged consistently in the related data. Themes often related to the four research questions but were analyzed separately in this chapter as the themes emerged and recurred.

Emerging and Recurring Themes

The purpose of the descriptive case study was to examine and describe components related to the EDGE Academy and FAME Academy related to how each program encourages at-risk students to stay in school. The case study also reveals why teachers and students believe at-risk students drop out of traditional school settings, the role of teachers, counselors and principals within an alternative and traditional education setting and the role of parent participation in the success or failure of students in alternative and traditional education programs. The researcher identified three recurring themes across the data related to why students stayed in school: positive daily contact with students that develops into a trusting relationship; smaller learning environment and providing learning opportunities that are relevant to real life, and their future. Four themes emerged helping to understand why teachers and students believe at-risk students dropout of traditional school settings: one size does not fit all, poor attendance, falling behind in school and poor coping skills. The researcher identified three themes related to the role teachers; counselor and administrators play in the success or failure in alternative and traditional education. All related to providing: self-paced and ability level instruction, opportunities that address different learning styles and providing extrinsic as well as intrinsic rewards to motivate. Finally, this case revealed an insight into how parents view alternative and traditional programs including: a last-chance effort at gaining a high school diploma and an improved home environment since attending alternative education. Although these themes were addressed individually, it is important to recognize that they were continually interrelated and did not appear to exist separately in the perceptions of the interview respondents.

Positive Daily Contact with Students

As early as 1965, the nation recognized the need for interventions addressing educational alternatives for at-risk youth. The state legislature mandated a law in 1992 that all school districts in the state of Oklahoma would have an alternative program or access to an alternative program by 1997. The communities of Dublin and Terry, Oklahoma, were no exception, and the Dublin School District began their alternative program in 1996, and Terry School District began its alternative program in 1999. Both schools developed mission statements, and their school names were acronyms that were synonymous with a successful vision for their alternative academy. Both schools were established on the premise of being a school of choice and a non-punitive environment. Very few rules and regulations were invoked but expectations were clear regarding attendance, curriculum and behavior. These programs were established as at-risk educational programs to serve students experiencing failing grades, exhibiting poor attendance or potential dropout tendencies.

Ten interviews conducted with seven teachers, one counselor and two administrators all revealed the importance of one-on-one positive daily contact with at-risk students. A significant number of at-risk students experience a myriad of home problems that are more intense than the majority of students in traditional education settings. One counselor stated in her interview, "We deal with relationship problems here just like in traditional education, but I help students with more serious things such as where am I sleeping tonight or food on the table. These are pressures that are put on them by life, not pressures of getting a high school diploma." The pressure these students

experience from these problems should not be ignored by educators and are compelling reasons to spend individual time to address daily occurrences for some. Sometimes the encouragement they receive at school is the only positive happening in their life that day. One administrator's response to this is, "The most important thing we as educators need to do is realize our students have more needs than just education at this time." He further states, "I have always told my staff I want every student every hour to be welcomed by the staff and tell them they are glad to see them, I also want you to check on them during the hour and see how they are doing." Evidence that students value the one-on-one contact is found in results of the student survey. Fifty-eight percent of the students responded on the survey that they never or seldom had a chance to talk with a teacher one-on-one in a traditional classroom. In contrast, 86 percent of the students said there were often or almost always chances for students to talk with a teacher one-on-one in their alternative school. The researcher observed students interacting with teachers, the counselor and administrators during site observations. In fact, the professional dialogue between the researcher and educator was interrupted many times to interact with students. It was observed that a high degree of comfort and security was prevalent between students and all educators.

Students that experience fair treatment and individual attention from educators tend to develop trust in those adults. One teacher stated, "If students trust you and know you are sincere, they will take care of you, they are very protective of us." Conversely, if students are pushed away they will lose confidence and faith in adults and trust will be jeopardized. Teachers act as institutional representatives, providing important signals to students about whether or not they belong in school (Bernstein & Rulo, 1976). By

providing learning atmospheres with safety, order and consistency educators are providing environments that create success and develop trust. Changes in an alternative school have to be implemented at a slower pace than in traditional settings. At-risk students experience so many uncertainties in their outside lives that small changes in school tend to be big problems, thus causing trust issues. The teachers at both alternative academies were aware of these issues and treated changes with sensitivity and placed value in the trust factor.

During sight visits and observations teachers maintained positive contact with students that exhibited a level of comfort that was unspoken but evident to the observer. All interviewees showed enthusiasm and excitement about the opportunity to discuss their experiences in the EDGE and FAME Academies.

Smaller Learning Environment

A second theme that recurred frequently in the data was the effects of a smaller learning environment on at-risk students. Comments made by interviewees explained that because students are working on so many different ability levels it is essential that the classes are small and a community atmosphere be developed. Identifying needs of students seemed to be relatively easy; it was trying to meet those needs and getting students to where they feel they are accomplishing something and making progress is much more difficult. One teacher said, "Some students' basic skills are very weak and it makes it hard to teach on all different levels." Teachers were continually individualizing instruction, especially in the areas of math and reading, and still they were challenged to teach all subjects such as social studies and science to the students as a group. Smaller learning environments enabled counselors to ensure that students are in the right classes

to graduate because that is the school's goal. Lee and Burkham (2001) found that such factors as the school's size, academic curriculum and social organization are related to students' decisions to stay in school or drop out. Getting a high school diploma means getting a better job for some, joining the military, attending a vocational school for others and enrollment in college for a few.

The smaller learning environment is not designed for bad students. It's for students who for one reason or another are not reaching their potential in a traditional classroom and who benefit from a smaller learning atmosphere. Having a small learning environment enables students to have more time and a better understanding of choices. The goal is to help students to perform better academically and feel better socially, which also empowers students to make better choices.

The small learning environment enables teachers and students to have time to talk and share. Teachers have more time to get involved in the lives of their students. Site visits and observations revealed that teachers know their students' habits, their looks and manners. There is a heightened awareness when students are missing from class. It is more like a family atmosphere, and when someone is absent or something is going on in someone's life everyone is aware. Smaller environments foster an atmosphere to encourage students to put forth-extra effort to succeed. Sixty-one students attending alternative education revealed on the survey that almost always they could ask a teacher, counselor or principal for help with a personal problem.

Providing Relevant Learning Opportunities

Several questions on the student survey were related to how meaningful is work in traditional education and alternative education relative to real life? The first question

asked, while attending traditional high school, how important was the schoolwork most students were assigned was meaningful and important? Eleven percent of the students surveyed responded with very meaningful and important, 46 percent of the students said somewhat meaningful and important and 41 percent of the students responded with not meaningful and important. While attending the alternative high school, how important is the schoolwork students are assigned are meaningful and important? Seventy one percent of the students surveyed said very meaningful and important, 28 percent of the students responded somewhat meaningful and important and 0 percent noted not meaningful and important. A theme that emerged was that schoolwork must be relevant for students to understand why they are doing it and the value. Schools with academic press, persistent and continuous efforts to keep all students engaged in high-level learning have far fewer dropouts (Lee & Burkham, 2001). Until students know their destination, and it is clear, then getting there will be difficult. One of the teachers interviewed had been teaching for 57 years, but this was her first opportunity to teach in an alternative school. She is a retired teacher but returned to the alternative academy because she enjoys being around the students. She had six students she is preparing for high school graduation in May. Her goal was to equip them with some real life experiences so she devised a plan to teach them about the stock market. She had an investment broker scheduled as a guest speaker, her neighbor donated $450 and with administration's approval her students actually purchased $75 worth of stock each. The investment counselor waived his broker's fee, counseled the students on wise investments and has checked on them periodically with tips to hold the stock or sell. Not only have the students been taught experiences valuable in life, they have sharpened math and communication skills as well. No doubt the destination for these students venture was clear, and they have had an experience that is both relevant and unforgettable.

At the heart of educating at-risk students is whether school makes sense to them. Until students see themselves as participants in their own education, they will not cross the divide. It is up to educators to build the bridge that connects the divide. The counselor interviewed said, " I encourage my students to stay in school by telling them they are valuable, they are important and they have a place in the world. We try to show them the logical side of school and the advantages of having an education." Observations, surveys and interviews revealed that many students just do not see a connection between their efforts and school success. It is difficult to enable students to understand that getting an education is a step to getting a better job. Many of the students expressed the desire to get a job, but most did not have a clear understanding of the difference between a job and a career. For some, earning minimum wage was "okay." This was a huge challenge for all educators that were interviewed; to help students understand the relevance of an education to the earning potential of a job in the real world. For some though, one interviewee said, "Once the light comes on, there's no stopping them. That is the real reward and that is when further training like the vo-tech begins to really matter."

The researcher observed English teachers at both academies helping students compose friendly letters, completing job applications, writing resumes and teaching skills required to get a job. One English teacher told his students, "Unless you want to make minimum wage all your life, you have to know how to write an essay and complete a job application, I want you to get a better job than that and I will help you." For some this is a real motivator and they understand these things will help them become contributing citizens. For others the role model they have grown up with is powerful and they are

content to let others, such as welfare, take care of them. Every educator interviewed expressed sadness and was disheartened by this reality.

