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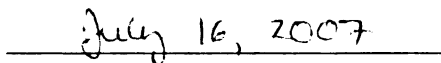
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WHAT BECOMES OF HIGH SCHOOL REFORM: THE CASE OF AN  
ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL

By

Stephen Heywood Marsden

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to  
Michigan State University  
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## **ABSTRACT**

### **WHAT BECOMES OF HIGH SCHOOL REFORM: THE CASE OF AN ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL**

**By**

**Stephen Heywood Marsden**

The purpose of the research was to investigate the factors influencing the sustainability of an alternative educational program as a high school reform. The general objective of the study was to collect information from three levels of analysis: institutional, organizational, and individual.

The research involved a review of the historical development of an alternative high school, the organizational role of school personnel in identifying and placing at-risk students in the alternative high school, and the individual educational outcomes of a group of twelve students selected for placement in the alternative high school. The findings indicate that educational reform, which departs from the grammar or regularities of schooling, is less likely to sustain itself as a unique and distinctive feature. Factors found in the three explanatory ideas help explain the effectiveness/ineffectiveness of the current alternative high school as an educational reform.

A limitation of the study is that it is qualitative in nature: only one school district was studied, and the number of participants was limited to twenty; hence no broad generalizations can be made. The use of interviews in this study also has some potential limitations in as much as there is a possibility of missed responses and/or a lack of disclosure.

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## **DEDICATION**

**This study is dedicated to my parents, Harvey and Harriet Marsden; my wife, Kristine  
Frogner; my son, Matthew S. Marsden; and my daughter Abby E. Marsden**

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Although this study and its findings are the responsibility of this author, several individuals have contributed to its completion. I wish to extend my appreciation to those individuals who provided guidance and support throughout the completion of this study.

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## PREFACE

After thirty plus years in the field of education, my interest in “doing what is best for kids” dominates and drives my daily interactions with students, parents, and colleagues. As Deborah Meier states, “Schools embody the dreams we have for our children.” Providing educational opportunities to at-risk students, in the hope of keeping them in school, is of the utmost importance. I have seen students become *turned-off and tuned-out* to their education because of academic failure, attendance problems, low involvement in school activities, inconsistencies in school policy, and a lack of connection to the school environment. My interest in alternative education gained momentum as I saw the procedure by which counselors and administration identified at-risk students and recommended them for placement in the alternative high school. The process of identifying and placing at-risk students in the alternative high school program seemed to be haphazard and confusing. I saw students who were failing enroll successfully in the alternative program, while others continued to flounder in the traditional educational program. I began to study the alternative educational program as one viable resource to help students complete their educational career. When talking with colleagues, I sensed a mutual feeling of frustration regarding the same issues of identification and placement of at-risk students in the alternative program. When my colleagues were asked why some students were referred for placement and other students were not, they responded, “There’s a lack of commitment on the part of students and parents. We are missing the students who fall under the radar, and we lose them between the cracks. We definitely need specific criteria and guidelines for placement.” As I questioned school personnel, my interest grew and I asked two questions: (1) why did

not more students enroll in the alternative program and (2) once there, what influenced the student success.

Training in special education taught me that students do not learn at the same rate or in the same way. Failure over an extended period of time tends to produce a feeling that successful learning is impossible. Students lose interest, and motivation disappears producing more failure. Disappointment over an extended period of time also results in the interruption of skill development. The alternative educational program offers the opportunity for at-risk students to break the failure cycle and achieve the goal of a high school diploma. Raywid (2001) states that if students have demonstrated they are not going to make it in one kind of school, we should let them try another. Research over the last fifteen to twenty years has rediscovered the importance of real engagement in learning. Engagement depends on authentic learning. Authentic learning occurs when student interests are stimulated. The purpose of the alternative program is to provide the opportunity for authentic learning.

There is a story behind this study. Initially, I was interested in why students dropped out of high school. As I pursued this question, I realized that I was particularly interested in whether the alternative high school could make a difference in offering students the opportunity to both complete their secondary education and prevent them from dropping out. In 2001, I was appointed principal of the Oakwood Alternative High School in the Hilltop School District\*. This appointment afforded me first-hand experience in the referral process, the factors influencing the placement process, insights

\* The name of the alternative high school, traditional high school, and school district has been changed for confidentiality reasons.

into the inner workings of the educational opportunities offered to the students, and the educational experiences of the students. During my tenure, I questioned whether the school was working successfully. I was particularly interested in the educational experiences of the students and the outcomes regarding the choice of placement. As I pursued the second question it became clear that my study really was not about how organizations processed its clients but rather about the success or failure of the alternative high school reform. My interest evolved to include the history of Oakwood Alternative High School, the factors influencing the organization (the school personnel) in processing the students for placement in the alternative school; and the educational experiences and outcomes of a group of twelve students selected for placement in the alternative school. The focus of this study was about the much larger question of why the alternative high school reform had a poor success rate shown at the three levels of analysis. The research question became what became of this innovative high school reform?

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## CHAPTER 1

“Education has been transformed from one of the avenues to economic success to an exclusive door of opportunity for achieving the good life. Those who have an education may access the incredible richness of economic opportunity in the United States; those without it are doomed to a life of economic servitude or even worse.”

R. Barr and W. Parrett

The purpose of this case study is to investigate, describe, and explain the fate of an alternative high school reform. The study seeks to find out what happened to an alternative high school that evolved over a twenty year period from having a relatively clear identity to one that became blurred, diffuse, and ultimately not very effective.

Three trajectories form the focus of this study:

- First, the institutional (the alternative high school) – what is its history and purpose?
- Second, the organizational (the school personnel) – how do they process students?
- Third, the client centered (the students moving through the process) – what influences their placement, educational experiences, outcomes, and perceptions.

The institutional trajectory considers school related factors. This idea has been referred to as the *grammar of schooling* (Tyack and Cuban, 1993). The grammar of schooling includes the traditionally accepted practices of age grading, the division of

knowledge into separate subjects, and pre-established curriculum. Students are required to complete academic tasks and show mastery through examinations. This grammar of schooling persists because it enables teachers to discharge their expected duties in a predictable fashion and cope with the everyday tasks that school board, principals, and parents expect them to perform. At the end of the school year, students are rewarded with academic credit. Success means earning the required number of credits within a given school year and moving on to the next grade level, while failure means staying in the same place or dropping out. Could alternatives that challenge such sturdy regularities survive and even thrive? Or is it likely that what starts as *alternative* is pulled gradually back into the institutional orbit of *schooling*?

The organizational trajectory takes up processes that educators engage in around the school in question, most particularly how identification and placement decisions get made by guidance counselors, principals, and other parties, including students themselves. School personnel act and react to established policies (written and unwritten), make decisions based on attitudes and perceptions, and interact with students.

Client centered trajectory refers to students and their career choices during the school years. By comparing students who attend the alternative schools with those who qualified but chose instead to attend the *regular* high school, we can examine the effect of each school in such terms as student GPA, graduation rates, and post-secondary plans. The concern here focuses on the educational experiences of the students, their educational outcomes, and the perceptions of their experiences.

The study uses the term *trajectory* to indicate the arc of development at these three levels of analysis over an extended period of time. In this sense the study is historical, while situating the experiences and perceptions of involved individuals in larger processes of school (and district) accommodations and tendencies.

### The Problem

Americans have created the most comprehensive system of public schooling in the world, yet fail to reach the total population of our youth. The needs of the at-risk student population, a term at once capacious and ambiguous, are overlooked. Schools are faced with the dilemma of what to do with students who (1) are not succeeding in school and/or (2) do not seem to fit into the institutional mold of schooling; taken in these two senses, *at-risk* seems to define a problem that at once refers to agency by students and to agency by the institution that educates. Dealing with these problems poses, for both schools and communities, a complex array of moral, ethical, and educational difficulties (Barr & Parrett, 1995). Forty years ago, students who were *turned off and tuned out* to learning were referred to as socially and culturally deprived; later the terminology changed to that of *disadvantaged*. More recently these students are described as “disengaged, disconnected, or at-risk” (Barr & Parrett, 1995). Today, at-risk students are defined as children/young adults who fail to make satisfactory academic progress, do not behave well in class, and do not do as they are told, or refuse to “play the educational game” directed by educators. Students identified at-risk are not limited to any single group. They cut across all social classes and occur in every ethnic group. Educators and public officials have most often attributed the problem of low

achievement by at-risk students to a lack of ability, character, or motivation. Others, it should be noted, attribute the problem to the school, not to the students.

The Center for Research on Effective Schooling for Disadvantaged Students (1994) estimates that between twenty and forty percent of our country's children are considered at-risk for educational failure. The Office of Educational Research and Improvement (1987) reveals that poor academic performance is the single strongest predictor of dropping out. It is also reported that the at-risk student's inability to adapt to prescribed roles of traditional learners and to traditional curriculum subject matter leads to low academic performance. The at-risk student often exhibits an inability to follow traditional schedules and timetables within schools and is challenged with daily attendance problems. To cope with this challenge one reform that many school districts have adopted is the establishment of so-called *alternative high schools*. Educators have hoped that this structural reform would address the problem(s) of the at-risk population and so reduce drop-out rates.

### The Case Study

In the 1960's, school districts began to develop and implement a new secondary school reform to address the problem of student drop-outs -- the establishment of the alternative high school. The alternative high school was designed to offer to students identified as being at-risk incentive to complete their educational career. The central quest of this study looks at the fate of this reform in a single case. The study will look at the history of one specific alternative high school (Jefferson Alternative High School), the educators responsible for identifying and processing at-risk students for placement in this school, and the educational experiences and outcomes of a group of

students allocated for enrollment in school. The study follows two groups of students identified as being at-risk through their four year secondary educational career. One group of at-risk students chose to enroll in the Brown School District's alternative high school, and the other group of at-risk students chose to enroll in the either Lincoln or Washington Traditional High School. The study may be conceived as a multi-level case study that is extensive in time while intensive via examination of both institutions and individuals.

The Brown School District selected for this case study was chosen out of convenience, easy access to information, and near-by familiarity. The Brown School District is located in a metro area on the fringe of a large city. Each of the fifteen elementary schools, three middle schools, two traditional high schools, and the alternative high school is fully accredited. The school district covers a geographic area of 35.3 square miles and services a population of 76,150 persons. The total enrollment of the district is 11,328 students. The alternative educational program draws its population from five feeder schools, those of three middle schools and two high schools.

In its mission statement, the Brown School District states, "The education of our students is our primary focus. We guarantee to all students the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to become effective citizens of the world. Our students are successful because parents, staff, and the community share high expectations for quality instruction and successful student learning. We stress quality. Our students and staff are challenged to excel. Our students annually represent high achievement in academics, athletics, career and technical education, and performing arts."

The Brown School District's community profile is depicted in Table 1.1

---

*Table 1.1*

Brown School District Community Profile 1999/2000 School Year

Population	76,150
Number of Households	30,689
Average Household Size	2.6
Single Parent Household with Children (%)	9.3
Adults in the district with High School Diploma (%)	87.6
Adults in the district with Bachelors Degree (%)	22.7
Median Household Income	\$59,571
Average Household Income	\$39,463
School Age Children (%)	17.1

---

Table 1.2 provides data regarding enrollment in the secondary educational programs (traditional and alternative high schools).

---

*Table 1.2*

Enrollment Summaries 1999/2000 School Year \*

<u>Grade</u>	<u>Traditional</u>	<u>Alternative High</u>
9 <sup>th</sup>	1,029	94
10 <sup>th</sup>	953	39
11 <sup>th</sup>	526	48

---

\*Note. The numbers presented in this table reflect a comparison of the enrollments in each grade level at the Jefferson Alternative High School and the traditional high schools for the specific year 1999/2000. These figures do not represent, nor can they be interpreted to represent the graduation rates for the traditional high school and alternative high school. These enrollment numbers are fairly typical each year.

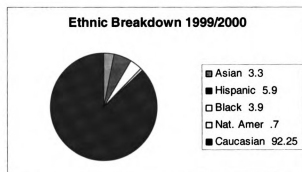
Enrollment in the alternative program is approximately nine percent of the total enrollment in the traditional high school program.

Table 1.3 provides the ethnic breakdown of the district's student population.

---

*Table 1.3*

**Ethnic Breakdowns 1999/2000 School Year**



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The ethnic breakdown of the alternative high school reflects similar patterns. The majority of the students are Caucasian (ninety-four percent); four percent Hispanic and two percent African-American.

Table 1.4 provides a breakdown of the staffing assignments for the secondary educational programs.

---

*Table 1.4*



### Staffing Assignments 1999/2000 School Year

<u>Staffing</u>	<u>Traditional High Schools</u>	<u>Alternative High School</u>
Total Staff	210	15
Teaching Staff	138	9
Counselors	8	1
Administrators	8	1
Student/Teacher Ratio	23:1	15:1

---

Four years is considered the normal period of time for a high school student to earn a regular high school diploma. Each student followed in this study was provided the opportunity to enter or leave the particular educational program (alternative and traditional high schools) chosen during this four year period.

The student's grade status is determined by the number of credits the student earns within a given school year. Students have the opportunity to earn a total of three credits each semester, or a total of six credits per school year. The following information is a breakdown of grade standings for the secondary programs:

- 0 – 5 Credits Freshman
- 6 – 11 Credits Sophomore
- 12 – 15 Credits Junior
- 16 – 22 Credits Senior.

A total of 22 credits are required for graduation.

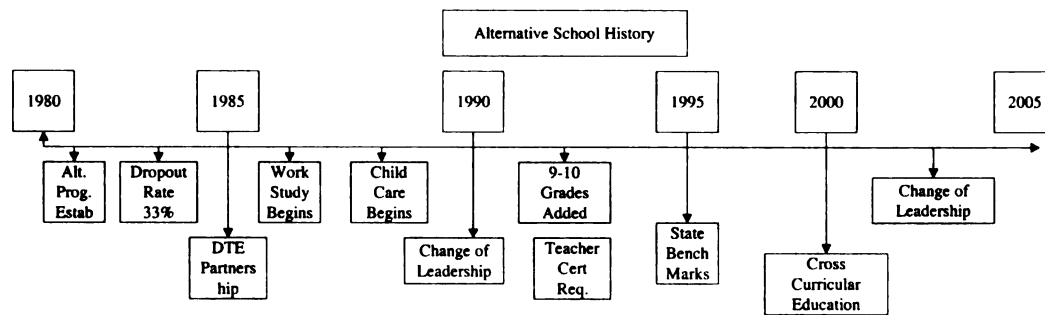
A brief description of the school will help situate the study for the reader. The program was established in the early 1980's. The Jefferson Alternative High School

began by enrolling students in the eleventh and twelfth grades only. In the 1990's, the ninth and tenth grades were added to the program. Students were recommended for placement in the alternative program by school personnel and/or by student selection. The alternative educational program was designed for students who had not been successful according to the normal standards of the traditional classroom environment and were not considered to be disciplinary problems. The program offered opportunities to address the various factors that affect students and their academic shortcomings, namely academic achievement and attendance. Student success was encouraged through smaller class size, which permitted teachers the opportunity to better know the students and to provide a supportive and positive environment through one-on-one instruction and reinforcement. In addition to academic learning, the alternative educational program strove to teach the student values and responsibilities necessary to become productive citizens in the community. The mission statement of the alternative educational program has been "to meet the students' needs, both social and academic, to prepare for the completion of their high school diploma, the world of work, and to become productive contributing members in our community." A major part of the story concerns how this school evolved over an extended period of time, as depicted in Table 1.5. Why such evolution should occur is one of the issues this study ponders.

---

*Table 1.5*

Alternative School Summary Timeline




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### Research Questions

The research questions behind this study focus on three levels of analysis:

- **Institutional** - What is the history behind the establishment of the alternative education program? What was its distinct identity and mission? How did the school evolve over time and in response to what set of forces and factors?
- **Organizational** - How were students identified for placement? What were the criteria for assigning membership? Who makes the decision for placement in the alternative educational program? What were the perceptions of the school personnel of the alternative program?
- **Client Centered** – What were the educational experiences of the students? What were the outcomes of these experiences? What difference did assignment to the alternative school make in comparison with continuing in the regular high school?

This study documents how Jefferson Alternative High School lost its identity and mission; the counselors lost the sense of why the student would go to the alternative school as opposed to remaining in the traditional high school and allowed the decision

for placement to be made by the students, and the data show that the at-risk student who chose to remain in the traditional high school had a better success rate in terms of remaining in school, graduating, obtaining employment, and other outcomes. Taken together these are ironic if not atypical outcomes. They beg for explanations, which will be supplied, albeit in speculative form, in the concluding chapter.

### Significance

Tyack and Tobin (1994) report that continuity in the grammar of schooling has frustrated generations of reformers who have sought to change the standardized organizational forms. . . . Why do challenges generally not succeed? According to Tyack and Tobin when reforms present a new departure from the regularities of schooling, they typically take hold on the periphery of the system in specialized niches, such as the alternative high school, for groups of students who do not fit the regular clientele for batch processing. The sustainability of reform is difficult. Why do many educational reforms fail? During the course of implementation a reform of various kinds often are conformed gradually but relentlessly to the commonplace outlines of what Metz (2003) has referred to as *real school*. There are many forces that influence the success of the reform including demographic, economic, cultural, political, sociological, and educational. Why did Jefferson Alternative High School evolve in the way that it did? After presenting details of the case, the study has applied three interpretative ideas to the data:

- Shopping mall high school (Powell et. al., 1985)
- Street-level bureaucracy (Lipsky, 1980)
- Stigma (Goffman, 1963)

Together these disparate ideas help to explain the fate of this particular reform while pointing to some of the larger issues in the case.

Chapter Two presents a historical perspective of the development and practices of the alternative high school reform based on the literature review on this subject.

Chapter Three presents the methodology used in this study. Included is the rationale, data collection, and sampling procedures.

Chapter Four provides an institutional history of the school as situated in its district. This chapter will describe how, over time, Jefferson Alternative High School gradually evolved to look in many respects like the traditional high school.

Chapter Five looks at organizational process. The chapter examines the school personnel responsible for identification of students for placement in the alternative high school and the decision making process by which placement is made. This chapter reveals how counselors and others involved in helping students to choose which school to attend often did not agree on the criteria to utilize in the identification and placement process because district policies became unclear as the school's identity and mission blurred.

Chapter Six presents a client-centered description of twelve students identified for placement in the alternative high school. The educational experiences of these students are traced over a four year period and the outcome of their choice of placement is shown.

Chapter Seven presents an exploration of three perspectives; the shopping mall high school, street-level bureaucracy, and stigma that explains the trajectory of the alternative high school reform. The shopping mall high school perspective helps

explain the institutional level analysis, the street-level bureaucracy perspective helps explain both the organizational and client centered analysis and stigma helps explain both the organizational and client centered analysis.

Chapter Eight reflects my personal observations, thoughts, and reflections regarding this particular alternative high school reform.

## CHAPTER 2

“Leaving school is usually one more step on a treadmill of discouragement, failure, and escape. But the individual tragedy is also a national waste.”

Dropout Tragedies, *Life*, 1960

Three trajectories form the focus of the study:

- First, institutional (the alternative school) – what is its history and purpose?
- Second, organizational (the counseling process) – how does it work?
- Third, client (the students moving through the process) – what influences their placement, perceptions, and educational outcome?

History repeatedly emphasizes dropping out of high school is a serious problem in public education. In the early 1990's, statistics from the U. S. Department of Education showed that about thirty percent of all students entering public high school as freshmen failed to graduate within the four year period of their schooling (Sherrow, 1996). Student success in school is directly related to the culture of school, which is based on academic engagement and school membership. Academic engagement is the student putting forth mental effort to achieve the knowledge and skills associated with the outcomes of formal schooling. Academic engagement is not present when learning depends on extrinsic rewards, when learning is restricted, and when educators are obsessed with covering *all* the material. School membership means establishing a bond

between the student, the adults in the school, and the norms governing the institution. School membership is achieved when social relations between the students and the school exist in both the formal and informal life of the institution. This occurs when the student is attached, committed, and involved in activities of the institution. If the student believes that the activities and the goals of the school are inappropriate for him or her, then the commitment of the student will be weak (Wehlage, 1989).

### At-Risk Students

Many disruptive forces influence the student's decision to leave school early. When the student fails in the school environment, they tend to continue this pattern of failure in their adult life and vocational world (Bowman, 1960). Students who leave school can be categorized in two ways. First is the involuntary group. This category is comprised of those students who leave because of transfer, suspension, and/or expulsion or as a result of a personal crisis such as illness, pregnancy, or family obligations. The second category is comprised of students who leave voluntarily. These students either have alternatives to school participation, or they have found participation in school completely intolerable or impossible.

Table 2.1 summarizes the key characteristics associated with the at-risk student and dropping out. The scholars reviewed are listed along the left side of Table 2.1; and the "X's" placed in the adjoining squares, identify the commonly held attributes. These scholars report that the major factors influencing student apathy in learning are:

1. school membership-failure of the student in establishing a feelings of connectedness to the school
2. lack of academic achievement



3. lack of school participation (involvement in extra-curricular activities)
4. truancy
5. conflict with authority figures
6. lack of social and emotional skills (communication skills and poor peer relationships).

---

*Table 2.1*

**Common Characteristics Identifying At-Risk Students and Dropping Out**

Scholars	Lack of School Social/Emotion	Lack of Academic	Lack of School Participation	Truancy	Authority Conflict	Discipline Problems	Lack of Skills
	Membership	Achievement	Participation				
Cervantes, 1965	X	X		X	X	X	X
Dorn, 1996		X	X	X		X	
Ekstrom, 1986	X	X		X	X		X
Hicks, 1969		X	X	X	X		
Kronick/Hargis, 1990	X	X	X	X			X
Mueller, 1964	X	X	X			X	X
Tidwell, 1988	X	X				X	
Wehlage/Rutter, 1989	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Topez/Invanoff, 1962	X	X	X	X		X	X

---

These scholars point out that the at-risk student usually follows a sequence of steps that typically leads to the decision to leave school. The cycle begins with a feeling that the student does not fit into the school environment (school membership). The student's grades begin to decline and failure increases. This leads to a lack of participation in extra curricular activities, such as attending after school sporting events, joining clubs, and other social activities. School is viewed as a negative environment. The student begins to be absent from school more and more frequently and soon

encounters conflicts with authority figures because of a lack of social skills necessary for positive interpersonal relationships with teachers and peers. This leads them to the next level which is laced with behavior problems and rebellion. The school tries to correct the behavior with suspensions. This punishment, in turn, leads to parental involvement, which fosters defensiveness and negativism on the part of the student. Loss of interest soon leads to grades lower than those of their peers. To avoid the embarrassment and feelings of inferiority, the student becomes truant more frequently and participates in more behaviors that require stronger disciplinary action. The student soon wants to leave this negative environment and enter into the world of work hoping it will be a more positive and rewarding situation.

Today, at-risk students are defined as children/young adults who fail to make satisfactory academic progress; do not behave well in class; do not do as they are told; or refuse to play the educational “game” defined by educators. The at-risk students often have special needs; they are in the language minority; are disruptive; are pregnant; are more often emotionally disturbed; are absent more; talk-back to teachers; and may be quiet and passive kids (Gibson, 1997). The at-risk students do not fit the mainstream mold (Kerka, 2003). There is a tendency to see at-risk students not as “turned off”, but as disruptive, deviant, and dysfunctional. Young people considered at-risk need the same things other children and adolescents need: the opportunity to learn and develop guidance in making constructive choices, and help with making connections to the school culture (Grobe, et. al., 2001).

Kronick and Hargis (1990) report that the at-risk student falls into one of four categories: quiet/passive student, reactive student, adequate or above academic potential

and drop-out/drop-in student. Quiet/passive students go unnoticed until they drop out and are usually comprised of the low achievers who have repeated grade failures. The reactive students are comprised of students who are out of synchronization with their academic learning abilities. These, too, are low achievers and have repeated grade failures; however, they are distinguished from the quiet/passive students in that they over-react to their chronic failures. They avoid failing by totally avoiding school. The final group of at-risk students is the drop-out/drop-ins. These students tend to dropout of their academic learning, but not out of the physical environment of the school. These students often leave school and then return semester after semester for social reasons.

### The Alternative High School

It is estimated that every year, 2.4 million students are considered for placement in an alternative educational program (Robertson, 1997). Each year, school personnel face the problem of where to place students who do not seem to fit with the rest of the school population. “The question is not ‘Is it possible to educate all children well?’ but rather ‘Do we want to do it badly enough?’” (Meier, 1995, pg 12). According to the American Federation for Teachers, education is responsible for three basic goals: insuring student safety, preventing disruptions in student learning, and providing appropriate help to the disruptive and violent student. In order to accomplish these goals, many school districts have implemented alternative education programs. These alternative programs have emerged as one way to serve many of our youth who have not succeeded in the traditional public school setting (Wint, 2003).

According to the Department of Education (2002), a commonly accepted definition of alternative schools does not exist. However, the Common Core of Data

(2002) defines an alternative education school as a public elementary or secondary school that addresses needs of students that typically cannot be met in the regular school, provides nontraditional education, serves as an adjunct to a regular school, or falls outside the categories of regular, special education, or vocational education (U. S. Department of Education, 2002). It is estimated that there are about 20,000 alternative programs and schools in the United States (Barr and Parrett, 2001).

During the 1960s and 1970s, there was a period of social unrest and upheaval. Society experienced an avalanche of youthful rebellion that became a stimulus for action by concerned educators (Sagor, 1999). It was during this time that alternative schools proliferated across America. School boards and school administrators expressed genuine sympathy for students who could not or would not succeed in the mainstream. School officials had to contend with a public that was demanding order and tradition in the schools. Much of this concern was generated by the depictions of the youthful rebellions on TV and in the movies. As a result, school boards took steps to deal with alienated youth and began to allocate funds to help these youth who did not fit the mainstream. Supporters of the alternative schools argued that the programs were of value because all children do not learn in the same manner or at the same rate. To be effective, alternative education must adapt to the uniqueness of the setting, the transitory nature of the population, and the characteristics of the youth (Guerin and Denti, 1999). Successful alternative programs searched for ways to make learning relevant and applicable to life outside of school. These programs offered more hands-on instruction, smaller class size, resources to assist with social and emotional issues, and vocational and career emphasis.

With federal legislation focusing on “leave no child behind”, there has been a push for increased accountability. In 2001, NCES surveyed 1,069 school districts about alternative schools and programs offered in their particular school district. A total of 1,540 school districts responded to the survey. The scope of the study was limited to public alternative schools, and programs administered by school districts. The study used the following definitions for at-risk students, alternative schools, and alternative programs:

- At-risk students – these are students in jeopardy of educational failure, as indicated by poor grades, truancy, disruptive behavior, pregnancy, or similar factors associated with temporary or permanent withdrawal from school.
- Alternative schools – usually housed in a separate facility where the students have been removed from the regular school.
- Alternative programs – usually housed within the regular school.

The data presented in the NCES study is based on the 848 responding school district (which is thirty-nine percent of the total districts surveyed) who reported having alternative schools and programs during the 2000/2001 school year. The total number of students enrolled in alternative schools and programs was 612,900. Larger districts with enrollment of 10,000 or more were more likely than smaller districts to have alternative schools and programs. Of the thirty-nine percent of the districts who had alternative schools and programs, sixty-five per cent had only one alternative school or program, and eighteen percent had two schools and/or programs. The study also pointed out that 1.3 per cent of all public school students attend a public alternative school or program.

During the 1999/2000 school year, thirty-three percent of the districts with alternative schools and programs reported that at least one of their schools or programs were unable to enroll new students because of staffing or space limitations.

According to the study, students enter and exit public alternative schools and programs for a variety of reasons and on an individual basis. The survey findings indicate that a variety of misbehaviors were reasons in themselves for transfers to alternative schools and programs. These misbehaviors included disruption to other students, possession or use of a weapon, possession or distribution of alcohol or drugs, physical fights, and disruptive –verbal behavior.

The study reported that seventy-four percent of the districts surveyed have a policy allowing students to return to their regular school. Twenty-five percent reported allowing only some students to return, and one percent of the districts did not allow students to return to their regular school. The reasons given for allowing students to return to their regular school were improved attitude, behavior, and motivation. One of the keys to successful alternative schools and programs is the staffing of the program. The study reports that the most successful programs have staff hired specifically to teach in the alternative schools. Eighty-six percent of the districts hire teachers specifically for the alternative schools. Forty-nine percent of the districts reported that the teachers were transferred by choice from the regular school, and ten percent assigned teachers involuntarily to teach in the alternative school.

The research also indicated the importance of having ancillary services available to the at-risk students. The ancillary services included counseling, social worker, and

school psychologist. Many of the students need these services to help direct them towards success in academic areas.

The scholars Raywid (1994), Natriello, et. al. (1986), Wehlage (1986), and Wint (2002) report the major characteristics associated with alternative educational programs. Table 2.2 summarizes their findings. The scholars are listed along the left side of the table and characteristics are listed across the top of the table. The “X’s” indicate the attributes most consistently associated with successful alternative educational programs.

