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A Study of the Alternative School Education Program in Mississippi

Teresa Moore Price

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A STUDY OF THE ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL EDUCATION PROGRAM
IN MISSISSIPPI

By

Teresa Moore Price

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty of
Mississippi State University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
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A STUDY OF THE ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL EDUCATION PROGRAM IN
MISSISSIPPI

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Alternative school models should represent options for students characterized as disenfranchised and/or underachievers. Mississippi's Alternative School Education Program Standards were established to provide a framework for local school districts to use in developing the alternative school's design to meet the unique needs of the students it would serve. It was established by Mississippi Law to serve as a learning alternative placement for students who had difficulty adjusting to a regular classroom environment or who experienced disciplinary problems in the classroom or at school.

Raywid (1999) suggested that unless alternative schools have sufficient freedom to do things differently from the traditional high schools – organize themselves differently, offer different curriculum or at least a different articulated curriculum, provide a different school climate with flexibility – then they are not going to be any more successful with their charges than the regular traditional high

school has been.

Five alternative schools identified by the Mississippi Department of Education as operating an exemplary Alternative School Education Program were examined in this study. A case study approach, which utilized observations, interviews and a report, was conducted to investigate eight areas identified as critical indicators necessary to operate an effective alternative school. These eight areas were: (a) a clearly and focused school mission, (b) a safe and orderly environment, (c) program expectations, (d) alternative educational opportunities, (e) instructional design, (f) a monitoring and evaluation system, (g) support services, and (h) parental/community involvement.

Each alternative school visited met all eight indicators. However, the state's program design falls short of rendering sufficient and appropriate services to young people with opportunity to obtain an education. The state's program does offer an alternative school setting to children that will allow them to remain in school and not be deposited on the streets as a result of suspension or expulsion from the regular school setting. However, the way the Alternative School Education Program is designed goes a long way toward shaping the nature of its establishment and its prospects for success. There is an immediate need for the state to engage in a paradigm shift for its alternative school program's design in order to better meet the needs of the public school system and the people it serves.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Eddie and Elizabeth Moore; to my children, Corwin and Rash; to my grandparents, David and Mattie Sargent; to my brother, Jr.; to my sisters, Jean, Sarah, Jay, and Ree; to my significant friend, Henry Randle; and to my dearest friends, Nellie Adams, Reverend William Givhan, and Erskin Davis.

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CHAPTER I
ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS

The History of the Alternative School Program

Alternative schools have, from many reported descriptions, stood for very different things. They have been established to address various problems, to fulfill disparate purposes, and designed to function quite differently from one another. According to Raywid (1999), they have functioned almost as an empty glass to be filled with any sort of liquid - or even used for something other than a glass.

Nevertheless, the alternative school program, in order to continue to educate children, had to prove to be adaptable, and its adaptability has contributed to the alternative school program's durability. Raywid (1999) suggested that it may be the flexibility of the program that leaves it somewhat marginal to the educational mainstream and a fringe rather than a fully accepted member of the educational establishment. It appears to be a challenge for alternative schools to achieve full institutional legitimacy even after decades and even when they provide an appropriate educational program for children.

The alternative school movement since the early twentieth century has produced interesting and provocative history. The term itself [alternative school] was most often used to describe schools that were alternatives to the existing public

schools. Whether through curriculum reforms or different infrastructures, alternative schools attempted to compensate for the political and academic limitations inherent in traditional public schools. According to Bauman (1998), the establishment of alternative schools with a mission to challenge traditional notions of power in the early twentieth century brought with them ideological departures from Horace Mann's view of a common school. In many cases, the impetus seemed to be the creation of a school that could serve as a site for the production of alternative and/or oppositions for cultural practices (Apple & Weis, 1986).

To Bauman (1998), even with the many variations of the school setup, child centered approaches were typically stressed. The most famous of alternative schools was probably at Summerhill (England), which was started in the 1920s by A. S. Neil. Bauman reported that by the 1950s there was a Summerhill society in the United States and it was widely cited as a model of alternative education. He also stated that A. S. Neill argued that children who commit crimes and acts of violence were primarily the products of repressed conditions. Even though the Summerhill program did not survive, Bauman argued it continued to influence later alternative school efforts by becoming a template for re-evaluating more traditional methodologies of schooling.

The social and political activism of the 1960s also influenced the alternative school movement. The term alternative connoted both innovation and possibility within school systems (Bauman, 1998). During the early 1970s, alternative schools were co-opted into a broader political agenda as they were incorporated into much larger desegregation plans. The term magnet frequently replaced the term alternative,

and, even more recently, the term has received the identity as school choice or charter school.

The struggle of the alternative school program to maintain its survival has somewhat dwindled and the alternative school concept that challenged the infrastructure and political agendas of traditional public schools seemed to be disappearing (Bauman, 1998). Bauman stated that in the 1990s the term alternative had re-emerged, but in the late 1990s, the concept did not carry nearly the romance of innovation it once did. Students who attend these alternative schools did so not because of the school's innovative creative curricular approaches, but because they were no longer succeeding in the more traditional school systems. Raywid (1994) noted that historically, alternative schools connoted choice, but many alternative schools came to be seen as a last chance for some before dropping out of school.

As suggested by Bauman (1998), instead of directly challenging traditional structures of the public schools, the existence of alternative schools has allowed legislators, policymakers, and many educators to avoid the necessity of making any significant reforms to the institution of schooling. The result has been that policymakers are able to attribute academic failure to characteristics of the students (e.g., at-risk students' maladaptive behavior) and to foster sympathy for the home school's decision to remove these disruptive voices and mannerisms. It is of importance to examine, within the larger social context, the function of alternative schools and their effectiveness in such an unequal formation of a large section of society.

Examples of Alternative Schools

The way the challenge of ensuring success for troubled youth is shown is also revealed by the assumptions about why youth are having troubles in the first place. Are they defiant? Disabled in some way? Or are they displaying symptoms caused by a system that is not meeting their needs? There are many issues dealing with reaching today's youth. Bowers (1987) noted this country has run the gamut of improving education for children by setting national goals, executing specific initiatives, and by vocalizing assurances, all with the notion that Americans will be second to none in the education industry. He also suggested that successful socialization for troubled youth leaves children with the increased capacity to perform behaviorally in a manner congruent with the expectations of others.