Dropouts in Traditional School Settings

The researcher endeavored to examine why students dropout of traditional schools. In this endeavor, the researcher examined three themes that emerged from the data: one size education does not fit all, poor attendance/falling behind and poor coping skills.

One Size Education Does Not Fit All

Large class sizes and expecting all students to perform on the same level was a strong theme that emerged in regard to why students drop out of traditional school. Many at-risk students have needs greater than most students in traditional education, but educators are still addressing students in the same way they have always addressed students. "When more of the same will not work, educational alternatives promote student engagement and ward off failure" (Hartzler & Jones, 2002, p.8). Some teachers are failing to realize they are working with students who are trying to manage adult responsibilities and are often overwhelmed by these pressures. One important fact that is overlooked by educators is they teach to the masses rather than the individuals. One teacher interviewed said, "I think the reason students drop out of traditional settings is that they push students too much in traditional high school to perform like all 30 of the students in the same classroom. All students learn at different levels and the pressure on some of them with their home life is just too much."

One important aspect of noticing that students do a good job and telling them is the time it takes to make contact with each student and conveying your feelings as a teacher. One-size does not fit all education makes it more difficult to individualize instruction, much less, praise each student for their individual work. According to the student survey, 52 out of 75 students reported that in traditional school their teacher never or seldom noticed and let them know when they did a good job. In comparison, 64 out of 78 students reported that in alternative school when they did a good job the teacher noticed and let them know. Another reason teachers teach as one size fits all is that it is easier to accomplish the work. The better students who have their homework, come to class on time and follow the rules are easier to teach. Teachers perceive students who do not care are more difficult to work with than students who do care. When in reality they are the students who need the extra help, who benefit from the individualized instruction the most and can accomplish work when given extra attention. Ancess and Wichterle (2001) suggest that close correspondence of curriculum, instruction and graduation requirements all anchored to a common set of intellectual habits of mind, characterize an intellectual community. The English teacher at the EDGE Academy stated, "Once I came down here and came face-to-face with their problems I realized that these students didn't grow up the way I did. I saw they have so many problems that they have to have some help. If we don't help them and individualize for them no one will." Some people describe traditional education as an assembly line type education. Most students are going to graduate especially if they stay long enough and do the right things. In alternative education, because of the self-paced component it depends on the student's will to work and desire to finish.

Poor Attendance In Traditional School and Falling Behind

A theme that emerged with great strength was the school attendance issue. Most at-risk students do not have parents or significant people in their lives pushing them to get up each morning and attend school. By the time these students reach high school age many are living on their own, live with a parent or legal guardian that is tired of fighting with them about going to school, have issues that hamper their ability to get up and go to school or just simply do not want to be in school. An indicator that supports the attendance issue in the student survey indicated that in a single school year out of 79 students attending traditional school, 36 students by choice missed 11 or more days, 6 missed 6-10 days and 9 missed 4-5 days. In a single school year out of 76 students 31 students said they had not missed by choice any days in alternative school, 8 had missed 1 day and 7 had missed 2 days. Only 3 students had missed 11 or more days in the school year while attending alternative education. Because the case study involves schools of choice these numbers are strong indicators that students want to be in school, and they are making the choice to go in spite of hardships and hindering factors of attendance. Perception of teacher quality affects absenteeism, and in schools where faculty are engaged and interested in students, overall absenteeism and drop out rate is lower

(Bryk & Thum, 1989). Poor attendance leads to a feeling of helplessness and hopelessness; students give up because they are so overwhelmed. They also miss out on a foundation that builds from one level to the next when they miss school even sporadically. Students do not usually verbalize attendance issues with adults who can help; therefore, they are easily frustrated and become defeated. They often see no reason

to go back to school because they are so far behind. Students are often not committed to improving themselves and the desire to acquire knowledge and skills is lacking. One principal said in his interview, "When students aren't here I go get them. I go right to their house and tell them I'm waiting in the car, you get up and come with me." Documents reviewed also enforced that attendance is expected in both of the case studies of alternative schools. It is made clear that both are schools of choice and poor attendance is not acceptable and there are consequences for not coming to school. During intake interviews students and parents/legal guardians are told that attendance is crucial because both schools have a waiting list. If students are not attending, their slot will be filled within five consecutive days of absences. Students know what to expect in the beginning and they are expected to be at school, on time and ready to learn.

Another attendance issue noted in an interview was, "Some students just don't fit in at traditional schools. They look different, act different, and therefore are treated different." The observations revealed a picture of a family-like atmosphere at both alternative schools. These schools are giving the students a place to belong and the connection between belonging and school are virtually tied together. They are accepted for who they are, what they have to offer and are valued as individuals based on what they contribute while at school.

Poor Coping Skills

This was an interesting theme that emerged in all ten interviews. All educators agreed that the students they teach in alternative schools have poor coping skills or suffer from the lack of coping skills in handling life on a daily basis. It was interesting the many reasons cited for poor coping skills. The teachers, counselor and administrators

described the students they serve at the EDGE and FAME Academies with ten descriptors associated with poor coping skills, they include the following:

1. Anger
2. Defiance
3. Home pressure
4. Absence of role models
5. Lack of social skills
6. They enjoy the drama
7. Mimic their home environment
8. It's not cool to cope
9. Inability to cope with change
10. Inability to cope with crisis situations

During an interview with the English teacher at the EDGE Academy he noted an interesting observance about coping, he said, "Survival skills might be a better term to use than coping skills. A lot of these kids have been put in positions where they have are just surviving. Some of them love to come to school in the winter because we have heat and they don't have heat where they are living." Even though this incidence seems like an extreme one, many of the interviews indicated similar situations that dealt with more than coping, they bordered on survival.

Both academies are providing classes that address relationships with other people. An important component of an alternative school is increased counseling services that help students deal with emotional and behavioral issues, and improved access to community social services to deal with issues outside of school that affect students'

ability to learn (Hartzler & Jones, 2002). One counselor had two parents verbalize that they had seen a change in their child since they had been attending the relationship classes. All ten interviewees agreed that relationship classes and relationship building activities should be a required component of all alternative schools. The student surveys revealed some interesting findings about relationships. Fifty nine percent of the students surveyed said their relationship with their parents had improved since they had been attending alternative school, and 83 percent said their relationships with friends had improved or stayed the same since attending alternative school. The overall consensus on the student survey was that the student's life had improved since attending the alternative school; 20 percent of the students indicated it was about the same and 78 percent noted that their life had improved.

Instructional Delivery

The themes that related to the instructional issues and the role of the educator are as follows: providing self-paced instruction based on ability level, providing opportunities that address different learning styles and providing extrinsic, as well as, intrinsic rewards to motivate. Following is a discussion of instructional issues:

Self-Paced and Ability Level Instruction

Although the aspect of self-paced and ability level instruction is closely related to the emerging theme of a smaller learning environment, there are some noted differences that materialized through the case studies. It is not just the fact that students are working below grade level or at a slower pace than others; it is how the teachers react to these differences in the classroom setting. When work is too difficult for students, rather than

trying harder the teachers noted they just give up. One teacher stated, "They develop a defeatist attitude and complete most tasks with a minimal effort at best." The researcher noted some documentation in cumulative folders of students prior to entering alternative school, some educators in a traditional setting left a paper-trail of data about these students that included: lacks motivation, undisciplined and does not care about learning. Also, documented in the files, was evidence that students were given work below their grade level and rewarded with passing grades for such activities. It was also noted that these students did not have specific learning disabilities, they had average IQ scores and some even had passing scores on standardized tests of achievement. So why then were students given work below grade level and not expected to rise to the occasion as other students? A teacher that was interviewed stated, "It depends on the students and how long it will take them to complete a course. In traditional education students don't have this luxury. In alternative school they have the opportunity to really grasp English I and then English II and then the light goes on. Once they see the light at the end of the tunnel, I can literally see their light go on and they realize they can make it." Because of the self-paced aspect of alternative education, educators are less likely to become frustrated with students and they slow down to help them reach their potential. Teachers who focus all of their attention on student's problems played a part, perhaps unwittingly, in causing many to drop out (Deluca & Rosenbaum, 2001). Teachers have the luxury of spending more time fostering self-esteem that also fosters success in academics. A teacher clearly states, "Success breeds success and at the same token failure breeds failure and that's just what we are looking at. Here they have the opportunity to be

successful. It's a non-threatening laid-back environment here. It's like I'm going to help you because I care if you succeed or not."

The researcher's on-site observations and the interviews with the teachers, counselor and administrators helped to explain that academic success was partially due to what the researcher terms "expected success." All students were required to complete assignments with 80 percent accuracy. They were made to re-do all assignments until they were successful. They were provided extra help and opportunities for tutoring and remediation. Some students balked at first at having to re-do assignments, but classroom teachers reiterated the "expected success" mantra and they noted improved academic growth and even attentiveness in class. One teacher even noted, "Now that students know what to expect, they try harder the first time and pay closer attention in class."