*Table 2.2*

Alternative Educational Programs

Scholars	Low Teacher/ Pupil Ratio	Supportive Environment	Student Centered	Student Engagement	School Membership	School Autonomy
Natriello et al, 1986	X	X	X	X	X	
Raywid, 1994	X	X	X	X	X	X
Wehlage, 1986			X		X	X
Wint, 2002	X		X	X		X

Raywid’s research on alternative educational programs is accepted as one of the premier standards. “Today’s alternative schools seem a far cry from those of the ‘60’s when the genre first surfaced in public education” (Raywid, 1994, p 26). The alternative school reform represents the most definitive departure from the programmatic, organizational, and behavioral regularities of traditional education. The

alternative program was designed as a reform of the traditional high school. It focused on making a school a community, empowering staff, providing active student engagement in learning, providing a curriculum that focused on student interests and needs, and ensuring authentic assessment. But throughout its history there has been ambiguity about its purposes. Raywid asks, whether it is for all students? Should enrollment be by student choice or by assignment? Raywid reports two consistencies that have characterized the alternative program. First, alternative programs were designed to respond to students who were not responding to the traditional program of academic achievement. This trait is often linked with the unsuccessful students – those who were deemed *disadvantaged* or *at-risk* and who either could not or would not be successful in the traditional education program. Second, the alternative program represents a departure from traditional school organization, programs, and environment. This trait has linked alternative programs to the idea of innovation and creativity in practice and organization.

Raywid identifies three pure models of alternative educational programs upon which all other alternative programs are based. Type I model is referred to as the *popular innovation*. This model strives to make schools challenging and fulfilling for all of the students involved. This type of alternative program reflects organizational and administrative departures from the traditional programmatic innovations and is likely to reflect themes or emphases pertaining to course content or instructional strategy.

Raywid's Type II model is referred to as the *last chance*. In this program, students are usually assigned to the program and include in-school suspension



programs, cool-down rooms, or long term placements for chronically disruptive students. In this type of program students do not have choices or options.

Raywid's Type III model is the *remedial program*. This form of alternative program focuses on providing remediation or rehabilitation, which can be academic, social/emotional, or both. This program model centers on the idea that after successful treatment, students can regain entry into the mainstream program.

In practice, alternative programs are usually a blend of these models. For example, a Type II program may adopt Type III aspects. It determines how the school will be evaluated; how the students will be placed, and what is assumed about the school and the students

Alternative models II and III are based on the assumption that the problems lie within the student. Alternative program model I assumes that the problems can be explained by the school/student match. By altering the school's program and environment, the student's responses will be altered.

How do these programs rate in evaluation? According to Raywid, the Type II programs yielded the fewest benefits. His analysis reveals that this program made no difference in dropout or referral rates and contributed nothing toward resolving the problems they were thought to solve. In Type III programs, student behavior improved in the supportive environment. However, the program had two major disadvantages. First, the program is very costly because of the low teacher/pupil ratios. Second, the student success was temporary. When the students returned to the traditional programs, the students reverted to the old habits of not being academically engaged and behavior problems re-emerged.

The Type I model has experienced more success than the Type II and III models. The success experienced in model I came through supportive programs for the students and innovations in presentation of instruction; for example, utilizing hands-on instruction for the students rather than the old standard lecture.

Alternative programs adopted by school districts are usually a mixture of the three models. Raywid reports that successful alternative programs were marked by small teacher/pupil ratios, programs designed by those who were going to operate them, teachers who chose to work in the alternative program, students and parents who chose to participate in the program, and a structure able to maintain a high degree of autonomy. Altogether, there are three sets of factors that appear to account for the success of the alternative program. First, the school generates and sustains a sense of community. Second, the school makes learning engaging. Third, the school provides the organization and structure needed to sustain the first two. Research supports the importance of making alternative programs a place where students want to be affiliated. Raywid reports that the alternative school's most important facet is they are a true departure from the traditional school's teacher-student interactions. Success depends on attention to cultivating a strong sense of connection among the students and between the students and teachers.

Raywid points out in her research that in order for alternative programs to be successful, systemic change must occur. This supports Tyack and Tobin's (1994) research on the endurance of reform. In order for reform to be sustainable it must be internalized into the traditional regularities of schooling. Successful alternative programs are contingent on system-wide support, which in turn calls for school district

and state transformation. A good alternative program represents a carefully built community, an engaging curriculum, and a synchronized set of organizational standards and arrangements.

Why has there not been a strong movement toward developing alternative programs? Raywid's answer lies in the lack of instructional legitimacy. Alternative programs have an image problem. This is due to the mixing of the three models into a single inaccurate composite, and partly from the *school for losers'* bias. Raywid (1994) points out that this negative image will continue as long as there remains a single standardized program plus one or two others to accommodate *deviants*. Traditionally school improvement has sought reform through tightening and intensifying bureaucracy, while alternative programs pose an organizational alternative to bureaucracy.

Today, alternative programs face several challenges. These include the selection and placement process, the operational facilities and materials utilization (which include the structural facilities housing the alternative program and the educational materials used for instruction), and perceptions by the public about the program. Nearly all schools claim to hold high expectations for all students, but in reality what is professed is not always practiced (Lumsden, 1977). There is a tendency to see the at-risk student not as turned-off, but rather as disruptive, deviant, and dysfunctional (McGee, 2001). According to McGee alternative schools are no longer seen as creative outlets for students whose needs are not being met by the traditional school. They are perceived as places where disruptive students are sent in order to protect and benefit the students who remain in the traditional school setting. The negative image of the at-risk students

entering alternative schools limits the number and the diversity of the students going into the alternative program (McGee, 2001). All too often alternative schools are viewed as dumping grounds or warehouses for difficult students.

Alternative schools often have problems in credibility as a result of the inadequate physical structure and educational content presented within the program. Alternative schools frequently have only old, out-dated textbooks, boring workbooks and repetitive tasks, limited expectations from teachers, outdated computers, no gymnasium or library, and limited cafeteria services.

In order to be effective, alternative education must adapt to the uniqueness of the setting and the characteristics of the students attending the alternative program (Guerin and Denti, 1999). Lange and Sletten (2002, p. 2) report “There is still very little consistent, wide-ranging evidence of their effectiveness or even an understanding of their characteristics.” This is in part due to the absence of a clearly established, widely accepted definition framework of alternative schools.

### Summary

The contributions of the studies and ideas presented in this review are limited in that much of what has been gathered has been based on survey information that dealt with responses to Likert-type surveys. Researchers often assume causality without actually reporting the students’ perspective. Turning off and tuning out to the educational process are facilitated by factors that contribute to the alienation students feel and their sense that major discrepancies exist between what the school promises and what can be delivered (LeCompte and Dworkin, 1991).

This study will analyze the historical development of one alternative high school with regards to its conception and evolution over a twenty year period. The research will be looking at what became of this alternative program? To answer this question, the study will look at the organization's school personnel and their responsibility in providing or not providing support to the program through their perceptions and will look at the experiences of two groups of students recommended for placement in the alternative program through their perceptions and educational outcomes.

## CHAPTER 3

This case study is set in the Brown School District in Michigan. The aim of the study is to provide perspective in understanding what became of an alternative high school reform. The study will provide an understanding of the factors that influence:

- Decision making in the referral and placement process of students identified as at-risk in an alternative educational program
- the social and cultural ambiguities and stigmas that influences the selection and placement process from the insider's perspective
- the latent function of the alternative educational program
- the evolving history of the alternative educational program, and the perceptions of the participants regarding their educational experiences and outcomes.

The insider's perception of reality is instrumental to understand and accurately describing situations, behaviors, and feelings reported in this case study. Recording and reporting the decision makers' voices will help to provide a better understanding regarding the consistencies and inconsistencies that influence the selection process of students identified as at-risk for placement in an alternative educational program.

Service bureaucracies consistently favor some clients at the expense of others, despite the organizations' official regulations to the contrary. To understand how and why these consistencies and inconsistencies occur contrary to established rules and policy, we need to know how the individuals who make the decisions in the organization experience the milieu of the environment. It is important to understand what factors or issues influence their decisions making. This research looked at the identification

process of the at-risk students, the placement process, and the outcomes of the placement process. The at-risk students' academic achievement, attendance, and perceptions of their high school experiences will be reported.

### Data collection

Data collection was conducted in three stages. Stage one: academic information was collected from Brown School District's student records regarding attendance, academic achievement, and graduation during a four year period from 1999/2000 to 2002/2003. Stage two: data was collected from counselors and administrators regarding the identification and selection criteria of the at-risk students. This information was collected through one-on-one interviews with the administration and counselors. Stage three: data was collected from students identified at-risk and their parents via surveys and phone interviews; this data focused on student and parent perceptions of the educational experiences and outcomes of the student's education.

The researcher used the respondent's generalized answers and verbatim quotations from the interview questions. The generalized answers allow the reader to judge the quality of the work and to gain first hand insight into the experiences that the individuals encountered. Verbatim quotations provide concise, accurate, and personal descriptions of the secondary high school climate and the opportunities afforded to the at-risk students in dropout prevention programs.

### Sampling

The course of this study followed two groups of students identified as 'at-risk' through a four-year period (1999/2000 through 20002/2003). Students in each group were identified as at-risk according to the school district's informal selection criteria of

poor attendance and poor academic achievement. Poor academic achievement is defined as failing one or more core academic (language arts, math, science, and social studies) classes in a semester during the eighth grade year. Recommended for placement in the Jefferson Alternative High School at the end of eighth grade were 93 students from a total of 861. These 93 students were then divided into two groups. One group of 51 students actually enrolled in the alternative high school. The other group of 42 students chose to enroll in the traditional high school. These two groups were then divided into male and female members. Six males were randomly selected in each group.

Both groups were followed through the school years 1999/2000 to their graduation in the school year 2002/2003. The following outcomes were studied:

1. Educational
2. Occupational
3. Personal/Life satisfaction

Table 3.1 below shows the total number of students enrolled in the eighth grade at the three middle schools, the number of students failing one to four academic classes each semester during the 1998/1999 school year, the number of students recommended for placement in the alternative educational program, and the number of students who chose to enroll either in the alternative program and the traditional high school.

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*Table 3.1*

8<sup>th</sup> Grade Failures in the 1998/1999 School Year

<u>Enrollment</u>	<u>Failing 1-4 classes</u>	<u>Recommended/ Not placed</u>	<u>Recommended/Placed</u>
861	204	42	51



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Data were collect via school records regarding attendance patterns, academic achievement, and grade retention, and the graduation rates in 2003 at the end of the four year period of 1999 to 2003. Each student in each group was given a survey to complete regarding his high school experiences. In addition to completing the survey, each student was contacted via the telephone and asked a series of ten open-ended questions regarding perceptions of his high school experiences, post high school educational pursuits, employment information, and personal life satisfaction.

Parents of these students were surveyed to gather data regarding family demographics, socio-economic status, and general educational information. Further, administrators and counselors from the middle schools, high schools and alternative schools were interviewed regarding the at-risk student identification and selection process for the alternative program. Each of the participants from this group was given two sets of scenarios consisting of a brief educational description of four students. The first set of scenarios was four fictitious students and the second set of scenarios was four actual students. Administrators and counselors read each scenario to determine the possible placement of the student in the alternative educational program.

The following questions were addressed to administration, counselors, and students:

1. How are students identified as being at-risk? What school district policy is followed in the identification and placement process? These questions are directed to the decision making process.

2. How do administrators and counselors describe the educational environment provided to the at-risk students? These questions are concerned with the potential influence of stigma on the educational facilities provided to the at-risk students. The administrators and counselors are viewed as the acting agents within the school context. Their roles influence the experiences of the at-risk students.
3. What do administrators and counselors do to accurately monitor, analyze and respond appropriately to the concerns and needs of the at-risk student that impacts on the student's school experiences? The focus is placed on the data and information gathered to monitor of the student's learning and level of involvement in school, the communication process and the quality of promoting school membership between the student, parent and educational environment of the school.
4. What influences does the choice of placement have on educational outcomes of the at-risk students? The focus centers on understanding the student's perspective of schooling and how this reaction to placement in either the alternative or traditional educational program influences educational outcomes.
5. How does the influence of the alternative educational program impact the student's school experiences and the decision to complete the educational process? Do the perceptions of the educational process, as seen by administration, conform to the principles set forth by the theories of what

causes feelings of alienation, disconnectedness to school membership, and the influences of emotional intelligence?

The study was also concerned with capturing, interpreting, and explaining the ways in which individuals, groups, and organizations are influenced in the decision making process for placement of their clients in an alternative educational program. The researcher looked for general statements about the alternative educational programs, the perceptions of the educational process regarding the academic, and the social and emotional needs of the at-risk students.

The researcher organized and interpreted the data, generated categories, themes and patterns, and searched for alternative explanations of the data.

This study is limited by the selection of the small number of all male participants and the relatively small geographic area from which they came, thus the generalizations are limited by such a small sample. Second, minority youth were not studied. Male students were selected because of researcher preference and are justifiable, as the purpose of the study is to report the voice of the student regarding their individual school experiences. Based on the researcher's interest and the methodology used in this study, the researcher chose to limit the data collection to the student's self-perceptions about his experiences in school. The researcher is interested in the thinking, values, beliefs, and school experiences of the student.

## CHAPTER 4

Like many school districts across the country, the Brown School District experienced growing concern with graduation and dropout rates. During the 1960's and 1970's, at-risk or disengaged students were ignored. Students who were discipline problems were suspended. Students who had attendance problems were notified that when they hit the magic number of twelve absences, they would lose credit in the class. Little or nothing was done to offer these students alternative choices except to encourage them to attend adult education classes.

The Brown School District implemented its alternative program in the early 1980's. The program began as a Personal Development Program (PDP). "The dropout rates in the high schools were extremely high. The central administrative office decided that it was time to develop a program that would combat the high dropout rates" (Interview with School Administrator, 2001). The program was primarily designed for junior and senior classes that met off-campus (which meant the program was housed in a separate facility away from the existing high schools). The program targeted the student, 16 years of age, who was having problems on the main high school campus, but who was not a major discipline problem. Students were often referred to as *the kids in the cracks*. The program was modeled after the adult education program. Teachers were hired from the adult education program, and as in the adult education program, teachers were not required to be State certified teachers. The Jefferson Alternative High School issued high school credits, and students had to abide by the existing student code of conduct. The foundation of the school was to offer to the student a personalized approach. The idea was to offer more flexibility with fewer standards of achievement.

The program offered classes in language arts, social studies, math, science, and vocational and business skills. The *regular school rules* did not apply: “For example, if the student wanted a cigarette, during the breaks he/she could step outside, have a smoke and not suffer any disciplinary consequence” (Interview with School Administrator, 2001).

The student was required to sign a contract prior to admission to the alternative program and to abide by the school district’s attendance and disciplinary policy. These rules included a dress code, appropriate language, and mandatory attendance. The attendance policy operated much like that in the adult education program. The attendance criteria consisted of completing a specified number of instructional hours. The student was allowed a total of 21 hours of missed instruction. Academic credit was awarded based on academic achievement and the completion of the specified number of hours of instruction.

If a student wanted to take a day off, no questions were asked. For example, one student came in and stated ‘I’m going to take the day off. What do you think?’ I responded with ‘Well, you’ve got twenty-one hours you can miss. You’ve got some time; it’s your call. You don’t have to be here, and I’m not asking you what the reason is for you wanting to miss. You’re an adult you make the call. But remember that if you get to the twenty-one hours, and then you get in an accident or get sick, or God forbid someone in your family dies, you will be dropped for the rest of the semester, and you’ll lose your credit.’ The student thought it over and said ‘Okay, I guess I’ll stay.’ Student attendance hours were posted. This allowed the students to check their attendance on a daily basis.

It worked like magic. We even noticed that students were checking on each other. We had one student come in to the office and ask if his friend was in attendance. When he found out that his friend was absent, the student asked if he could go home and get him so he wouldn't be dropped from the program. The students watched out for each other. They began to take ownership. (Interview with School Administrator, 2001)

The program received referrals from the regular high schools counselors. At first, many of the students referred to the alternative program were discipline problems. The program's initial premise was not to accept the student with discipline problems. The first semester the alternative program was opened, 95 students enrolled. Students had to go through a screening interview where grades, attendance, and disciplinary records were checked. The policy of the alternative program was explained, and the student signed a contract stipulating that nonattendance or discipline issues would result in being dropped from the program. At the end of the first semester, half of the students dropped out. This high rate of dropping out was due to violations of the attendance policy. This failure rate caused the administration to question the attendance policy, but after much deliberation by the staff and the administration, it was decided that the attendance policy must be retained. The second semester 90 students enrolled. At the end of the second semester, 60 students earned credit. The dropout rate had declined from 50% to 33%. The program was beginning to show some success.

Our admissions criterion was to help *the kids in the cracks* (the students who were non achievers but did not act out or call attention to themselves). The student who was constantly high or who was in the *basement* (again this referral

is made to the student who did not pass academically, but still attended on a daily basis) was not accepted. The program was not going to do anything different for the student who was in the *basement* than was being done at the regular high school. We would just end up kicking them out. They needed help from some place else. We wanted the student that was lost, the one getting D's and E's. We wanted the student who just did not want to be in school, the one who couldn't wait to reach age 16 and dropout. This is the ones! Give us a shot at him. (Interview with School Administrator, 2001)

The alternative program started with three classrooms and one room for the administration (which consisted of a principal and a secretary). The teaching format was different from that of the regular high schools. Teachers were hired under an adult education contract. They were paid an hourly rate.

The teachers we hired for the alternative program wanted to teach in a different environment. Many of the teachers we hired were *the more seasoned teachers*.

The teachers were thrilled to be involved with the program and were having a good time with the students. Our classrooms looked a lot different from the regular high school classrooms. You could walk in to a classroom and see students sitting on top of the filing cabinets or sitting with their feet up on the desk. The teachers taught the students how to relate to each other and to adults. We taught the students to use polite communications; 'How do you do! It's nice to meet you.' The students learned that they were part of the school. (Interview with School Administrator, 2001)

During the alternative school's second or third year, a partnership was formed with Detroit Edison. One of Detroit Edison's executives heard about the school and its alternative approach to education. The executive approached the administration with a proposal to form a business/educational partnership. The students were taught job shadowing, given vocational opportunities, and taught employability skills necessary to get and retain a job in industry. Frequently students participated in field trips to various businesses and industries, such as the Fermi Nuclear plant. The students were given opportunities to job shadow employees at Detroit Edison, whether as a receptionist or a lineman.

One time, Detroit Edison was putting on a big gala event in downtown Detroit. Students were asked to help work at the event; they were given the opportunity to greet guests, to open their car doors, to escort the guest down the red carpet, or to work in the coat check. Detroit Edison even provided tuxedos for students. This opportunity solidified our partnership. It was terrific. Students began to see the importance of what they were learning. The students wrote papers about their experiences. This partnership provided the alternative program the chance to expand. (Interview with School Administrator, 2001)

The next year the alternative program began to incorporate a work-study aspect. The student would attend school for a half-day and then report to a job site for the remainder of the day. The student was allowed to earn up to two credits for their work experience. The only conditions were that the students had to be at their job sites on a daily basis and receive good work evaluations from their employers. The student also had to maintain employment for the length of the semester.



The teachers acted as mentors to the students. If a student came up a half credit short from graduating, the teacher would assign to the student an independent study. Even the administrator got involved.

One time a student came to me and told me he was a half credit short in English.

The administrator asked the student what interested him. The student said he was an avid deer hunter. The administrator and the student designed a project to study deer in their natural habitat. The student went to the DNR and researched the most populated areas in the county. The student selected a site, set up a deer blind, and video taped the feeding habits of deer. The student supplied feed for the deer and graphed the number of pounds of deer feed consumed and the feeding times. The student turned in a 75-page paper, typed and with pictures.

This is something a dropout never would have done at the regular high school. It was the best thing I had ever seen. When I took the paper to the English teacher, her response was 'Oh my God. Wow, it was there all the time.' That student came back to see me a month ago, and today he is the director of transportation at a neighboring school district. (Interview with School Administrator, 2001)

The alternative program evolved over the next couple of years. The program was moved to a larger facility. A day care facility was offered for the student with young children. The course offerings changed.

We began offering different perspectives on the regular academic subjects. The academic requirements were there, but the venue was different. For example, we substituted the History of the Wild West and Star Wars for the mandatory social studies. The school incorporated a

school store. Students were awarded credit based on the success of the store's operation. The student's grade was based on how far off the 'till' was at the end of each week. If the student slipped merchandise to friends, and the inventory did not match the gross receipts, the student's grade went down. The program became very successful."

(Interview with School Administrator, 2001)

In the 1990's there was a change in the school district's leadership. A new superintendent was hired. It was suggested that the alternative program adopt the quality schools philosophy espoused by Glasser's. The program was changed to accommodate ninth and tenth grade students. The idea was to work with the at-risk student and then send them back to the regular high school. The program was moved again to an old renovated elementary building. The staff was now required to be state certified. Teachers were held accountable for teaching the school district's educational benchmarks. Content areas were linked to the same textbooks used at the regular high school. The staff was told that if a student was to return to the regular high school from the alternative program, the student had to be familiar with the academic content used at the high school.

The student was expected to achieve the benchmarks (levels of academic proficiency) designed by the school district for math, science, language arts, and social studies. The at-risk students had to achieve the same levels of proficiency dictated by the MEAP test. The only difference between the alternative program and the regular high schools was the at-risk student was off-campus, and the class size was smaller.

New times, new thinking, accountability, pressure for mastery learning, and a lack of vision that not all students learn in the same way or at the same rate caused the alternative program to change. The central administration got caught up in the philosophy of *no child left behind*. The at-risk student wouldn't be left behind; they'd just be left in places where they could function best. The alternative program has become less and less *alternative* (Interview with School Administrator, 2001).

Community members and school personnel thought the program was becoming nothing more than a watered down version of the regular high school. Staff disenchantment grew as a result of the new expectations placed on them. The program changed again in 2000. Legislative changes (by the State Board of Education) were affecting the total educational perspective of the school district. These changes, such as grading the school district on graduation rates, drop out rates, State requirements for MEAP testing, and No Child Left Behind (NCLB) forced the school district to implement cross-curricular education. This meant that all secondary schools were to provide the same content class offerings in all its secondary programs. In other words, all of the high schools were required to offer the same content in the academic classes offered in the district. All language arts classes were required to teach the same content and use the same materials. The alternative program was required to use the same textbooks, benchmarks, and course content as used in the traditional high school. To accomplish this change, the alternative program's course offerings had to match those offered at the traditional high school. The child care center provided to the students was dropped. The work-study program was dropped. Students were required to take the

traditional language arts, math science, and social studies. Elective classes included art and computer keyboarding. The business/education partnership fell by the wayside. What had been an alternative educational program was now becoming a traditional educational program.

Today the alternative education program is divided into two schools. One alternative program is designed for students 16 years of age or older and operates under the guidelines of adult education. The second alternative program is designed for at-risk students in the ninth and tenth grade. This is the alternative education program under study.

### Summary

The alternative school was established as a result of Brown School District's concern about high drop out rates. The dropout rate is calculated by a State of Michigan using a specific formula. The formula's end result is a calculation of the number of students entering the ninth grade and the number of students in that class who graduate four years later. The decision was twofold. The school district's decision to implement the Jefferson Alternative High School was influenced by (1) the State Board of Education and (2) the policy goals of advocacy for students and meeting the mission statement; that students become contributing citizens in the community. It was modeled after the school district's adult education program and was designed to meet the educational needs of the eleventh and twelfth grade students. The intent of the alternative school was to offer a more flexible curriculum that provided the student with a less restrictive academic environment. Students with poor attendance and low academic achievement levels were placed in the program. Students with disciplinary

problems were not accepted. The program offered classes in the basic academic areas (English, math, science, and social studies) as well as classes in vocational and business skills. Class size was kept at a minimum, approximately 10-15 students per classroom. The alternative program was distinguished from the traditional program in several ways:

The regular school rules did not apply. Students were expected to abide by the school district's code of conduct, but some infractions were overlooked, such as smoking or skipping. Students were given more ownership for personal behavior. Students collaboratively designed a contract regarding expectations in school and behavioral considerations. Students were given the opportunity to help write the school's rules and classroom expectations regarding acceptable behavior and grading policies. An example of this input is that students were offered alternative ways of completing assignments. Not all students were good at writing research papers. Students were asked 'What would be a fair way for you to demonstrate your mastery of this particular skill (Interview with School Administrator, 2001).

During the first few years of operation, student success was minimal. The student had difficulty adjusting to expectations placed on them. There was a 50% dropout rate the first year. The administration and teaching staff, however, stood their ground and maintained that the program would be successful. During the second year, the dropout rate was reduced to 33%. The staff worked to change the perception of the alternative school. The staff taught the students communication skills and how to relate to each other and to adults. Students began to feel that they were part of the school.

School membership began to be established. Student ideas and input were valued and important. As the school moved into its third and fourth years, a work-study program was introduced. Students were taught employability skills. Partnerships with local businesses and one corporation (Detroit Edison) were established. Students incorporated on the job work experience, job shadowing, and a continuation of good communication skills. Teachers mentored the students and implemented alternative approaches to teaching the core academics.

Over the next couple of years, the program moved to a larger facility. A day care program was added to allow single parent families to continue their education. Course work was made relevant to the needs of the students. One example cited was the implementation of a school store. Students' grades were based on the successful operation of the store. Students learned math, problem solving skills, and consumer awareness.

In the 1990's, leadership within the Brown School District changed. Concern for cross-curricular instruction arose. The district adopted Glasser's philosophy of quality schools. Ninth and tenth grade classes were added to the program. The teaching staff was required to have State Certification. Teachers and students were required to meet the school district's benchmarks for education in the core academic areas. Students were expected to achieve the same levels of academic proficiency as those enrolled in the traditional high school program. If a student wanted to transfer from Jefferson Alternative High School back to the traditional high school they would be familiar with the academic content and expectations in the traditional high school setting.

More students with behavioral and social problems were referred to the alternative program. As reported, “New times, new thinking, accountability, pressure for mastery learning, and a lack of vision that not all students learn in the same way or at the same rate caused the alternative program to change” (interview with school administrator, 2001). This was a change made by Brown School District to accommodate the concern of treating the children en masse, rather than individually. Students with behavioral issues were problematic. Recommendations were made to make the environment in the traditional high school more conducive to academic achievement and to provide a safer environment for the daily operations of the building.

In the late 1990’s and early 2000, new leadership was hired, and the alternative program changed again. The curriculum mirrored the curriculum found in the traditional program. Students had to take traditional language arts, math, science, and social studies. The elective classes were limited to computer keyboarding, art, and reading. Gone were the work-study programs, day care, and business partnerships. Over the years, more students were recommended for placement in Jefferson Alternative High School, based on disciplinary problems. The concept of the alternative program followed Raywid’s conceptualization of the three types of alternative programs. The Brown School District’s alternative program began as a *school of choice*. It incorporated the idea of both restructuring and of a departure from the traditional educational program. Administration believed that the basic problem of the students’ lack of achievement lay with the design of the school. Great effort was taken to provide an educational setting that established the concept of school membership. Students were offered courses that were relevant to their interests and

needs. Success was achieved in lowering drop out rates. The school district had established a low teacher/student ratio which was the only difference in the set-up. As the program grew from an 11 – 12 program to a 9 – 12 program, it changed its conceptual goal of providing an alternative program for the *kids in the cracks* to a program goal of rehabilitation in academic achievement in order to return the alternative student back to the traditional high school, thus the change in the curriculum. The original purpose of the Jefferson Alternative High School which was to meet the needs of the students was abandoned to meet the educational demands placed on the school district by the State's educational concerns, those of grading of school districts, MEAP scores, and NCLB.

The changes made to the alternative school were creating a school alternative in name only. The distinctive features of the structure during the original implementation were now blurred. The succession of different leaders, the concern for standardization to promote educational efficiency and academic accountability, confusion in the criteria for assigning membership, and the lack of commitment/priorities all influenced the changes in the alternative high school.



## CHAPTER 5

The school personnel who participated in this study included two ninth grade, high school dean of students, two high school counselors, three middle school counselors, and the counselor from the alternative educational program. Each of these participants was asked questions regarding:

1. Identification process of at-risk students for placement in the alternative educational program
2. Major factors that influence the placement decision
3. Factors that influence the at-risk student's choice between enrollment in the alternative educational program or the traditional high school program.
4. Challenges encountered in the placement of at-risk students in the alternative educational program

### Deans of Students

Betty is the Dean of Ninth Grade Students at Lincoln High School, one of the two high schools in Brown School District. Betty has been in education for fourteen years. She spent seven years teaching math at a middle school in the Brown School District followed by a transfer to Lincoln High School, one of Brown's two traditional high schools, to teach math. After completing an administrative internship, Betty was promoted to the position of Dean of Students. Betty has been in this current position for two years; her primary responsibility is to oversee the academic progress of ninth graders.

Betty was asked about the written policy regarding the establishment of the alternative program, identifying at-risk students, and the placement process of those students into the alternative program. Betty reported that she had seen nothing written about these issues. She said that the unwritten policy for identifying and placing at-risk students is “a student between fourteen and sixteen years of age, who was getting D and E grades, not achieving the school district’s academic bench marks, or wanted to be in smaller classes.” Betty talked me through the referral process.

Well, a referral is usually made by a teacher, counselor, or me. I look at poor attendance and poor grades. Then I talk to the student about the alternative program. I tell the student that the classes are small, which allows for more one-on-one instruction. If the student is interested, I call the parents and talk to them. If I get a positive reaction I fill out an application and send it over to the alternative school and they take over the process.