Alternative education describes a variety of schooling and programmatic options for youth who do not meet codified norms of behavior or academic success in mainstream settings. Blankstein (1997) noted that articles with titles such as "The Positive Education Program in Practice," "Improving School-Based Interventions," and "Learning Style Strategies That Help At-Risk Learners Read and Succeed" all addressed promising programs and teaching techniques that seek out and build on the remarkable strengths and abilities of children and families. However, these same articles often dismissed clients as disabled or dysfunctional, and/or having limited abilities that would warrant some type of special services.

Nevertheless, alternative education has been defined as one way to transform our current systems for educating and reaching all young people. Blankstein (1997)

provided research that helps frame the many promising avenues to system-wide transformation that have been employed by successful alternative programs.

In this country, we have not, until recently, made an organized effort to define what we mean by an education. Simply by default, the traditional system has achieved some degree of curriculum unity through the textbook industry. But outside of this, there has been a great disagreement about what the curriculum should be and whether children really benefit from the traditional education program (Blankstein, 1997).

According to Evans (1997), the eminent psychiatrist Rudolf Dreikurs claimed, “The most important skill for raising a child in a democracy is the ability to encourage that child” (p. 10). Dreikurs also considered encouragement to be the single most important quality in getting along with others, so important that the lack of it could be considered the basic influence for misbehavior. Dinkmeyer and Losoncy (1996) concurred that encouragement is the key ingredient in most positive professional and personal relationships. Alternative School Programs [for many years] have provided opportunity for student participation and educational success. Dinkmeyer & Losoncy showed that young people benefit from consistent participation in well-run Alternative School Programs.

Raywid (1999) identified eight areas as a commonality found in effective alternative schools. These are: (a) clearly stated and focused school mission, (b) safe and orderly climate, (c) program expectations, (d) alternative educational opportunities, (e) instructional program, (f) monitoring and evaluation system, (g) support services, and (h) parental/community involvement. He reported that a clearly

stated and focused school mission must be defined to address for whom is the alternative school intended and what is to be accomplished by the program. Raywid also suggested that the alternative school's primary focus should be to educate and benefit those who attend. It should provide for learning in a safe and orderly environment. The alternative school's design [created using specific guidelines] should be developed to render high program expectations, educational opportunities, and quality educational services. The program's nature and its prospects for success must be monitored and evaluated on a regular basis. All stakeholders (parents, community, and other agencies) must display a vested interest in the development of this program if it is to avail with success. Therefore, alternative schools are highly malleable. They will be what they are made to be.

Special services have been provided for school age children for several decades. After school programs are an offspring of alternative schools. They too were first created to provide academic options for students not successful in regular education programs (Raywid, 1999). The following programs describe how these special services offered intervened positively with students who did not succeed in a traditional school environment.

After School Program

Skooglund (1996) described the task of reclaiming youth at risk as being overwhelming. As a newly appointed director of a federally funded after-school program

(an alternative to expulsion from a regular education) for 40 adolescent juveniles on probation, she had expected that she would spend six months giving her time and skills to serve a group of young people, trying to keep them in line and to help them change their behavior. According to Skooglund, many of the kids were throw-aways and had been kicked out of most of the systems that had been put in place for them: public schools, shelter homes, treatment facilities, detention centers, etc. She attested that the children had more to offer to the staff, to the program, to themselves, and to her than she could have ever imagined. Skooglund also reported that the greatest challenge was not finding the good in these young people, but convincing professionals in other youth serving agencies to do the same.

Learning Unlimited Program

Jim Ellsberry (1997) described the “Learning Unlimited Program,” which emphasized the four C’s (connection, competence, self-control, and contribution) of creating caring communities, as a school-within-a-school. This is a voluntary alternative program in a large suburban high school. The author described specific components of the program and how they meet student needs for connection, competence, self-control, and contribution. Ellsberry explained that Learning Unlimited was clearly a quarter-century ahead of the times. The components of the program were perfectly aligned with the many basic needs models that have experienced popularity (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 1990; Mendler, 1992; Sagor, 1993, as cited in Ellsberry, 1997). This program provided opportunities for students to give back to the community and value themselves as worthy citizen.

The Community Circle of Caring Journal (1996) devoted an entire issue to “Reaching Today’s Youth.” According to reports by principals, superintendents, and directors of alternative schools traditional high schools do not work for some teenagers. School systems across the country are looking for alternatives to traditional schools as they try to reach students at risk.

PEP Texas

Freda Schooler (1995), principal of PEP Texas alternative school, expressed her belief that Second Chance Schools are successful programs that help at-risk kids succeed. She announced that traditional high schools do not work for some teenagers. If the teenager is in the juvenile justice system, a traditional school is not an option. Schooler established a Second Chance School for kids, and named it PEP - Preparing for the Future with Education and Pride in Accomplishments.

David Esquibel, a 19-year-old, described PEP as a better chance to learn. He also recommended that it would be a wise decision for some to attend this school. Students from nine west Texas towns were reported as PEP enrollees. Some who did not speak English had dropped out of junior high school long ago. Others had run into trouble with teachers or law enforcement in their hometown. Superintendents in the region immediately embraced this idea of cooperating to educate teenagers who habitually skipped class, drastically lagged in their studies, were pregnant, or were not making any headway in a regular school. PEP reported that 72 students showed up when the doors opened in August 1992, and they continued to show up on a

regular basis. Some three years later, Schooler (1995) reported nearly 140 enrollees as young as 14 and as old as 58 have attended.

Schooler (1995) also reported that students have earned regular diplomas and general education development diplomas (GED) at PEP. They may start and finish any time during the year. This flexibility allows students to manage their time when they find themselves being full-time employees and/or parents. Classes are self-paced and include required courses in science, history, and English. PEP also offers a heavy dose of vocational training in food production, home economics, building trades, auto mechanics, and health occupations. This type of service delivery obviously provides an alternative to the regular school program. PEP seems to provide a nurturing understanding of needs. It is an educational program that provides educational opportunity which allows for the production of literate, contributing human beings to a global society.