Also, noted in the interviews was the fact that students who worked on so many different ability/grade levels was one of the biggest challenges of teaching in an alternative setting. "Knowing when to hold someone back or pushing them into something when they are not ready and then knowing when to speed up and move on can be tricky in my self-contained classroom," states the teacher that instructs the middle-level students in the morning and also works with high school students in the afternoon. The teachers noted that identifying their problems in the subjects is not as difficult as meeting everyone's needs and getting them where they are making accomplishments and experiencing success. Being self-paced is an important aspect that helps address these noted difficulties. It is not just an issue of academics but an issue of students' attitude as well.

Addressing Different Learning Styles

The emerging theme of different learning styles of at-risk students was fascinating. Some teachers interviewed were adamant that at-risk students have different learning styles than students in traditional education, and some said they definitely did not see a difference in learning styles. However, the one statement that was made by all that was a commonality was, "It's not so much their learning styles are different it's just their pace of learning is different. There is a difference in actual learning styles and how long it takes to learn something." Being serious about enabling unsuccessful youngsters to become successful should include good education that offers small, personalized schools, offering authentic learning and producing student engagement (Raywid 2001). One teacher said, "They have to touch it, smell it and feel it, this helps because their attention span is short and we have to switch gears more often. I have to work with them one-on-one and this becomes more of a security blanket than a learning style." One teacher stated, "Sometimes it's the different learning styles that cause them to get left behind in the traditional setting." Still this is unclear to the researcher if it is truly learning styles or learning pace that makes the difference for these students. One clear message to the researcher through observations and interviews was a set amount of time on task at the alternative school does not work. You have to take as much time as the student needs and this may not be directly correlated to learning styles.

Also, observed in the alternative schools were that students enjoyed time on the computer and felt comfortable in the self-paced environment. They also liked a cooperative learning atmosphere, the buddy system and helping each other. They were not afraid to ask for help, and not always help from the teacher but help from a peer was

welcomed in many instances. One interesting note by the researcher was that in both alternative schools when the survey was being administered none of the students wanted the survey read to them. No students asked for clarification on the survey, and they all appeared confident in answering questions. Although students were not asked to write comments on their survey one student wrote, "I sometimes regret the decisions I made when I attended traditional school. But that is what this program is for. I'm glad we have something like this. Because of the EDGE Academy, I will get to walk across the graduation stage in May."

Extrinsic and Intrinsic Rewards that Motivate Students

On-site observations at the alternative academies revealed that attentions stray and minds wander. Teachers were moving about providing one-on-one instruction, for some to just keep them on task rather than academic help. It was a challenge to provide creativity for these students and not standardized learning. For some, creativity was an intrinsic reward that motivated them to complete assignments and move on to new ones. However, some required extrinsic motivators such as a piece of candy, a promise of a Coke or extra computer time. The teachers' interactions with the students were based on what motivated each one as an individual. Although motivation was a difficult claim to evaluate, it was clear that students responded to some extrinsic motivators they deemed valuable. One interesting intrinsic motivator observed was respect from the student's peers and teachers. When students and teachers responded favorably to a student's success or accomplishment, there was a noted look of satisfaction on the student's face. They also responded with positive body language, they gave each other high-fives, they

smiled and they even hugged each other or the teacher. These were powerful unspoken messages that provided the students an intrinsic reward to be motivated.

Parental Involvement and Support

Two themes that were related to parental involvement and support of alternative education and traditional education are: a last chance effort for their child to graduate from high school and improved home environment since their child enrolled in alternative education.

A Last Chance Effort for Graduation

Many parents of students that attend alternative education did not graduate from high school and do not have a high school diploma. Therefore, it makes it difficult for them to see much beyond graduation. One way both alternative schools encourage the participation of parents is to require they be present at the intake interview. During the interview everyone involved gently begins planting the seed regarding the importance of education. As an observer at an intake interview a parent stated, "I never had a chance to go to college and I work at a minimum wage job, I want my child to do better than me." This was an encouraging statement to observe but was an isolated incident at best. The art teacher at the EDGE Academy says parent's value education somewhat by stating, "The majority of families value education by saying if you get it that's great, if not get on down the road." All educators interviewed agreed that the lack of education is a cycle that perpetuates itself. The student's parents, and the parent's parents do not have an education; therefore, there has not been a role model that breaks the cycle.

Improved Home Environment

The students answered a question on the survey that revealed some interesting facts. Twenty-five students said their relationship had improved with their parents since they had been attending alternative school, and 22 students stated that their relationship was about the same. One teacher stated in her interview, "The parents look at education in a different way than teachers do and it's not just about education, but about getting a good job or even a career." She said that she has used that statement when talking to parents a lot because she wants to impress on parents that their children can have jobs that pay good wages, and there are different ways to view the need for education.

Summary

A synthesis of data from interviews, surveys, site visits, informal observations and document examination was presented in this chapter. The presentation of the research findings from the data was organized by themes as they related to each research question. The three themes that emerged from the data that related to how do alternative schools encourage at-risk students to stay in school were presented as the following: positive daily contact with students that develops into a trusting relationship, smaller learning environment and providing learning opportunities relevant to real life and education makes a difference in the future. Three themes recurred throughout the data on why teachers and students believe at-risk students drop out of traditional school settings, they are as follows: one size education fits all, poor attendance in traditional school and poor coping skills. What role do teachers, counselor and administrators play in the success or failure in alternative and traditional education programs had three recurring themes they are as follows: self-paced and ability level instruction, addressing different learning

styles and extrinsic and intrinsic rewards that motivate students. How parents view alternative and traditional programs had two recurring themes: a last chance effort for their child to graduate from high school and improved home environment since their child enrolled in alternative education.

While several other factors related to the research questions were found in the data, only those discussed emerged as recurring themes. Data were compared and contrasted to crosscheck the accuracy of descriptive information. Chapter VI presents a summary and discussion of findings related to the research questions. Implications and recommendations for further research are identified.

CHAPTER VI

Summary, Discussion of Findings, Implications and Recommendations

Overview

This chapter presents a summary and discussion of findings related to the emerging and recurring themes. The chapter will conclude with implications and recommendations for further research.

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to describe two alternative programs designed to educate students, ages 13-20, who exhibit at-risk characteristics for not graduating from high school. The EDGE and FAME Academies were developed to provide an educational setting for at-risk students. The students served in both of these schools exhibited characteristics that indicated a lack of academic success in their traditional classroom settings and becoming potential dropouts from their traditional high schools. The design of both of these programs claimed uniqueness in providing smaller learning environments, instruction organized to incur success, a great amount of one-on-one student to adult contact, a strong emphasis on a counseling component and empowered teachers, counselor and administrators.

Findings Related to Trust

Positive Daily Contact with Students

The beliefs, vision and efforts of seven teachers, one counselor and two administrators, were found to provide the strongest explanation for the success of at-risk

students in the EDGE and FAME Academies. The combinations of their educational experiences in both traditional and alternative education are the foundations for which these schools exist. Every teacher believed in the work they were doing to help their students. Teaching, counseling and administering in alternative schools were not jobs but career paths that each person had chosen. All ten interviewees could return to traditional settings if they so choose; all but one were adamant about staying where they are to continue their work with at-risk students.

The home environments that at-risk students experience on a daily basis are significant contributing factors to their success in school. As a high school principal said, "If you want to know why some students drop out, look at their parents, they pass their low aspirations on to their kids" (Black, 2003, p. 37). Home environments do not become difficult places for children over night; they have lived in these environments for years. Some of the results of living in complicated environments over an accumulation of years are: despair, helplessness, hopelessness, anger and lack of motivation. Educators that work in alternative schools recognize the need to address these difficulties to help their students. They understand the complexity of students' worlds and ultimately do not blame the children for their plight in life. Rather they focus on recognizing their complex and sometimes crisis situations, and devising plans and methods to help these children succeed.

Educators at both academies recognize the importance of developing a trusting relationship with their students. They cultivate a relationship with their students based on mutual respect for one another. They realize the importance of restoring confidence and faith in adults within a school setting and that they can depend on adults for help.

Both schools exhibited high standards where honest communication and mutual respect were the norm rather than the exception, and the adults understand that they may be the only anchor students have. They engaged in positive daily one-on-one contact with students and fostered an environment where dialogue was open and free to take place within the school.

Smaller Learning Environment

Neither the EDGE Academy nor FAME Academy was fancy new buildings where the students attended class. They were both old buildings that were neat and clean but what was occurring inside was the deciding factor of the success of their students. They were using the space they had in their buildings and creating smaller learning communities that had teachers involved in their students' learning and students were actively engaged in their own success. They had low student to teacher ratio that allowed teachers to work one-on-one with students when it was needed. They really got to know their students and how they think. Earnest observation of students over time allows teachers to develop different ways to approach them. It allowed them to come up with methods to reach their students through creative approaches such as buddy teaching, peer tutoring and cooperative learning.