When asked what happens when the alternative school receives the application, Betty reported that once the application is sent to the alternative school, it is up to the parents to contact the school and set up an appointment to meet with the counselor.

Betty reported that the biggest challenge is the perception of the parents and/or the student regarding placement. “The alternative school is seen as a place for *druggies*. The school is seen as a place for bad kids.” Betty also reported that there is no evaluation policy, no statistical data on the success rate of at-risk students returning to the traditional school, and no data on graduation rates.

Who actually decides whether or not the student is placed in the alternative program? She reported that school administrators and counselors make the

recommendation, but ultimately it is the parents and students who make the final decision:

It should be up to the educators. The student should have to attend for at least one semester. We have very little control over the decision to enroll. Parents are reluctant to make the decision. We see students who have on-going behavior and academic problems. We make repeated suggestions for the student to enroll in the program, but the parents' perceptions of the program as being a *bad* school keeps them from enrolling their kid. Our goal is to get the student to graduate. We need to do everything we can to ensure this happens. It's simply because the parents don't want to have their child leave the regular high school. They want their child to be in an environment that they have been accustomed to in the past.

Betty reported that she believed that the school district did not have a high priority in supporting the alternative program. "There is a lack of commitment to identify at-risk students. It would be nice if we could place all the students, but we don't have a large enough facility. It comes down to money." When asked if discipline issues enter into the referral process, Betty responded, "It depends on the discipline problem. Misbehaving is not a reason to deny placement, but students with major problems like drugs, fighting, and intimidation are not referred for placement." Betty's response led me to ask if the referral and placement process is working. Betty stated that it works for only a small minority of students. "Some students are placed that shouldn't be and some that would benefit are not placed because they want to stay at the regular high school for social reasons."

The second interview was conducted with the Dean of Ninth Grade Students at the Washington High School, Lincoln High School's sister traditional program. Walter has twenty-eight years of experience in education. He began his teaching career as a high school math teacher. After teaching ten years, Walter received his Masters in counseling and became one of Washington's counselors. Walter completed an administrative internship, was promoted to the dean of students, and has been in this position for the last five years. Walter's primary responsibility is to oversee the academic progress of the ninth graders.

What was the school district's written policy for identifying at-risk students and placing them in the alternative program? Walter responded that he knew of no written policy. "Classification of students is vague. The intent of the alternative program was for students who were struggling academically, but it is difficult at times to define what is meant by *struggling student*." I asked Walter to describe the referral process.

The counselors and I look at the student's progress. If the student has not been successful in two or more academic classes, we contact the parents and suggest that they investigate the alternative program. We tell them that the alternative program may be able to help build the necessary skills for their child to be more successful in high school.

Walter reported that the greatest challenge is not one of identification, but of placement in the alternative high school. It is in eliminating the misconceptions parents and students have about the alternative program. "Students don't want to be separated from their peers and friends. Parents see the alternative school as being a setting where the student will be stereotyped."

Walter stated the school district had a low priority at-risk students and placing them in the alternative program. “We have to come up with ways to dispel the myth that the alternative school is a school for students with behavior problems.” I asked Walter if discipline issues were a factor influencing the placement process. “No, it’s strictly based on academics. Discipline problems should not be referred.” I followed Walter’s response by asking if the referral process was working. Walter stated:

The process is working in theory. If we continue to allow the parents and students to be the ones who are given the power to make the decision about placement, then the answer is no. In reality, we are not doing all we can to help the students.”

What should be done to make the program more successful? Walter answered, “Good communication between educators and parents. We (educators) need more support in our recommendations, we need more support financially, and we need to dispel the stereotypes.”

### High School Counselors

The third interview was with Harriet, one of Washington’s High School counselors. Harriet has been in education for twenty years. She spent ten years teaching foreign language at Washington High School. After she earned her Masters in guidance and counseling, Harriet became a counselor at Washington, and has held this current position for ten years.

The interview began by asking Harriet if there is any written policy regarding the identification of at-risk students and the placement of these students in the alternative program. Harriet reported that she was not aware of any written policy.

“We try to identify the students using our D/E report (this report gives the names and classes of all students receiving either a D or E grade), which is published at the end of each marking period. But the placement process is sort of fly by the seat of your pants.”

I asked Harriet to describe the referral process.

I normally use the D/E report, but a teacher may come and see me about a student who is not doing well in class. Next, I'll contact the student's other teachers and have them prepare a progress report. The progress report asks the teacher to list the student's strengths, weaknesses, and attendance habits. I then call the student down to see me. I talk about the student's grades in middle school. Then I contact the parents and talk to them about the alternative school.

It's just a conversation until I fill out the application, if I can get that far.

Harriet reported the biggest challenge in the referral process is convincing the parents that their child's placement in the alternative program is necessary for the student's success. “It's a sell job and I'm not real good at selling. I don't know how much else I can do. My hands are tied. I can't make them go there. I tell them all the positives, but the parents don't want their kid to be labeled as an alternative-type kid.” Harriet reported that there is little communication between the counselors at the middle school and high school regarding the criteria to be use in placing at-risk students in the alternative program.

Who actually decides whether or not a student is placed in the alternative program? Harriet responded that the professional should have the power to make the decision, however the parents and the students make the decision.

They have all the cards. It's not working this way. We (the educators) need to be able to tell parents your child needs to go. . . . We should be able to say 'if you are not doing x, y, z, then you'll be attending the alternative program'. We are setting these kids up for failure.

Harriet reported that the referral and placement process is problematic.

First is the parent's refusal to place their child in the program. "I think it (the alternative school) got a bad reputation right from the beginning. When it was first begun parents would call it the *crazy school*, the *dumb, dumb school*.

Second is the failure of the middle school counselors to have convincing conversations with parents about the importance of academic achievement and that placement in the program will help their child. Third is time. I feel stretched so many ways. I want to help every kid, and I think I try to help every kid, but I'm only one person and when they give me three hundred kids it's like putting a band aid on a knife wound. You can't be there all the time. Some kids are going to fall through the cracks.

Harriet reported that the school district has a low priority in supporting the alternative program. "If it was a high priority you'd have a full school, more support, and a referral process that's consistent." I asked Harriet what needs to be done to make the program successful. "I think we need to make it mandatory that kids in the middle school who are not successful academically should go directly into the alternative program. If you are going to leave it the way it is, it's not going to succeed."

The next interview was with Steve, a counselor at Lincoln High School for nine years. Prior to becoming a high school counselor, Steve spent time counseling in the private sector.

Steve reported that he has seen nothing written regarding neither the identification of at-risk students nor any written policy establishing the alternative program. Steve talked me through the referral process.

There is no consistent procedure. If parents know about the program and wants their child to go there they call me, and I refer them to the Dean of Students.

The Dean starts the process of checking grades and attendance. Otherwise, the Dean starts the initial referral. She checks the D/E report on the ninth graders.

If the student is failing three or more academic classes, I contact the student. I ask them why they are failing. I go over what the alternative program is and give the student an application to take home to fill. It's up to the student and parent to make an inquiry at the alternative school.

Steve reported the big challenge in the referral process is the stigma attached to the alternative program. "The kids and parents hear that the alternative program is a druggie school, that it is a bad school, and that it's a school for kids who have been to jail." Steve further reported that parents and kids believe they have the automatic right to move up to the high school, despite any academic failures. "There should be something in writing that defines the placement reasons. How can you expect a middle school student, who has failed five or six classes, to do well in high school?" Steve asserts that the school district should be able to tell parents and students that placement in the alternative school is mandatory.



The school district has a low priority in placing students in the alternative program, Steve reported.

I think we have a number of at-risk students in this district and they need to be helped. I think we do an okay job, but we have to have better communication between the middle schools and high schools. We all have to be on the same page. Student discipline issues have not influenced the referral process. Every referral I have made has been based on academic issues.

Mary is a counselor at Jefferson Alternative High School. She has been in education for fifteen years. She began her education as an elementary teacher. After several years of teaching, she returned to graduate school to earn her Masters degree in Guidance and Counseling. Mary served an internship as a middle school counselor; she then moved to the Jefferson Alternative program as the counselor.

Mary was unaware of a written policy or criteria regarding identification of at-risk students or the referral process. She has worked on a committee comprised of middle school and high school counselors to look at criteria both for identifying at-risk students and candidates for the alternative program.

Criteria established by the committee recommending placement in the alternative program emphasized the student's lack of academic success in the middle school, i.e. the student failed half of the academic classes, the student was not a significant behavioral problem, and the student could benefit from smaller classes. It was never formally presented to the school board."

In the referral process, Mary reported teachers are the primary people who make referrals to counselors. Counselors meet with the students, contact the parents, and

discuss the program as an option. “The parents then contact me to set up an appointment for a visitation. After the parents have visited, I fill out an admission form, check to make sure the student is not special education certified, and then schedule the student for classes,” said Mary.

The lack of follow-through by middle school and high school counselors is the big challenge Mary states. “They (teachers and counselors) don’t buy into the program. They don’t believe that the program is a legitimate educational program and supportive of kids.” Mary also believes that there is a breakdown in the communication process. She relates, “Sometimes the counselors don’t talk to the parents. They leave it up to the kid. They tell the kid, ‘Hey, you’re failing all your classes you should think about going to the alternative school.’ They don’t promote our program.” When asked who makes the decision for placement in the alternative program, Mary stated the decision for placement is left to the parent. She, along with the other counselors who were interviewed, reiterated the decision for placement should be made by the professionals; the community should be more informed, and alternative program is a school for *bad kids* is a myth that should be exposed.

Mary asserts the school district has a low priority in supporting the alternative program. Mary said the district offers no support to the program financially, verbally, nor physically.

They don’t come to visit the program. They don’t put money into the program to keep class size low or provide the needed interventions, like social workers and psychologists. Parents are not given enough information about the program. We are in a ‘Catch 22’. We are expected to teach the same curriculum, the same

bench marks, cover the same material to the students who couldn't make it in the regular school.

To make the program stronger and more successful, Mary offers these suggestions: the administration should back the program, allow teachers more flexibility in terms of course offerings and course content, and allow the program to be autonomous in its decision making.

### Middle School Counselors

The sixth interview was with Margaret, a counselor at Van Buren Middle School. Margaret has been an educator for twenty years. She taught language arts in the middle school, and has counseled students at Van Buren for the past eleven years.

Margaret reported she did not know what the policy was of the alternative program. When asked about the written criteria regarding the identification and placement of at-risk students in the alternative program, Margaret responded:

The criteria was taken from some source, somewhere, and never very well adapted to our needs. I don't know anyone in the middle schools that was involved in this process. The kids I see as qualifying for placement are the ones that don't fit in real well to the school environment. They are the hall creepers. The ones that get lost in the shuffle.

Margaret states the referral process is subjective. She does not follow the conventional process of checking the student's grades and attendance. Margaret's method is to sit down and make a list of the students she sees repeatedly in her office. "Sometimes I ask the secretary who she thinks might be a good candidate, because

she's got good instincts. Then I go to the teachers to get information on what the kid is doing in class." Margaret stated:

I don't always refer students at the end of the eighth grade. Some students should be given the opportunity to prove they can do the work. I prefer to have the high school counselors start the referral process. I'll send home information about the alternative program . . . . But I tell them that nobody can make you go there, but it's a good thing to think about.

The challenge in the referral process, reported Margaret, is convincing the parents that it (placement) is a good option for the student: "I think it's the perception of the program. Many of the kids who should go there feel like they are going to miss out on all the high school activities." Margaret stated that the perceptions of the parents are often based on ill-conceived ideas. "We can tell them that it is a good place," she said. "Why do they think Jefferson is a drug high school? Is it publicity? An old reputation? I don't know."

Who makes the decision for placement in the program? Margaret responded, "It's the parent's decision. Final decision for placement, should be done by the people who really know and see the big picture, i.e. the educators" Margaret maintains, but she also sees a dilemma, "As a parent myself, I wouldn't want somebody telling me and my kid where they belong." When asked the school district's priority in identifying and placing at-risk students in the alternative program her response was, "You mean the people who pay the bills. Low!"

Are student discipline problems a factor influencing the referral process, Margaret gave an answer that was contradictory to that of other school personnel. "I

think they should absolutely be part of the process. Sometimes those kids are discipline cases because their home life and other things in their lives are so screwed up and nobody is paying attention to them. Somebody needs to.” The final questions to Margaret were how successful is the referral process and what if anything could be done to make the program more successful. Margaret replied,

The process is obviously not working. We are missing the students who kind of creep around. I don’t know all of the kids assigned to me. If they don’t call attention to themselves, we miss them. We don’t advocate for them because they push us too far, and we end up saying ‘let’em go’. The program has to be full-size and flexible.

Sue, the seventh interview was a counselor at Polk Middle School. Sue’s has been in education for twenty-five years. Prior to her working as a counselor for the past fifteen years, Sue taught at the elementary level.

Sue stated that she had seen neither written policy regarding the identification of at-risk students nor a written policy regarding the placement of at-risk students in the alternative program. She said,

When I was in the elementary school we started to identify at-risk kids by their behavior, attendance, and test scores. The only policy I knew when I moved to the middle school was that special education students were not eligible for the alternative program. But this was not written in any policy books, it was just word of mouth.”

Sue reported the first step in the referral process was to identify who failed the core classes (language arts, math, science, and social science). The name of the student

was placed on a master list. If the student was constantly referred to the office for behavior problem, the student's name was eliminated from the list. Sue continued,

Once identified, the student was called to my office and the possibility of enrolling in the alternative school was discussed. The student is told that they would be in smaller classes, would take the curriculum at a slower pace, and would get more one-on-one instruction. At that point I either gave the student a brochure to take home, or I mailed it to the parents. It was up to the parent to make contact with the alternative school.

Sue reported that the biggest challenge to the referral process was that it is harder and harder to identify students who cannot do the work. "Today, there are students who can't do the work, and students who won't do the work (who eventually will become the future kids who can't do the work because they have lost the skills). This has to do with effort and attitude, and it is really hard to measure effort and attitude."

What is school district's priority regarding the identification and placement of at-risk students in the alternative program. Sue responded,

They don't see it as a high priority. Discipline issues are a major concern in the referral process. I have always felt that students enrolled in the alternative program were going there to really stay on task and earn the necessary credits to help them graduate on time. If discipline problems are sent to the program, then the teacher is not going to have the time to provide that one-on-one instruction promised because time is being spent on handling discipline issues."

Asked if the referral process was working and what could be done to make the program stronger and more successful, Margaret reported.

We are doing more and more than we've ever done before, but it seems that the more we do in one area then we lose something in another area. I have never seen any type of evaluation on the program. It would be interesting to see how many of the students we have sent to the program returned to the regular school or graduated. What we need is better communication with everyone - - - teachers, high school counselors, parents and students."

The last interview was with Jodi a middle school counselor from the Tyler Middle School. An educator for thirty years, Jodi has taught students in both the elementary and middle school. Jodi has been a counselor at Tyler for the last fifteen years.

I asked Jodi about the existence of any written policy regarding the establishment of the alternative program, the identification of at-risk students, and the placement process of students in the alternative program. Jodi responded that she had seen no written policy regarding the identification criteria or the referral process. "We have an agreement between the middle school counselors that we follow, basically, it's not cast in stone," she answered. I asked Jodi to describe the referral process. Jodi said:

I don't see anything wrong with the process other than it needs to have more teeth in it. . . . I make a list at the end of the semester of the students failing three or more core classes. I call them down and tell them they need to start thinking about where they are headed. I send home a letter explaining what the

alternative program is all about. I encourage parents to make a visit to the alternative program. I don't know if you can do this in public education, but we need to be able to say 'your child must go to the alternative program.'

"The challenge to the referral process," stated Jodi,

It is the pie in the sky belief by parents that their child is going to turn it (academically) around. It's the negative perception of the school. I had one parent think that the alternative school was for pregnant girls. I try to change this negative perception, but if the perception in the parent's head is negative you are neither going to change it nor place their child in the program.

I asked Jodi who makes the actual decision regarding placement in the alternative program. She reported that it is the parent who makes the final decision: "If they say 'no', its no. They don't listen to our recommendations. It should be the school who makes the decision."

Jodi reported the school district is mediocre in its support for the program. Jodi explained,

We are doing everything we can here given the parameter in which we work.

We, at least, provide an alternative program. I think we are making progress in identifying at-risk students, but we are a long way off from being successful in their placement. To effect change the process we need to have more leverage from the school district in terms of either putting pressure on parents or just flat out not giving parents the power.

Interestingly the referral process for placement of at-risk students in the alternative educational program varies from building to building (high schools and



middle schools) and from counselor to counselor. The consensus among the counselors (both at the high schools and middle schools) is that when a student was identified as being at-risk using the *exception report* (the report providing D/E grades) and attendance patterns, a written brochure about the alternative educational program must be given to the student to take home for the parents to read. However, more emphasis is placed on using the exception report at the high schools than at the middle schools.

The consensus of the counselors who were interviewed was that poor grades and poor attendance were the major factors that influence the referral process. However, there were some contradictory and conflicting responses. One high school counselor stated “Grades are the number one indicator, but I’d rather not send a student who is failing all six classes. This student needs to participate in group counseling.” The counselors’ caseload, in the regular high school, is 350:1. At the middle school the counselor’s caseload is 500:1 and in the alternative educational program the counselor’s caseload is 140:1. With high counselor caseloads, counselors are unlikely to provide this (group counseling) service, nor to know all of their students and their shortcomings. Other responses from the counselors regarding factors that influence their decision for referral included are non-participation in class, lack of parent responsiveness, and lack of motivation. In general, counselors at both high schools and the three middle schools agreed that failure to earn credits and failing academic classes are the major factors influencing placement of at-risk students in the alternative education program. Inconsistencies arose, however, in actual practice. A middle school counselor reported:

We look at grades at the end of each semester. If a student is failing three or more academic classes, we use that as our break point. We also look at behavior.

However, if the student is failing academic classes but is passing elective classes, we don't like to refer him/her to the alternative program. We prefer to send this student to the regular high school and hope that interest in the elective area will spark interest in doing better in the academic areas.

A high school counselor reported, "A student failing six classes is not a good candidate for placement in the alternative program because chances are he/she is not going to make it no matter where he/she is placed." .

The counselors and deans were asked who makes the final decision for placement in the alternative educational program. Each administrators and each counselor reported that the final decision for placement in the alternative educational program is made by the student and/or the parents. Who should make the decision for placement of the at-risk students in the alternative educational program? Each of the administrators and counselors responded that the final placement decision should be left to the educators.

Why are more students not placed in the alternative educational program? The overall responses from each participant indicate it is the perception of the alternative program within the community (the school district) that is influential in the placement decision.

Administrators and the counselors were asked, "What is the main challenge in identifying and placing at-risk students in the alternative educational program? The alternative program is negatively perceived by parents and students were the overwhelming reply.

The final two questions asked of the counselors and administrators dealt with the academic of at-risk students participating in the alternative program. The two questions asked were: (1) Is the placement process working and (2) what, if any, changes should be made to improve the placement process.” The majority of the counselors replied that the current alternative program is not working. “The program needs to be mandatory. There needs to be some bite in the placement process. There needs to be definite criteria and it needs to be consistently followed by everyone.” In response to the second question, again, the counselors were in agreement: “The image of the program needs to be changed. Parents need to be informed regarding the positive of the program. Administration must back the program in all aspects, providing support financially.”

Administrators and counselors were given two sets of scenarios designed to duplicate the process for placing students in an alternative educational program. Characteristics associated with potential at-risk students included attendance patterns, academic achievement and general behavior. Participants read each scenario and recommended student referral or non-referred to the alternative high school program. Students in Scenario A are fictional students. Students in Scenario B are actual students attending the traditional high school.

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### *Scenario 5.1*

#### (Fictional Student) 1A

John is currently in ninth grade, attending a suburban high school of 1,535 students. During his seventh grade year, John was absent a total of 39 days. In middle school he was not a behavioral problem but was sent to administration numerous times for

failure to bring the necessary items (textbooks, paper, and pencils) to class and for failure to submit classroom assignments to his teacher. John failed language arts, math, science, and social studies. He passed gym and music. During his eighth grade year, John has was absent from school 29 days. Again, John failed language arts, math, science, and social studies. He passed art and reading. Teachers report that John is not a behavior problem. He did no work on assignments when given the opportunity in class, did not contribute to class discussions, and rarely turned in homework assignments. During the first quarter (ten weeks) of John's ninth grade year he missed 3 days. John had failed language arts, social studies, science and math by the end of the first quarter (ten weeks).

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Each of the administrators recommended this student be placed in the alternative program. Four counselors recommended placement for this student. One counselor did not recommend placement in the alternative program for this student, and one counselor did not respond to the scenario. John does meet the unofficial criteria reported by the school personnel. During his middle school career, he had an excessive number of absences, had repeated academic failures, and had no behavioral problems. In the traditional high school setting, John's attendance has improved; however, he is still continuing to experience academic failure. Two counselors reported that they would recommend John for special education evaluation.

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*Scenario 5.2*

(Fictional Student) 2A

Richard is currently attending a traditional high school housing 1,535 students and is enrolled in ninth grade. During his eighth grade year, Richard was absent from school a total of 65 days. He was sent to administration on numerous occasions for failure to bring the necessary supplies (textbooks, paper, and pencils) to class and for numerous behavior problems (insubordination, profanity, intimidation, and refusal to follow classroom rules). Richard was suspended from school a total of 6 times during the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. These suspensions were usually for three days or less. Richard failed language arts, social studies, science, math, and computers. The only class he passed was gym. At the end of the first quarter (ten weeks) of his 9<sup>th</sup> grade year, Richard is failing science and social studies and is receiving a D in language arts and math. He was sent to administration 3 times for disruptive classroom behavior. Teachers report that he is intelligent but refuses to complete classroom assignments.

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An analysis of this scenario shows that Richard has excessive absences, behavioral issues, and academic failure while attending in middle school. Administrators recommended Richard for placement, in the alternative educational program. Counselors were split in their responses. Half of the counselors recommended Richard for placement and the other half recommended Richard attend the traditional high school. According to the criteria used by administrators and counselors for placement, Richard should not be recommended for placement. He exhibited an excessive number of absences, academic failure, and behavior problems in middle school. In high school Richard is failing only two academic classes and continues to be

a behavioral problem. Interestingly, three of the counselors did recommend Richard for placement. They explained that there are reasons for Richard to act out, and placement in smaller classes would help Richard to improve both in behavior and academics.

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### *Scenario 5.3*

#### (Fictional Student) 3A

Rhonda is currently completing her eighth grade year. She attends a suburban middle school with an enrollment of 1,200 students. Rhonda has been absent an average number of days this year, and is currently failing every academic class. Her teachers report that she is unmotivated, easily distracted, and spending most of her classroom time putting on make-up. Her art teacher reports that Rhonda is extremely talented and is her best student.

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In this scenario, one administrator and two counselors recommended Rhonda for placement in the alternative program; three counselors recommended that Rhonda should not be placed in the alternative program. One administrator and one counselor did not respond. In reviewing Rhonda's school experiences, she does not have attendance problems. She is experiencing academic failure in each of her content classes and is not focused. Applying the criteria used by the school personnel, Rhonda would be a good candidate for the alternative program. However, only three of the school personnel recommended Rhonda for placement. One reason given for not referring Rhonda to the alternative educational program was that she seemed to attend school for social reasons. Two counselors recommended that Rhonda enroll in

vocational school.

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#### *Scenario 5.4*

##### (Fictional Student) 4A

Ariana is currently a second year ninth grader. She attends the same high school as Richard and John. Ariana has earned no credit during her time in high school. She is defiant and rude in her behavior. Ariana has been suspended for fighting, possession of drugs, intimidating other students, and insubordination with administration. Ariana only absences from school came from serving suspension. When she has completed assignments and turned them in, she has received above average grades. Teachers report that Ariana does nothing in class except for sleeping in class, disrupting or confronting other students.

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In this scenario, two administrators and three counselors recommended no placement because, “Placing Ariana in the alternative school would only reinforce the idea that the alternative school is for *bad kids*.” Two counselors recommended Ariana for placement because of her repeated pattern of academic failure. She was a second year ninth grade student and has earned no credits and because she was a behavior problem.

The students presented in Scenario B were actual students attending the traditional high school.

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#### *Scenario 5.5*

(Actual Student) 1B

Jenny is currently in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. She has failed four of six classes at the end of the first semester (twenty weeks). She passed math class with a D and health class with a C. During this first semester she was absent 11.5 days. Approximately ten weeks into the second semester, she has been absent a total of 3 ½ days. At the end of Jenny's ninth grade school year, her grades rose to three B's, two C's and one A. In middle school she achieved A's and B's. In eighth grade, Jenny was absent a total of twenty-nine (29) days. In seventh grade she was absent a total of twenty-three (23) days and in 6th grade Jenny was absent a total of eighteen (18) days. Jenny was sent to administration on three occasions for attendance problems and on one occasion for inappropriate behavior.

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An analysis of this scenario shows Jenny was academically successful in middle school, but she did have problems with her attendance. When she enrolled in high school, her academic grades dropped, but her attendance improved. Two administrators and four counselors recommended that Jenny should not be placed in the alternative program because "she seemed to be turning things (attendance and academic success) around."

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*Scenario 5.6*

(Actual Student) 2B

Gene is currently in ninth grade. In sixth grade he passed his academic core classes (math, science, social studies, and language arts) with D's. In seventh grade he failed language arts, math, and social studies. He passed science with a D. In



seventh grade he failed language arts, math and social studies. He passed science with a C. In eighth grade he failed all of his academic core classes (math, science, social studies, and language arts). He passed technology, physical education, and learning strategies. He was absent a total of 10 days during his three years. Gene has been referred to administration on two occasions for attendance problems. During his first semester of high school, he failed all of his classes except physical education (which he passed with a D). Currently, in the second semester, he has three C's, one D and two E's. He has missed a total of 2.5 days in the current school year.

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An analysis of this scenario indicates Gene struggled academically in middle school, though attendance was good. In high school, Gene earned a half credit at the end his first semester (twenty weeks). He seems to be improving academically. Two administrators and five counselors recommended that Gene be placed in the alternative program. Comments, such as, "He is not a behavior problem, and smaller classes would probably help him," were representative of their responses. One counselor recommended that Gene not be placed in the alternative program: "He struggled in middle school, but he is starting to pass some of his classes. I'd probably recommend testing for special education".

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### *Scenario 5.7*

(Actual Student) 3B

Bob is currently in ninth grade. In sixth grade, seventh grade and eighth grade Bob passed all of his classes. In sixth grade he was absent 15.5 days; in seventh grade he was absent 13 days, and in eighth grade he was absent 18 days. Bob was sent to administration on one occasion for inappropriate behavior.

During his first semester in high school, Bob failed science, math, and marketing. He passed language arts with a D, physical education with an A and social studies with a D. In the second semester, Bob is failing language arts, math, and social studies, and is receiving a D-in science. He has been absent 12 days.

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In this scenario, Bob had attendance problems in middle school that seem to be carrying over into his high school career. In addition to attendance problems, Bob is experiencing academic failure in his first year at high school. School personnel were split on their recommendations. One administrator and two counselors recommended Bob for placement in the alternative high school. One administrator and three counselors recommended that Bob remain in the traditional high school. Explanations from the school personnel who recommended placement included, "It looks like he is capable of doing the work (academically) but is a little slower," and "If he is struggling, I think the alternative program would help." Comments from the school personnel not recommending placement included: "Bob's problem seems to be related to attendance," and "He's doing okay in his fun classes. This seems like a motivation problem."

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*Scenario 5.8*

(Actual Student) 4B

Joe is currently in eighth grade. In sixth grade, Joe passed all of his classes. He was absent 19 days. In seventh grade he failed language arts, math, and introduction to foreign language. He earned a D in physical education and a C- in life skills, social studies, and science. During his seventh grade year, Joe was absent a total of 19.5 days. During the first semester of his eighth grade year, Joe failed science, history, and language arts. He passed music and math with a D-. He is currently failing all classes except foreign language (in which he currently has a D-). Joe has been absent 40 days this school year.

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An analysis shows Joe is struggling with both academics and has an attendance. Using the criteria for recommending a student for placement in the alternative program, Joe is a good candidate. However, the recommendations were split: one administrator and two counselors recommended Joe for placement in the alternative program, and one administrator and three counselors did not recommend Joe for placement. Comments ranged from “I would not recommend him for placement. He definitely has an attendance problem, but I think he could do the work (academically).” “I would recommend him for placement. He’s got the ability and he needs to get a good base so he can graduate.”

Summary

In reviewing the data and the information presented in this chapter, it is evident that the school personnel could not agree among themselves regarding the criteria for assigning membership to the alternative high school. Specifically, in the scenarios, one

can see how different the interpretations of student information by the school personnel vary from building to building. In the different buildings not every counselor makes the same kind of referrals. There were inconsistencies in the counselors' interpretations of the situations regarding the advocacy for the client. There were inconsistencies found in the counselor's emphasis of academic achievement. One counselor stated, "Grades are the number one indicator, but I'd rather not send a student who is failing all six classes." The school personnel blamed these inconsistencies on the fact that placement policies were unwritten and not clear. This resulted in repeated examples of the influence involving multiple actors making differing decisions. School personnel reported that they gather all of the information that is pertinent for the referral, but ultimately turned the final decision for placement over to the parents and the students. The school personnel reported that this decision is influenced by the student's and parent's perspective of the program, i.e., "The community's perception of the program is that it is a place for bad kids and kids with drug problems." "The parents fight the placement. They don't see the positives."