Buechel Metropolitan High School

Daischner (1995) reported that Jefferson County Public Schools (Louisville, KY) strive to provide educational programs that are inclusive of all students, even those who make poor decisions and violate the districts' Uniform Code of Student Conduct. Daischner also used a pretty clear analogy to describe just how important employment of certified teachers is to the organization of an Alternative School Program and its success. He proclaimed that just as medical specialists provide intensive care for hospital patients with specific needs, educational specialists at the alternative school provide educational intensive care for students in grades 6 through

12. According to Daischner, the staff of Buechel Metropolitan High School (the alternative school) is the key to its success. He believed that everyone - the bus driver, the school secretary, the custodian, the counselor, the teachers, the assistant principal - have to be committed to helping students succeed. This type of commitment makes a difference, not just in alternative schools but in regular schools as well. Transforming disruptive students into winners is quite a challenge for all schools. However, Buechel meets this challenge daily by providing a highly structured, disciplinary program offering students a variety of academic incentives and implementing experiences and consistent consequences for corrective measures.

Bay-Arenac

Shannon Napieralski, a senior at Bay-Arenac (MI), beat the odds when she graduated with honors from Bay-Arenac Community High School, an alternative/charter school. According to the Michigan Education Report (2001), Shannon refused to become a statistic. She has a son who, at the time of this report, was two years old and she was well aware that 70% of teen mothers drop out of school. However, Shannon would not be one of them. In June 2001, Shannon graduated from Bay-Arenac Community High School.

Bay-Arenac is a charter school, one of the few in the state chartered by an intermediate school district, which serves grades seven through nine. It is an alternative school that provides personalized education programs and career preparation for students who are not served by the traditional school setting. Many of Bay-Arenac's students are dropouts from traditional public schools, students who

have been in trouble with the law, or teen moms like Shannon. But, as the report reveals, they all share a common bond - a desire to graduate, gain work experience, and lead successful lives (Michigan Education Report, 2001).

Riddel Ranch

Hemphill (1995) described how, instead of stealing car stereos, one teenager in his classroom at the Riddel Ranch learned how to make money legally by installing them. Instead of talking trash and intimidating people, students have to make sales pitches and perfect business plans that might get them start-up loans in the future. Hemphill described that instead of feeling they have no future, or at most a bleak one, some students are talking about goals. There seems to be an assignment of worthiness given to their existence, Hemphill implied.

PEP Ohio

Quinn, Osher, and Valore (1997) quoted 17-year-old Jeffrey as saying:

At West Shore, students are individuals; at public school, they're numbers. My teachers here treat me with respect so I return that respect. We are not only supposed to have opinions on different issues, but are encouraged to voice those opinions. It may not change the outcome of the situation, but at least we get a chance to state our point of view. (p. 58)

Cuyahoga County, Ohio, where Jeffrey attends high school, is an example of a community that offers alternative solutions for children and youth with emotional or behavioral problems and their families. A need to customize services that would contribute to the educational growth of these individuals was identified.

According to Quinn et al. (1997), through a unique non-profit agency known as the Positive Education Program (PEP), the community successfully integrates the

services of more than eight major agencies to provide for over 1,400 children with emotional or behavioral problems and their families annually. This concept is reflected in PEP's mission statement: "To provide integrated services to children and adolescents experiencing significant social, emotional, and behavioral problems, and to their families, using a collaborative, ecological approach" (p. 58).

Unlike many programs that serve as little more than dumping grounds where the community's difficult children are isolated from the rest of society, PEP is a community-wide effort to collaboratively provide effective practices to address the many and varied needs of children and youth with emotional and behavioral problems. Through the combined efforts of the schools, agencies, organizations, and families, Cuyahoga County accomplishes what would otherwise be impossible. This models the adage that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts (Quinn et al., 1997).

Dallas County Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Program

Ball (1997) described the Dallas (TX) County Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Program as Positive Alternative Student Success! This program was created in response to Dallas County's Senate Bill 1, which was passed by the Texas Legislature in 1995. It required juvenile boards in counties with populations greater than 125,000 to have a juvenile justice alternative education program for students between the ages of 10 and 17. According to Ball, the philosophy of the school is to develop and maintain an efficient, effective program for troubled youth based on the concepts of dignity, respect, and self-esteem. Students are not assigned to the school as punishment; rather, students

who are not functioning well in the regular school setting are referred to the school to receive more direct guidance in improving their behavior and academic proficiency.

Students are referred to the school because (a) they have been expelled from school or adjudicated in the juvenile court, (b) they have charges pending against them in the juvenile court system, or (c) they have been expelled for a district alternative education program for persistent misbehavior and voluntarily agree to enroll in the program.

Special education students who have been expelled and adjudicated may also be referred to the program after a duly constituted admission review and dismissal.

John H. Martyn High School

Caudle (1995) described John H. Martyn High School as an alternative school for behavior disordered adolescents in Jefferson, Louisiana. Martyn utilizes a school-wide behavior management system to provide a safe learning environment and to allow students to obtain pro-social skills. Components of the plan include: (a) the point system that reinforces academic achievement and appropriate acquisition of behaviors; (b) level review meetings that are multidisciplinary and provide opportunities to help each student internalize appropriate behaviors; (c) contracting which is a situation where there are a variety of contracts used to modify student behaviors with one particular contract included that is a violence elimination contract among the principal, student, and parent; (d) the Martyn intervention model which facilitates positive changes for the student who is acting inappropriately or experiencing distress; (e) the discipline philosophy that involves helping each student accept responsibility for his or her own behavior; (f) social skills training which

provides the students with instructions that stress pro-social behaviors; (g) vocational opportunities for skills development to occur as a student moves through each level of the system; and (h) a crisis team and a crisis management plan that are in place on the Martyn campus.

Duling Alternative School

Armstrong and Barber (1997) reported that a visit to a well-established and well-operated Alternative School Program in the state of Mississippi was inspiring. They proclaimed that Jackson Public School System operates an alternative education program at Duling Alternative School where seven teachers, two teacher assistants, and three social workers, along with three security officers and a strong administrative staff, provide 60 students who have failed to make it in regular school settings a rich curriculum.

Students are placed at Duling Alternative School only after having a disciplinary hearing at the district level (with appeal rights). They stay in the alternative school for one or more grading periods, continuing their regular class work from their home school, plus receive remediation where needed. Also, included in these services are special workshops and counseling sessions for behavioral development. The students are returned to their home school at the end of a grading period if they have shown academic improvement, attendance on a regular basis, attitude adjustments, and appropriate behavior. One of the social workers follows the student back to the home school to ensure a smooth transition back to a regular school setting (Armstrong & Barber, 1997).