Both schools displayed evidence that teachers worked together collectively and collaboratively and were empowered to make decisions that were best for their students. There was not a lot of complex governing organizations and formal committee structures that guided their staff meetings. Quite the opposite, rather than discussing a lot of bureaucracy issues that dominated time, there were deep-ongoing discussions that took place where education was the topic issue. If issues arose, teachers could meet with

almost no notice, gather in one room and listen to what each person had to say. Their continuing dialogue and face-to-face discussions were powerful modems that allowed these teachers to think outside the box and brainstorm ideas to help their students. These teachers were frequently weighing evidence of success of their students, exploring alternative viewpoints and safely asking the question "So what can we do different to help our students be successful?"

Providing Relevant Learning Opportunities

A big challenge for educators not only in alternative education but traditional classrooms is personalizing the schooling process that facilitates students' growth. It is a challenge to steer intelligent students in the right direction to become problem solvers of the future. High school students need to see the why and the relevance of the curriculum; they need to make a self-connection and have a sense of purpose of their everyday world in relation to school. In alternative schools many students simply need mentoring, structure and an opportunity to see their own potential.

At the EDGE and FAME Academies the educational role of the teachers, counselor and administrators is to accept the students, recognize their strengths and possibilities and understand the realities they face daily. The researcher witnessed teachers fostering hope and encouraging students to explore and venture into the unknown. It is a full-time job keeping students interested and motivated. Teachers work hard at making the curriculum come alive and make sense to their students by building it around topics that students are curious about and want to gain knowledge. They are making the curriculum engaging through hands-on and real-life application processes. These teachers have set up environments that invite questions and then they spend time

moving about the room answering these questions and gently nudging their students so that curiosity is kept alive and current.

In traditional high schools the lessons are often dry and clear-cut; not so at the two alternative academies involved in this case study. The researcher witnessed teachers bringing in their own interests and immersing students in these interests to make learning exciting for them. Lessons were not taught straight from a textbook in a mundane manner but were taught using a myriad of resources. Connections were made to how students can use this knowledge later in life. Teachers were observed continually searching for resources that would enhance their lessons and boost the state of Oklahoma's mandated curriculum of Priority Academic Student Skills (PASS).

The survey data revealed that students were more satisfied with the relevance of their learning experiences to life in alternative school than in traditional high school. They further indicated on their survey that because they feel valued in their alternative school, their attendance has improved and they are attending school by choice.

Findings on Dropouts in Traditional School Settings

One Size Education Does Not Fit All

Students should not have to be at-risk for not graduating from high school for educators to figure out that everyone does not learn at the same rate or in the same way. Even in traditional classrooms we have students that are on different ability levels; it is just that in the traditional classrooms these students are often left-behind their peers because they do not learn as quickly as others, or they cannot keep up with the rigors of the curriculum. A strong emphasis of fellow educators in the alternative schools studied was that they slowed down, if needed, to meet the needs of every child. They all agreed

that it was important to meet a student where they are, and that may mean that a student that is classified as a ninth grader may be working on a sixth grade level. These educators responded by rolling up their sleeves, collecting a myriad of resources, spending extra time with the student and allowed them to work at their pace to get them on grade level. Their "expected success" philosophy was based on individualizing instruction for students. Students were viewed as challenges and not hardships to bring them along in their education process. Another strong indicator that teachers understood the differences in these students is they realized that outside factors affected their education, how they reacted to school on a daily basis, their moods and why they acted certain ways at school.

The norm in most traditional classrooms is everyone is judged by the same standards. However, at the EDGE and FAME Academies teachers are expected to know their students well; why they may not have their homework, why they did not do well on a Friday test or why they are not paying attention in class. Individual attention is difficult to accomplish when students are expected to be in a one size fits all situation. Focused on the fact that no two human beings are treated the same in the alternative academies studied, they both had a real strength in individualizing instruction and attention for each student.

Poor Attendance in Traditional School and Falling Behind

The popular phrase, you build it and they will come does not hold true for some students regarding their school experience. If at-risk students experience hardships, do not have a role model, are not required to go to school or just do not want to come to school, they will not attend. Poor attendance in school was at the top of the list of

concerns for the at-risk students studied at both alternative academies. According to the frequency distribution table of the student survey in Appendix I, 36 students indicated that they had made the choice to cut or skip classes in excess of eleven times in one school year while attending traditional high schools. However, since their enrollment in alternative school only three had made the choice to cut or skip classes. Because the EDGE and FAME Academies are schools of choice, this is a strong indicator that these students want to be in school. When students enrolled at the academies, they were told that this is a school of choice and if they choose not to come there were consequences. There was a lengthy waiting list and someone would fill his or her spot quickly. Both academies are strict regarding attendance because of the waiting list and because both are schools of choice.

The philosophical and practical goals of the EDGE and FAME Academies were found supportive of the attendance compliance issues. Both schools offered counseling in relation to attendance issues. Attendance in school was not the root of the problem for these children; rather it is a result of problems children experience in school. Many teachers interviewed said that their at-risk students did not fit in the traditional school; therefore they simply would not attend. All of the alternative teachers understood the problems their students experience because of poor attendance. Several voiced opinions that their students were so far behind because they had missed out on basic skills because they were rarely in school. They also understood that some students felt alienated in traditional schools. These were starting points for these teachers. Their goal was to first meet their students on their level, then encourage them to be at school everyday. The researcher observed during several site visits teachers telling students, "I'm glad you are

here today." This small gesture of encouragement and kindness toward these students was enough to bring them back day-after-day.

Poor Coping Skills

The counselor along with the teachers and administrators all agree that many of the students they serve at the EDGE and FAME Academies do not have good everyday life coping skills. Life is very difficult for many of these students, and they do not know how to cope with hardships. They have never been taught coping skills and they react to some situations using drama. The drama becomes a way of getting attention, and some have learned that this may be the only way they can get attention. Even if it is negative attention, they are getting some, and then it becomes a cycle for them that is difficult to break.

The counseling component at both schools was often related to coping with life for these students. The counselor worked on reflective processing and behavior modification skills. The researcher observed the staff incorporating numerous role-play situations; trying to give their students the opportunity to learn how to react differently in situations. Teachers expressed concern that so many of their students handle situations with anger. They react to situations both big and small by getting upset and their tempers flare. Teachers also expressed concern that many of the students think that handling situations with physical violence is the answer. Staff members identified consistency and reinforcement of positive behaviors as the technique that provided the most effective results with changing inappropriate behavior. It was observed on several occasions that teachers simply stopped the class when inappropriate behaviors were displayed and they all just talked. It took a lot of time from class, but teachers expressed how grateful they

were to work in an atmosphere where they had the luxury of time to stop and handle situations in this manner. More than one teacher commented on the effectiveness of taking time right when a problem arises and talking it out, rather than waiting and admonishing a student later. The counselor at the EDGE Academy was on hand at all times to help with these situations, but the FAME Academy had a contract counselor and did not always have the luxury of the counseling component at all times. This was a major concern for the FAME Academy staff and the researcher noted that this was a downside for this school. Having the counselor on hand at all times was a real plus for the EDGE Academy.

Instructional Delivery

Self-Paced and Ability Level Instruction

The component of self-paced and ability level instruction is closely related to one size education does not fit all and smaller learning environments. The key component in self-paced and ability level instruction is the teacher. Teachers can be the deciding factor whether a student grasps a concept or they move on leaving a student behind. In traditional classrooms, many at-risk students feel embarrassed to ask questions when they do not understand a concept. They may further feel ridiculed, singled out and defeated. This causes them to get behind, and when they get so far behind and cannot catch up they are in a viscous cycle of defeat. Students that come to alternative schools often have a hard time asking questions and opening up because of their past experiences in traditional classrooms. Having teachers who are patient and encourage questions are often foreign to what they have experienced in the past. One of the teachers said that sometimes her students seemed cowed because of fear to ask questions and ask for help. She went on to

say that she has to spend a lot of time with these kids to get them to understand that her job is to answer questions and to never be afraid. However, so many of these students have experienced feelings of ridicule that they have built up a wall of resentment toward teachers, and the teachers in both alternative schools said they just have to wait them out. They have to allow the students time to trust them and really know that they are not going to embarrass them because they ask questions or because they do not know the answer. The blended students from five school districts at the FAME Academy did not experience problems that were any different from the students that came from one high school as the EDGE students. All students were more successful in the self-paced and ability level instruction environment where trust was fostered.

Another support system for both the EDGE and FAME Academies are volunteers and mentors that come on a regular basis to help their students. The researcher witnessed an attitude of just because you say you are there to help does not mean that students will trust you right away. Students had to have reassurance through the volunteer's actions and words that they really wanted to help. The Chief of Police in Dublin volunteers at the EDGE Academy on a regular basis. For a long time the students did not know he was the Police Chief. He did not want them to know because he wanted to develop the trust factor first, try to get to know the students and then reveal his profession. The researcher observed during several site visits an elderly gentleman interacting with the students and they responded to him as if he were one of the staff members. Because so many at-risk students are on different levels and work at different paces, volunteers and mentors are a vital ingredient in at-risk students' success.