Instead of uniformly applying the selection criteria, the placement decision is influenced by the personal priorities of the individual decision maker. Each counselor's personal interpretation of the student's ability and actual academic achievement influences the decision for placement recommendations, which, in turn, accounts for the opposing recommendations for both the fictitious and actual students in the scenarios. Client statistics may indicate little about the objective needs of the client population, but they do reflect the organizations that cater to those needs.

Administrators and counselors perceive the referral process is a concept of unstructured decision making. There is no written policy to be followed. Because there are no written guidelines, there is no consistency in the way students are referred to the alternative program. Counselors are unsure about where the students should go. One counselor stated, "It is a subjective process. Only sometimes will a teacher report a concern about a student's lack of academic progress." Further, the counselor reported that it is the negative perception of the program that hurts the referral process: "If we had specific criteria, made the teachers more aware about the alternative program, and had a lot more PR in the community the alternative program would be more successful." Preferences, rules, policy, people, and outcomes are mixed together in ways that make the interpretation of information uncertain and unclear.

All of this data suggest that the identity and the mission of the alternative high school have become blurred.

## CHAPTER 6

The students are a crucial part to this study. As mentioned earlier, two groups of six male students, all identified as being at-risk, were followed over a four year period from the 1999/2000 school year, the year the students entered high school, to the 2002/2003 school year, the year the students were to graduate. All students from each group were recommended for placement in the alternative educational program for the 1999/2000 school year. Group A consists of six students who elected to enroll in Jefferson Alternative High School, and Group T consists of six students who elected to enroll in the traditional high school. The data collected on each group of students covers the following areas: attendance; academic achievement (the number of credits earned each year during the four year period); time spent studying; graduation results; current employment status; student participation in school activities; student perceptions of their education; student sense of community involvement; student desire to continue education; student involvement with peers (post-graduation); student perceptions of the reasons for their referral to the alternative program; student perceptions of the alternative program; and student reflections on his decision for placement. This information will be presented in the form of mini-cases on each student. The first six mini-cases are the male students recommended for placement in the alternative education program but chose to attend the traditional high school program.

Traditional High School Students

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Walter

Walter moved into the school district and enrolled in the seventh grade in the 1996/1997 school year. Walter struggled academically in seventh grade; he earned mainly C's and D's. His attendance was poor. Walter was absent 34.5 days of the 180 required days in seventh grade. In eighth grade, Walter's attendance improved. He did not miss any days that year; however, Walter continued to struggle academically. He failed 3 out of 6 classes and was recommended for placement in the alternative high school. Though Walter did fit the profile of poor attendance and low academic achievement, he chose to enroll in the traditional high school for ninth grade, and he continued to struggle academically. At the end of his freshman year, he had earned only two credits out of a possible six. His absenteeism continued to be high. He missed twenty-two days his freshman year. In 2000/2001, Walter began his second year at the traditional high school. During his second year Walter's attendance improved as did his academic success. Walter was truant 14 days and he earned three credits. Walter had now earned enough credits to be a sophomore. However, Walter was a full year behind his peers in credits. During the 2001/2002 school year, Walter had perfect attendance and earned all of his possible credits. At the start of the 2002/2003 school year, which should have been Walter's senior year, Walter chose to quit. In his three years enrollment in the traditional high school, Walter had earned a total of 14.5 credits with a GPA of 1.57.

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During our interview, (Two years later) Walter stated that he was living with his parents. He reported that he was single and was unemployed. When I asked about his experience in high school, Walter reported that he did not like school and that he did not

really study during high school. He reported spending less than one hour per day working on homework. Walter also reported that he participated in no extra-curricular or athletic activities. Walter stated he had received a fair but boring education. He said that his teachers were well prepared to teach the classes, but that they really were not available for him. Walter reported that he had few friends in high school, and the ones he did hang with influenced him to skip school. He indicated that he wished he had worked harder in high school, and he considered he had made the wrong decision regarding not enrolling in the alternative high school. I asked Walter why he had been referred to Jefferson Alternative High School: he stated that it was “probably because of my attendance and failing grades in middle school.” When asked why he did not choose to enroll in the alternative program, Walter stated that his parents believed it was a school for *bad kids*. Walter reported that he was not involved in any community activities.

Asked if there had been any single event or person who had had a significant impact on his life while he was in high school, Walter replied “No”. Walter stated that he wished he had worked harder in high school and had “learned more math.” Did Walter make the right decision in regard to his choice of enrollment? Walter responded, “No, I should have gone to the alternative high school.”

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### John

John moved into the school district at the beginning of his seventh grade year. John was an average student, academically, in both seventh and eighth grades. His attendance in middle school was good; he was absent six days in seventh grade and 2.5



days in eighth grade. This was puzzling. The criteria for being identified as at-risk are based on poor attendance and low academic achievement. John fit neither of these two criteria. John's transcript indicates he experienced moderate success in the traditional high school environment. In his freshman year, he earned 5.5 credits (out of six credits) and was absent three days. In his sophomore year John earned 4.5 credits (out of six credits) and missed three days. In his junior year, John earned 3.5 credits and did not miss any school days. In John's senior year, he took extra classes to make up for his earlier failures. John earned eight credits that year and did not miss any school. John graduated with his class in June 2003. His GPA was a 1.41.

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During our interview, John stated that he was currently living with his mother, is single, has a part time job, and earns less than \$1,000 per month. When asked about his experience in high school, John reported that he did not participate in extra-curricular or athletic activities. He said he had received a fair education, but his teachers and the administration really did not care about him. John also stated that the discipline administered to students was not fair or equal among the students. He reported that he did not study during high school, and spent less than one hour per day working on homework. When asked if there had been any significant event that he remembers from his high school experience, John responded that he did have one teacher who took an interest in his life. Why had John been referred? He stated the dean of students in the high school had recommended he enroll in the alternative high school because of his failing grades in his freshman year. John also stated that he had been recommended for placement in the alternative high school by his middle school counselor. He did not

choose to enroll in the alternative program because his parents believed it was a school for *druggies and troublemakers*. John said he had made the right decision in remaining in the traditional high school.

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### Daniel

Daniel entered middle school for his sixth grade year where he struggled academically, failing four of his six classes. Daniel was absent 8.5 days out of 180 schooldays. In seventh grade, Daniel continued to struggle academically, failing three classes and was absent seven days. In classes where he passed, he earned mostly D's. During the first semester of Daniel's eighth grade year he failed four classes and was absent four days. In the second semester, Daniel failed three classes and was absent 3 days. Daniel was recommended for placement in the alternative high school, but chose to attend the traditional high school (he did fit the profile of poor attendance and low academic achievement). Daniel was not academically successful in his freshman year. He earned a total of one credit (out of a possible six credits). His attendance was good. He only missed a total of six days during the entire school year. In Daniel's second year in the traditional high school, he demonstrated marked improvement in his academic achievement. He earned a total of six credits. Although he was still a full year behind his classmates, Daniel continued to work hard. In his second year, he only missed six days of school. In Daniel's third year of high school, he slipped both academically and in his attendance. Daniel missed 19.5 days during his third year and only earned 3.5 credits during the school year. At the beginning of Daniel's fourth year of high school, he transferred to the alternative high school. During this year Daniel did

not miss any school. He was able to make up the credits he lost in his freshman year by attending after school extra credit classes in addition to attending the alternative high school during the day. Daniel graduated with his class in 2003 with a 1.53 GPA.

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During the interview, Daniel stated that he was currently single and living at home with his mother. He reported that he was unemployed and that he was not pursuing a post secondary educational program. When asked about his experience in high school, Daniel reported that he did not participate in extra-curricular or athletic activities. He said he had received a good education, his teachers were well prepared, and his teachers and the administration did care and listen to him. Daniel stated that the discipline administered to students was fair among the students. Daniel saw himself as having fairly good attendance in high school: "I only missed maybe one or two times a month". Daniel also reported that he spent at least one to two hours studying each night during high school. When asked if there had been any significant event that he remembered from his high school experience, he responded "Nothing." Daniel stated that his counselor at the middle school had recommended he enroll in the alternative high school because of his poor attendance and academic failures. When asked why he chose not to enroll in the alternative program, Daniel stated that his dad had told him that he had gone to the regular high school and that is where he wanted Daniel to go. Dan stated that he had made the right decision in remaining in the traditional high school.

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Craig

Craig entered middle school in the sixth grade. Craig passed all of his classes in his first year at middle school. However, Craig was absent 21.5 days in sixth grade. In the seventh grade, Craig's academic achievement began to slide. During his first semester he failed two classes. In the second semester he failed five classes. His attendance did improve in seventh grade; during this year he was absent nine days. Craig's eighth grade year was not much better; he failed three of his classes in the first semester and two in the second semester. Craig was identified as an at-risk student during his eighth grade year and was recommended for enrollment in the alternative program by his middle school counselor; Craig fit the profile with poor attendance and low academic achievement. Craig chose to enroll in the traditional high school for ninth grade. During this first year Craig earned three credits out of a possible six and was absent 0.5 day. In his second year as a freshman, Craig earned 5.5 out of six credits and was absent a total of six days. Craig earned four out of six credits his third year at the traditional high school and was absent one day. In his fourth year, Craig earned a total of 5.5 credits out of six and missed five days of school. Craig did graduate with his class in 2003.

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During the interview, Craig stated he is single and lives at home with his parents. He did not work during high school, but he currently has a part time job. Craig did not share how much he is being paid at his job. Craig is attending community college. Asked about his experience in high school, Craig reported he had not participated in extra-curricular or athletic activities. He said he had received a fair, but boring education, his teachers were well prepared, the teachers and the administration

cared for and listened to him, and discipline administered to students was fair. Craig had fairly good attendance most of the time in high school and spent less than one hour studying each night. When asked if there had been any significant event that he remembered from his high school experience, he responded “Nothing.” When asked why he had been referred to the alternative program, Craig stated that his counselor at the middle school thought he would do better in school if he were in smaller classes. Craig did not choose to enroll in the alternative program, because he and his parents thought it was a school for *losers*. In looking back, Craig reflected that he should have enrolled in the alternative high school.

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### Noah

Noah entered middle school in the sixth grade. Noah passed all of his classes in middle school. Noah’s attendance during his years in middle school was good: in sixth grade, he was absent three days; in seventh grade, Noah had perfect attendance, and in eighth grade, he was absent four days. A teacher identified Noah as an at-risk student during his eighth grade year and recommended enrollment in the alternative program. No explanation was given to support the referral, and Noah did not fit the referral profile of poor attendance and low academic achievement. Noah chose to enroll in the traditional high school for ninth grade. During his first year he earned all six credits out of a possible six and was absent two days. In his second year, Noah earned five out of six credits and was absent one day. Noah earned five out of six credits during his third year at the traditional high school and had perfect attendance. In

his fourth year, Noah earned all six of his credits and again had perfect attendance.

Noah did graduate with his class in 2003.

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At the time of the interview, Noah was single and lived at home with his mother. He was employed part time and earned less than \$1,000 per month. He was not pursuing any post secondary educational programs. Asked about his experience in high school, Noah reported he had not participated in extra-curricular or athletic activities. He had received a good education, his teachers were well prepared, and the teachers and the administration had cared about him and had and listened to him. Noah stated the discipline administered to students was fair. He had fairly good attendance in high school; however, Noah reported spending less than one hour each night studying during high school. When asked if there had been any significant event that he remembered from his high school experience, he responded “Nothing.” When asked why he had been referred and he stated “I don’t know.” When asked why he chose not to enroll in the alternative program, Noah stated that his dad had told him that if he went to the alternative high school, he would not get a regular diploma. Noah remarked that he had made the right decision in remaining in the traditional high school.

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#### Nick

Nick entered middle school in the sixth grade. Nick failed three of his six classes in sixth grade year and was 16.5 days. In seventh grade, Nick failed three classes of his six classes and was absent 10.5 days. In eighth grade he failed four of his classes of his six classes and missed twenty-four days of school. A counselor identified

Nick as an at-risk student during his eighth grade year and recommended enrollment in the alternative program. Nick did fit the alternative school profile of poor attendance and low academic achievement. Nick chose to enroll in the traditional high school for ninth grade. During his first year Nick earned three out of the six credits possible and was absent 8.5 days. In his second year, Nick earned four out of six credits and was absent nineteen days. Nick earned five and a half out of six credits his third year at the traditional high school and was absent seven days. In his fourth year, Nick earned all six of his credits and had perfect attendance. Nick also attended night school during his last year. Nick graduated with his class in 2003.

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At the time of the interview, Nick was single and lived at home with his mother. He was neither employed nor pursuing any post secondary educational programs. When Nick was asked about his high school experiences, Nick related he had not participated in extra-curricular or athletic activities, he had received a good education, teachers were well prepared, and teachers and the administration did care for and listened to him. Nick stated the discipline administered to students was fair. Nick stated he had good grades in middle school and poor attendance in high school, and these were two reasons why he had been recommended for the alternative high school. Nick reported spending at least two or more hours studying each night during high school. When asked if there had been any significant event that he remembered from his high school experience, he responded, "Yea, I graduated." Nick chose to enroll in the alternative program, because his parents thought it was a place for *bad kids and*

*druggies*. Nick said he had made the right decision to remaining in the traditional high school.

### Alternative High School Students

The next six mini-cases are drawn from the male students who were recommended for placement in the alternative education program and who chose to enroll.

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#### William

In 1996/1977, William enrolled in the sixth grade. William was moderately successful in sixth grade. Grades ranged from B's to D's, however, attendance was poor. William was absent 35.5 days. In seventh grade he became less focused academically. During the first semester he failed one class out of six, and in the second semester he failed two of his classes. William's high absenteeism continued; he was absent forty days in the seventh grade. In eighth grade, William failed three out of his six classes during the first semester, and in the second semester, he failed four of his six classes. Again, his attendance was poor. He was absent thirty-four days. William was recommended for placement in the alternative high school by his middle school counselor: William did fit the alternative school's profile of poor attendance and low academic achievement. William chose to enroll in the alternative high school for ninth grade. At the end of his freshman year, he had earned four credits out of a possible six credits. His attendance improved, he missed one day. In 2000/2001, William began his sophomore year. During the first semester of his second year William earned a total of 2.5 credits. At the end of this first semester, William dropped out of high school.



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At the time of the interview, William was living with his parents, single, and was unemployed. When asked about his experience in high school, William reported that he did not participate in any extra-curricular or athletic activities. William indicated he had received a poor education. He asserted neither administrators nor teachers cared about the students. William was bored by school and had not studied during high school; he spent less than thirty minutes per day working on homework. William said he had no friends in high school. When asked why he had been referred, he stated his middle school counselor, "Thought my negative attitude might improve." William's parents were concerned about his enrollment in the alternative high school, because they thought it was a school for *bad kids*. William said he had made the wrong choice regarding his enrollment.

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### Christopher

In 1996/1977, Chris enrolled in the sixth grade. Chris was fairly successful in sixth grade. He earned C's during the sixth grade; however, he missed nine days. In seventh grade he was less focused. During the first semester he maintained his C grades; however, in the second semester he failed four of his six classes. Chris was absent ten days during the seventh grade. In eighth grade, Chris failed all six of his classes during the first semester; he failed four of his six classes in the second semester of his eighth grade. His attendance was poor in eighth grade; he was absent sixteen days. A friend recommended alternative school to Chris because "My friend thought I would do better there." Chris did fit the alternative school's profile of poor attendance

and low academic achievement. Chris chose to enroll in the traditional high school for ninth grade. He continued to struggle. Chris failed all of his classes. While attendance was good, he was unsuccessful academically. In the tenth, Chris enrolled in the alternative high school. Though he experienced some academic failure his grades began to improved, Chris was able to earn five credits. In eleventh grade, Chris earned 5.5 credits. He had perfect attendance. In his fourth year at the alternative high school, Chris earned five credits out of six. Chris did not graduate with his peers in June of 2003. He had earned only eighteen credits.

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At the time of the interview, Chris was currently with his parents. He was single, had a part time job, and he was currently earning between \$1,000 and \$2,000 a month. Chris said he returned to the traditional high school for the 2003/2004 school year to earn the missing four credits and to graduate. Christopher did not participate in any extra-curricular or athletic activities. Chris said he had received a good education, administrators and teachers listened to him, and discipline administered was fair and equal for all students. Chris reported he spent about one to two hours a night on his home work. His friends were supportive. One reason he enrolled in the alternative high school was because a friend attended who told Chris that he would be more successful at the alternative high school. Was there a significant event in his high school career? Chris confided he had been in an automobile accident, and it changed the way he looked at life. His mom was supportive of his decision to enroll in the alternative school program. He remarked, "She wanted me to be happy." Chris stated he made the right decision by enrolling in the alternative high school. Chris did graduate in 2004.

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Joe

In 1996/1977, Joe enrolled in the sixth grade. Joe had fair success in sixth grade. He earned C's and D's his first semester. In the second semester he failed four classes. His attendance was poor. He missed twenty-seven days. In seventh grade his grades improved; he failed one class. His attendance, however, continued to be a problem as Joe was absent forty-three days. In eighth grade, Joe failed five classes. His attendance continued to be a problem. He was absent fifty out of ninety days in eighth grade. Joe was recommended for placement in the alternative high school by his middle school counselor. Joe did fit the alternative school's profile of poor attendance and low academic achievement. Joe chose to enroll in the alternative high school for ninth grade. At the end of his freshman year, he had earned one credit out of six credits. Joe's attendance began to improve; he missed seven days. In 2000/2001, Joe began his second year at the alternative high school. During the first semester of his second year, Joe earned two credits. His attendance habits from middle school returned, and Joe missed twenty-one days during the first semester. Joe was placed in the juvenile detention facility for truancy. Joe did not return to the school district and did not graduate.

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At the time of the interview, Joe stated he was living on his own, he was single, and was working full time. He earned between \$2,000 and \$3,000 a month. When asked about his experience in high school, Joe reported he participated in no extra-curricular or athletic activities. Joe received a fair education. He said both

administrators and teachers listened to him, and school discipline was fair and equal for students. Joe said he studied little during high school, less than one hour per day working on homework. Joe was referred to the alternative high school by his middle school counselor because of his attendance problems. Joe's dad did not want Joe to attend the alternative high school, but Joe also stated that his dad did not have a clue about the school. Joe stated that he would have had more success had stayed in the regular high school.

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### Adam

In 1996/1977, Adam enrolled in the sixth grade. Adam was successful in sixth grade and passed each of his six classes. His attendance was also acceptable. Adam missed 2.5 days. In seventh grade he began to slip academically. He failed four of six classes. Attendance in the seventh grade remained good; he missed six days. In eighth grade, Adam lost all focus. He failed five of his six classes. His attendance remained acceptable. He missed eight days that year. Some of his eighth grade teachers and his middle school counselor recommended Adam for placement in the alternative high school because of his academic failure. Adam fit the alternative school's profile of poor attendance and low academic achievement. Adam chose to enroll in the alternative high school for ninth grade, where Adam's academic struggle began to improve. At the end of his freshman year, he had earned six out of six credits. He was absent eight days. In 2000/2001, Adam began his sophomore year. During his second year Adam again earned six of his six credits. He was absent thirteen days during the school year. In his third year, Adam earned five out of six credits and was absent eight days. In his fourth

year at the alternative high school Adam earned five out of six credits and missed only four days of school. Adam graduated with his peers.

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At the time of the interview, Adam was currently living with his parents. He was single and unemployed. Adam participated in no extra-curricular or athletic activities. Adam said he had received a good education. Both administrators and teachers listened to him. Adam studied during high school and spent about one to two hours per day working on homework. Adam was referred because he had been unsuccessful in middle school. His parents did not want him to attend the alternative high school, but Adam reported “I knew it would be better for me if I wanted to graduate.” Adam was pleased with his decision to enroll in the alternative program.

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### Jeff

In 1996/1997, Jeff enrolled in the sixth grade. Jeff had fair success in sixth grade. He passed six of his six classes his first semester, but failed three of his classes the second semester. Jeff’s attendance in the sixth grade was poor. He missed thirty days that year. In seventh grade he became less focused. During the first semester he failed three of his six classes and in the second semester he failed five of his six classes. Jeff was absent eleven days during the seventh grade. In eighth grade, Jeff failed four out of his six classes during the first semester. In the second semester of his eighth grade, Jeff failed four more of his six classes. His attendance was poor in eighth grade. He was absent twenty days. Because of poor grades, Jeff was recommended for placement in the alternative high school by his middle school counselor. Jeff fit the

alternative school's profile of poor attendance and low academic achievement. Though Jeff chose to enroll in the alternative high school for ninth grade, his academic struggle did not improve. At the end of his freshman year, Jeff had earned two and a half credits out of a possible six credits. He missed twenty-nine days his freshman year. In 2000/2001, Jeff began his sophomore year. During his second year Jeff earned a total of two credits out of a possible six credits. He was absent fifteen days during the school year. In 2001/2002, Jeff left school. He did not graduate.

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At the time of the interview, Jeff stated he was living with his mother. He was single and unemployed. When asked about his experience in high school, Jeff said that he had not participated in any extra-curricular or athletic activities. Jeff was not sure how he would rate his education. He said both administrators and teachers were fair and listened to him. He studied little during high school, spending less than thirty minutes per day working on homework. When asked why he had been referred to the alternative high school and he said that his middle school counselor thought Jeff would have more academic success in high school if Jeff was in smaller classes. Jeff said, "my mom was willing to try anything in order to get me to pass." Jeff was unsure if he had made the right decision.

### Attendance

A major factor influencing the identification of at-risk students is attendance. Students selected for this study experienced from little to severe attendance problems during their middle school and high school years. During the 1998/1999 school year when they were in eighth grade, five of the twelve male students experienced fewer

than ten absences each. Seven of the twelve male students experienced more than fifteen absences during this same 1998/1999 school year. Over the four year period studied, student attendance patterns fluctuated. In the traditional high school, five of the six students experienced a decrease in the number of days he was absent each year. The sixth student experienced an increase in the number of school days absent. In the alternative high school, two of the six students experienced a decrease in the number of days absent. Three of the students experienced an increase in the number of days they missed school each year, and one student ended up dropping out.

#### Academic Achievement/Graduation

The second major factor in the identification and placement of at-risk students in the alternative program is academic achievement. As mentioned earlier, the student grade status is based on the accumulation of credits within a given school year. The student has the opportunity to earn six credits per given school year. To graduate, a total of twenty-two credits must be earned during the four year period. The following information is a breakdown of grade standings in both the traditional and alternative high schools:

0 – 5 credits	freshman
6 – 11 credits	sophomore
12 – 16 credits	junior
17 – 22 credits	senior

In the middle school, students are not required to earn credits nor are they retained for academic failure.

During the four year period studied, five of the six students enrolled in the traditional high school earned the required twenty-two credits and graduated. One student in the traditional high school failed to earn the required twenty-two credits. This student did not graduate. During this same four year period, one student enrolled in the alternative high school earned the required twenty-two credits and graduated. Two of the six students withdrew from school at the beginning of their third year. Two students completed the four years but did not earn enough of the required credits to graduate. Graduation rate of the students enrolled in the traditional high school was 83.3 %. Graduation rate of the students enrolled in the alternative high school was 16.66%.

#### Attention to Study Time

The students in each group were asked to reflect on the amount of time spent studying each day, during high school. Four students (one from the traditional high school and three from the alternative high school) reported spending less than thirty minutes per day studying. Of these four, one student (in the traditional high school) graduated. Five of the twelve students reported studying less than one hour per day (four students were in the traditional high school, and one student was in the alternative high school). Of the four students in the traditional high school, three graduated in the four year study period, and one did not graduate. One student enrolled in the alternative high school did not graduate. Three of the students (one student from the traditional high school and two students from the alternative high school) reported studying between one to two hours per day. Of these three students, one student from the alternative high school, and one student from the traditional high school graduated, the



second student (from the alternative high school) did not graduate. One student (alternative high school) reported studying more than two hours per day. This student did graduate.

The students in each group were asked if they planned to continue their educational status. Of the group attending the traditional high school, three of the students who graduated were currently enrolled in a post-high school educational program. Two of the graduated students from the traditional high school were not enrolled in any educational program. The remaining student did not graduate and were not enrolled in any educational program. Of the group of students attending the alternative high school, two students were currently enrolled in educational programs. One student had graduated and was enrolled in community college. One student did not graduate, but had re-enrolled in the traditional high school to complete his education and graduate. The other four students from the alternative high school were not enrolled in an educational program.

#### Extra Curricular Activities

The students in each group were also asked about their involvement in extra-curricular activities during high school. No students in either group participated in any extra-curricular school activity. One of the students who attended the alternative high school responded, "Man, we did not have any after school activities." A few of the students from each group indicated they had attended some of the traditional high school's football games. However, they indicated that this was to be with friends. It should be noted that the alternative high school had no any athletic team or club. The student who wanted to participate in any of these activities was allowed to return to

their home high school for participation. It is also noted that none of the twelve males participated in any athletic or club activity.

### Peer Relationships

Students were asked whether friends attended the alternative high school. Five of the students who elected to enroll in the traditional high school responded “No”. One student from this group had a friend attending the alternative high school. Of the six students enrolled in the alternative high school, four responded that they had a friend(s) attending the alternative program. Two students responded they knew no one attending the alternative program prior to their enrollment.

As a follow-up question, the students were asked “What did your friend think about the alternative school?” Responses were mixed. Four students (two from the alternative high school and two from the traditional high school) reported a friend who said, “The school (alternative) was a lot easier and had smaller classes.” Two students responded, “I don’t know.” One student from the alternative program reported that his friends “wanted me to go there because they went there.” There is an interesting side note regarding the friends of these twelve students, all the students reported their friends graduated from high school.

### Community Involvement

One goal written into the mission statement of the Brown School District is to produce contributing citizens for the community. After the 2003 graduation year, each of the twelve students were asked if they were involved in activities, such as volunteer work, interested in local politics, or informed concerning community events (via newspaper). Ten of the twelve students (six from the traditional high school and four

from the alternative high school) responded “No”. Two students, both from the alternative high school, responded they were somewhat involved in community activities (volunteer work).

### Referrals

The last three categories are significant to this study: they tell (1) the reason for their referral; (2) the person(s) who recommended the student for enrollment in the alternative high school, and (3) the student response regarding enrollment in the selected school of choice. Eight of the twelve students were recommended to attend the alternative high school by a middle school counselor. One student indicated his friend had recommended the alternative high school. Two students were recommended by a high school dean of students, and one student was recommended by his teacher. In this research a list of eighty students collected from the three middle schools were recommended for enrollment at the alternative high school. Names of the twelve students participating in this study came from the list generated by the middle school counselors.

Six of the twelve students had been recommended for the alternative high school because of failing grades in middle school. Two students said the counselor indicated they would do better academically if they were in smaller size classrooms. One student had no idea why he was recommended. One student was recommended because he had a poor attitude towards school. Two students were recommended because of poor attendance.

### Decisions

The final question asked of each student was “Was your decision to attend the school of your choice, the right one for you?” From the group attending the traditional high school, four students responded, “No”. Two students responded, “Yes”. It is interesting to note that three students who responded “No” did graduate. The fourth student responding, “No” did not graduate. The two students who responded, “Yes” graduated. In the group attending the alternative high school, four students responded, “No”. These four students did not graduate in the four year period. Two of the students responded “Yes”. One did graduate within the four year period. The second student did not graduate within the four year period; however, he did graduate in 2004.

#### Decision Reasoning

The fourth question raised in this study was, “What explains why some students choose to enroll or choose not to enroll in the alternative educational program?” To obtain information regarding this question, the students were asked what factors influenced the decision to attend or not to attend the alternative program? Student answers were varied. The students who chose to attend the alternative program responded that the idea of smaller classes and more individualized help influenced their decision.

- “My grades were slipping, and there were too many kids in my classes.”
- “My grades were really bad, and my brother was going there (the alternative program), and he was doing well.”

The students who choose not to attend the alternative program responded:

- “I did not want to miss stuff going on in the high school.”

- “I had more choices at the regular high school.”
- “My friends told me not to go because of all the fights that occurred.”
- “I wouldn’t be able to be with all my friends.”

### Factors Influencing High School Years

Each group said they had nothing they wanted to learn in high school. When each group was asked to tell what the most significant event was for them in high school, the majority (over 66%) reported there was no significant event in high school. Three students responded with a significant event reported these three things as significant for them: graduation, being drunk and having a car accident, and having two teachers who cared about him.

Each group was asked what changes would he make to the high school and the high school experiences, more than 66% reported they had no suggestions. Of the four who responded, two in the traditional program said they would have tried harder, and in the alternative program group, one said he would have tried harder, and the other one said he would have increased break time. When asked to tell what was remembered most about high school, four in the traditional program said no memory; the other two said they wished they had tried harder. In the alternative program group, three had no memories; two had memories of their friends, and one remembered high school being fun.