Houston (Texas) Schools

Paige (1995) reported that the Houston (TX) Independent School District (HISD) strived to stem the dropout rate, raise academic achievement, and meet the needs of students with special interests and skills. He suggested that one of the most effective ways to accomplish these challenges is through alternative schools. According to Paige, it is HISD's goal to give every student the best possible education, but the fact remains that not all young people can reach their full potential in traditional classrooms. Dr. Rod Paige now serves as the U. S. Secretary of Education and manages the commitment proposed by President Bush of "No child left behind." Paige believes now as he did when serving with Houston's schools that alternative schools give students the special attention they need, offering them unique opportunities for success (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2001).

Characteristics of Alternative School Programs

Early efforts at using alternative schools as a means of introducing educational change generated a number of options and showed positive signs. While the language and labels have changed, the small schools and schools-within-schools movement occurring recently is a reflection of whether alternatives can survive in larger systems, a reflection of the extent those systems can support such innovation. Fizzell and Raywid (1997) found that innovative alternative schools lack adequate funding. They also found that the Alternative School Program (an educational program that is separate and apart from the regular school setting) has come to mean

so many different things when addressing the needs of troubled youths that it is fast losing its meaning. It is a program that offers students an opportunity to attain an education.

A number of issues confront those adopting, designing, operating, or overseeing alternative schools. Formative policy decisions shape such programs and are repeatedly reinforced or undermined through daily implementation decisions (Raywid, 1999).

Raywid found that there are many fundamental issues decided when shaping the alternative school and determining its nature and, these issues will recur throughout the life of an alternative school. A change in treatment with respect to any one of the issues associated with the alternative school may go far in sending an established alternative school in quite a different direction. Alternative school models should represent options for students characterized as disenfranchised and/or underachievers. If we are to assume a need for educational reform, then alternative schools are one response (Cicchelli & Marcus, 1997).

There are still those who hold that alternative schools have functioned primarily as support for keeping the current system intact, permitting maintenance of the status quo by simply removing those students who are failing. The purpose of the Alternative School Program may be a mixed blessing, obscuring urgently needed changes in all schools. The neediest students often prefer alternative schools even when defined as escape valves to permit keeping the lid on the comprehensive high school (Raywid, 1999). There is a continuing risk that such programs will become

and are no more than dumping grounds and holding pens for students who are difficult to control.

Raywid (1999) suggested strongly that unless alternative schools have sufficient freedom to do things differently from the traditional high school - to organize themselves differently, to offer different curriculum or at least a different articulated curriculum, to provide a different school climate with flexibility - then they are not going to be any more successful with their charges than the regular traditional high school has been. On the other hand, at a time when accountability pressures are strong, there is a temptation to reverse the decentralization of authority that autonomy represents. The way this type dilemma is handled, as suggested by Raywid, plays a large part in shaping the alternative school. He identified the theory that the status of a separate school is probably most ensuring of maximal autonomy, and that satellite location and status probably come next. He also believed that schools-within-schools have more to negotiate and ought to have more assurances if they are located within a host school. If located within a multiplex composed of other comparable programs, their status would be that of a small school. A final statement to sum it all up is the way the Alternative School Education Program is designed goes a long way toward shaping the nature of its establishment and its prospects for success.

Proper educational services and the availability of programs to deliver them again come together to emphasize the effect they have on learning. These elements [when identified in educational systems] enhance personal interactions and provide sufficient educational planning to occur daily in regular classrooms. Noddings (1986)

examined the positive effects on students' learning and behavior when they learn to care for others and for themselves. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) argued for classrooms that emphasize collaboration and provide space for exploring diversity of opinion. A growing body of research (Cotton, n.d.) documents the barriers posed by a belief that poor and minority children are unable to achieve high levels of learning. Therefore, there is a great need to serve those who do not fit the regular mold of intellectual development in a traditional education program. Brophy's (1983) research pointed out that the teacher who consistently elicits greater gains in students are those who, also consistently, places strong emphasis on expectations, on mastery of content, and on allocating the most available time for activities that accomplish mastery. They are effective classroom organizers and managers who maximize time on task and in interactive lessons. They also encourage teacher-student discourse; reduce time spent on seat work and increase time spent engaged in hands-on activity. These are the qualities searched for in Master Teachers. These are the type teachers who care and have concern for all children; not just those placed in an alternative school setting.

Issues Affecting Alternative Schools

Laws have mandated the availability of alternative schools since the Education for All Handicapped Act (1975), which reflected the wishes of many parents, educators, and legislators who sought ways to educate children appropriately. Many came to realize that the absence of this type special service or the loss of these service options would violate the civil rights of students with disabilities and/or

limitations (Kauffman & Hallahan, 1995). The consensus of advocates for students with disabilities was that these students, too, should be part of mainstream classes with modified services. This viewpoint was incorporated in Public Law 94-142 (Education for all Handicapped Act, 1975) with the least restrictive environment mandate as a part of the law. This mandate was retained in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1990 (Fizzell & Raywid, 1997).

The results of this litigation, according to Mercer, Mercer, and Yell (1995), indicated that IDEA supported the continuum of appropriate placements of students with disabilities or other limitations into the general population or in programs that were inappropriate and/or inadequate in service delivery. Nevertheless, the enactment allowed alternative school placement for special students who, in other cases, would have been confined to a traditional limited learning environment with no other options to explore.

John Goodlad (1990) posed the question, “Can we have effective schools?” (p.1). His response was that problems confronting American schools are substantial: the resources available to them are in most instances limited, the stakes are high, and it is by no means preordained that all will go well for many of them in the end. He also implied that American schools are in trouble. In fact, the problems of schooling are of such crippling proportions that many schools may not survive. Goodlad stated, “It is possible that our entire public education system is nearing collapse” (p. 1).

As recent as the year 2001, President George W. Bush’s first budget request delivered to the Congress called for an increase in federal funding for the United States Department of Education that was greater than any other domestic federal

department. However, there was much discussion given to whether the increase in the budget was enough to meet the needs of the current student population and to address the obligations set forth in Bush's "No Child Left Behind" proposal (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2001).