Addressing Different Learning Styles

The different learning styles of students attending alternative schools and traditional schools were not a clear-cut issue in this study. Some of the teachers agreed that their at-risk students had different learning styles but all agreed their pace of learning was different than most students in traditional classrooms. Observations at both alternative schools revealed teachers addressing different learning styles by allowing them to touch, taste, feel and experience. These type-learning experiences do happen in traditional classrooms, but the one component that is different in alternative schools is the time teachers spend to address the issue of learning styles. In several discussions with the teachers they said that many of their students attention spans are very short. Some of the factors that contribute to their students short attention spans are: they have not been read to at home, they have not been expected to follow through with tasks at home, they do not have role models that model attentiveness and some simply do not know the meaning of focus. Because of these deficits, they get left behind in traditional classroom settings.

Another confusing issue regarding learning styles was that at-risk students require a huge amount of one-on-one attention. The teachers interviewed agreed that this is not a learning style but a security issue for their students. The teacher was the single most deciding factor when it came to how much attention a student received. The researcher witnessed teachers up and moving from student to student. They seldom sat down, did not grade papers while students were in class and did not indicate to a child they would not help them. Learning styles and how students learn was not an important issue at these alternative schools. It was more an issue of attention from teachers to students and the students' comfort level to ask questions and ask for help.

Extrinsic and Intrinsic Rewards that Motivate Students

A powerful extrinsic motivator for students at the EDGE and FAME Academies was computer time. Because of the self-paced concept at both schools, more computer time meant moving to the next level or graduating faster. Computers may start out as extrinsic motivators but soon become intrinsic to many students. As they realize that more time on computers is an essential component to graduating, then it becomes something inside them that motivates them to work harder and stay on the computer longer. The self-paced concept is a natural motivator for some students.

It was observed by the researcher that the maturity level of the student also depended on the level of extrinsic rewards needed to motivate. The middle school students responded to motivators such as food, getting a Coke on Friday or having extra time at lunch to talk with friends. Observations revealed that the high school students were more focused on the task at hand and wanted to complete their work. One of the high school teachers at the EDGE said, "High school students here don't want you to waste their time with nonsense, they just want to finish."

It was interesting to observe that the teachers knew what motivated everyone of their students on an individual basis. Getting to spend extra time in the art room especially motivated one student. The teacher laughed and said, "Some days the only way I can get him to do his work is I bribe him with his art project." This was an example of using an extrinsic reward at its finest.

Findings on Parental Involvement and Support

A Last Chance Effort for Graduation

The administrators at the EDGE Academy and FAME Academy both stressed the importance of parental involvement for their schools. However, both expressed disappointment at the lack of parental involvement. One powerful expectation that both schools enforce is that a parent or legal guardian accompanies a student upon enrollment. If the parent cannot be present, the child will simply not be enrolled in either school. Some of the parents attend this meeting because they view it as their child's last chance effort to graduate from high school. During one intake interview, one parent exhibited signs of weariness at her child's lack of success in traditional schools. She believed that this was her child's last chance to graduate. She also expressed the desire for her child to graduate by stating, "I didn't graduate from high school, in fact no one in my family has, and if my child graduates they will be the first one in our family." She also went on to state, "But I am tired of fighting with him about going to school, I guess if he doesn't make it here then he just won't make it."

Discussions with the counselor and administrators revealed that many of their students' parents have a limited education. Valuing education is foreign to many of these people and they simply do not understand this concept. Some parents confessed that they had bad experiences in school and they expect their children to have bad experiences. Their beliefs about school are based on past experiences that have been neither positive nor pleasant. Every person involved in both academies realized the importance of helping their students' parents feel welcome at school. They encourage their parents to visit the classrooms anytime. The researcher observed teachers walking with students to their cars at the end of the day just to make contact with the parent.

Improved Home Environment

Not a great amount of evidence was gathered to support that students' home environment had improved since they had been attending the EDGE and FAME Academies. Some students are parents themselves and some are living in hardship conditions, and many do not have contact with their parents at all. Therefore, improving their home environment since they had been attending the alternative academy was a difficult concept to confirm. However, 57 students did say on their student survey that their overall life had improved since they had been attending the alternative school and 72 of the 79 students said they would rather stay in alternative school than attend a traditional high school. Even though these last two findings are not directly related to an improvement in home conditions, they are directly related to student satisfaction in relation to their friendships, their well-being and their overall satisfaction of attending the EDGE and FAME Academies.

Discussion of Findings

The interrelated themes that emerged from the data clearly presented perspectives of explanations addressing the research questions. The existence of the EDGE and FAME Academies was critically related to the efforts and commitment of the teachers, counselor and administrators of these programs. The persistence of both programs was strongly related to the success of the students by strong attendance and graduation from high school. The interconnectedness of the emerging themes provided interesting explanations that directly related to all four-research questions.

Descriptively, the EDGE and FAME programs are indeed unique in many ways. Not only in the design components, but on-site observations led this researcher to

conclude that the most unique component of these educational settings are the philosophical foundations shared and demonstrated by all staff. Not only was the staff committed in their beliefs and practices, but every education professional interviewed were solid in their support of their alternative programs. Only one teacher said, "Sometimes I think about going back to teach in a traditional setting; I might return to the high school if the right opportunity comes along." This comment did not indicate that he was not in support of the alternative program; rather it was an indication that he enjoyed teaching in the traditional classroom too. The other nine interviewees, including the counselor and two administrators, were adamant about continuing their work in the alternative setting. The strength and amount of conviction from the educators in this case study were phenomenal.

Harvey, Prather, White, Jack and Hoffmeister (1968), have for over 30 years identified a significant relationship between student behavior and teacher behavior. The case study of these two alternative schools concludes that not only are teacher and student relationships related but also more importantly, how the students viewed their traditional classroom experiences and their alternative classroom experiences and how they affected their behaviors. At-risk students in the present study indicated on their surveys that in the traditional high school the majority of students said their teachers never or seldom noticed when they did a good job on an assignment. However, 82 percent of the students said that in their alternative school that a teacher almost always or often noticed when they did a good job and they complimented them on their work. A high percent of attendance in alternative school was a strong indicator that these students want to be in school. There was a direct relationship of students not going to school at their traditional

high school versus wanting to go to school when they were enrolled in the EDGE OR FAME Academies. Fifty-three percent of the students surveyed said they had been truant from class between six and eleven days while attending traditional school. Only 10 percent said they had been truant between six to eleven days school since they enrolled in their alternative school. Thirty-six students indicated they had skipped class 11 or more times while in traditional high school and only three indicated they had skipped 11 or more days since they had been attending the alternative school. Considering both are schools of choice, documents reveal a strong average daily attendance figure and they boast a high attendance rate.

This case study presents evidence that at-risk students in secondary schools need an adult support system that are committed to them on an individual and personal basis, as well as a curriculum related basis. There is strong evidence to support that teachers who share the same rationale and core values and who agree on teaching methods and choose to work with at-risk students will have more success in helping students see their own potential. Because the educators in this case study have chosen to work with at-risk students as a career choice, they are better equipped to mentor students, provide structure and help their at-risk students overcome social obstacles and pressures. These educators were focused on the lives of their students and expressed a deep caring for them. One teacher expressed her feelings and attitude by saying, "I ask myself, what is happening in their lives today and how can I help them?" The overall attitude of all ten educators interviewed was their major role in education is to accept their students, recognize their strengths and possibilities and understand the realities they face, which are very different from their own realities.

This case study reports that there are some teachers particularly well suited to working productively with at-risk students. These teachers have the ability to assess students individually and do not over generalize or stereotype them. The interviews revealed that teachers, counselor and administrators agree on the importance of providing a self-paced and individualized education program for every student they teach. They refuse to look at the history most of their students bring with them from their traditional school. Discussions and on-site observations revealed that many of the students in the EDGE and FAME Academies come from their traditional schools with paper trails, with data that reflects statements such as: lacks motivation, undisciplined, doesn't care about learning, or lazy. The teachers at both academies reject these notions about their students and concentrate on motivating them and getting them excited about coming to school. They are focused on the learning capacity of their students rather than the intelligence capacity. They are committed to helping students have a solid base of knowledge and skills. They also have a clear vision to instill in their students' confidence to meet challenges both in school and life.

Characteristics of low-efficacy teachers take their toll on student achievement. In a report prepared for the U. S. Department of Education's National Institute of Education, researchers Ashton, Webb and Doda (1982), arrived at the following findings: low-efficacy teachers hold low academic standards for low-achieving students, in contrast, high-efficacy teachers hold higher standards for the same students. Low-efficacy characteristics were contrary to what was observed at both the EDGE and FAME Academies. The teachers believed in their students' capacities to learn and in their capacities to teach; thus producing a teacher that expected as much of him or her as they

did their students. Observations revealed a learning environment where teachers motivated their students, provided stimulation and engaged and empowered them. Interviews revealed educators who took responsibility for students' learning, and when students failed, they examined their own performance for improvement. One teacher stated during an interview, "I challenge myself to be the best and when I'm not it bothers me." She went on to state, "I enjoy these students probably more than they enjoy me; I want to be here." The attitude that all students can learn and all teachers can teach permeated throughout this case study.