Each group of males was also asked whether there had been a significant person in his life who influenced his high school years. Five from the traditional group reported there had been no significant person of influence; one reported having an influential

teacher. Two students from the alternative program reported an alternative program teacher had influenced them; one student reported a traditional program teacher had influenced him; two students reported no influential person, and one reported his best friend had been the most significant person in high school.

Each student was asked, “Who made the decision to attend either the alternative school or the traditional school?” Each student, in each group responded he either they made the decision or his parent made the decision. When asked, “Did your parents influence the decision whether to attend the alternative program?” Five students reported “Yes” the parents did influence the final decision. One student reported his parents did not influence the final decision. One student reported his parent “did not really care, as long as I was getting good grades.” Some responses indicate the parents’ perceptions of the alternative educational program influenced the final decision for enrollment. A phenomenon is evident in the placement of at-risk students in the alternative educational program, a phenomenon that is potentially feeding a vicious circle. This phenomenon deals with the concept of stigma. The stigma relates to the individual and to the organization, i.e. namely, the stigma attached to the alternative educational program. Stigma is a negative perception of an individual or an organization. The perceptions pf stigma is often influenced by myths, stereotypes, prejudices, and values. Stigma is manifested in the perceptions of the parents to influence their children on the choice of educational placement, the perceptions of counselors and teachers who recommend placement, and the perceptions of the at-risk student placed in the alternative educational program. This perception of stigma creates a disjuncture between the manifest mission of the school district to serve its population

and the perception that the alternative educational program is the least favorable, the least popular school of choice in the school district, and the least possible chance of fulfilling that.

In a talked with a father of a student who participated in the study, the father was asked why his son had chosen not to attend the alternative program. "We wanted him to take responsibility for his poor grades and poor judgment. We did not want the stigma placed on him that he was going to a special school."

Students who did not enroll in the alternative program reported answers similar to those reported by the administrators and counselors: "My parents did not want me to go to a school full of druggies." "I wanted to be with my friends at the regular high school." "My parents heard about all the bad kids that went there (the alternative program)." "I did not want to miss out on all the stuff that goes on in the high school."

The final question asked of each groups was, "Was your decision to attend or not attend the alternative program a good decision?" Each student who enrolled in the alternative educational program stated the decision to enroll was a positive one. Each student who had chosen not to enroll responded he had made a mistake in remaining at the regular high school.

One student reported, "My dad did not want me to go there (to the alternative program). He did not know anything about the program. He just wanted me to go to the regular high school and graduate." Another student stated, "My parents did not want me to go. My dad thought it would be like getting a GED." Another student stated, "My parents had heard a bunch of bad stuff about the school (the alternative program) that it was full of druggies."

## Summary

There were many inconsistencies found regarding decisions made by the counselors in recommending students for placement in the alternative high school based on attendance in the eighth grade. Five of the twelve students had less than ten absences during the entire eighth grade year. Seven of the recommended students had more than fifteen absences during their eighth grade year. Each of the counselors stated, as reported in Chapter Five, absenteeism was a primary factor influencing the decision to recommend students for placement in the alternative educational program.

Each group of students attendance patterns were followed over the four year period and it was found to be an even split. Fifty percent of the students in each group experienced more than thirty absences, and fifty percent of the students experienced less than twenty absences.

The second major criterion for recommending students for placement in the alternative program is academic achievement. Based on the recommendations from eighth grade, records of the twelve students who participated in the study, five failed three or more classes each semester, one student failed no academic classes, and the remaining six students failed three or more academic classes. There are inconsistencies in the criteria used by the school personnel in their recommendations. During their high school careers, the data shows the students attending the traditional high school experienced more consistency in earning credit than did the students enrolled in the alternative high school. The data reveals students enrolled in the traditional high school graduated at a higher rate than the students enrolled in the alternative high school. Five



of the six students in the traditional high school graduated within the four year period. One of the six students in the alternative high school graduated in the four year period.

Reported study habits of the students indicate the majority of the students in each group studied less than one hour per day. Students reported little if any involvement in extra-curricular activities. This is an important finding. In Chapter Two, research reports involvement in extra-curricular activities is vital for students to establish a connection to the school. This connection signals a feeling in school ownership. When students are not actively involved in after school activities, there is less chance academic success will be evident.

Students reported they were not actively involved in community activities after completion of their four year educational career. This is opposite to the goal or mission statement of the school district to become a contributing member of the community. The student's perception is this is not a priority.

Student perceptions are at the heart of this study. Each student was questioned about his perceptions: (1) why was he referred for placement in the alternative program (2) what factors influenced decisions for his placement (3) was his decision a benefit or a deterrent to his academic success. Reasons for referral ranged from academic failure in the middle school to poor attendance in the eighth grade. One student said he was referred because of behavioral issues in the middle school. Students who attended the traditional high school chose to enroll in the traditional school because the alternative program was a *place for losers*. Students who attended the alternative program said even though the program had a negative image, they chose to enroll because the smaller

class sizes would help them, or their poor grades influenced their decision, or they had a sibling attending the alternative program.

The referral and recommendation processes were definitely influenced by ambiguity, inconsistencies, the interactions and relationships between the multiple actors involved, and the negative perception (stigma) of the alternative program by school personnel, parents, and the students themselves.

Perceptions by the students of their educational outcomes were mixed. Students enrolled in the alternative program responded positively: they had made the right choice in attending the alternative high school. Of interest is that only one of the six students attending the alternative high school graduated within the studied four year period. Responses of the students enrolled in the traditional high school were mixed. Half of the students had a positive perception of his high school experiences and half perceived his experiences though not negative but rather as non-committal. Commonalities among these students included the following:

- Each of the twelve students agrees that extra curricular activities are an important part in keeping children in school. However, each of the students stated that he did not participate in extra curricular activities or athletic activities
- Each of the students is currently single
- Each of the students with the exception of one, lived with one or both parents after schooling
- Ten out of the twelve students stated that the teachers and administration cared about them and listened to them

- Six out of the twelve students are continuing their education.  
Three of the six continue to work on obtaining their high school diploma
- Four of the six at-risk students enrolled in the traditional high school said they had made the right decision regarding their enrollment. Two of the students stated they should have enrolled in the alternative high school. One of the two students failed to graduate.
- Opinions on the placement decision were divided among the six alternative high school students. Three of the six students felt he had made the right decision, two students said he would have done better if he had enrolled in the traditional high school; one student offered no opinion.

In looking at student outcomes, the data reveal that it did make a difference for the students who chose to enroll in the alternative high school. One student out the six enrolled in the alternative school graduated on time. Five of the six enrolled in the traditional school graduated on time. Why did this happen? The historical development of the alternative program and the changes to the program's design may have been factors. What is evident from the data is that attending the alternative high school did make a difference in the students' educational experiences and outcomes.

## CHAPTER 7

This chapter will discuss the ideas that explain or influence the fate of this alternative high school. Powell et al. (1985), Lipsky (1980), and Goffman (1963) provide insight into the creation and sustainability of the alternative high school. Three explanatory trajectories were selected because the issues they incorporate influence the institutional history, the organizational process, and the client-centered experiences.

### The Shopping Mall High School

To attempt to entice and graduate the entire population, and ensure that most are somehow better for it, is a monumental and exhausting task. Powell, 1985

Shopping Mall High School (Powell et.al., 1985) provides an interesting perspective on the development of the alternative educational program. Powell and colleagues report that between 1900 and 1940 attendance in secondary education boomed. This was chiefly because economic alternatives to education diminished. Changes in the structure of industry and technology reduced the number of unskilled jobs adolescent had filled. Laws were passed that effectively closed a youth out of the job market in manufacturing. Gradually firms and industries raised the entry level education requirements for jobs. Students began attending high school because more education was believed to be an advantage for job security. Educational organizations felt it necessary to expand and to accommodate the diversity found among adolescent high school students. Powell reports that one solution was to create the opportunity to provide all students with choices that would fit their needs, much like how a shopping mall offers a myriad of choices to customers to provide for and to satisfy their diverse

needs. By making numerous and different accommodations to its students, education would be able to achieve the results everyone desired: a high school diploma. The accommodations are so varied and numerous because students vary enormously. According to Powell, the variations and accommodations are provided to meet the needs of the alienated, the passive, the motivated and unmotivated, the preppy and poor, and the gifted and the handicapped.

According to Powell, the shopping mall high school contains four elements. These four elements are not all found together but rather make-up the framework of secondary educational programs. The make-up of the horizontal curriculum consists of variety in course offerings. For example, the studied alternative high school offered: history of the wild, wild, west, Star Wars, and DTE job shadowing. The variety came in taking traditional classes and giving them a twist. The vertical curriculum's designating characteristic is in the difficulty of the courses. This curriculum is usually identified with advance placement classes and tracks. The third element embraces offerings in clubs, athletics, and performing arts which together form the extracurricular curriculum. Finally, the shopping mall concept offers accommodations that come under the umbrella of the services curriculum. Providing an alternative educational program is seen as a means to other educational ends. The programs here are limited only by the possible problems, for each problem conveys a need for a program.

An important consideration, when variety exists in the afore-mentioned curriculums, is how choices are made. The power resides in the hands of the customers. For example, in the case of a student enrolling in the alternative educational program, the philosophy behind making the choice is that the opportunity is there if the student is



willing and able to take advantage of it. In this system, the burden of choice falls mainly on the student; the choices the students make are shaped by how they, and sometimes their parents and peers, view the program. The perception by the student and parents is often a negative view. Choice is also influenced by the importance of being with acquaintances in as well as outside class. Powell reports (pg. 440) the student's self perception dramatically affects choice. Sometimes friendships and self perceptions work together causing students to stick with those they regard as their own kind. Powell also reports that many parents play a far more aggressive role in choice. Many times parents who lack a high school or post-secondary education are not involved with their child's educational process. Powell asks how schools attempt to engage students. How do they educate students about making wise choices? The most important resource schools have is the guidance counselor. Advising students is regarded as a specialized professional function of counselors. The counselor's role in advising students about enrollment in alternative educational program is a primary responsibility. However, Powell reports that often the help received from counselors is minimal. Most perceptions are that student advising is dominated by the logistics of scheduling and meeting graduation requirements. Many times, investigating various educational programs or offerings was up to the parents "to become educated on how to use the resources within the school by taking the initiative themselves in contacting some of the people here" (Powell pg. 48.) For example, this is what is reported often happening when counselors would tell parents about the alternative high school, but then leaves it up to the parents to follow through for further information. In general, the reach is from the student to the school rather than the school to the student. One reason

for this is the student/teacher ratio. A typical ratio runs about 420:1. With such high caseloads, it is difficult to provide the one-on-one attention needed to meet the needs of all students. This could be a reason why placement in the appropriate educational program is so difficult. Counselors complain that about seventy-five percent of their time is spent on record keeping.

In order to deal with meeting the needs of all the students, school districts have established the *specialty school* (Powell et. al., 1985), “The character of the student’s school experience tends to differ from that of students who make fewer demands or have neither the abilities nor the disabilities to make them stand out” (Powell pg.119). In these selective programs the students are different in one important respect: for them, school has not been a winning experience. They are the students who have not really learned to cope. Many students are troubled, depressed, and sometimes self-destructive. These troubled students are those who cannot or will not agree to even the most undemanding high school accommodations. According to Powell, the students who are placed in the alternative specialty school are the students who create the most problems. These problem students experience academic failure and truancy issues. The largest and most exasperating group of trouble makers consists of the chronic truants, who drop in and out of school. Many of these are the students who attend school but drop in and out of classes because “They like coming to school and meeting their friends, but don’t like the regimented routine of classes and assignments” (Powell, pg. 142). The alternative program was started for these students who seem to need more structure and attention. The idea was to make it harder for them to cut classes or cause a stir and vanish into the great anonymous mass in the school. This was accomplished by making



the class sizes smaller than those found in the traditional high school. In the traditional high school, class size averages between thirty and thirty-five students. In the specialty school, class size averages range between twelve and fifteen. A strong reason for investment in the specialty school is that state funding practices are based on average daily attendance, which creates a strong incentive for schools to keep attendance up. Another reason is the tight link between attendance and academic achievement, which is in turn associated with school retention.

Specialty schools usually serve very particular student constituencies, who are distinguished by special characteristics. For example, in the alternative program those characteristics are truancy and academic failure. There are usually a number of threads running through the specialty school. These threads help explain how the school became designated as special and how the high school experience is shaped as a result.

One of these threads is advocacy. This relates to the influences of individuals who are supportive or who have a negative perspective. A second thread is that all specialty schools have an admissions process of some sort. The admissions process can be very clear-cut or at times mystifying, as not everyone qualifies. A third thread reflects what the specialty school does not offer. The range of choices within them tends to be restrictive. For example, in the alternative program the curriculum tends to be focused on the academic side. Course offerings are geared to help the at-risk student make-up for academic failure experienced in the traditional school. The course offerings may vary the approach in the delivery of content in traditional course offerings, in order to meet the interests of the students. For example, one alternative school in this study offered the History of the Wild West in place of the traditional U. S.

History, and Star Wars in place of government. But not all students are equally committed or take advantage of the school's willingness to provide alternative opportunities. Under circumstances of unequal will or ability, the specialty schools are the natural outgrowth of the desire of some clients or their representatives to obtain what they want (Powell, pg.144).

Why do some students and parents accept the recommendation for enrollment when others do not? The answer lies in providing students and parents with enough information to make informed choices. Some parents do not want their child enrolled in an alternative educational program for several reasons: instruction may be inferior, or the child may not receive a genuine diploma. Others parents want their child to attend the same school the parents attended, for the child to be considered successful.

How does the admission process work? Who gets in? In most cases, based on objective data or on some combination of data and the opinions of staff, the student is found to have special characteristics or to meet specific criteria required for enrollment. However, the ultimate decision for placement must be accompanied by a willingness of the participant to agree to the terms of the program. All admissions to specialty schools generate discontent. Some students do not like the constraints imposed by the program and avoid membership by choosing not to enroll or by dropping out. Being part of a specialty school often keeps the students from participating in the many courses and extra curricular activities found in the traditional high school. The at-risk students find their choices restricted in ways that indicate they are different from other students. Most school districts do not mandate enrollment in the alternative programs, but as an implicit condition of continued membership in the school district, the at-risk student is

persuaded to enter the program. In some school districts this is the student's last chance. An at-risk student often views this placement as limiting their choices; courses and teachers are selected for them where structure and supervision are highly controlled.

One effect of the constraints on choice is that the specialty school offers a more likely possibility of graduation than does continuation in the traditional school. Restrictions protect the student from the temptations that come with the ability to make choices and to prevent them from leaving school empty-handed. The specialty school constraints are designed to encourage achievement. They provide students with a coherent and useful education, one that leaves them prepared for what follows high school (Powell, 1985).

The correlate of less choice for those in the specialty school is that they receive more attention from school staff. Lower student/teacher ratios make this possible. Providing counseling to the students is a central feature. The counselor/student ratio is much smaller at 150:1, as opposed to that found in the traditional high school. The personal investment of the specialty school teacher in her students usually takes the form of some special attention.

The specialty school has potent advocates working to insure that the school provides services to its students, including guidance counselors, administration, parents and students. Parental support can be both positive and negative. If parents receive accurate information regarding the purpose of the specialty school, they are more likely to support the program, then enrollment is likely to be positive. If parental perception of the program is that their child will be stigmatized, enrollment will not occur. This is

also true of the student perceptions and influences whether the student continues in the program. Teachers and administration can also be powerful advocates for the specialty school. If these two groups feel an affinity for the program and what it teaches or the type of student it services, then support is positive. Administrative support can affect teacher assignments, the number and types of courses offered, and the actual assignment of students. Community support is important to the acceptance of the program. In many cases it is the community-at-large that acts as a positive or negative advocate.

The advocacy of the program changes dramatically if there is a negative stigma attached to the program. Truants and troublemakers lack advocates who approve of their behavior, but who will lobby for these students to be sent to the alternative school. At the very least, the school serves as a place where these students can continue their education in an environment that is separate and safe, away from influencing the mainstream students with their unacceptable behavior and lack of interest.

In the 1980's, the school district established its alternative high school with several goals in mind: provide an educational environment that would maximize the power the school has to retain the student in the environment, to increase graduation rates, and provide a multitude of choices and accommodations to the students.

#### Educators as Street-Level Bureaucrats

The decisions of street level bureaucrats, the routines they establish, and the devices they invent to cope with uncertainties and work pressures, effectively become the public policies they carry out.

Michael Lipsky, 1980

Lipsky's theory of street-level bureaucracy deals with how the actions of organizations' influence the behaviors of individuals and workers. He refers to public service organizations as "Street-Level Bureaucracy". He points out that the street-level bureaucrats who make the everyday decisions and who run the operations of organizations are confronted by issues of organizational restrictions, constraints, and performance measures. The constraints faced by the street-level bureaucrats include limited or inadequate resources, political issues, and client interactions.

Who are street-level bureaucrats? Lipsky defines them as public service workers who interact directly with individuals in the course of their jobs and have substantial discretion in the execution of their work. Examples of street-level bureaucrats in the educational organization include teachers, counselors, administrators, and social workers. They determine the eligibility of clients for benefits and services provided by organizations and programs and have considerable discretion in determining the nature, amount, and quality of benefits and sanctions provided by their agencies. For example, in education school personnel decide who will be suspended, who will remain in school, who will be recommended for placement in the alternative educational program, who will remain in the traditional educational program, and the subtle decision of who is teachable. Street-level bureaucrats have different priorities from those of management. The street-level bureaucrat is interested in processing work consistent with their preferences and the interests of their clients. The organization, on the other hand, is interested in processing work in ways that are result-oriented. The organization is concerned with performance that exposes them to critical scrutiny. The managers are interested in achieving results consistent with agency objectives. The

street-level bureaucrats are constantly torn by the demands of the organization and their clients to provide effectiveness and responsiveness to their needs. One way in which the interests of the street level bureaucrats (in the case of this study it is the counselors and school administrators in each referring building) depart from those of managers (the school district) is their need to process work loads effectively and efficiently. The fact that street level bureaucrats must exercise discretion in processing the clients with inadequate resources means that they must develop shortcuts and simplifications. For street-level bureaucrats; high caseloads, episodic encounters, and constant pressure for immediate decisions force them to act without being able to consider whether an investment in searching for more information would be profitable (Lipsky, 1980). The street-level bureaucrat faces decision making with preconceived notions, stereotypes, prejudices, interpretations, and beliefs in existing myth that affect the decisions they make. When policy is developed through the growth of low-level decisions regarding routines and categories, those dimensions effectively determine policy within the parameters established by management. These street-level routines and simplifications often become the policies that are delivered. For example, the teacher's informal classification of students by attributed academic achievement effectively determines school stratification policies. Interactions become routine when work consists of decisions made about people during the interaction itself. Routines and simplifications are subject to biases. Some teachers may be oriented toward fulfilling the organization's objectives, but also structured to aid the street-level bureaucrats job responsibilities that, in turn, may conflict with the organizations' demands. Routines

and simplifications are also subject to the bureaucrats' occupational and personal biases, which include prejudices and stereotypes (Lipsky, 1980).

A key issue influencing the street-level bureaucrat's decision making process is the availability of resources. Limited or inadequate resources facing street-level bureaucrats include both time and money available to run the organization and provide services to clients. In educational organizations, the goals and missions are established by the management (the school board and central office administrators). Building administrators, counselors, and teaching staff are the street level bureaucrats responsible for making the daily decisions to meet the goals of the school district. The school personnel of each individual building seek to meet the demands and needs of the students but are torn by the restrictions and limitations imposed by federal mandates, state funding for education, imposed by policy and guidelines established by state departments of education, and policy established by school boards and central office personnel in their role of operating the entire school district.

Time availability resources trap the street-level bureaucrats between an overbearing workload and a paucity of time and energy for attending to the needs of clients (Moore, 1987). Bureaucratic decision making takes place under conditions of limited time. Street-level bureaucrats work with a relatively high degree of uncertainty because of the frequency or rapidity with which decisions have to be made. Street-level bureaucrats characteristically have large caseloads relative to their responsibilities. High caseload ratios relative to the street level bureaucrat responsibilities often make it difficult to service the needs of the client academically, monitor attendance concerns, and make individual contacts. The typical caseload ratio for school counselors is 400:1.

Teacher/student ratios are often set at 32:1. In order to provide a successful alternative program the teacher/client ratio should be set at 12-15:1 and the counselor/client ratio set at 150:1. In addition to the high number of caseloads, an emphasis on housekeeping chores, such as filling out forms, checking student academic records, preparing for state testing requirements, graduation duties, parent conferences, and seeing every single student, affects the amount of time available to clients.

The availability of financial resources also affects the street-level bureaucrats' decision making process. School districts are tied to the funding established by state and national legislation. The required monies needed to run a successful educational operation are constrained. The number of allocated spaces to service clients is limited by the financial funding available in order to hire additional teachers to provide small class size. The financial funding of education is limited by per pupil allocations. This means that operational funds for the school district are determined by the number of pupils enrolled in the district. The school district must set the teacher/pupil ratio at cost effective levels.

The availability of services to clients is another issue that influences the street-level bureaucrats' decision making. A complication in providing services through street-level bureaucracies comes about because the demand for service is sometimes unpredictable. This is because the number of people treated by street-level bureaucrats is only a fraction of the number that could be treated or because their theoretical obligations call for higher quality treatment than is possible to provide to individual clients (Lipsky, 1980: 37).



Lipsky reports the street-level bureaucrats' environment is political and routines chosen by bureaucracies themselves are political.

Street-level bureaucracies . . . determine the allocation of particular goods and services in the society . . . . To say that their actions are political is to indicate that some people are aided; some are harmed, by the dominant patterns of decision-making. If the dominant patterns of decision-making are characterized by routine and simplification, then the structure of these patterns must be analyzed to determine who gets what, when, and how . . . (Lipsky, 1980).

Choices and/or decisions are made based on the street-level bureaucrat's personal predispositions. Decisions are often based on stereotypes, which are based on appearance, demeanor, or other attributed qualities. In employing these stereotypes, street-level bureaucrats are able to ration time, energy, sensitivity, and organizational resources in a manner consistent with their tolerance for stress. Lipsky argues there exists independent schema of decision making, and these have important differential impacts. It is not enough to simply process people, but it is in influencing them and their ability to act. Theoretically, there is no limit to the demand for free public services. Agencies that provide public services must and will devise ways to ration them. This may be done by fixing the amount or level of the services in relation to other services. In the case of placing at-risk students in an alternative educational program, the placement is influenced by the number of allocated spaces by the school district. This allocation of spaces is a direct result of the school district's budget priority. The inconsistencies exhibited by the school district decision makers when it comes to

deciding which students should be placed in the alternative educational program is a direct result of having to ration the placements themselves.

Ideally, street level bureaucrats should respond to the individual needs of the people they serve. However, in practice they deal with their clients on a mass basis. Service bureaucracies often favor some clients at the expense of others, despite official policy. As in the case of public education, street level bureaucrats should respond to the needs of the individual children, but in practice they develop techniques to respond to the children as a class. In the placement of at-risk students in an alternative educational program, this is evident when one student is recommended for placement and another student, meeting the same criteria, is not recommended. Street level bureaucracies encounter conflict and ambiguity in the tensions between client-centered goals and organizational goals. Street-level bureaucrats deal with ambiguities and inconsistencies relative to their responsibilities.

According to Lipsky, a “client processing mentality” is a direct consequence of psychological stress and alienation from the job:

Street-level bureaucrats . . . impose personal conceptions of their job when they make superior efforts for some clients, concealing that they cannot extend themselves for all. At times this perspective results in favoritism toward certain groups, but it may also apply without group bias (Lipsky, 1980).

These stereotypes and prejudices can also set into motion a set of rationalizations to limit objectives and to turn clients away (Lipsky, 1980). The decision process is

characterized in the form of stereotypes and prejudices. Clients perceived as hostile, disrespectful, or apathetic may receive limited attention and service.

Accommodations of workers to job stress account for the slippage between policy intents and policy actions. To adapt or deal with this slippage, street-level bureaucrats have developed simplifications and routines to deal with the complexity of the work task when the official categories prove inadequate for expeditious work processing or if they significantly contradict their preferences.

The clients of street-level bureaucrats also influence the outcome of a decision with their responses to the implementation of decisions (sometimes they respond angrily to real or perceived injustices, act grateful and elated, or sullen and passive). The ability to treat clients as individuals is significantly compromised by the needs of the organization. These needs are based on available resources, heavy caseloads, demands from outside agencies, and priorities and preferences of the bureaucracies.

Conflict and ambiguity encountered by street-level bureaucrats is often found in tensions between client centered goals and organizational goals. Lipsky believes that it is the decisions of the street level bureaucrats, the routines they establish, and the devices they invent to cope with the uncertainties and work pressures that effectively become the public policies they carry out. In the educational organization, the school personnel of the individual buildings seek to meet the demands and the needs of the students, but are torn between the restrictions and limitations imposed by the school board and central office administrators in their role of operating the entire school district. The major dimensions of public policy – levels of benefits, categories of eligibility, nature of rules, regulations and services – are shaped by district policy,

politics, and administrative officials. The policy making roles of street level bureaucrats are built upon two interrelated facets of their positions: a relatively high degree of discretion and relative autonomy from organizational authority. This does not mean that street level bureaucrats are unrestrained by rules, regulations, and directives from the school board.

Street level bureaucrats are expected to be advocates, to use their knowledge, skills, and position to secure for clients the best treatment or position consistent with the constraints of the service. However, there is a contradiction in delivering street level policy through a bureaucracy. The clients of street level bureaucracies are non-voluntary; they obtain services which cannot be obtained elsewhere. Service is delivered by people to people. This service, however, when delivered through the bureaucracy invokes a model of detachment and equal treatment under conditions of resource limitations and constraints. The achievement of advocacy is undermined by several critical factors. First, advocacy can only be done on behalf of single units. This, however, does not mean that only one client can be dealt with at a time, but it does mean that advocacy may be compromised by large caseloads and mass processing of clients. Counselors have large caseloads, which means that every minute devoted to one client means less time for others. Second, advocacy is incompatible with organizational perspectives. Organizations typically impose tight control over resource dispersal. This conflict, of organizations seeking to treat all of the clients equally, and the street level bureaucrats advocating for individual clients influences the decision making. Third, advocacy is incompatible with controlling clients. The street level bureaucrats must make judgments about the credibility, eligibility, and performance of

the clients. Street level bureaucrats do the best job they can, but their efforts are tempered by their job responsibilities and the goals of the organization.

### Stigma

Stigma offers an unusual excursion into the situation of persons who are perceived to be unable to conform to standards which society calls “normal”.

Erving Goffman, 1963

Stigma is a negative perception of an individual or an organization. The stigmatized perceptions of stigma are influenced by myths, stereotypes, prejudices, and values. Stigma is manifested in the perceptions of the parents whereby they influence their children on whether to enroll in the alternative program, the perceptions of the counselors and teachers who are willing or unwilling to recommend students for placement, and the perceptions of the at-risk students recommended for placement in the alternative educational program. Goffman’s idea focuses on how stigma influences decision making.

Originally, stigma meant a bodily sign deigned to expose something unusual or bad about the moral status of a person. The sign was usually a visual, physical mark that would distinguish the person from others. Goffman (1963) initially associated stigma with three different varieties: abominations of the body, blemishes of character, and tribal identities. To stigmatize an individual was to define the individual in terms of a negative attribute and then devalue him/her in a manner appropriate to this label. Today, stigma is widely used to refer to a disgrace: “A stigma is a special kind of relationship perceived between an attribute and a stereotype” (Goffman, 1963, p. 4). Dovidio et al (2000) reports that stigma is largely a social construction, shaped by

cultural and historical forces. It is determined by the broader cultural context (involving stereotypes, values, prejudices, and ideologies), the meaning of the situation for the participants, and the features of the situation. For example, in the case of placement of at-risk students in an alternative educational program, the decision makers are influenced by a variety of social perceptions associated with stigma (as also reported by Dovidio et al, 2000; Heatherton et al, 2000; Neuberg et al, 2000, Stangor and Crandall, 2000). In decision-making, confusion, complexity, ambiguity, and interpretation are often based on preferences and expectations about outcomes associated with different alternative actions. It is assumed that actions implemented are based on the best alternatives available to the decision maker. However, in everyday events, there are complications that influence the process and the consequence of the outcome. For example, parents may be influenced by the perception that the alternative educational program is not a real high school; that the child placed in the alternative educational program will be unable to graduate from a real high school (many times the parents' alma mater), and that placement in the alternative educational program will label their child as a trouble-maker. The rationale, used by school personnel to place the student in an alternative educational program may be to rectify academic failures, poor attendance patterns, or prevent potential dropouts. However, the decision maker's (usually the parent and/or the student) commitment is often overshadowed by the lack of this aforementioned urgency, differences of opinions, or fear that their child's self-esteem or social identity will be discredited. According to Goffman (1963) stigma and its synonyms (stereotyping and prejudice) conceal a double perspective: the stigmatized individual will be perceived as different – one that is perceived immediately

(discredited) or one that is not immediately perceived (discreditable). The choice for not placing an at-risk student in an alternative educational program will prevent the perceived loss of social identity (associating with *normal* peers) and/or that attachment of a negative connotation of being a *loser*. How does an organization, as in the case of the alternative education program, become stigmatized? What affect does stigma have on its effectiveness? Possessing an attribute that makes one different from others constitutes stigma. In the case of placement in the alternative educational program, the perceiver (the decision maker) may be assigning the attribute of a non-achiever to themselves or to their child. Organizations, like individuals, also become stigmatized (Heatherton et al, 2000). For example, the alternative school is often perceived negatively because the students enrolled are perceived negatively as they do not have the same values or work ethic of the students enrolled in the traditional high school. This stigma of the organization is often attached to the individual. Schools face serious problems holding the interest and enthusiasm of their clients. Organizational stigma is derived from the unintended consequences of school organization, its practices, and its experiences.