According to a report provided by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (2001), since Bush's first day in office, the President has voiced a commitment to provide every U.S. child with access to a quality education. Yet, the report stated that leaving no child or adolescent behind will require a significant increase to the federal budget. Goodlad (1984) discussed limited resources preventing or causing much difficulty to produce good, quality schools and he pointed out that, in order for an institution to survive, it must require from its clients substantial faith in its usefulness and a measure of satisfaction with its performance.

The primary clients of American public schools are the parents and their school-age children. These are the voices to be heard and their needs must be met if educational services are to produce strong competitors in the United States. Some 20 years ago, Goodlad (1984) discussed that the attainment of a democratic society depends on the existence of schools equally accessible to everyone, since we are all their clients. It is not easy, however, to convince a majority of our citizens that this relationship exists and that schools require their support because of it. This task is even more difficult if citizens perceive the schools to be deficient in regard to their traditional functions. Nevertheless, the ability of schools to do their traditional jobs or perform their responsibilities of assuring literacy and eradicating ignorance is at the center of current criticism, which is today intense in nature.

This nation has not outgrown its needs for special schools or customized educational programs (programs created to meet the unique needs of children; i.e., special education services, alternative education services, and Title I programs.). The public school education system must provide for children a free, appropriate, and sufficient education. DeBlois (1994) reported alternative public schools are in jeopardy just when we need them most to meet the needs of troubled students. However, this does not have to be. According to DeBlois, alternative schools can be created and developed so that they do not crumble the minute the political winds shift or the economy begins to slow down. He identified certain elements — certified teachers, counselors, organized curriculum, sufficient staff, consistency, and healthy environment — that must be present in order for alternative school programs to be effective.

The research that forms the foundation of the Choices Approach (such as the Alternative School Program) is grounded in an understanding that, in a democracy, the public and the experts have interrelated roles to play in the framing of public policy. As Richard Smoke (1987), former Research Director at Brown University's Center for Foreign Policy Development explained, experts can clarify the goals and trade-offs to be considered and lay out specific policy choices along with their costs and risks. According to Smoke, we must understand that undertaking of any educational mandate [placed upon educational institutions of the state] to carry out the assignment to design customized programs to address the specific needs of any given society is astronomical. Nevertheless, we must observe the trade-offs

imbedded within these mandates and recognize the practicalities for society as they impact local, state, and national communities.

According to Graseck and Daniels (1995), experts have no special insight into which goals should have priority and which risks are worth taking. These are decisions of national scope (public choices) which all Americans must make together. Examining existing program types in other states should be a first step taken to adopt or design special programs of any type. The experts' attention to the consequences and feasibility of various policies acts as a counter, most of the time, to wishful thinking. Then the public, on the other hand, can criticize policies that seem contrary to public priorities. This decision making process better explains that when government was faced with rising pressure to see that troubled kids were removed from the classroom, yet kept from the streets, government mandated that all school districts begin an Alternative School Program. However, careful examination since this mandate has challenged whether or not these alternative programs are meeting the specific needs of this targeted population. Finally, putting public priorities into practice requires expertise that the public-at-large cannot provide. These narrower policy decisions can be appropriately considered expert choices. Those who have much knowledge base as to what is best for the clients being served should render such final decisions.

There have always been options for children and parents (Waldrip, 2002). Originally, parents with the financial means could send their children to parochial schools, to private tutors, or to private schools. And, if parents were wealthy, they could send their children away to dormitory schools better known as the elite private

schools. Unfortunately, these types of privileges hinder the growth of public schools. Such writers as Bill Hooks (1984), Carol Gilligan (1982), and Nell Noddings (1986) have pointed out those strategies that improve learning for our children and that counter the biased traditions of education grant alternatives to the conventional system.

Taylor (2002) suggested that the Effective Schools' process is a tried and true process of school change that can create schools in which all children make progress and are ready for study at the next level. According to Taylor, the Effective Schools movement has come a long way since the early 1970s, and all educators are still being challenged to find out what the followers of the early Effective Schools Research have been up to in the intervening decades such as new program development like alternative schools.

In the early 1980s, the Effective Schools Movement produced empirical research that caught the heart of many with the message all children can learn. However true this statement might be, there are still stipulations and uniqueness to appropriate educational programming to carry out its commitment. According to Taylor (2002), the original correlates became expanded descriptions of what works in school reform. Secretary of Education William Bennet espoused the Effective Schools Movement and over the decade the language of the correlates became the language of school improvement and school reform. Taylor noted the original six correlates or characteristics of Effective Schools were presented by Ronald Edmonds and John Frederickson, and were disseminated by Edmonds in an article published in the October 1979 issue of Educational Leadership. Since that time, according to

Taylor, the conceptual framework of the correlates has been investigated, and seven newer, more broadly based correlates are now specified as follows: (a) clearly stated and focused school mission; (b) safe and orderly climate for learning; (c) high expectations for students, teachers, and administrators; (d) opportunity to learn and student time-on-task; (e) instructional leadership by all administrators and staff members; (f) frequent monitoring of student progress; and (g) positive home/school relations.

Even with the setting of such quality standards for our educational programs to meet, there are still many challenges remaining. The Effective Schools Process has not been able to sustain change in districts and schools where it has not been embraced by the current superintendent or by a majority of school board members. Nor has it been able to change the performance of school districts in large urban settings such as New York City, Los Angeles, and Chicago and small rural settings in certain states like Mississippi and Alabama (Taylor, 2002). However, many individual schools in these districts have been successful in their own school reform efforts and most of them have used a process like the Effective Schools Process, if not the process itself.

Many school districts and individual schools have carried out successful school reform without having even heard of Effective Schools or the Effective Schools Process, Taylor (2002) states. In fact, the more school reform is analyzed in schools, districts, and at the state level, the more there appears to be a generic model for successful school change. Educators and communities figured out what was

needed and created schools in which all children learned the intended curriculum and achieved at levels that enabled them to be successful at the next level of study.