A finding that disappointed the researcher was the lack of parental involvement in both alternative academies. Parents being visible in school buildings, volunteering, helping with class activities and so forth portray a visible sign of parental involvement. Virtually no type of parental involvement of this type was taking place at either alternative academy. However, it should be noted that lack of parental involvement should not be misconstrued as lack of parental support. Both schools studied had few rules, but one of the rules they were adamant about was that a parent or legal guardian must be present during the intake interview or enrollment would be denied. The researcher noted during several observations at intake interviews parental support was evident. Parents wanted their children in school, they wanted them to be successful and they understood the importance of attendance. They did not express a willingness to be in the school on a regular basis unless they were called or needed for a specific reason. Provided with an opportunity to visit or be in their child's school without a specific reason held very little significance to the parents or legal guardians observed in this case study.

Implications

The results of this descriptive case study suggests that careful, intentional relationship building between teachers and students becomes the foundation for at-risk students being motivated to stay in school and graduate. Chances for success are enhanced when students are allowed to work on their own ability level and are allowed the luxury of working at their own pace of learning.

Recognition of teachers who have a high sense of self-efficacy, are not afraid to build relationships with students and understand how powerful these relationships are for guiding behavior was evident in the findings. Clear and fair expectations instead of rules, enforcing consequences consistently without anger and empowering students to have a say in their education also enhanced student success. Teachers who do not give up on students, and who do not stereotype and judge students, do make a difference. Accepting students in the here and now and meeting students socially and academically right where they are, help them meet the challenges of an aggressive curriculum and overcome obstacles of everyday life. Teachers with a high sense of efficacy understand at-risk students and at-risk students deserve these teachers.

The importance of leadership in these alternative schools permeated all results of this study. A demonstration of commitment of both leader and staff influenced the outcomes of both alternative programs. Positive role models for at-risk students are crucial to the program itself. Students that exhibit at-risk characteristics must be exposed to adults that lead by example, talk-the-talk and walk-the-walk. Consequently, staffing in both alternative schools are of utmost importance for the progress and future of both schools.

Data related to parental involvement to the research questions of the study did not emerge strongly as a theme. This absence in the findings permits the inference that at-risk students can still be successful and graduate from high school even if their parent is not involved in their education. The presence of staff that supports these students provides the resilience they need to graduate from high school. Although parental involvement was required at the intake interview, it is not required on a regular basis at either alternative school. At-risk intervention must be sustained through the school setting by focusing on the students, providing coping skills and helping them with situations that are out of their control. Positive parental involvement was not indicated in this study as a successful intervention for helping students graduate from high school.

Recommendations for Further Research

This qualitative case study uncovered information valuable to future research, offering other areas for consideration. Undeniably, the research in at-risk education must continue. Alternative education in all forms must be studied to gain knowledge about innovative programs intended to help students who exhibit at-risk characteristics, and how to decrease the number of students who are potential dropouts or have dropped out of high school.

It would be beneficial for further research to include the effects of professional development for educators to include how to help students that display signs of at-risk behavior. All teachers will encounter students with at-risk tendencies; therefore the schools must provide education in how to help these students through effective teaching strategies and interventions starting in the early years.

Identifying students that exhibit at-risk behaviors in the early years needs to be a focal point for research regarding these students. Educators should be equipped to help young children when they are more impressionable and more open to learning opportunities. University teacher and principal preparation programs must begin to address strategies to intervene with the problems of at-risk students within our public schools. A requirement of regular classroom teacher methods and preparation classes should be counseling strategies to help them understand the signs of at-risk students and how to effectively intervene.

Labeling was a concern in this study prior to the focus on at-risk students. In educational settings students are placed, for one reason or another, in designated education programs intended to serve a population with identifiable needs. Labeling students by virtue of placement is a criticism educators have always incurred. Paradoxically, to identify a student at-risk in alternative settings is synonymous with labeling students in these settings.

Through practical experience and careful research, educators must develop learning environments that provide safe environments for educationally fragile students. It should be a challenge posed to all educators to shy away from the negative connotation and label of the term "at-risk." Literature revealed concerns among educators about labeling students, fearing that an at-risk label would establish expectancies and impede academic success (Covington, Beery, 1976; Ibanez-Velez, 1991; Margonis, 1992; Meece, 1993; & Richardson, 1989). Without clarification of what at-risk truly means, it is difficult to interpret the meaning; you find yourself asking the question "At-risk for what?" Perhaps a better label for these students is "educationally disengaged." If

educators must label students, then one might infer that a student that is educationally disengaged must have at one time been educationally engaged. This term should lead educators to the conclusion of what they can do to help educationally reengage students. If students were once educationally engaged, later educationally disengaged, then further research should focus on educationally reengaging students.

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Appendix A

Matrix of Findings and Sources for Data Triangulation

Major Findings	D	S	O	I
Category 1. Teachers Role in Educating At-Risk Students				
1. Teachers, counselors & principals have a significant impact on educating at-risk students in alternative schools		X	X	X
2. Teachers, counselors & principals provide support to help at-risk students be successful	X	X	X	X
3. Teachers, counselors & principals hold students accountable for attendance in alternative education programs	X	X	X	X
4. Teachers, counselors & principals provide a student-centered environment		X	X	
5. Students are allowed to help each other, fostering a buddy system and collaborative learning environment			X	X
Category 2. Challenges in Educating At-Risk Students				
6. Students work at their own pace and ability level	X		X	X
7. Absence of one adult role model to foster positive relationships		X		X
8. Motivating at-risk students to come to school then stay in school	X	X	X	X
9. Teachers staying organized with lessons because students are all on different ability levels and different assignments			X	X
10. Meeting the needs of all students	X	X	X	X
Category 3. Coping Skills and Resilience of Students Attending Alternative Schools				
11. Students home environment does not support education and good jobs				X
12. Absence of adult role model to teach coping skills with everyday life				X
13. At-risk students are faced with crisis situations on a regular basis (i.e. parent in prison, abuse, alcohol and drugs)				X
14. Fostering a consistent environment where students know what to expect enhances coping skills	X		X	X
D = Documents O = Observations **S = Surveys I = Interviews**				

Category 3 Cont'd: Coping Skills and Resilience of Students Attending Alternative Schools	D	S	O	I
15. Developing skills where students are contributing citizens to society	X	X	X	X
16. Introducing changes gradually is an important aspect to helping at-risk students cope with day-to-day life			X	X
Category 4. Parental Involvement in Alternative Education				
17. Many parents have not graduated from high school, therefore at-risk students do not see the need to graduate			X	X
18. Development of a trusting relationship with parents/legal guardians facilitates student success			X	X
19. Parents/legal guardians are required to attend intake interview to be considered for placement in alternative academies	X		X	X
20. Many at-risk students live with someone other than parents (grandparents, boy or girlfriend, friend or on their own)				X
Category 5. Making Graduation Relevant and Attainable for At-risk Students				
21. Helping students set realistic goals and teaching that goals are relevant and attainable	X	X	X	X
22. Setting high expectations "what you expect is what you will get"			X	X
23. The use of extrinsic and intrinsic rewards to encourage graduation	X		X	X
24. Positive reinforcement breeds success and "success begets success"			X	X
Category 6. Addressing Different Learning Styles of At-Risk Students				
25. Short attention span for many at-risk students that relate to academic and social problems			X	X
26. High degree of teacher self-efficacy to address varied learning styles			X	X
27. Developing a casual atmosphere fosters an environment where students are safe to take risks and individuality emerges		X	X	X
28. Develop a cooperative learning environment that addresses individual learning styles	X		X	X
D = Documents O = Observations **S = Surveys I = Interviews**				

Appendix B

Evaluation Rubric and Evidence of Evaluation for
Dublin EDGE Academy 2002-3003

CRITERION	IMPLEMENTATION LEVEL
Intake and screening	Exemplary
Collaboration	Exemplary. Area partnerships have been cultivated to support this program
Individualized instruction	Exemplary.
Counseling and social services	Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory. Excellent counseling components are in place but student participation levels were unsatisfactory. The program has an active, hands-on counselor committed to providing consistent services for each student; individual & group counseling sessions are held weekly; other agencies, including representatives from Americorps, provide counseling services; all members of the staff also participate actively in each student's progress. The student data, however, indicated that the typical student participated in only one counseling session per month.
Graduation plan	Exemplary. 60 students graduated
Life skills instruction	Exemplary. Provided through various modalities, many topics & issues are covered; offered across the curricula; life skills also a part of the counseling program; all members of the staff participate.
Self-evaluation	Exemplary
Effective instruction	Exemplary. All components of this criterion are met: student driven, group work, CAI, texts, hands-on projects, service learning projects, guest presenters, exhibitions, student presentations.
Arts education	Exemplary. Exceeds expectations; full-time art teacher provides varied, full-range arts instruction
Certified teachers	Criterion met
Courses meet curricular standards	Criterion met
Clear and measurable goals and objectives	Criterion met
Effective class size and student/teacher ratios	Criterion met
Faculty selection	Criterion met
Budget	Criterion met. Funding from Duncan significantly exceeds "match" expectation
Student participation	Criterion met. Program is located in separate facility but students may participate in any activity provided by the school district
Designed to serve students in grades 6-12 most at-risk of not completing a high school education for a reason other than a disability	Serves grades 6-12 (2001-02 was the second year for the middle school addition, located in a separate wing of the building. Two teachers served this population.)