Jones (1986, p.43) writes “Stigma refers to a faulty generalization from a group characterization (a stereotype) to an individual member of that group irrespective of either the accuracy of the group stereotype or the applicability of the group characterization to the individual in question.” Stereotyping and prejudice are central features to stigma. Social psychologists consider stereotyping to be a normal consequence of individual’s cognitive abilities and limitations and of the social information and experiences to which they are exposed (Dovidio, 2000). Stigma is a

powerful phenomenon. It is a social construction and involves two fundamental components: the recognition of difference based on some distinguishing characteristic, and a consequent devaluation of the person. Goffman (1963) described stigma as a sign or mark that designated the person as “spoiled” and therefore less valued than “normal” people. For example, in the case of the at-risk student in the alternative program, the perception of the at-risk student is that the student is a “loser” or “druggie”. The student is perceived as flawed, compared to the “regular” student in the traditional educational program.

The concept of stigma is related to a negative evaluation of the person and the social characteristic. The personal characteristic is a perception of a behavior or condition that is thought to involve an undesirable departure from what is considered “normal”. The social characteristic is a perception of marginality associated with a group and is centrally defining. Goffman (1963), states that social identity involves identity standards which individuals apply to themselves to be considered part of the social environment. For example, students consider themselves to be accepted by their peers and parents as a good student if they attend school on a regular basis and experience academic achievement. The individual becomes stigmatized when he/she accepts the standards but does not conform to the standards.

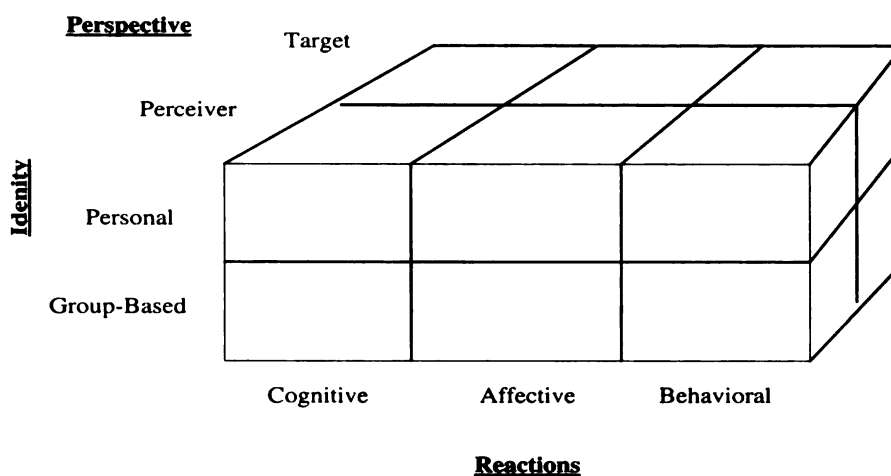
Understanding stigma and stigma involves recognizing the different perspectives and experiences of those who are stigmatizing others and those who are stigmatized. Figure 7.1 illustrates how stigma can be understood.

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*Figure 7.1*



## Stigma



People who stigmatize others are referred to as *perceivers*. The recipients of stigma are referred to as *targets*. Perceivers and targets have different needs, goals, and motivations, which can further shape how they perceive and interpret information. The interactions between perceivers and targets are important. It is not the interaction with others who are actually stigmatized, but with others who are believed to be stigmatized. For example, the perceiver believes that the persons with whom the target will be interacting will adopt the characteristics of the stigmatized. The target is a naïve participant who is randomly assigned to the condition and is unaware that he/she is being stigmatized.

Stigma also involves perceptions of deviance but extends to general attributes of character and identity (Dovidio, 2000). The major negative impact of stigma normally resides in the social and psychological consequences. Most situations involving stigma lead to social avoidance or rejection. The student recommended for placement in the alternative program, the student considers that he/she is being isolated from their social

interactions with peers or being rejected from the perception of being a *regular* student.

Heatherton, et. al. (2000, p. 1) states,

A person who is stigmatized is a person whose social identity, or membership in some category, calls into question his/her full humanity. The person is seen as devalued, spoiled, or flawed in the eyes of others.

Perceptions shape reactions cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally. The perceived controllability of stigma affects how stigmatized people or organizations construe the reactions of others to them as well as the influence of stigma on self-esteem. For example, the students enrolled in the alternative school will become marginalized or will take on the perceived negative characteristics associated with the alternative school.

Fisk and Neuberg (1990) propose that people form impressions of others through a variety of processes that lie on a continuum reflecting the extent to which the perceiver utilizes a target's particular attributes. At one end of the continuum are category-based processes in which membership determines impressions with minimal attention to individual attributes. At the other end of the continuum are individual processes in which individual characteristics, not group membership, influence impression. Brewer (1998) proposes that category-based processing is more likely to occur than person-based processing because social information is typically organized around social categories. Stigma is both an interpersonal and an inter-group phenomenon. It affects what motives are most salient how people process information and how they interpret information and make attributions. When personal identity is salient, an individual's needs, standards, beliefs, and motives determine behavior: "When people's social identity is activated 'people come to perceive themselves more

as interchangeable exemplars of a social category than as unique personalities defined by their individual differences from others'” (Turner et. al, 1987, p. 50).

Affective, cognitive, and behavioral elements are basic components of stigma. Behavioral reactions may be the consequence of affective reactions and/or cognitive effort. Affective reactions are more likely to dominate initial reactions to stigmas that are more individually oriented. Reactions that are more collective may initially be more cognitive. Collective stigmas are often associated with stereotypes and influence how information is encoded, stored, and retrieved. Affective reactions may occur initially, but subsequent cognitive responses may temper, modify, or justify the affective response.

It is important to emphasize that stigma is a collective and culture phenomenon. Cultural representations are stereotypes, ideologies, values, and beliefs that are widely known and/or shared. Stigmatized individuals, either through direct experience or through awareness of cultural representations, know that their social identity is devalued by others (Crocker, 1998). Awareness that one's social identity is devalued can influence collective personal esteem and self-esteem. Awareness of a negative stereotype associated with a particular group or organization can produce a *stereotypical threat* (Steele and Aronson, 1995). Stereotype threat can lead to self-threat when the content of the negative stereotype is salient and relevant to the person's behavior or attributes in a given situation. For example, the perception that the alternative school is for *bad kids* and *losers* influences the perception of the at-risk student recommended for placement that he/she will be seen as a loser; this, in turn,

influences the student's decision to enroll. In stigma, the target appraises the predicament by developing coping strategies. One of these strategies is avoidance.

Why do people stigmatize? Humans value the groups to which they belong. People stigmatize others who are seen as a threat to the membership in a particular group. Stigma exists primarily in the minds of the perceivers and the targets as a cultural social construction, rather than a universally stigmatized physical feature. Stigma arises from the perceptions of group boundaries. It is manifested in an *Us* versus *them* rationalization. For a characteristic to be associated with stigma, it must be shared among the members of a given group. In the case of the stigma attached to the alternative school, truancy and academic failure are perceived in the individual as being a *trouble-maker* or *loser*. This stereotyping and prejudice, particularly in comparisons made between so called *in-groups* and *out-groups*, affects the self-esteem and social identity for the perceiver. This may account for the perception that placement in the alternative program will affect the social standing of the target. The perceiver believes that the stereotype of the student's enrolled (troublemakers) will be attached to the potential enrollee and will transfer to the perceiver as well; therefore, the decision is made not to enroll in the alternative program.

Cultural stereotypes may take on a self-fulfilling prophecy. The existence, or perceived existence, may undermine the motivation and accomplishments of members of the traditionally devalued group. Steele (1992, 1997) states that people who feel undervalued and *marked* by stigma are likely to feel threatened when faced with the prospect of being negatively stereotyped. For example, the at-risk student may not fail

more frequently than others, but they may more likely feel psychologically devastated by failure leading them to misidentify with academic achievement.

Low school achievement clearly fits as a stigma (Jussim et. al, 2000). Low performing students with histories of poor academic achievement are placed in alternative programs (Oakes, 1985, Rist, 1970). Negative expectations are attached to low-achieving students. These negative attributes undermine the students' motivation and render them more susceptible to confirming the negative expectations. Students who have been stigmatized because of demographic group membership or because of their history of low achievement are more vulnerable to the effects of expectancy.

### Summary

The theories of Lipsky, Goffman, and Powell help explain the factors that influence the decision making process of recommending and placing at-risk students in an alternative educational program. These theories are interrelated and express the concerns that ambiguity, advocacy, inconsistencies, client /bureaucracy relationships, available resources, and stigma all influence the decisions made by school personnel and parents/students. Goffman reports that both social and personal identities are part of the concerns and definition regarding the individual whose identity is in question. Lipsky reports relationships between the street level bureaucrats and their clients are also influenced by the perceptions, identities, and interpretations of the people involved. Powell reports that specialty schools were designed to improve the interactions between the clients and the organization and also influence how decisions were made. Figure 6.2 provides a representation of the major inter-relatedness of issues presented in these three theories.

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*Figure 7.2*

Factors Influencing Decision Making

Theorists	Client	Limited			
	Interactions	Advocacy	Resources	Perceptions	Stereotypes
Lipsky, 1980	X	X	X		X
Goffman, 1963	X			X	X
Powell, 1985	X	X	X	X	X

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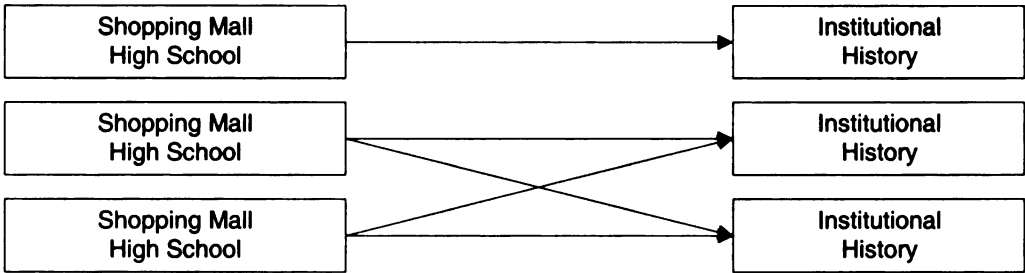
These three trajectories help to explain the fate of the alternative high school in this study. The alternative high school was developed as a specialty school. In its original design it offered an educational environment that provided distinct features that capitalized on the interests of the students. The history demonstrated that during its evolution the institution lost sight of the distinctive features that defined it as a specialty school.

The street-level bureaucracy trajectory explains how the factors of limited resources, contradictions and confusion by the school personnel in fulfilling the organizations needs versus the clients needs, political demands imposed with the changing succession of leadership, workers personal perceptions and predispositions influencing decision-making, lack of consistent student advocacy, and limited services provided to the clients based on the inconsistent application of criteria and decisions because of unclear and unwritten policies.

The stigma trajectory helps explain how negative perceptions of the alternative program and the students associated with the program influence decisions made by school personnel, students, and parents. Figure 6.3 represents the relationship between the trajectories presented in this chapter.

Table 7.3

Trajectory Relationships



In reviewing the data and the information presented in this chapter, we can understand the role ambiguities, inconsistencies, interpretations of information, client advocacy, adequate resources, involvement of multiple actors, and issues of stigma found in Lipsky, Goffman, and Powell influence the decision making process. Specifically in the scenarios, examine how different are the interpretations of student information by the school personnel and how it varies from building to building. Not every counselor in the different buildings makes the same kind of referral. Inconsistencies made by the counselors in the interpretations of the situations regarding advocacy for the client. Inconsistencies were found in the counselor's emphasis on academic achievement. One counselor stated, "Grades are the number one indicator for at-risk students, but I'd rather not send a student who is failing all six classes. That

student just may need some counseling (This seems to be a bit of an oxymoron. The counselor states that the child needs group counseling; however, the counseling ratio is at 350:1. This is another example of limited resources). School personnel reported they gathered all of the information that is pertinent to a referral, but the end result is that the parent and the student make the final decision. Accurate information is seldom used by either the parent or the student. The school personnel may present accurate and statistical information regarding the student's attendance and failure rate, but the parent and child make their decision based on their perceptions that the program *is for losers*. This is where we see the influence of Goffman's stigma.



## CHAPTER 8

There were three parts to this study: Part One looked at the history of the alternative program in the studied school district; Part Two looked at the perceptions of administrators and staff regarding the referral process of at-risk students to the alternative educational program and the placement process of the at-risk students in the alternative educational program, and Part Three looked at twelve students referred to the alternative program over a four year period in high school, and the students' perceptions of their educational experience.

Alternative programs that are designed for the following students:

- Those who have dropped out of high school
- Those who are in danger of dropping out
- Those who are perceived as disruptive and difficult to manage in a traditional environment
- Those that have fallen behind in grade level due to academic failure
- Those who have attendance problems
- Those who are living on their own and working during the day.

According to Inger (1997), the alternative school program, works best for students who fit some or all of the following criteria:

- have a goal in mind
- have been lost, bored, or frustrated in a regular classroom
- like to learn at their own pace
- need a lot of student-teacher interaction
- need to work or want to work during the day

Most alternative programs are designed after Raywid's three conceptual models.

Table 8.1 provides a summary of Raywid's three conceptual models.

*Table 8.1*

Alternative School Models

	Placement	Focus	Cost	Assumptions	Outcomes
Type 1 School of Choice	Students make decision to attend	Restructured classroom, programmatic themes, departure from traditional curriculum	Least costly	Problem with way school relates to student	Success rate more lasting. Designed around interests of student
Type 2 Last Chance	Mandatory placement by school	Behavior modification, little attention to modifying curriculum		Problem with student	Yields few benefits, problems not resolved
Type 3 Remediation	Student Choice	Remediation/rehabilitation, social/emotional growth	Most costly	Problem with student	Behavior improves, but success does not last

Part One

In part one; this study looked at the alternative educational program in one specific school district, from its inception to the present day. The programs implementation of the program was an example of Powell's ideas behind the specialty school: "High schools similarly offer specialty shops: the students in them are regarded by the school as special, as preferred customers" (Powell, 1985, p. 118). The study revealed that over the years the program evolved from the concept of a specialty school to a watered down version of the traditional high school program. The original design of the alternative school program was to service students who were considered to be at high risk of dropping out of school because of attendance, and academic and behavioral

problems that prevented them from operating successfully in a public school setting. The age group served was from 14-18 years of age. In these early years, referrals to the alternative school were based solely on the student's academic achievement and attendance patterns. However, over the years, discipline issues became a major factor that influenced referrals. Students who had attendance problems and who experienced academic failure were identified for placement, but disciplinary problems became a major factor in the decision of who was to be referred to the alternative program. This shift in the referral policy is an example of the influence of stigma and may have contributed to the fate of the reform. The consideration and use of the student's disciplinary record reinforced the stigma that the school was a place for *drugies* and *losers*. In addition to factoring disciplinary issues into the referral process, the curriculum of the alternative program changed to reflect what was offered at the traditional school. This change, it was reasoned, supported the idea that if a student chose to return to the traditional program, course offerings would be in alignment and the student would lose no learning. Counselors reported that the system, as it is presently constructed, is not working:

It's only working for a small minority. Some students are placed in the alternative program that shouldn't be placed, and some students are not placed in the program because they want to stay in their regular high school.

School personnel are inconsistent in the use of the unwritten criteria of applying attendance and lack of academic achievement as guidelines for student referral. Some of the students in this study were referred to the alternative program because of high

absenteeism and academic failures, while some of the students referred were also major discipline problems in the traditional high school.

According to the information presented in the case study, the alternative school began as a *School of Choice*. The school followed Raywid's model III. However, the program gradually evolved into a cross between Raywid's *Last Chance* program and the *Remediation* program was a key component of the program. The student would be able to return to the traditional high school upon achieving academic success in the alternative program. However, the counselors reported that this unwritten intention was not always imparted to the student and/or the parents. The student was led to believe that enrollment in the alternative school was a final placement, when in reality the student could return to the traditional school once their academic standing was improved. This ambiguity of lack of written criteria may have influenced the academic achievement of the students enrolled in the alternative high school. Because there were no written school district guidelines about who should be referred to the alternative program there was inconsistency in the way students were referred to the program. These students may have assumed the stigma that they were losers, the outsiders. A high school counselor reported:

It is a subjective process. Sometimes a teacher will report a concern about a student's lack of academic progress, but at other times teachers are reluctant to refer students to us for consideration. The process is only working to a degree. If we had specific criteria, made teachers more aware about the alternative program, and had a lot more PR in the community the alternative program

would be more successful. Referrals to the program were a hit or miss type of referral.

The inconsistencies shown are what Lipsky (1980) reports as a lack of knowledge, information, values, and conception of purpose. The major actors may find their commitment to a policy incompatible with other important priorities: they may be dependent on other players who lack the same sense of urgency; they may have differences of opinion or are constrained by the demands of the other players. Lipsky (1980) reports that implementation problems arise when policy does not specify objectives clearly, provide adequate resources, and have too high expectations. Established policy may have more support, but it does not ensure that the implementation process will be successful. Failures in programs can be attributed to failures in implementation. In the alternative educational program that was studied, specific criteria for identifying at-risk students, specific criteria for placement, and specific individuals in charge of making the decision for placement, specific criteria for acceptance, and specific attention to outcomes with feedback to improve the process. None of which is evident in the Brown School District. As reported by counselors and administration, the program is not working to expectations. This lack of intent in the implementation process may have caused confusion in the students as to what was their purpose was in attending the alternative high school. Was the purpose of their enrollment to earn lost credits and improve their academic standing in order to return to the traditional high school, or was it to prepare them for post-secondary careers? This ambiguity further impacted on the success of the program.

One of the problems vocalized by the counselors was that the school district had a low priority for supporting the alternative program: "Money drives the system. If the money is not there, you can't build a successful program." This is an example of Lipsky's theoretical issue of limited resources influencing the decision making in street level bureaucracies and of Raywid's research of institutional legitimacy.

## Part Two

In Part Two, this study looked at the perceptions of the referral process and the success of the alternative program that were held by the school personnel. The overall conclusions of the school personnel are that the referral process has not been successful. It is evident that the existing referral process reflects Lipsky's (1980) concept of unstructured decision making. Administrative decision-making, within educational organizations, are either structured (programmed decisions) or unstructured (unexpected decisions). Structured decisions follow direct, well-stated written policy. Unstructured or unexpected decisions are made when there is inconsistency in the decision-making. This usually occurs when policy is unwritten and left to the interpretation of the decision-makers. Effective decisions are made by recognizing the problem, clarifying the related issues, collecting information, setting priorities, and implementing the solution. Although procedures and criteria used to solve problems are usually fairly well established, the decision-maker must collect all the pertinent information, interpret the criteria, and apply this to a specific person (Lipsky, 1980). In the case of placement of at-risk students in an alternative educational program, the pertinent information is the student's rate of attendance, acquisition of academic grades, and behavioral interventions.

The perceptions of the school personnel reveal the influence stigma has on decision making. Goffman reports that stigma is the negative perception held by the decision maker. In this case study the decision makers, which are the parents and the students, saw referral to the alternative program as unacceptable for their child. Hence, they did not want their child to participate in the program because of the negative stigma attached to the program. The stigma attached to myths, stories and stereotyping not only influenced the parents and students in their decision of whether to attend or not attend the alternative program, but it also influenced the school personnel who make the decisions to refer. One counselor reported that “teachers often don’t refer students to us for placement in the alternative program because they don’t know about the program. They think it is for the trouble makers or the students with substance abuse problems,” and “The community’s perception of the alternative program is that it is a bad place for kids, it’s a place for kids; with drug problems.” Counselors reported that parents do not want to label their child as an *alternative* student. Parents and students see the alternative school as a negative place to continue education. This is an example of the findings of Dovidio’s, et al. (2000), namely, that stigma is largely shaped by cultural forces, myths, stereotypes, prejudices, and ideologies. These shape the meaning of the situation for the participant. The perceivers are influenced by the myth that the alternative educational program is not a real high school. Parents are often under the misconception that if their child is placed in the alternative high school, he/she will not be able to graduate from a *real high school*, and that placement in the alternative program will label their child as a *trouble-maker*. This negative perception supports what Goffman (1963) reports, namely, the stigma and its synonyms conceal a double

perspective. The stigmatized individual will view himself as different that is perceived immediately (discredited), or one that is not immediate (discreditable).

In analyzing the scenario data, responses of the administrators and counselors regarding referral of students for placement in the alternative educational program reveals many inconsistencies. Recapping statistical outcomes regarding the referral process of both the fictional and actual students for placement in the alternative educational program, the researcher found no significance between the group assignment and the referral. No specific criteria, in the referral process, were used consistently by both groups. Each of the students cited in the scenarios had attendance problems, academic failures, and behavioral issues. Each group looked at these descriptive characteristics assigned to the students but weighted their concerns differently.

Examine the actual students depicted in Scenario B. These students were enrolled in the Brown School District. Information presented in the scenario was factual. Student 1B (Jenny) was recommended for placement by two of the counselors; the remaining four counselors and two administrators did not recommend the student for enrollment in the alternative high school. In reality, Jenny (1B) was never referred to the alternative program. At the end of her first semester in the traditional high school (1999/2000) she had earned a total of one credit. At the end of the 2001/2002 school year she had earned a total of four credits. Student 2B (Gene) was recommended for placement in the alternative high school by one administrator and two counselors. One counselor did not respond. One administrator and three counselors did not recommend placement in the alternative high school. In reality, Gene was never referred for



placement at the alternative high school. At the end of his first semester in the traditional high school (1999/2000), Gene had earned a total of 0.5 credits. By the end of the 2001/2002 school year, Gene had earned a total of 2 credits. Student 3 B (Bob) was recommended for placement by one administrator and two counselors. One administrator and three counselors did not recommend him for placement in the alternative high school. In reality, Bob was never referred for placement in the alternative high school. Bob earned 0.5 credits by the end of his first semester in the traditional high school (1999/2000). At the end of the 2001/2002 school year, Bob had earned a total of 6.5 credits. Student 4B (Joe) was recommended by one administrator and three counselors for placement in the alternative high school. Two of the counselors recommended that Joe not be placed in the alternative high school. Two counselors did not comment. In reality, Joe was not referred to the alternative high school. He was attending middle school and had failed all of his core content classes at the end of the 2001/2002 school year. Joe enrolled in the traditional high school in the fall of the 2002/2003 school year. These inconsistencies are an example of what Lipsky (1980) reported as decision making being unconnected to actions. At-risk students may or may not be referred for placement based on attendance problems or academic failure. The roles of complexity, ambiguity, and interpretation in decision making are often underestimated. Preferences, rules, policy, people, and outcomes are mixed together in ways that make the interpretation uncertain and unclear. Decision making theory is based on preferences and expectations about outcomes associated with different alternative actions. It is assumed that the actions implemented are based on the best alternatives available to the decision makers. However, there are complications that

influence the processes and the consequences of the event. Ambiguity about preferences affects implementation of decisions. The lack of written policy/guidelines, the interpretation of information of the school personnel and personal preferences influenced the decision made for placement in the alternative program. It is interesting to note that all four students described in Scenarios B, who were actual students in the school district, were never referred for placement in the alternative program.

Perceptions, simplifications, and routines of decision-makers, especially when there is more than one decision-maker involved, influences the outcomes of decisions (Lipsky, 1980). One counselor explained,

The way it is now, it is not working. We should be able to tell parents that their child needs to be placed in the alternative program. All we can do now is to suggest that the student be placed in the alternative program. Right now it's just a conversation with the parents. We need earlier counselor intervention in the sixth grade.

### Part Three

In Part Three, the study looked at the academic achievement, attendance, and graduation of the students during the four year period from 1999/2000 to 2002/2003, and their perceptions of their school experiences and educational outcomes. The data collected, indicates disparity between the at-risks students attending the alternative high school and the at-risk students attending the traditional high school.

- Students attending the alternative high school did not fare as well as those at-risk students attending the traditional high school.

- Students attending the alternative school, on average, missed more days each year than those attending the traditional high school.
- Students attending the alternative high school, on average, earned fewer credits each year than those attending the traditional high school.
- Students attending the alternative high school graduated fewer students than did in lower numbers those attending the traditional high school.

What is interesting is that the expected result of success for at-risk students who attended the alternative program would be better than those students who attended the traditional high school. This reversal of the results was unexpected. The goal of the alternative high school was to provide a learning environment designed to meet the needs of the students and promote their success to graduation; meanwhile, it was expected that the at-risk students enrolled in the traditional high school would continue to experience attendance problems, academic failure, and non graduation. The at-risk students enrolled in the alternative high school experienced the opposite result: only one out of the six students graduated high school. Five of the six students who attended the traditional high school program graduated. The disparity in these unexpected results raises the question of what were the reasons for these differences. The motivational factor of the students may be one reason. Students enrolled in the alternative high school may have perceived no differences between the school curriculum from which they came and the curriculum of the alternative high school. Repeated failures experienced at the alternative high school may have caused them to give up. A review of the history of the alternative program showed the program changed from a hands-on design to one of a straight academic curriculum that mirrored the traditional high

school. Another possible explanation may be the lack of familial support provided to the group enrolled in the alternative high school. The students enrolled in the traditional program may have experienced more positive support from family members. This, again, may be attributed to the negative perception of students enrolled in the alternative program. A third possible reason for the disparity may be that the students who enrolled in the alternative program had a longer history of disciplinary issues in the traditional program. These disciplinary issues may have carried over into their education at the alternative high school. Another factor: too many absences create large gaps in learning that cannot be made up.

Other significant findings include the majority of students in both groups reporting they did not feel confident in their post high school environment. They did not elaborate on the reasons why. Each of the twelve students reported that they had good communication skills and could hold down jobs, but only one-third of each group was employed either part-time or fulltime. The majority of the twelve students reported problems managing their finances and were lacking skills in that area. The students in each program report they were equally uninvolved or vested in their school community. Researchers (McCall, 2003) noted that children are less likely to do well in school when they feel disconnected from that school. The students in this study had limited or no experience with extra curricular activities in their schools or their communities.

In this study, the information and data was collected and analyzed presented in this study, yet the question remained: What became of alternative high school reform? When the alternative program was initiated, and students experienced success, the Brown School District made the alternative high school program a priority by providing

financial and educational support. Originally, the program was developed with the interests of the students in mind. Classes included a hands-on curriculum that engaged the students, student/business partnerships, day-care facilities, and innovative courses. Over time the school changed. A significant event that brought about a shift in the direction the program took was the change in leadership. Hargreaves and Goodson (2006) point out it is the changes of leaders and leadership that most directly and dramatically provoke change in an individual building. Over time, Jefferson Alternative High School lost its original purpose. The school became alternative in name only and gradually was allowed to languish. The community's perception of the school became stigmatized because the program gradually began enrolling students seen as *druggies*, *losers*, and *misfits* which reinforced the community's perception. The robust distinctive identity and mission of the school changed to an outlet for placing undesirable students. The hands-on instruction became busy work. The alternative high school became a low priority for the school district; the mission drifted and became blurred and unattractive. The data revealed that the alternative school did not provide the educational outcomes once experienced by the students enrolled in the program. In this study, the students enrolled in the alternative school did not experience the same success as those who chose to remain in the traditional school.

In this study, when asked whether the identifying and placing of the at-risk student in the alternative school was a high priority in this school district, the school personnel ranked the district's priority from moderate to low. A further (second) question asked was where on the list of priorities should the school district rank the identification and placement of the at-risk student in the alternative school, each of the

school's personnel responded with a resounding *high*. The school personnel were asked how alternative program was working. Their responses were similar:

- It's only working for a small minority. Some students are placed that shouldn't be there, and some that would benefit are not placed because they want to stay in the traditional high school for social reasons.
- The way it is now, it is not working.
- Obviously not! There should be a lot more students placed.
- The program would work if the administration backed the program and allowed us more freedom and flexibility.

### Reflections

After collecting the information and data presented in this study, the question remains: What became of the alternative high school reform? When the alternative program was initiated and the students experienced success, the district made it an educational priority item by providing financial and educational support. The program was originally developed with the interests of the student in mind. The classes included hands-on curriculum that engaged the students, student/business partnerships, day-care facilities, and innovative courses. Over a period of time the school changed. One of the significant events that brought about a shift in the direction the program took was the change in leadership. Hargreaves and Goodson (2006) point out it is the changes in leaders and leadership that most directly and dramatically provoke change in an individual building. The alternative high school lost its original purpose, and the alternative soon became alternative in name only. The alternative aspects of the school gradually languished. The school became stigmatized in the community's perception.