Alternative Schools in Mississippi

Alternative education was established by Mississippi law to serve as a learning alternative placement for students who had difficulty adjusting to a regular classroom environment or who experienced disciplinary problems in the classroom or at school (Thompson, 1999). These identified needs guided the state in designing an Alternative School Education Program that would offer special services to these students. The mission of the Alternative School Education Program in Mississippi, according to Thompson, is to promote the areas of (a) academic performance, (b) behavior modification, (c) functional skills, (d) career education, (e) character education, and (f) employability skills in a learning environment that offers high expectation and high support. The six areas are to be addressed through a collaborative effort by the students, parents, and school faculty. A commitment is to be made to provide a safe, structured environment that is conducive to helping students to function in today's ever-changing society.

Section 37-13-92 of the Mississippi Code of 1972, Annotated, establishes the Alternative School Education Program for compulsory school-age students and requires all school districts to maintain and operate such programs. The law governing the Alternative School Program was first amended in 1994 to revise the categories of compulsory school-age students. These students could be assigned to an alternative school program of local districts that were now authorized to offer a GED

preparation program. School districts could participate in a consortium to render this special service. However, they must designate which district shall operate as the lead district when the alternative school program is operated jointly by two or more school districts. The amendment also required the State Board of Education to establish minimum guidelines for the Alternative School Education Program, and provide a procedure for removal of students from the alternative school who become involved in criminal or violent behavior (Rucker, 1999).

Senate Bill 2510 of the 1995 Regular Session amended Section 37-13-92 of the Mississippi Code to its present form. The 1995 amendment provides procedures, standards for supervision, and removal of a student from regular school to the alternative school. It provides for written prior notice to be sent to the parents of students who are placed in the alternative school. The State Department of Education is directed to provide certain information to school districts in developing an Alternative School Education Program and its general purposes (Rucker, 1999).

Section 37-19-22 of the Code establishes the funding formula for the Alternative School Education Program. The formula for funding the program is three-quarters of one percent (.0075%) of the school district's average daily attendance or 12 pupils, whichever is greater, multiplied by the state average per pupil expenditure. School districts may request additional funding for the program by submitting a written proposal to amend allocations for operation (Rucker, 1999).

According to Rucker (1999), the Alternative School Education Program, as described in Section 37-13-92 of the Mississippi Code, provides an additional opportunity to remain in school for those children who have been suspended or

expelled from school, who have been referred to the program due to disciplinary problems by the parent, legal guardian or custodian of the child, or who have been referred to the program by depository order of a chancellor or youth court judge. Conformity for the current structure of the Alternative School Education Program was mandated to begin with the 1993-1994 school years. The program has been in operation for 10 school years. The responsibility of implementing the Alternative School Education Program rests with both the individual school district and the State Department of Education. The law specifies the role of school districts as to establish, maintain, and operate an alternative school program and to provide the continuing education of a student who has been placed in the alternative school setting (Titles 35-37, Section 37-13-92, Mississippi Code, 1972, Annotated, p. 383).

Armstrong and Barber (1997) reported that the Mississippi Department of Education, through the Office of Community and Outreach Services, surveyed all school districts' alternative school program in the state during the fall of 1995 to investigate how well the program was being implemented according to state guidelines. Half of the school districts were cited for deficiencies. These cites were primarily for the lack of adequate, certified teachers in the program. The districts were given the opportunity to present plans of correction for cited deficiencies to the State Department to comply with the Accreditation Standards for the Alternative School Education Program.

Equity in education for students placed in an alternative school setting was to be ensured by providing the opportunity for students to remain in a school setting that offered educational alternatives to the one provided by the regular school program.

The alternative school concept was promoted and adopted by Mississippi with the intent to provide educational options that emphasized varied instructional methods, create flexible learning environments in an open school community based on the needs of its students, and provide educational opportunities different from traditional school settings (Armstrong & Barber, 1997).

Therefore, the mission of the Alternative School Program in Mississippi is to promote the areas of academic performance, behavior modification, functional skills, career education, character education, employability skills, community, and parent involvement in a learning environment that offers high expectations and unlimited support (Thompson, 1999).

Armstrong and Barber (1997) implied that the best description of this concept working could be observed in a letter submitted to a friend from a student who had been placed in this type setting [alternative school] in Mississippi's schools. This program in Mississippi was aimed primarily at the students who committed serious behavioral violations of the school code in regular educational settings (who would otherwise be expelled or suspended for long periods) and would benefit from an intensive/alternative program that would keep them off the streets and enhance their potential for fulfilling their educational goals. The letter from an alternative school student to her friend reads:

First, I want to tell you about the school that I have started attending. All I know it's called the Alternative School. This school is perfect. It makes me look forward to succeeding. I don't mind [sic] getting up and going in the morning. I also don't mind [sic] getting my lesson and trying to learn at this school. We have several different teachers that come in and teach us different subjects. We have breakfast and lunch during the day. We are in a small trailer, but I still think of it as a good school. Simply because you know how I

use to be at the high school. Over here I'm all for succeeding and planning for the future. One of my teachers has given me a positive attitude toward school, because she is not only helping me with trying to get the education I need in life, but also letting me know about the world and its people. That's why I want to succeed and show everyone in the world that I will reach my goal. (p.1)

Love (1996) corroborated that the Mississippi Board of Education had the responsibility for promulgating minimum guidelines for the Alternative School Education Program and for providing, upon request, informational material on developing a program that takes into consideration the size, wealth, and existing facilities of an individual district to create this type program. In Mississippi, the source that is responsible for the administration of the Alternative School Education Program is the Office of Community and Outreach Services within the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE).

According to Love (1996), this office developed guidelines to be used by school districts in the implementation of the Alternative School Education Program. These guidelines were developed according to minimums required by Section 37-13-92 and adopted by the Mississippi Board of Education in September 1995.

Mississippi's guidelines, in brief, required school districts to: (a) provide local definition and approval of policies and procedures for the program, (b) provide due process procedures for disciplinary removal from school, (c) provide curriculum and instructional methodology addressing academic, behavior, functional skills, and career orientation through a developed Individual Instruction Plan (IIP), (d) allow student/teacher ratio in each classroom to be no greater than 15:1, however, exceptions may be granted through the SDE, (e) provide adequate instructional staff

to ensure the continuing education of students, (f) provide classroom supervision at all times, certified teachers, support staff with adequate credentials, and certified administrators, (g) consortium of school districts opportunity, (h) establish rules and regulations for operation, (i) provide clean program facilities, (j) operate in compliance with state/federal laws, (k) maintain proper record keeping, (l) administer appropriate state assessments, (m) provide and implement evaluation components, (n) install operable schedules, (o) employ a motivated and culturally diverse staff, (p) promote parent involvement, and interagency communication (Thompson, 1999).