Evaluation Rubric and Evidence of Evaluation for
Terry FAME Academy 2002-2003

CRITERION	IMPLEMENTATION LEVEL
Intake and screening	Exemplary: Schools send a written referral, transcripts, and/or cumulative folder to the FAME Director when a candidate for the program was identified. An administrator from the sending school, counselor, FAME Director, parent and student discussed the appropriateness of placement in the program. Once the decision was made to place a student, a FAME enrollment packet was completed and a written promotion plan or graduation plan was written for each student.
Collaboration	Exemplary. The local health department, local youth shelter, OPAT, OJA, DHS, county sheriff's department, Americorps, and county vocational technology center were collaborating partners with the program.
Individualized instruction	Exemplary. The middle school class was self-contained and separate from the high school component of the program. One middle school teachers individualized instruction for students in the 6th through 8th grades maintaining a maximum class size of 10. Interested high school students took American Sign Language I and II in the distance learning classroom this year. Work in API modules was self-paced. Instruction in the program was varied and multidimensional, accommodating the individual interests of students.
Counseling and social services	Exemplary. An LPC provided both individual and group counseling services. Each student participated in a one-hour group session once a week. Some of the topics covered this year included making good choices, goal setting, drug/alcohol issues, and family dynamics, grief and anger management. Individual counseling varied according to individual student needs.
Graduation plan	Exemplary. The student, parent or teacher reviewed each student's graduation plan with the student the fifth week of each nine-week period or sooner upon the request. A promotion plan was maintained for younger students.
Life skills instruction	Exemplary. Students took a field trip to the Shelton Center in a nearly community for a presentation on character building and making the right choices. They also visited a local bank for a tour of the bank. They learned about the various kinds of bank accounts and the importance of establishing good credit. Each student received a small calculator. Students volunteered for the Kiwanis Pancake Day at the county fairgrounds. They set up tables/chairs, cooked, served pancakes and helped cleanup afterwards. The Kiwanis Club asked staff and students of the program to attend a Kiwanis luncheon to make a presentation about FAME Academy. A young man paralyzed in a car accident involving alcohol spoke to the students about the perils of drinking and driving. Life skills were also integrated into the curriculum.
Self-evaluation	Exemplary. All required data and the self-evaluation were submitted to OTAC ahead of deadline.

Effective instruction	Exemplary. Instruction at FAME Academy typically included many opportunities for hands on, experiential learning. Examples of hands on projects the middle school students participated in this year included producing a video of their interviews with veterans at a local nursing home. Middle school science students made Power Point presentations on volcanoes and created a volcano in class. They also launched rockets. Both middle and high school students took part in Arbor Day activities relating to ecology, biology and physical science. Guest speakers were also part of instruction. Representatives from the National Guard, U. S. Army and the county Vocational Technology Center made presentations to students. Curricular materials included teacher made materials, textbooks and API modules. Computer software available for use with computers included Skillsbank, Boxer Algebra, Keyboarding, Career Search and Power Point.
Arts education	Exemplary. The program received an Arts in Education Grant, which provided for two hours of daily music and visual arts once a week utilizing two artists in residence. Students had the opportunity to learn digital photography and video. They also created their own original musical CDs using an electronic keyboard and software. An art show was held at the end of the year to showcase the many talents of FAME Academy students. Exhibits included charcoal, pen and ink, and pastel drawings. They created paintings of landscapes and wildlife. Students also provided musical entertainment at the art show.
Certified teachers	Criterion met
Courses meet curricular standards	Criterion met
Clear and measurable goals and objectives	Criterion met
Effective class size and student/teacher ratios	Criterion met
Faculty selection	Criterion met
Budget	Criterion met
Student participation	Criterion met
Designed to serve students in grades 6-12 most at-risk of not completing a high school education for a reason other than a disability	Criterion met

Appendix D

General Interview Questions for Teachers Teaching in an Alternative School

1. What pseudonym would you like to call yourself throughout this interview?
2. How many total years have you been teaching?
3. How many years have you taught in an alternative setting?
4. How many years have you taught in a traditional classroom?
5. How would you best describe your teaching experience in an alternative setting?
6. How would you best describe your teaching experience in a traditional classroom?
7. What challenges do you face teaching at-risk students?
8. What challenges did you face teaching students when the majority were going to earn a high school diploma.
9. How do you encourage students to stay in the alternative school and graduate?
10. Did you have to encourage students in a traditional classroom to stay in school and graduate differently than you do at-risk students?
11. Do you work closely with student's families (parents/legal guardians) within the education context?
12. If the answer is yes to question 11, then please explain how you work with these families.
13. Do you find that at-risk students have different learning styles than students in traditional classrooms?
14. If so what are those learning styles and how you do you address them?
15. Do you enjoy working with at-risk students?
16. Did you enjoy working in a traditional classroom setting?
17. Which setting would you prefer to teach in?
18. If it is alternative education, explain why.

19. If it is a traditional classroom, explain why.

20. What are your biggest challenge teaching at-risk students?

21. Would you return to the traditional classroom if you had the chance?

22. If yes, explain.

23. If no, explain

Appendix D Continued

General Interview Questions for Counselors Working in an Alternative School

1. What pseudonym would you like to call yourself throughout this interview?
2. How many total years have you been counseling students?
3. How many years have you counseled in an alternative setting?
4. How many years have you counseled in a traditional classroom?
5. How would you best describe your counseling experiences in an alternative setting?
6. How would you best describe your counseling experiences in a traditional education setting?
7. What challenges do you face counseling at-risk students?
8. What challenges did you face counseling students when the majority was going to earn a high school diploma?
9. How do you encourage students to stay in the alternative school and graduate?
10. Did you have to encourage students in a traditional setting to stay in school and graduate differently than you do at-risk students?
11. Do you work closely with student's families (parents/legal guardians) within the education context?
12. If the answer is yes to question 11, then please explain how you work with these families.
13. Do you find that at-risk students have different learning styles than students in traditional classrooms?
14. If so what are those learning styles and how you do you address them through counseling?
15. Do you enjoy working with at-risk students?
16. Did you enjoy working in a traditional education setting?
17. Which setting would you prefer to be a counselor?

18. If it is alternative education, explain why.

19. If it is a traditional setting, explain why.

20. What are your biggest challenge counseling at-risk students?

21. Would you return to the traditional setting if you had the chance?

22. If yes, explain.

23. If no, explain

General Interview Questions for Administrators Employed in an Alternative School

1. What pseudonym would you like to call yourself throughout this interview?
2. How many total years have you been an administrator?
3. How many years have you been an administrator in an alternative setting?
4. How many years have you been an administrator in a traditional school setting?
5. How would you best describe your administrative experience in an alternative setting?
6. How would you best describe your administrative experience in a traditional setting?
7. What challenges do you face being an administrator where the students are at-risk?
8. What challenges did you face being the administrator when the majority of students were going to earn a high school diploma.
9. How do you encourage students to stay in the alternative school and graduate?
10. Did you have to encourage students in a traditional classroom to stay in school and graduate differently than you do at-risk students?
11. Do you work closely with student's families (parents/legal guardians) within the education context?
12. If the answer is yes to question 11, then please explain how you work with these families.
13. Do you find that at-risk students have different learning styles than students in traditional classrooms?
14. If so what are those learning styles and how you do you address them?
15. Do you enjoy working with at-risk students?
16. Did you enjoy working in a traditional education setting?
17. Which setting would you prefer to be an administrator?

18. If it is alternative education, explain why.

19. If it is a traditional setting, explain why.

20. What are your biggest challenges being an administrator where there are at-risk students?

21. Would you return to the traditional setting if you had the chance?

22. If yes, explain.

23. If no, explain

Appendix E

Survey Instrument for Tenth-Twelfth Grade Students Attending Alternative Education

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this survey. The survey asks your opinion about a number of things in your life, including your family, friends, and school. Your answers to these questions will be confidential. This means your answers will stay secret.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. This is not a test, so there are no right or wrong answers.
2. Each question should be answered by marking only one of the answer spaces. If you do not find an answer that fits exactly, use one that comes closest. If any question does not apply to you, or you are not sure what it means, just leave it blank.
3. It is best to use a pencil so that you may erase if you change your answer.

PLEASE DO NOT PUT YOUR NAME ON SURVEY.

PLACE SURVEY IN BLANK ENVELOPE UPON COMPLETION.

These questions ask for some general information about you. Please mark the response that best describes you.