The school district tacitly abetted the stigma process by enrolling students seen as *druggies, losers, and misfits*. The robust distinctive identity and mission of the school changed to an outlet for placing undesirable students. Hands-on instruction became busywork. The alternative high school became a low priority budget item for the school district; the mission drifted and became blurred and unattractive. The data revealed that the alternative school did not produce the educational outcomes once experienced by the students enrolled in the program. In this study, the students enrolled in the alternative school did not experience the same success as those who chose to remain in the traditional school.

Alternative school reform programs have been studied carefully over the past four decades. These studies have shown contradictory results: parental support and parental skeptics; students engrossed in learning and with better attendance versus apathetic students; students experiencing academic achievement versus students continuing to fail; students with positive attitudes about themselves and the school versus students with negative perceptions of themselves and the school; and programs designed to meet individual needs and interests of the students versus programs designed to meet the needs of students as a class. The findings of this study support what the research of Hargreaves and Goodson (2006), Tyack and Tobin (1994), Fink (2000), Fullan (1993), and Stein et. al (2004) have found that the further away reforms get from the traditional grammar of high school, the more likely those reforms will not sustain themselves, and various forces such as demographic, leadership succession, organizational ambiguities, and stigma will result in pulling the school back to look indistinguishable from any other high school. Sustaining fundamental reform at the

high school level by changing the regularities of the high school, by way of the curriculum, time management, and student behavioral norms is extremely difficult. Innovations can be implemented successfully with effective leadership, sufficient budget, and strong internal and external support (Gross, Giacquinta, and Bernstein, 1971), but few innovations seem to be institutionalized (Anderson and Stiegelbauer 1994; Fullan, 1991). The *grammar of schooling* reasserts itself (Tyack and Tobin, 1994). The sustainability of reform is influenced by economic availability, school district politics, leadership succession, perceptions, and clear policies. Tyack and Tobin (1994) summarized the outcome of reform nicely: Reform movements that reinforce the existing ‘grammar’ of subjects, classes, lessons, and testing are more likely to be adopted and become institutionalized. Innovative reform that challenges the “grammar” enjoys only temporary success. Hargreaves and Fink (2004) report that the key principles of reform sustainability appear to be that reform needs to focus on what matters, make improvement last, and achieve its end without doing harm to others around it. In this study the alternative school did not sustain its viable programs because of the succession of leadership, negative perceptions, unwritten and unclear policies, and the blurring of its innovative features.

This alternative school was created to provide distinctive schooling that would serve the particular needs of its particular students, the so-called square pegs who do not fit in the round holes. A key element to sustained reform is evaluation. Reform needs to be viewed in the rearview mirror of reflection and not for serving the ambitions of the policy makers of the moment. The sustainability of reform requires steady focus on both student learning and achievement; on developing a clear process; on finding ways



to make learning more vivid and real; on retaining standards but refraining from standardization; and on treating history and experiences as strengths to be drawn from rather than obstacles to be overcome in the quest for improvement (Hargreaves and Goodson, 2006).

The goal of education is to provide all children with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to become contributing members of the community. With the new educational standards placed on students today, namely, graduation requirements, it is imperative that educational reform help those students for whom high school traditionally does not work. Is the alternative school the answer? The case under study here casts doubt on this approach to reform, but other high school reforms have suffered similar fates. The suspicion that marginalized students become further marginalized via inattention and heedlessness is perhaps supported in this case, but such person-centered attributions are not particularly useful. Rather, the case adds one more example of historical and institutional process that now has been widely identified. I suspect there is likelihood that neither the alternative high school nor the traditional high school will respond effectively to these disaffected or alienated youth. I believe the outcomes experienced by students in the alternative high school studied in this research are not the failure of the school itself. I believe the outcomes reported in this study are attributed to a lack of will and purpose on the part of the students. Student motivation or lack thereof is a critical influence for the academic success of the individual student. If there is an implication for policy and practice here it is to alert educators to all of these forces and tendencies as one check on reform choice and implementation. The long haul is worth heeding as well as the short term.

## APPENDIX A

**MATRIX OF SCHOOL PERSONNEL INTERVIEWS**

Question	HSD 1	HSD 2	HSC 1	HSC 2	ASC 1	MSC 1	MSC 2	MSC 3
What is the school district's written policy for establishment of alt. ed. program?	I don't know of any	I don't know of any	Nothing is written	I've never seen anything written	I don't think there is a policy	I don't think there is a written policy	I've never seen a written policy	No idea
What is the school district's written Policy for identifying at-risk?	Nothing written	Classification of students is vague. We use a good faith policy: look at students who appear not to do well	There is no written policy.	I've never seen a written policy.	I'm not aware of anything written. A committee was formed to look at criteria, but there was no input and was not formalized	I don't know but there must be.	I know in elementary we started to identify kids by behavior, attendance, and test scores. Test scores and attendance are easy criteria, but behavior is difficult.	There are no written criteria. We have an understanding, but it is not cast in stone.
What is the school district's written policy for placing at-risk in alt. ed. program?	Nothing written. Unwritten is that student is between 14 – 16, are getting D's and E's,	Nothing written	We try to identify students using a "D/E" report published at the end of each marking	I've never seen a written policy	Nothing is written, but informally a student failing 1/2 their classes, is not a significant	I don't know.	We are not to place special education students. (This policy is understood. It is not a formal	There are no written guidelines.

**MATRIX OF SCHOOL PERSONNEL INTERVIEWS (Continued)**

Question	HSD 1	HSD 2	HSC 1	HSC 2	ASC 1	MSC 1	MSC 2	MSC 3
	struggling academically, not achieving dist. Bench marks, or student may want smaller classes		period. But placement policy is sort of "fly by the seat of your pants."		behavior problem, is not a special education student, struggles in large classes		written policy.	
Talk me through the referral process for placing an at-risk student in the alt. ed. program.	Referral made by the teacher, counselor or me. Look at poor attendance, poor grades. We talk to student about the alt. ed. program.: small classes, more one on one instruct. If student is interested we call parents. If parents are positive we fill out an application and send it to	Counselors and I look at student's progress. If unsuccessful in 2 or more academic classes we talk to parents and suggest they investigate the alt. ed. program. We suggest that the program may help their student build skills to be successful in H.S.	Sometimes a teacher will come to counseling to refer a student. We check the "D/E" report. Those students failing are called down to the counseling office. We look at their M. S. grades; ask what's going on at home. We call parents and tell them about the alt.	There is no consistent procedure. If a parent knows about the program and wants their child to go they call the Dean of Students to start the paper work (checking grades, etc). The alt. ed. counselor is contacted and a visitation is set up. If it is a non-parental	Nothing is written. Teachers are supposed to refer students who are struggling in class. Counselor is to contact the parent and talk to them about the alt. ed. program. The parent and student are invited to the alt. ed. program open house (one night per school year). We	The referral process is subjective. At M. S. we know who are repeat disciplinary problems are. These kids are also on our failure lists. I usually sit down and make a list of kids who are having problems with attendance, academics and discipline. I ask house	Once a student has been identified (no mention made of the criteria used for identification). Student is called down to discuss alt. ed. placement. I talk about what they are doing. We send a letter home about the alt. ed. program. We try to get the parents to make a visit	We make a list at semester of the students failing 3 or more core classes. We call the down to counseling and tell them they had better start thinking about what they are doing. We send a letter home about the alt. ed. program. We try to get the parents to make a visit

**MATRIX OF SCHOOL PERSONNEL INTERVIEWS (Continued)**

Question	HSD 1	HSD 2	HSC 1	HSC 2	ASC 1	MSC 1	MSC 2	MSC 3
	<p>the alt. ed. program and they take over.</p>		<p>ed. program. It usually is a conversation.</p>	<p>request, the Dean of Students looks at the D/E report at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> marking period and at the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> marking period. Students who are failing, parents are contacted by mail. Some parents call. If they do call, I tell them about the alt. ed. program. If the parent is interested we let the alt. counselor know and she sets up a visit. Sometimes we send home a</p>	<p>encourage the student and parent to visit the program.</p>	<p>leaders to do the same, then the teachers. We throw out the names of special education students. We look at how many parent contacts have been made and then sit down and talk to the students. I don't like just calling parents. I prefer that the H. S. counselor or the alt. ed. counselor call the parents. I sent home written information with the student. I tell</p>	<p>material to take home for parents. Then I turn it over to the alt. ed. counselor for follow-up. We try to answer any questions we can, but the rest is up to the alt. ed. counselor.</p>	<p>to the program on the Open House night (it is a suggestion only). We also have a staffing (a meeting with the teachers and parents) to talk about the student's academic progress and make a plan to improve the situation.</p>

**MATRIX OF SCHOOL PERSONNEL INTERVIEWS (Continued)**

Question	HSD 1	HSD 2	HSC 1	HSC 2	ASC 1	MSC 1	MSC 2	MSC 3
				brochure with the student.		the student this is an option, but they don't have to go. Think about it.		
What is the biggest challenge in identifying and placing at-risk in alt. ed. program?	That the alt. ed program is a place for druggies. There is no statistical data on the success of at-risk students returning to regular H.S. and their success there and graduation.	Biggest challenge is in identifying the students, eliminating misconceptions of parents and students about the alt. ed. program.	Convincing parents that placement is necessary. It's a "sell" job. Grades aren't the be-all/end-all determiner. Students may be working at H. S. but not turning it in	Stigma attached to the alt. ed. program.	Getting teachers and counselors to buy into the alt. ed. program. Having time to talk to students about the program. Finding out why students are failing (is it suspension, attendance, motivation).	Convincing the parents that the alt. ed. program is the best option for their child. The perception is that the alt. ed. program is not a real high school. Students think that by going to the alt. ed. program that they'll miss out on all the H. S.	It is harder and harder to identify students who can't do the work. Today there are the kids who can't do the work and kids who won't do the work (who eventually will be come the kids that can't do the work because they have lost the skill). It has to do with effort and attitude and it's really	It's the pie in the sky belief by parents that their child is going to turn it around. It's the perception of the school. Its negative. One parent thought the program was for pregnant girls. I try to change that incorrect perception, but if a parent has a negative perception in their head, you are not going to be

**MATRIX OF SCHOOL PERSONNEL INTERVIEWS (Continued)**

Question	HSD 1	HSD 2	HSC 1	HSC 2	ASC 1	MSC 1	MSC 2	MSC 3
What is/are the reason(s) why more students are NOT placed in alt. ed. program?	Community perception that the alt. ed. program is a place for "bad" kids and kids with drug problems.	Socialization. Students don't like being separated from their peers and friends. Parents don't want their child taken out of the regular H.S. Parent wants their child in an environment they are accustomed to.	We have never sat down (all counselors) and said this is the criteria we will use for placement. Parents don't want the label of alternative kid placed on their child. The program has gotten a bad rap. Parents call it the "crazy school" or "the school for dumb, dumb."	Parents and students believe they have a "right" to move on to H. S. The alt. ed. program has a poor image. It is a school for trouble makers. There should be something written and in place that defines the placement reasons. Maybe students in the M. S. need to earn credit in-order to move on to H. S. How can you	Parents are not informed about the alt. ed. program. Lack of awareness about the program in the community. The myth is that the alt. ed. program is for "bad" kids. Kids are being missed. Kids fail at the M. S. level and in H. S. but there is no follow-up. Counselors should be asking teachers who is failing. But	There are some kids the alt. ed. program won't take because it's believed that they are trouble makers. But may be they wouldn't be trouble makers if they were in a smaller environment or smaller classes. Some kids just slide through. They don't act out. They are "hall creepers." They are the real quiet kids, the ones	Parents fight it. They don't see the positive. I guess the parents see the placement as someone telling them "Hey, you didn't do a good job in raising your child." When it really boils down to a problem of maturity. Its also the image of the school. I think it's the size of the building. It's not big enough.	able to place their child. The negative connotation. Parents believe that every student attending the alt. ed. program is a druggie; every child has a police record. That kind of negative connotation is hard to over come.

**MATRIX OF SCHOOL PERSONNEL INTERVIEWS (Continued)**

Question	HSD 1	HSD 2	HSC 1	HSC 2	ASC 1	MSC 1	MSC 2	MSC 3
				<p>expect a M. S. student who is failing 5 out of 6 classes to do well in H. S.</p>	<p>if the teachers don't buy into the alt. ed. program, referrals don't happen. Referrals usually don't happen unless there is some discipline problem.</p>	<p>nobody notices. Our schools are too big. Lots of times teachers don't refer kids because they don't want to see the kid in the alt. ed. program. Sometimes we won't refer a student because we hope the student will take an elective class that will peak their interest. Sometimes there are at-risk kids we think might be ok at the H. S. so we don't refer them. Some kids are just</p>		



**MATRIX OF SCHOOL PERSONNEL INTERVIEWS (Continued)**

Question	HSD 1	HSD 2	HSC 1	HSC 2	ASC 1	MSC 1	MSC 2	MSC 3
Who decides placement of students in alt. ed. program?	Admin. and counselors make recommendations but ultimately it is the parent and students who make the decision.	Combination of teachers, counselors. Admin., students and parents. But parents and students make the final decision.	Parents and students make the decision. They have all the cards. It is not working this way.	Parents	It's up to the parent and child.	It's the parents' decision. Lots of times the students doesn't want to go and the parents support it.	I don't think you can place a student in the alt. ed. program without the support of the parents	Right now it's the parent. If they say "no" – its no. They don't listen to our recommendation.
Who should decide the placement of students in alt. ed. program?	It should be the educators. The student should have to go at least one semester	The educators should have the final decision.	We should tell parents "your child needs to go." Professionals should have the power to make the decision. It should be the educator's decision. In 8 <sup>th</sup> grade we should be able to say "if you are not doing x,y,z then you'll be attending the	The school district should be able to say to parents and students "you will be attending the alt. ed. program for a year. When you get your grades up and earn credit you may return to the regular H. S."	Students should not have the final say. It should be up to the school district. Once a child demonstrates he/she does well in alt. ed. program, they may return to the regular H. S. The student should not be the person making the	I think it should be the people who really know and see the big picture, which is the educator. But as a parent, I wouldn't want somebody telling me and telling my kid where they belong. That's the dilemma.	No response	It should be the school. But in public education, I don't know whether you can ever do that. We should be able to say you have to go to the alt. ed. program for at least one year or one semester.

**MATRIX OF SCHOOL PERSONNEL INTERVIEWS (Continued)**

Question	HSD 1	HSD 2	HSC 1	HSC 2	ASC 1	MSC 1	MSC 2	MSC 3
			alt. ed. program” We are setting kids up for failure in H. S. if they are not successful in M. S.		decision whether to attend the alt. ed. program. The placement decision should work like a special education IEP (a team decision made up of the parent, teacher counselor and administrator)			
Give some examples of problematic placement of at-risk students in to the alt. ed. program.	Very little control in the home and parent reluctant to make a decision. On going behavior problem. Kept dragging on.	Placement in the alt. ed. program would be good for the student, but because of behavioral issues and substance abuse issues fear that the student would	One was a refusal of placement by the parent because of poor perception of the program M. S. counselor not having more convincing	Convincing a student that placement is the best option. Students don't want to leave their friends even though they are failing all of their classes.	Discipline problems would be the biggest problem. Another would be defensive parents because they've been told their	We had one case where we had a student, who would have been perfect for the alt. ed. program, but he was a special education student and the alt. ed.	The only problem case was when we sent an 8 <sup>th</sup> grade student to the alt. ed. program because she was pregnant and was a half year younger than everyone else,	We had a student who should have been placed, but because of the way it was handled (with no teeth), the mother called the principal and told us to stop harassing

**MATRIX OF SCHOOL PERSONNEL INTERVIEWS (Continued)**

Question	HSD 1	HSD 2	HSC 1	HSC 2	ASC 1	MSC 1	MSC 2	MSC 3
	Repeated suggestions to go to alt. ed. program, but parent's perception were it was a "bad" school. Finally student placed, student ended up doing so well that parents sent the younger sibling.	have a bad influence on students currently placed in alt. ed. program.	conversations with parents regarding the importance of the placement of their child in the alt. ed. program.  Convincing parents of what could happen if their child is not placed – failure and possibly dropping out.	A student wants to be placed in the alt. ed. program but parents are against the placement.	child is not motivated.  Another would be no interventions in the home, such as substance abuse treatment, anger management.  The placement of special education students in the alt. ed. program.	program doesn't take special education students. There are some cases that involved behavior problems, but I can't really recall any in particular. They weren't accepted because they had been in trouble or had attendance problems.	but it worked out ok.	her about sending her daughter to the alt. ed. program. We tried to get the mother to look at the program and make a visit, but the parent flat out refused.
What is the rationale for placement or the major identifiers?	It would be nice if we could place all students, but we don't have a large enough facility. But parents often refuse	Self referral. Students who want to be in smaller classes	Grades are # 1 identifier, but I'd rather not send a student failing all 6 classes. He/she needs counseling (This seems	Grades and attendance. Students failing 3 or more classes have a chance to be successful if they are placed in the	Poor grades, poor attendance, not participating in class. Not turning in homework. Minor discipline	Absences and non-responsive parents. This in turn affects grades because the student can't keep up. Lack of motivation.	I look to the classroom teacher to keep me informed about how the kids are performing in class. Absences and	We look at grades each semester. If a student is failing 3 or more classes (academic) we use that as our break point. We

# MATRIX OF SCHOOL PERSONNEL INTERVIEWS (Continued)

Question	HSD 1	HSD 2	HSC 1	HSC 2	ASC 1	MSC 1	MSC 2	MSC 3
	placement		to be an oxymoron: the student needs group counseling, however with the counseling ratio at 350:1 how can counselors provide this service.	alt. ed. program. Students failing 6 classes are not a good placement because chances are he/she is not going to make it no matter where they are placed.	problems.	Parents don't care about their kid.	grades are a big part of the referral. We use 15 absences as the magical number. Once a student reaches 15 absences, we refer the student to pupil accounting. At 5 absences the teacher calls home and at 10 absences the counselor calls home and at 15 the administrator calls home. Grades are the second identifier. We have 4 core classes. If we were to grant credit that	also look at behavior and what is important. If we have a student who is failing the academics but passing the electives, we don't refer them to the alt. ed. program. We will send them to the H. S. and hope that the interest in the elective area will hook them into doing better.

**MATRIX OF SCHOOL PERSONNEL INTERVIEWS (Continued)**

Question	HSD 1	HSD 2	HSC 1	HSC 2	ASC 1	MSC 1	MSC 2	MSC 3
What is the school District's priority for identifying and placing students in alt. ed. program (1 being low and 5 being high)	About 3	3. We need to think of ways of dispelling the myth that the alt. ed. program is for students with behavior problems.	In the middle. It's not a high priority. If it was a high priority, the alt. ed. program would be full. There is no consistency.	Realistically it's about a 2. We have a number of at-risk students that are not being helped.	Realistically the priority is a 1. The district doesn't support the program financially, verbally, or physically. They don't come to the building, they don't showcase the alt. ed. program. They don't put money into the program to keep class size low or	In reality, with the people who pay the bills, a 2.	I think from the teacher's standpoint it's a 3.	would be 8 credits a semester. If a student is failing 6 to 8 credits we talk to the student
								In reality, its about a 2 or 3.

**MATRIX OF SCHOOL PERSONNEL INTERVIEWS (Continued)**

Question	HSD 1	HSD 2	HSC 1	HSC 2	ASC 1	MSC 1	MSC 2	MSC 3
What should be the school District's priority for identifying and placing students in alt. ed. program?	A 5	A 5	A 5	A 4	provide the interventions needed.  A 5. If we are going to prepare kids to contribute to the community, we need someplace where kids are going to learn the skills.	5	5	5
What is the role of the person making the referral for placement?	Explaining that the decision to be placed in the alt. ed. program is the best for the student. Our goal is to get the student to graduate. We need to do everything we can to ensure	To inform parents that placement in the alt. ed. program is an opportunity to earn credits in order to graduate.	No response	Obviously identification of students. Definition of the role responsibilities. Who does what and when? Promoting the program. Dispelling the myths about the program and the	Counselors are the key to the program. They are the liaison between M. S. and H. S. Counselors need to be searching out kids who are failing and giving them the information	I think the counselors have the role of identifying and recommending, but the teachers have to be involved. If we don't know how the kid is behaving and working in	No response.	My role is an information gatherer: test scores, grades, attendance. I make recommendations. But on the whole, the counselor, doesn't know the student too well. It is the teacher

# MATRIX OF SCHOOL PERSONNEL INTERVIEWS (Continued)

Question	HSD 1	HSD 2	HSC 1	HSC 2	ASC 1	MSC 1	MSC 2	MSC 3
	this happens.			erroneous perceptions in the community.	about the alt. ed. program and promoting the program.	class, we can't make referrals. We know the kid's background, which might help determine if they should be placed.		who knows the student. The teachers should be making the referrals.
Is everything being done to place at-risk students in the alt. ed. program?	There is a lack of commitment to identify at-risk students. Counselors don't get all the referrals	Maybe if we give the student a little more time to get his/her act together they will turn their failures around. Student achievement based on merit should be the deciding factor	We are doing a good job. It upsets me that we spend so much time helping at-risk students and don't spend time helping the talented and gifted.	The program is not promoted. We try to meet the needs but there is a definite problem with the definition of role responsibilities. There is no follow through with parents.	Definitely not. There is no follow through. Intervention doesn't occur soon enough. Parents aren't kept informed. They are not given enough information about the program. We are in a "Catch 22". We're expected to teach the	We are missing the students who kind of creep around. I don't know all the kids assigned to me. If they don't call attention to themselves, we sometimes miss them. Sometimes we miss the ones that tick us off. We don't advocate for	I don't know what H. S. counselors do, but all the M. S. counselors are on the same page. We (this counselor was referring to the counselors in her building) meet once a month for lunch and talk about what's going on. As far as criteria	The H. S. people don't value what the M. S. counselors have to say. There is no consistency between the M. S. counselors on what we do. There is a tendency to turn everything over to the H. S. counselors at the end of the school

**MATRIX OF SCHOOL PERSONNEL INTERVIEWS (Continued)**

Question	HSD 1	HSD 2	HSC 1	HSC 2	ASC 1	MSC 1	MSC 2	MSC 3
					same curriculum, meet the same bench marks, and cover the same material. What is alternative about that? There are no support services for the students. We need more flexibility in scheduling and programming.	them because they push us too far and we end up saying "let them go." They're a pain in the butt. The trouble maker ort lazy kid let them go to the H. S. and fail.	and policy, we all try to be on the same page.	year. Recommendations and follow-up get lost. Money also drives the system. If the money is not there, you can't build a successful program.
What is the counselor/student ratio?	In H. S. it is about 350:1	About 350:1	About 320:1. We don't have enough time. We are stretched thin in our duties and responsibilities. It's like putting a	About 400:1	About 140:1. The counselor's caseload is huge. They can't spend enough time with at-risk students.	500:1. We don't make good decisions for everybody out there who needs it. Too many kids	500:1	375:1. This affects our ability to know the kids.



**MATRIX OF SCHOOL PERSONNEL INTERVIEWS (Continued)**

Question	HSD 1	HSD 2	HSD 1	HSD 2	ASC 1	MSC 1	MSC 2	MSC 3
Are discipline problems a factor in the placement decision?	It depends on the disciplinary problem. Misbehaving is not a reason to deny placement. Major problems with drugs, fighting, and intimidation are not placement referrals	Discipline problems should not be referred.	band aid on a knife wound. The alt. ed. program has said that they don't want discipline problems. But if you want to help kids, they've got to be placed somewhere. At-risk kids are going to have discipline problems. If they have a lot of problems, then I'm not going to refer them to the alt. ed. program. The alt. ed. program doesn't have the help to deal with	Not that I've seen. If a student is succeeding at H. S. and is getting in trouble we don't think of the alt. ed. program as an option. Every referral I've made has been based on academics.	Sometimes, students shouldn't be placed just to get them out of the H. S. Just because a student has discipline problems he/she shouldn't be ruled out of placement.	Definitely. Some kids are discipline problems because of their home life and nobody is paying attention to them. Negative attention is better than no attention. They should absolutely be part of the process.	It's a major factor for me. The alt. ed. program is supposed to be able to work more on a one-to-one basis. They can't do that if they are battling behavior problems.	No, discipline is not a factor. When the program first started, we were told not to send discipline problems, but that has now slipped by the roadside. The quiet and naïve kid is going to have a difficult time surviving in a setting with other aggressive kids.

**MATRIX OF SCHOOL PERSONNEL INTERVIEWS (Continued)**

Question	HSD 1	HSD 2	HSC 1	HSC 2	ASC 1	MSC 1	MSC 2	MSC 3
What are the major factors that impact on the placement decision?	The parents decision.	Strictly academics.	those kinds of problems. Academics	Moving on to H. S. Grades and achievement.	Not passing academic classes, poor attendance, not turning in homework, lack of involvement and participation in class.	It's what I know personally about the students. My personal knowledge is the biggest indicator.	I think its motivation and attitude. It's also the students failing of 4 or more classes (core classes). We wouldn't refer students who fail their electives.	It's the parent's decision.
Who should make the final decision for placement?	Parent's decision regarding their child needs to be respected. But if we're looking at the child and they haven't done well in 13 years, put them on a temporary placement in H. S. If they don't do well,	Parents can be part of the conversation, but allowing them to make the final decision is a mistake.	The professionals should have the final decision in placement. Parents should not have the final say so – it doesn't work.	The district should have the final placement decision. If the parent is dead set against placement, they should have to sign a contract that says "if your child is not successful in the 1 <sup>st</sup> semester,	The school district should be more forceful in placement. More frequent contact with parents. There should be definite criteria for placement. It is primarily counselors asking who should be a	Absolutely, but I wish we could apply more pressure. It's not that we know everything, but we know a lot.	You have to give that decision to the parent. We need to give them all the tools to make that decision.	It has to be a joint decision. I don't think we can force a student to go to the alt. ed. program.

**MATRIX OF SCHOOL PERSONNEL INTERVIEWS (Continued)**

Question	HSD 1	HSD 2	HSC 1	HSC 2	ASC 1	MSC 1	MSC 2	MSC 3
	then the student should be placed in the alt. ed. program			then they must be placed in the alt. ed. program in the 2 <sup>nd</sup> semester." When coming out of the 8 <sup>th</sup> grade, the decision for placement should be up to the parent. But use a contract after the 1 <sup>st</sup> semester at H. S.	good candidate. Parent input is important, but educators know what is best for students.			
Is the decision making process for placement of at-risk students in an alt. ed. program	Only for a small minority. Some students are placed that shouldn't be and some that would benefit	For some. If we continue to allow the parent/student to be the ones who are given the power to make the decision, then	The way it is now, it is not working. We should be able to tell parents that their child needs to be placed in the	We definitely need specific criteria and guidelines for placement. The current way is working, but it could be	The process is working to a degree. It is much better now than it was 4 years ago. If we had better criteria, made the	Obviously not. There should be a lot more kids placed. It falls apart because the parents are the people making the	No.	No. We do a good job in identifying, but not in placing.