In 1992, the Mississippi State Legislature, faced with rising pressure to see that troubled kids were removed from the classroom rather than expel them from the school system, mandated that all school districts begin an Alternative School Program to address the unique needs of these students. This program was to be aimed primarily at students who committed serious behavioral violations of the school code in regular educational settings and who would benefit from an intensive/alternative program that would keep them off the streets and enhance their potential for fulfilling their educational goals (Mississippi Code, 1972, Annotated, War Veterans and Pensions Education, Section 37-13-92, A.L.R., 5th 1., pp. 383).

Alternative schools should prevent failure through highly individualized curricula, counseling services, and regular program evaluations. It is essential that the Alternative School Program offers sufficient and appropriate services to students who are assigned to the setting (Armstrong & Barber, 1997). History has certainly pronounced considerable ambiguity to the purpose of alternative schools, even in the state of Mississippi. The question that remains to be answered is whether the

alternative school is for all students or only for the special-needs populations. More challenging students are dependent on a good education, and we should provide a free, appropriate, and sufficient education for children, despite these ambiguities and the emergence of multiple alternatives (Raywid, 1999).

Purpose of the Study

According to the Mississippi State Department of Education (1996), the Alternative School Education Program shall provide an additional opportunity for students to remain in school after being removed from the regular school setting because of failure to conform to the school's code of conduct. It is the intent of the study to serve as a report on five exemplary alternative schools in Mississippi identified by the State Department of Education. This research will examine these five school districts identified as operating an exemplary alternative school that meets state guidelines.

This study will examine the operation of five Exemplary Alternative School Programs in the state of Mississippi by interviewing school personnel who will respond to questions that will identify the program's educational opportunity sufficiency and appropriateness. Eight areas identified in effective alternative schools have been developed in the literature. These eight areas are: (a) clearly stated and focused school mission, (b) safe and orderly climate, (c) program expectations, (d) alternative education opportunities, (e) instructional program, (f) monitoring and evaluation system, (g) support services, and (h) parental and community involvement.

Research Statement

The research statement for this study is when school districts in Mississippi address the eight essential areas mandated by state guidelines to create and operate an alternative school; the result is that the program is recognized as being an exemplary one. The schools will be found to be in compliance with state guidelines as rendering appropriate and sufficient educational opportunities for students placed in the alternative school. To validate this general statement, the following indicators [standards] must be met.

1. An Exemplary Alternative School Education Program has a clearly stated and focused school mission.
2. An Exemplary Alternative School Education Program operates in a safe and orderly environment.
3. An Exemplary Alternative School Education Program identifies the program's expectations/goals.
4. An Exemplary Alternative School Education Program identifies educational opportunities for students.
5. An Exemplary Alternative School Education Program identifies its instructional program design.
6. An Exemplary Alternative School Education Program applies a monitoring and evaluation system.
7. An Exemplary Alternative School Education Program identifies support services such as Special Education.

8. An Exemplary Alternative School Education Program involves parents and the community in its operation.

Limitations

Inherent factors in the research may limit findings. The sensitive nature of the investigation may serve as a limitation to the honesty of reported data for the study. Even though school districts are mandated to create an Alternative School Education Program, the hardship of funding this demand with specific guidelines poses many difficulties for school officials, and may cause embarrassment for a district to reveal actual conditions about its existing program.

CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to examine the operation of five exemplary Alternative Schools in the state of Mississippi as identified by Mississippi Department of Education (MDE). The school districts' Alternative Education School Program will be examined for educational opportunity sufficiency and appropriateness. This chapter presents the design of the research, and a description of the participants, the instrument, the procedures followed, and the method of data analysis.

Research Design

The research method used in this study is a case study approach which utilized observations, interviews, and document analysis. A case study is a design particularly suited to situations where it is impossible to separate the phenomenon's variables from their context (Yin, 1984). In the examination of exemplary alternative schools in the state of Mississippi, there may possibly be some variables present that influence their operation's effectiveness. However, it is impossible to determine or separate any one influential variable. A list of questions was used to serve only as a guide in this study and will not place a limit on the number of questions used to address the eight areas examined in the study. These eight areas are: (a) a clearly

stated and focused school mission, (b) safe and orderly climate, (c) program expectations, (d) alternative education opportunities, (e) instructional program, (f) monitoring and evaluation system, (g) support services, and (h) parental/community involvement.

According to Finley and Knowles (1995), in case study research emphasis is placed on understanding why certain things occur. Others, such as Bartlett (1989), characterized the purpose of a case study as twofold: (a) to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of the groups under study; and (b) to develop general theoretical statements about regularities in social structure and process.

Merriam (1988) advocated case study research because it focuses on discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspectives of those being studied. Additionally, it offers the greatest promise of making significant contributions to the knowledge base and practices of education.

Merriam (1988) also stated that internal validity asks the question of how one's findings match reality. She identified triangulation as a vital strategy in case study research. She defines triangulation as an approach that allows opportunity for: asking the participants for verification of the data, consultation with peers about the data, and description of the researchers' assumptions, worldview, and theoretical orientation.

According to Eisner (1991), research such as case studies becomes believable because of its coherence, insight, and instrumental utility. By these terms, Eisner means that case studies use persuasion rather than statistical proofs of cause and effect or association. He carefully points to the field of law as a model for such work.

For example, he stated that lawyers utilize the theaters of courtrooms to convince juries of the plausibility of their case. So it is with case studies that the weight of the evidence, the coherence of the facts presented, and the cogency of the interpretation convince the reader of the explanations given.

The goal of reliability is to minimize errors and biases in a study. One of the principal aims of triangulation in the social sciences is to corroborate one set of findings with another; with hope that two or more sets of findings will converge on a single proposition. Triangulation of data will be used to find converging elements among the different data sources. An audit plan (code exhibits alphabetically to identify each participant, create individual files, place files in locked file cabinet when not in use) is in place to secure the handling of data collection and an explanation of outlined procedures is provided for recording given responses during interviews. There are certain threads or characteristics of case study research [verification of data, consultation about data, reports of data] that weave together and cause a strong connection to be made within the study. Merriam (1988) identified these threads as a rich thick description of the phenomenon under study; they illuminate the reader's understanding of the phenomenon under study; and they rely on inductive reasoning in that the generalization made as a result of studying the phenomenon emerge from the examination of the data collected in context.