1. How old are you?

____15

____16

____17

____18

____19

____20

____21

2. How many years have you been in high school?

____

3. Are you?

____Female

____Male

4. What do you consider yourself to be?
(choose that apply)

____White

____Black

____American Indian/Native American, Eskimo or Aleut

____Spanish/Hispanic/Latino

____Asian or Pacific Islander

____Mixed (Please specify:_____)

This section asks about your experiences at school

5. Putting them all together, what were your grades like before you attended alternative school?

____Mostly F's

____Mostly D's

____Mostly C's

____Mostly B's

____Mostly A's

6. Putting them all together, what are your grades like while attending alternative school?

____Mostly F's

____Mostly D's

____Mostly C's

____Mostly B's

____Mostly A's

7. In the last year while attending traditional school, approximately how many whole days did you miss because you skipped or "cut"?

____None

____1

____2

____3

____4-5

____6-10

____11 or more

8. In the last year while attending alternative school, approximately how many whole days did you miss because you skipped or "cut"?

____None

____1

____2

____3

____4-5

____6-10

____11 or more

9. While attending traditional high school, how important was the schoolwork you were assigned was meaningful and important?

____Very meaningful and important

____Somewhat meaningful and important

____Not meaningful and important

10. While attending the alternative high school, how important is the schoolwork you are assigned are meaningful and important?

____Very meaningful and important

____Somewhat meaningful and important

____Not meaningful and important

11. How important do you think the things you are learning in alternative school are going to be for your later life?

____Very important

____Quite important

____Fairly important

____Slightly important

____Not at all important

12. When you were attending traditional high school how often did you:

Enjoy Being in School ____Never ____Seldom____Sometimes____Often____Almost always

Hate Being in School____Never ____Seldom____Sometimes____Often____Almost always

Try to do your best in school___Never___Seldom____Sometimes___Often___Almost always

13. While attending alternative school how often do you:

Enjoy Being in School ____Never ____Seldom____Sometimes____Often____Almost always

Hate Being in School____Never ____Seldom____Sometimes____Often____Almost always

Try to do your best in school___Never___Seldom____Sometimes___Often___Almost always

14. In traditional school when I did a good job my teacher noticed and let me know about it.

____Never ____Seldom____Sometimes____Often____Almost always

15. In alternative school when I do a good job my teacher notices and let me know about it:

____Never ____Seldom____Sometimes____Often____Almost always

16. Are your grades better in alternative school than in traditional high school?

____Never ____Seldom____Sometimes____Often____Almost always

17. There were lots of chances for students in traditional high school to talk with a teacher one-on-one:

____Never ____Seldom____Sometimes____Often____Almost always

18. There are lots of chances for students in alternative school to talk with a teacher one-on-one.

____Never ____Seldom____Sometimes____Often____Almost always

19. When attending traditional high school if I had a personal problem I could ask a teacher, counselor, or principal for help.

____Never ____Seldom____Sometimes____Often____Almost always

20. When attending alternative school if I had a personal problem I could ask a teacher, a teacher, counselor, or principal for help.

____Never ____Seldom____Sometimes____Often____Almost always

21. My parent's notice when I am doing a good job and let me know about it:

____Never ____Seldom____Sometimes____Often____Almost always

22. How often do your parents tell you they're proud of you for something you've done?

____Never ____Seldom____Sometimes____Often____Almost always

23. My relationship with my parents has improved since I have been attending alternative school:

____NO!!!____ no ____About the same ____yes____YES!!!

24. My relationship with my friends has improved since I have been attending alternative school:

____NO!!!____ no ____About the same ____yes____YES!!!

25. My overall life has improved since I have been attending alternative school:

____NO!!!____no____yes____YES!!!____About the same

26. I would rather be attending a traditional high school rather than an alternative school:

____NO!!!____no____yes____YES!!!

Appendix H

Frequency Responses to Research Questions in Relation to Interview Questions

Research Questions	Interview Questions
How do alternative schools encourage students to stay in school?	T10, T11, T16, T17, T18, T19, T23 C 10, C17, C18, C20, C23 A5, A7, A10, A17, A18, A20, A23, A24
Why do teachers and students believe at-risk students drop out of traditional school settings?	T9, T15, T16, T17, T18, T22, T23 C8, C9, C11, C17, C19, C23 A6, A7, A8, A9, A10, A11, A17, A18, A19, A23
What role do teachers, counselors and administrators play in the success or failure in alternative and traditional education programs?	T5, T6, T7, T8, T9, T10, T15, T16, T18, T19, T22, T23 C5, C6, C7, C9, C10, C15, C16, C17, C18, C20, C23, A5, A7, A8, A10, A11, A15, A17, A18, A19, A20, A23
What role does parent participation play in the success or failure of students in alternative and traditional programs?	T12, T14, T17 C7, C12, C14, C17, C23, C24 A7, A9, A10, A12, A14, A17, A23
1-23 Interview Question Number	
T = Teacher C = Counselor A = Administrator	

Appendix I

Frequency Distribution Survey Results

QUESTION	Frequency #	RESPONSE
1. How old are you?	n = 79	15 16 17 18 19 20 21 **10 9 27 20 11 2 0**
2. How many years have you been in high school?	n = 78	1 yr. 2 yrs. 3yrs. 4 yrs. 5 yrs. 6 yrs. **12 17 25 21 2 1**
3. Are you? Female or Male	n = 78	Female Male **35 43**
4. What do you consider yourself to be?	n = 78	White Black American Ind. Hisp. Asian Mixed **54 3 8 9 0 4**
5. Putting them all together, what were your grades like before you attended alt. school?	n = 79	Mostly F's Mostly D's Mostly C's Mostly B's Mostly A's **29 27 13 10 0**
6. Putting them all together, what are your grades like while attended alt. school?	n = 78	Mostly F's Mostly D's Mostly C's Mostly B's Mostly A's **0 1 12 43 22**
7. How many days did you skip while attending traditional school?	n = 79	None 1 2 3 4-5 6-10 11 or more **15 2 4 7 9 6 36**
8. How many days have you skipped while attending alternative school?	n = 76	None 1 2 3 4-5 6-10 11 or more **31 8 7 7 15 5 3**
9. How meaningful and important is the work in traditional high school?	n = 79	Very meaningful and important **9** Somewhat meaningful and important **37** Not meaningful and important **33**
10. How meaningful and important is the work in alternative high school?	n = 78	Very meaningful and important **56** Somewhat meaningful and important **22** Not meaningful and important **0**
11. How important are the things your are learning in alt. school going to be later in life?	n = 78	Very Important **41** Quite Important **22** Fairly Important **14** Slightly Important **1** Not at All Important **0**
12. When you were attending traditional high school how often did you:	n = 79 n = 78 n = 82	Enjoy Being in School Never Seldom Sometimes Often Almost Always **20 26 17 11 3** Hate Being in School Never Seldom Sometimes Often Almost Always **1 10 19 20 28** Try to do your best in school Never Seldom Sometimes Often Almost Always **10 16 21 20 15**

QUESTION	FREQUENCY #	RESPONSE
13. While attending alternative school how often do you:	n = 79	Enjoy Being in School Never Seldom Sometimes Often Almost Always **0 6 11 26 36**
	n = 78	Hate Being in School Never Seldom Sometimes Often Almost Always **23 33 19 2 1**
	n = 80	Try to do your best in school Never Seldom Sometimes Often Almost Always **1 0 4 23 52**
14. In traditional school my teacher noticed when I did a good job:	n = 75	Never Seldom Sometimes Often Almost Always **27 25 10 10 3**
15. In alternative school my teacher noticed when I did a good job:	n = 78	Never Seldom Sometimes Often Almost Always **3 3 8 18 46**
16. Are your grades better in alternative school than in traditional high school?	n = 82	Never Seldom Sometimes Often Almost Always **1 0 9 4 68**
17. Chances to talk with a teacher one-on-one in traditional high school:	n = 80	Never Seldom Sometimes Often Almost Always **18 28 19 8 7**
18. Chances to talk with a teacher one-on-one in alternative school:	n = 79	Never Seldom Sometimes Often Almost Always **3 2 5 13 56**
19. In traditional high school if I had a personal problem I could ask a teacher, counselor or principal?	n = 76	Never Seldom Sometimes Often Almost Always **24 13 22 9 8**
20. In alternative school if I had a personal problem I could ask a teacher, counselor or principal?	n = 79	Never Seldom Sometimes Often Almost Always **4 6 8 13 48**
21. My parents notice and tell me when I do a good job:	n = 79	Never Seldom Sometimes Often Almost Always **4 9 13 14 39**
22. How often do your parents tell they're proud of you?	n = 81	Never Seldom Sometimes Often Almost Always **10 5 14 24 28**
23. My relationship with my parents has improved since I have been attending alternative school:	n = 79	NO!!! no About the same yes YES!!! **7 4 21 22 25**

Appendix I Continued

QUESTION	FREQUENCY #	RESPONSE				
24. My relationship with my friends has improved since I have been attending alternative school:	n = 79	NO!!!	no	About the same	yes	YES!!!
		10	**3**	**34**	**19**	**13**
25.My overall life improved since I have been attending alternative school:	n = 78	NO!!!	no	About the same	yes	YES!!!
		2	**3**	**19**	**38**	**16**
26. I would rather be attending a traditional high school than an alternative school?	n = 79	NO!!!	no	yes	YES!!!	
		56	**16**	**5**	**2**	