**MATRIX OF SCHOOL PERSONNEL INTERVIEWS (Continued)**

Question	HSD 1	HSD 2	HSC 1	HSC 2	ASC 1	MSC 1	MSC 2	MSC 3
working?	are not placed because the want to stay at the H. S. for social reasons	no we are not doing all we can to help students.	alt. ed. program. All we can do right now is tell parents their child needs to go to the alt. ed. program. It's just a conversation. We need earlier counselor intervention in the 6 <sup>th</sup> grade, but in M. S. the counselor/pupil ratio is 500:1.	better. We need better communication. Sometimes I don't know who is going over to the alt. ed. program.	teachers more aware at the 8 <sup>th</sup> grade about the program and lots of P.R. in the community, the alt. ed. program would be more successful.	placement decision.		
What changes could made to improve the placement process?	Working closely with middle school counselors and keeping the lines of communication open.	Good communication between educators and parents. Educators need more support in their	It needs to be mandatory that if you are failing in M. S., you will be placed in the alt. ed. program. You must stay in	Informing students and parents early on in their education about consequences of failing. I think we are	If the administration backed the program (meaning the central office/board of education) and allow us	There needs to be some bite in the placement process. We can make all kinds of lists and recommendations	More communications with parents.	The program needs more leverage from the district in terms of not giving parents the power. The negative perception of

**MATRIX OF SCHOOL PERSONNEL INTERVIEWS (Continued)**

Question	HSD 1	HSD 2	HSC 1	HSC 2	ASC 1	MSC 1	MSC 2	MSC 3
		<p>recommendations, we need more support financially, and we need to dispel the rumors.</p>	<p>the program for at least 1 year. If you are successful, you can return to the H. S., if you are not successful you must remain a 2<sup>nd</sup> year in the alt. ed. program.</p>	<p>doing an OK job on referrals.</p>	<p>more freedom and flexibility, smaller class size (central administration wants the teacher/pupil ratio to be at 20:1), definite criteria for placement and consistency of following the same criteria for placement across the district.</p>	<p>ons, but if parents don't buy it, it doesn't work. The program design has to be full size. The program has to be flexible. Some kids don't need 2 years.</p>		<p>the alt. ed. program has to change.</p>

Matrix Scenario A

School Personnel	Scenario 1	Scenario 2	Scenario 3	Scenario 4
H. S. Dean of Students	Refer the student to pupil accounting. Failing 4 classes, not a behavior problem, not involved in classroom work. I would refer the student to the alternative ed. program.	Would not refer for placement in the alternative program. Referral to Youth Assistance. Student is disruptive. Behavior is not going to change by being placed in the alternative program. Excessive absences.	Would recommend for placement in the alternative program. Student is not motivated. Smaller classes might get her involved.	Would not recommend for placement. Would refer her to substance abuse program. She's got above average grades. I would hand select her teachers in the regular H. S. and push her.
H. S. Dean of Students	The student is not a behavior problem. Struggling academically. Good referral to the alternative program.	More of a behavior problem than academic problem. Would not recommend placement in the alternative program. Work on correcting the behavior.	Student may be a candidate for the alternative program. Needs to work on organizational skills first.	Would not recommend for placement. Her behavior is disruptive. Recommend outside counseling.
H. S. Counselor	Student has attendance problems, organizational problems. Needs smaller class size.	You could probably place the student in the alternative program. Would also refer to pupil accounting for	Student could be placed, but would not recommend her. Place her in a vocational school. Student is not into	Would not recommend for placement. She's defiant, drug problems. She's smart, but causes

Matrix Scenario A (Continued)

School Personnel	Scenario 1	Scenario 2	Scenario 3	Scenario 4
	recommended for placement in the alternative program.	attendance. Looks as though student could pass if he wants.	school, only attending for socialization purposes.	problems. Put her in group counseling.
H. S. Counselor	Test the student for special education. Would not refer the student to the alternative program. Work with the student on study skills. Put him on a contract.	Would not refer for placement in the alternative program. Hold a staffing to discuss classroom work. Inform parents about the alternative program. He's intelligent, just acting out.	Would not recommend placement. Get her involved in art classes. Maybe vocational school. Tell parents about the alternative program, but I don't think that's the best placement.	This would be a good recommendation for placement. She's a 2 <sup>nd</sup> year 9 <sup>th</sup> grader. No earned credit. She is a behavior problem, but behavior might be the result of earning no credit in 2 years. She needs to be successful and earn credit.
Alt. H. S. Counselor	Would recommend the student for placement in the alternative program. Needs more help.	Would recommend for placement in the alternative program. There's a reason for the acting out. Needs smaller classes, encouragement, more one-on-one instruction.	Would not rule out placement in the alternative program. She needs some career planning. Hook her up with a mentor in the alternative program.	Would recommend placement, but she needs to be put on a behavior contract, get substance abuse treatment. Give her a chance. If it doesn't work, get her home schooling.

Matrix Scenario A (Continued)

School Personnel	Scenario 1	Scenario 2	Scenario 3	Scenario 4
M. S. Counselor	Test the student for special education placement. If he doesn't qualify, recommend for placement in the alternative program. Not a behavior problem.	Should have gone to court with the number of excessive absences. Would recommend for placement in the alternative program. Give him opportunity for success in a smaller environment.	Would not recommend her for placement in the alternative program. Get her involved in a summer art program. Student needs constant monitoring at the regular H. S.	Would not recommend placement. She needs counseling. The alternative program would not help.
M. S. Counselor 7	Would recommend placement in the alternative program. Not passing classes, good attendance, not a behavior problem. Smaller class size may help.	Would not recommend for placement in the alternative program. Too many behavioral problems.	Would recommend her for placement. She needs one-on-one instruction.	On the fence for this student. Probably would not recommend for placement because of her behavior.
M. S. Counselor 8	Would recommend placement in the alternative program. Smaller class size	Would not recommend for placement in the alternative program	Would recommend placement. Must provide a strong art program.	Would not recommend placement. She'll reinforce the school



Matrix Scenario A (Continued)				
School Personnel	Scenario 1	Scenario 2	Scenario 3	Scenario 4
	will help. Failing classes and not working.	because of behavior problems.		image of being a place for bad kids.

Matrix Scenario B

School Personnel	Scenario 1	Scenario 2	Scenario 3	Scenario 4
H. S. Dean of Students	Would not recommend student for placement. She looks like she's turning things around academically. I'd leave her in the H. S..	I would recommend placement. Failed academic core classes in M. S. and H. S. Test scores indicate he is capable. May want to test for special education placement.	Would recommend for placement if he's working in his classes. If teachers say he's not working but maintaining "D's" I'd leave him in H. S. If he's struggling then the alternative program would help.	I'd test for special education placement first. Absences are a big factor. This could be affecting his grades. If teachers indicate he's working hard and getting "D's" he may qualify for special ed.
H. S. Dean of Students	I would not recommend placement in the alternative program. She's making improvement.	Would recommend for placement. Struggled in M. S. Not a behavior problem. Smaller classes may help.	Would not recommend for placement. I'd put him at the top of my list to watch. Test scores indicate he's not capable of performing even at the alternative program. Problems seem related to attendance.	Would not recommend for placement. Test scores indicate that he could use skill building. I'd watch him for future placement.
H. S. Counselor	I would recommend placement in the alternative program. She's had some problems in M. S. She's missed a lot of days. She's not strong academically. Smaller classes may help.	Would recommend placement. Good candidate. Not a behavior problem.	Would not recommend for placement. Failed 3 academic classes.	Would recommend placement. Got an attendance problem. Failing everything. Definitely needs to go.
H. S. Counselor	I would not recommend placement. She started	Would not recommend for placement. Recommend	Would not recommend placement. Did ok in M.	Would not recommend for placement. Has a

Matrix Scenario B (Continued)

School Personnel	Scenario 1	Scenario 2	Scenario 3	Scenario 4
	out a little rough but she's starting to have some success. She has poor attendance but is doing ok.	testing for special education. Struggled in M. S. MEAP scores are low. Starting to pass some classes. Meet with the parents and place the student on a contract and tell them the options.	S. Doing ok in the fun classes. He's not motivated. I'd sit down with parents and develop a plan of action. Motivation is a problem.	definite attendance problem. He can do the work. I'd let parents know about the alternative program, but this is an attendance problem.
Alt. H. S. Counselor	I would not recommend placement. She started out having some problems but seems to be doing ok. She needs some support at the H. S.	Would recommend for placement. Below endorsement levels in MEAP. Needs more one-on-one help. Not a behavior problem.	Would not recommend placement. He's capable of doing the work. He needs support in the H. S.	Would recommend for placement. He has an attendance problem and is failing classes.
M. S. Counselor	I would not recommend placement in the alternative program but would tell her about the program. Her attendance is a problem. Her grades are getting better.	Would recommend for placement.	I can't really answer this one without knowing the kid. You can look at the numbers (test scores) but you don't know what's going on beneath the surface.	Did not answer this question. Counselor got side tracked talking about one of her former students.
M. S. Counselor	I would recommend placement. I think it would be short term.	Would recommend placement. He needs smaller classes. He has a chance of making it.	Would recommend placement. He seems slower. Attendance is bad.	Would not recommend placement. He has poor attendance. Test scores indicate he's working above his ability. He may be a referral for special education

Matrix Scenario B (Continued)

School Personnel	Scenario 1	Scenario 2	Scenario 3	Scenario 4
M. S. Counselor	I would not recommend placement. At this point she's passing.	Would recommend placement. Even though he has 3 "C"s", he's a typical non-achiever. Grades have gone down since 6 <sup>th</sup> grade. Not a behavior problem.	Would recommend placement. Attendance is a problem.	placement. Would recommend for placement. He's got the ability. He needs to get a good base so he can graduate.

# COMPLETED STUDENT SURVEYS AND DATA TABLE

## STUDENTS NOT ENROLLED IN ALTERNATIVE PROGRAM

STUDENT	98/99 MIDDLE SCHOOL	98/99 1 <sup>ST</sup> SEM FAILURES	98/99 1 <sup>ST</sup> SEM ABSENCES	98/99 2 <sup>ND</sup> SEM FAILURES	98/99 2 <sup>ND</sup> SEM ABSENCES	99/00 1 <sup>ST</sup> SEM HIGH SCHOOL	99/00 1 <sup>ST</sup> SEM FAILURE
TS 1	Tyler	2	8	3	26.5	Washington	2
TS 2	Polk	0	0	0	2.5	Washington	0
TS 3	Tyler	4	4	3	3	Washington	6
TS 4	Van Buren	3	2	2	7	Lincoln	2
TS 5	Polk	0	1	0	3	Lincoln	0
TS 6	Tyler	1	8.5	3	16	Lincoln	3

## STUDENTS ENROLLED IN ALTERNATIVE PROGRAM

STUDENT	98/99 MIDDLE SCHOOL	98/99 1 <sup>ST</sup> SEM FAILURES	98/99 1 <sup>ST</sup> SEM ABSENCES	98/99 2 <sup>ND</sup> SEM FAILURES	98/99 2 <sup>ND</sup> SEM ABSENCES	99/00 1 <sup>ST</sup> SEM HIGH SCHOOL	99/00 1 <sup>ST</sup> SEM FAILURE
AS 1	Polk	3	8.5	4	7	Jefferson	2
AS 2	Tyler	3	9.5	3	24	Jefferson	1
AS 3	Polk	6	14.5	5	2	Jefferson	5
AS 4	Polk	1	10	4	40	Jefferson	0
AS 5	Van Buren	3	2.5	3	5	Jefferson	0
AS 6	Tyler	4	7.5	4	12	Jefferson	3

## STUDENTS NOT ENROLLED IN ALTERNATIVE PROGRAM

STUDENT	99/00 1 <sup>ST</sup> SEM CREDITS	99/00 1 <sup>ST</sup> SEM ABSENCES	99/00 2 <sup>ND</sup> SEM HIGH SCHOOL	99/00 2 <sup>ND</sup> SEM FAILURES	99/00 2 <sup>ND</sup> SEM CREDITS	99/00 2 <sup>ND</sup> SEM ABSENCES	00/01 1 <sup>ST</sup> SEM HIGH SCHOOL
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# COMPLETED STUDENT SURVEYS AND DATA TABLE (Continued)

## STUDENTS ENROLLED IN ALTERNATIVE PROGRAM

STUDENT	ATHLETICS IMPORTANT	SERVICE CLUBS IMP	INTEREST IN CLUBS	FINE ARTS IMP	ACADEMIC COMPETITION IMP	STUDENT GOV'T IMP	INTRA SPORTS IMP
AS 1	Not very 1	Not very 1	Did Not Part 4	Not very 1	Did Not Part 4	Did Not Part 4	Somewhat 2
AS 2	Not Very 1	Did Not Part 4	Did Not Part 4	Somewhat 2	Did Not Part 4	Did Not Part 4	Not very 1
AS 3	Somewhat 2	Did Not Part 4	Did Not Part 4	Somewhat 2	Somewhat 2	Somewhat 2	Very 3
AS 4	Somewhat 2	Somewhat 2	Somewhat 2	Very 3	Not very 1	Not very 1	Somewhat 2
AS 5	Somewhat 2	Not very 1	Not very 1	Very 3	Did Not Part 4	Not very 1	Somewhat 2
AS 6	Not Very 1	Did Not Part 4	Did Not Part 4	Not very 1	Did Not Part 4	Did Not Part 4	Not very 1

## STUDENTS NOT ENROLLED IN ALTERNATIVE PROGRAM

STUDENT	STUDENT PUB. IMP	RATING OF EDUCATION	PROUD OF HS	TEACHERS PREPARED	DISCIPLINE FAIR	TEACHERS CARED	LEARNING ATMOSPHER
TS 1	Not very 1	Fair	Agree 3	Agree 3	Disagree 2	Agree 3	Agree 3
TS 2	Did not part 4	Good	Agree 3	Agree 3	Strong Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Agree 3
TS 3	Did not part 4	Good	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3
TS 4	Did not part 4	Fair	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3
TS 5	Not very 1	Good	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3
TS 6	Did not part 4	Good	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Strong Disagree 1

## STUDENTS ENROLLED IN ALTERNATIVE PROGRAM

STUDENT	STUDENT PUB. IMP	RATING OF EDUCATION	PROUD OF HS	TEACHERS PREPARED	DISCIPLINE FAIR	TEACHERS CARED	LEARNING ATMOSPHER
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# COMPLETED STUDENT SURVEYS AND DATA TABLE (Continued)

AS 1	Did not part 4	Fair	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3
AS 2	Not very 1	Poor	Disagree 2	Agree 3	Agree 3	Strong Disagree 1	Agree 3	Disagree 2
AS 3	Somewhat 2	Good	Agree 3	Agree 3	Strong Agree 4	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3
AS 4	Not very 1	Fair	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3
AS 5	Somewhat 2	Good	Strong Agree 4	Strong Agree 4	Strong Agree 4	Strong Agree 4	Strong Agree 4	Strong Agree 4
AS 6	Somewhat 2	Not sure	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3

## STUDENTS NOT ENROLLED IN ALTERNATIVE PROGRAM

STUDENT	ADMININ LISTENED	TEACHERS LISTENED	ATTENDED SCHOOL REGULARLY	PEER RESPECT	DECISION MAKING OPPORTUN	LIKED SCHOOL	DRUG / ALCH PROBLEMS
TS 1	Agree 3	Agree 3	Disagree 2	Strong disagree 1	Agree 3	Disagree 2	Disagree 2
TS 2	Disagree 2	Disagree 2	Agree 3	Strong disagree 1	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3
TS 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Strong Disagree 1	Disagree 2
TS 4	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree	Agree 3	Agree 3	Strong Disagree 1	Disagree 2
TS 5	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Disagree 2
TS 6	Agree 3	Agree 3	Disagree	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Disagree 2

## STUDENTS ENROLLED IN ALTERNATIVE PROGRAM

STUDENT	ADMININ LISTENED	TEACHERS LISTENED	ATTENDED HSCHOOL REGULARLY	PEER RESPECT	DECISION MAKING OPPORTUN	LIKED SCHOOL	DRUG/ALCH PROBLEMS IN SCHOOL
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# COMPLETED STUDENT SURVEYS AND DATA TABLE (Continued)

AS 1	Agree 3	Agree 3	Most of time	Agree 3	Agree 3	Disagree 2	Disagree 2
AS 2	Disagree 2	Disagree 2	No	Strong disagree 1	Disagree 2	Disagree 2	Disagree 2
AS 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Yes	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3
AS 4	Agree 3	Agree 3	Not all time	Strong disagree 1	Disagree 2	Disagree 2	Disagree 32
AS 5	Strongly agree 4	Strongly agree 4	Yes		Strong agree 4	Agree 3	Strong agree 4
AS 6	Agree 3	Agree 3	Most of time	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Disagree 2

## STUDENTS NOT ENROLLED IN ALTERNATIVE PROGRAM

STUDENT	RESPECT STAFF	TEACHERS AVAILABLE	PRIDE IN SELF	SELF CONFIDENCE	GOOD COMMUN	COMM INVOL	VOLUN IN COMM
TS 1	Agree 3	Disagree 2	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Disagree 2	Disagree 2
TS 2	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Strong disagree 1	Agree 3	Disagree 2	Disagree 2
TS 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Disagree 2
TS 4	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Disagree 2	Disagree 2
TS 5	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Disagree 2	Disagree 2
TS 6	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Disagree 2

## STUDENTS ENROLLED IN ALTERNATIVE PROGRAM

STUDENT	STAFF RESPECT	TEACHERS AVAILABLE	PRIDE IN SELF	SELF CONFIDENCE	GOOD COMMUNI	COMM INVOL	VOLU IN COMM
AS 1	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Disagree 2	Disagree 2



# COMPLETED STUDENT SURVEYS AND DATA TABLE (Continued)

AS 2	Agree 3	Disagree 2	Agree 3	Disagree 2	Disagree 2	Disagree 2	Disagree 2
AS 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3
AS 4	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Disagree 2	Disagree 2
AS 5	Strong agree 4	Strong agree 4	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3
AS 6	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Disagree 2	Disagree 2

## STUDENTS NOT ENROLLED IN ALTERNATIVE PROGRAM

STUDENT	DESIRE TO CON'T ED	LIVE HEALTHY LIFESTYLE	CAN MANAGE FINANCES	CAN KEEP JOB	PROBL SOLVING SKILLS	I AM RESPONSIBLE	HANG WITH FRIENDS
TS 1	Agree 3	Strong Agree 4	Strong Disagree 1	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	No
TS 2	Disagree 2	Agree 3	Agree 3	Disagree 2	Disagree 2	Disagree 2	Some of them
TS 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Some of them
TS 4	Disagree 2	Agree 3	Disagree 2	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Yes
TS 5	Disagree 2	Agree 3	Disagree 2	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Yes
TS 6	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Sometimes

## STUDENTS ENROLLED IN ALTERNATIVE PROGRAM

STUDENT	DESIRE TO CON'T ED	LIVE HEALTHY LIFESTYLE	CAN MANAGE FINANCES	CAN KEEP JOB	PROBL SOLVING SKILLS	I AM RESPONSIBLE	HANG WITH FRIENDS
AS 1	Disagree 2	Agree 3	Disagree 2	Agree 3	Disagree 2	Agree 3	A few
AS 2	Disagree 2	Agree 3	Disagree 2	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Some of them

# COMPLETED STUDENT SURVEYS AND DATA TABLE (Continued)

AS 3	Agree 3	Strong Agree 4	Disagree 2	Strong Agree 4	Strong Agree 4	Agree 3	No
AS 4	Disagree 2	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	No
AS 5	Agree 3	Strong Agree 4	Strong Disagree 1	Strong Disagree 1	Agree 3	Agree 3	No
AS 6	Disagree	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	Agree 3	No

## STUDENTS NOT ENROLLED IN ALTERNATIVE PROGRAM

STUDENT	FRIENDS ENCOUR YOU	FRIENDS ATTEND ALT SCH	FRIENDS OPINION OF ALT SCH	FRIENDS INFLUENCE YOU	FRIENDS GRADUATED	FRIENDS CONTINUING EDUCATION	DID YOU HAVE MANY FRIENDS
TS 1	Discouraged	No	Don't know	Skipped with them	Yes	Yes	No
TS 2	Yes	No	Thought it was for losers	No	Yes	Some	I don't know
TS 3	Neither	No	Big time losers, bad kids	No, wanted to be with them	Yes	No	I guess so
TS 4	Yes	1	Thought it was easy	Not really	Yes	Yes	No
TS 5	Discouraged	No	I don't know	No	Yes	About 1/2	Yes
TS 6	Didn't influence	No	Heard it was easy	No	Yes	Some	Yes

# COMPLETED STUDENT SURVEYS AND DATA TABLE (Continued)

## STUDENTS ENROLLED IN ALTERNATIVE PROGRAM

STUDENT	FRIENDS ENCOUR YOU	FRIENDS ATTEND ALT SCH	FRIENDS OPINION OF ALT SCH	FRIENDS INFLUENCE YOU	FRIENDS GRADUATED	FRIENDS CONTINUIN EDUCATION	DID YOU HAVE MANY FRIENDS
AS 1	Neither	No	Told me there were lots of fights	Friends didn't want me to go	Yes	Yes	No
AS 2	No	Yes, couple	They wanted me to go to school they were going to	Told me not to go because of fights	Yes	Some	I don't know
AS 3	Yes	Yes	Said that it was easier and smaller classes	I wanted to go because I had friends there	Yes	No	I guess so
AS 4	I don't know	No	They really didn't say	No	Yes	Yes	No
AS 5	Yes	Yes	They heard that there were smaller classes	Told me it was easier	Yes	About ½	Yes
AS 6	Not Sure	Yes	Said it was a school for losers	Yes, told me smaller classes, teachers helped	Yes	Some	Yes

## STUDENTS NOT ENROLLED IN ALTERNATIVE PROGRAM

STUDENT	TIME STUDYING	ACTIVITIES WITH FRIENDS	LIKE TO HAVE LEARNED	SIGNIF EVENT IN HS	DONE DIFFERENTLY IN SCHOOL	HS MEMORY	SIGNIF PERSON IN HS

COMPLETED STUDENT SURVEYS AND DATA TABLE (Continued)

TS 1	Less than 1 hr	Skipped School	More Math	Can't think of anything	Would've worked harder	Can't think of anything	No one
TS 2	Less than 30 min	Played video games	Classes I could build things in	Had 2 teachers that cared	Nothing	Want to go back	A teacher
TS 3	1-2 hrs	Hung out	Nothing I can think of	Nothing	Done better in my classes	Done better in school	Can't think of anyone
TS 4	Less than 1 hr	Hung out, played basketball	Nothing	Nothing	Nothing	Nothing	Nobody
TS 5	Less than 1 hr	Went to movies, partied	Nothing	Nothing	Nothing	Nothing	No one
TS 6	More than 2 hrs	Hung out, played video	Nothing	I graduated	CHANGE HS IN ANYWAY	HS MEMORY	SIGNIF PERSON IN HS

STUDENTS ENROLLED IN ALTERNATIVE PROGRAM

STUDENT	TIME STUDYING	ACTIVITIES WITH FRIENDS	LIKE TO HAVE LEARNED	SIGNIF EVENT IN HS	DONE DIFFERENTLY IN SCHOOL	HS MEMORY	SIGNIF PERSON IN HS
AS 1	Less than 1 hr	Hung out	Nothing	Don't know	Nothing	Nothing	No one
AS 2	Less than 30 min	Nothing much	Nothing	Nothing	Nothing	Nothing	Nobody
AS 3	1-2 hrs	Played sports	How to manage money	Car accident, I was drunk	Didn't pass many classes, guess to do better	It was fun	My best friend
AS 4	Less than 1 hr	Partied	Basketball	Field trips	Nothing	My friends	One of the alt. School teachers
AS 5	Less than 1 hr	Went their house, played video	Do better than I did	Music and art classes	Longer breaks between classes	My friends	Regular H. S. teachers
AS 6	More than 2	Got in trouble	Nothing	Nothing	Nothing	Lots of ups and	One of the alt.

# COMPLETED STUDENT SURVEYS AND DATA TABLE (Continued)

hrs	sometimes			downs	School teachers
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## STUDENTS NOT ENROLLED IN ALTERNATIVE PROGRAM

STUDENT	WHAT PERSON DID	ATTEND SCHOOL NOW	WHO RECOMM ALT SCHOOL	WHY RECOMM	POSITIVE ASPECT HS	NEGATIVE ASPECT HS	PARENTS OPINION ALT SCH
TS 1	N/A	No	M. S. counselor	Bad grades	My friends	Too many kids	It was for bad kids
TS 2	He was real	Yes	H. S. Dean of students	My grades	Friends	Getting in trouble	Sch. For druggies and troublemakers
TS 3	N/A	No	M. S. counselor	I didn't pass any of my classes	More stuff going on	Nothing	It wasn't a real H. S.
TS 4	N/A	Yes	H. S. counselor	Thought I'd do better in smaller classes	Can't think of anything	Got in trouble	School for losers
TS 5	N/A	No	8 <sup>th</sup> grade teacher	I don't know	Wanted to be with friends	Can't think of anything	Wouldn't get a real diploma
TS 6	N/A	Yes	M. S. counselor	I was absent a lot and my grades	Meeting new people	Nothing	It was for bad kids

# COMPLETED STUDENT SURVEYS AND DATA TABLE (Continued)

## STUDENTS ENROLLED IN ALTERNATIVE PROGRAM

STUDENT	WHAT PERSON DID	ATTEND SCHOOL NOW	WHO RECOMM ALT SCHOOL	WHY RECOMM	POSITIVE ASPECT HS	NEGATIVE ASPECT HS	PARENTS OPINION ALT SCH
AS 1	N/A	No	M. S. counselor	Thought smaller classes would help	Smaller classes	The people going there	Thought it wasn't a real H. S.
AS 2	N/A	No	M. S. counselor	My attitude	Nothing, didn't like the kids	Classes were boring	Heard it was for bad kids
AS 3	Convinced me to stay in school	Yes	Friend of mine	Thought I'd do better	Smaller classes, teachers more patient	Not many electives	My mom wanted me to be happy
AS 4	Took time to help me	No	M. S. counselor	Missed a lot of school	I was passing my classes	Being absent so much	Dad didn't understand
AS 5	Talked to me	Yes	M. S. counselor and teachers	I didn't pass a lot of my classes	Teachers helped me	My grades	Thought I wouldn't get ed.
AS 6	Cared about me	No	M. S. counselor	My grades	Teachers helped	Didn't study	Mom willing to try anything

## STUDENTS NOT ENROLLED IN ALTERNATIVE PROGRAM

STUDENT	GOOD DECISION TO ATTEND						
TS 1	No, think I'd done better at reg. H. S.						

**COMPLETED STUDENT SURVEYS AND DATA TABLE (Continued)**

TS 2	No, stupid school							
TS 3	Yes, but I didn't work very hard							
TS 4	No, missed my friends							
TS 5	Yes							
TS 6	No							

**STUDENTS ENROLLED IN ALTERNATIVE PROGRAM**

STUDENT	GOOD DECISION TO ATTEND							
AS 1	No, think I'd done better at reg. H. S.							
AS 2	No, stupid school							
AS 3	Yes, but I didn't work very hard							
AS 4	No, missed my friends							
AS 5	Yes							
AS 6	No							

Matrix of Students Interviewed

Student	How did you happen to enroll in the Alt. Ed. program?	How did you hear about the Alt. Ed. program?	Who made the decision to attend the Alt. Ed. program?	Did your parents influence the decision to attend the Alt. Ed. program?	Did your counselor influence your decision to attend the Alt. Ed. program?	What factors influenced the decision to attend the Alt. Ed. program?	Did your friends influence the decision to attend the Alt. Ed. program?	Was the decision to attend or not attend the Alt. Ed. program a good decision?
1 (enrolled)	M. S. counselor recommended	M. S. Counselor	I did.	Yes, they said it's up to you to decide.	My counselor said I could get more one-on-one instruction.	Smaller classes and more help.	No	Yes.
2 (enrolled)	Came here from H. S.	M. S. teacher told me about the program.	I did.	My dad didn't want me to go (he didn't know anything about the program). He wanted me to go to the regular H. S. to	Yes, they told me a lot and my sister went here.	My grades were slipping. Too many kids in my classes.	No. They told me not to come because of all the fights.	Yes.



Matrix of Students Interviewed (Continued)

3 (enrolled)	My brother was going here	My brother, my M. S. teachers and principal	I did.	graduate. They really didn't care, as long as I was getting good grades	No	My grades were bad. My brother went here and he was doing good. Smaller classes.	No. They wanted me to go to the regular H. S. to be with them	Yes.
4 (enrolled)	I went to H. S. and only earned 2 ½ credits at the end of my first year.	My friends	I did.	My parents didn't want me to go. My dad thought it was like getting a GED.	No. The counselor didn't help at all.	Smaller classes and more help.	Yes, they said it would be easier.	Yes
5 (enrolled)	I wasn't doing very well in H. S. and I wanted to be able to earn some credits	My H. S. counselor	My mom	My mom was willing to try anything to get my grades up.	My counselor told me it would be easier and that the teachers would help more.	I wanted to come here because I had a lot of friend here.	My friends all like the school, they said I wouldn't have any homework.	Yes
6 (enrolled)	M. S. counselor	M. S. counselor	My	No, my mom said	Yes	I never did my work and	No.	Yes

Matrix of Students Interviewed (Continued)

	recommended I attend		mom, but I really wanted to come here	if I wanted to go it was ok.		got in trouble. I heard it was easier, smaller classes.		
7 (enrolled)	I didn't do very well in M. S.	M. S. principal told me It would be good for me.	I did.	No	No response	I didn't want to go to a big H. S.	No.	Yes
8 (did not enroll)	N/A	My counselor said there were smaller classes and more none-on- one instruction	My parents and me.	My parents heard a bunch of stuff about the school (it was bad and full of druggies).	No	I didn't want to miss stuff going on at the regular H. S.	A little. All my friends were in the regular H. S. and I wanted to be with them.	Sometimes yes and sometimes no
9 (did not enroll)	N/A	M. S. counselor. Told me there were smaller classes	Both my parents and me.	No	No	I had more choices at and options at the regular H. S.	No.	No

Matrix of Students Interviewed (Continued)

10 (did not enroll Father answered questions for child)	N/A	His counselor	We did	No	No	We wanted him to take responsibility for his poor choices and poor judgment. We also didn't want the stigma of him going to a special school.	No.	No
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### **EDUCATION**

Michigan State University  
East Lansing, Michigan  
Doctor of Philosophy (2007)  
Major: Education Administration K-12

Oakland University  
Rochester, Michigan  
Education Specialist (1994)  
Major: Administrative Leadership

Oakland University  
Rochester, Michigan  
Masters in Special Education (1978)  
Major: Learning Disabilities

Oakland University  
Rochester, Michigan  
Masters in Teaching Reading (1972)

Michigan State University  
East Lansing, Michigan  
Bachelor of Arts (1969)  
Major: Social Science

### **EXPERIENCE**

Assistant Principal 2002 - present  
Waterford Kettering High School  
Waterford Public Schools  
Waterford, Michigan

Principal 2001 - 2002  
Four Towns Discovery Alternative High School  
Waterford Public Schools  
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Assistant Principal 1998 - 2001  
Sashabaw Middle School  
Clarkston Public Schools  
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Special Education Teacher 1974 - 1998

Waterford Kettering High School

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U. S. Army - Brigade Operation Officer: Vietnam, 1970-1971

Awarded the Bronze Star and Army Commendation Medal

Military Instructor: Fort Knox, KY, 1969-1970

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