Participants

Participants in this study were identified by the Mississippi Department of Education as school districts operating an exemplary alternative school. There were a

total of ten schools identified by MDE as being exemplary schools: five urban, three rural and two consortiums. Based on the school districts' location in the state, five alternative schools were chosen for this study. There was a particular interest in secondary grade levels (9-12), because of the significance of the program providing an alternative educational opportunity. These schools were selected because of their proximity to the researchers' home base. Each school district's superintendent was mailed a letter that explained this research project, and that indicated that their participation was strictly voluntary. A letter was also sent to the director/principal of the alternative school if this person differed from the school's superintendent. The MSU IRB granted approval for this study (see Appendix A).

Instrumentation

An interview protocol was used in the interview sessions as the instrument to gather data. Case studies are field focused; by this term Eisner (1991) implied that the researcher has the opportunity to go to the people and places where the events of interest are happening. He also indicated that a characteristic of case study research is that studies are non-manipulative; that is, objects and situations are studied intact instead of in an artificial, experimental environment.

This study involved a visit to five schools in the state that were identified by the Mississippi Department of Education Division of Alternative Education and Student Support as operating alternative schools that are meeting state standards. In this study, the alternative schools' administrator was interviewed. This interview session allowed the researcher to indulge in discussion with the program's director

about the elements that contribute to the operation of an effective Alternative School Education Program. Documents from each participating school were obtained to verify the eight areas addressed in this study. The interview protocol was used to direct interview sessions. A copy of this protocol is presented in the Appendix B. The protocol covers the eight areas mentioned: (a) clearly stated and focused school mission, (b) safe and orderly climate, (c) program expectations, (d) alternative educational opportunities, (e) instructional program, (f) monitoring and evaluation system, (g) support services, and (h) parental and community involvement. Each school was given a pseudonym. No identifiable information has been used.

Procedures

Participants were advised that this research project has been fully approved by the Institutional Review Board of Mississippi State University. The data for this study were collected from five alternative schools. Each school had been identified as an Alternative School Program within a school district that is urban, rural, or a partnership in a consortium. One visit was made to each school where an interview took place with the Alternative School Administrator. The interview was guided by the interview protocol with items that are pertinent to the operation and management of an effective Alternative School Education Program as set forth by MDE standards. Observation field notes were taken at each school visited along with notations of responses made by the interviewees to questions related to the eight areas identified in this research project. The interview sessions were taped. Documents supplied by the alternative schools were analyzed by the researcher.

Data Analysis

The purpose of basic research, according to Knirk (1991), is knowledge for the sake of knowledge, and to understand and explain. The ultimate goal of case study research is to portray the complex pattern of what has been studied in sufficient depth and detail so that the reader can understand it (Barlett, 1989). The questions asked in this research will provide primary knowledge of the selected schools identified as exemplary alternative schools in the state of Mississippi.

Case study research uses narratives to optimize the opportunity of the reader to gain an experiential understanding of the case (Stake, 1995). The responses from interview questions provided a narrative for this study. A case study relies on direct interpretation of both individual data and the aggregation of data until something can be said about them as a class (Carson, 1993). According to Carson, the biggest task is to condense the information in order to find similarities within the data. Furthermore, suggestion is made that interpretation of data moves beyond this task to the consideration of causes, consequences, and relationships.

Yin (1984) reported that case study analysis is one of the most desirable strategies used to portray a pattern matching logic. Through data sources such as triangulation, comparing, and cross-checking the data (pattern matching logic) produce consistency of information achieved which in turn strengthens validity. The intertwining of these strategic patterns in a systematic data analysis successfully addresses reliability and validity. The utilization of these strategies also delivers a quality narrative report that will confirm the findings of the case study research (Carson, 1993).

In these case studies, transcripts of interviews, field notes of observations, and analysis of documents were compared to develop the individual cases. In each of these cases, the eight research questions were answered.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH RESULTS

The purpose of the study was to examine Exemplary Alternative Schools in the state of Mississippi. The intention of the research study was to render a report on the Alternative School Education Program in Mississippi. Five Exemplary Alternative Schools in Mississippi, identified by the State Department of Education, were visited. The geographical location of each school district may serve as an explanation for the demographic data reported in each alternative school for its ethnic composition. Also, the Mississippi Department of Education [students] average daily attendance rate (ADA) is reported at 97% for the school year 2003-2004 (mde.k12.ms.us).

School administrators were interviewed addressing eight areas indicated in state guidelines as required standards to be met for implementing the Alternative School Education Program (a clearly stated and focused school mission, a safe and orderly climate, program goals and expectations, alternative educational opportunities, a quality instructional program, a program monitoring and evaluation system, support services, and parental/community involvement).

Following are the case descriptions of each of the alternative schools. A discussion is then presented of how well each school addresses the eight indicators. The chapter concludes with a summary.

The Case Studies

Alternative School SMAS

This school site is an off-campus, separate building location. The building's appearance mimics that of a secure facility having a narrow entryway where one has to be buzzed in (door unlocked) and then continue walking through a metal detector arch. There is limited yard space for extensive landscaping. The parking lot, located at the front of the building, takes up most of the grounds for the front entry leaving no space for beautification.

SMAS houses only students who have been assigned to the alternative school. The school's mission is to take at risk children and modify their behavior. It is the goal of the program to turn around children who have been identified as heading the wrong way.

The principal of SMAS has several years of experience in law enforcement, is a college graduate, and has military credentials. He is also a certified trainer in school safety techniques. There is no security officer employed at this school; however, school personnel have received school safety training and certification. The principal [on occasion] provides some of the safety training for the school's staff. There is a full-time guidance counselor on-site. When asked if behavioral therapists are employed, the principal replied that school personnel serve dual roles.

The principal feels the program has resulted in students beginning to develop greater self-discipline. According to him, using behavior modification techniques have made a big difference in the number of repeat offenders returning to the

program. The program also serves students who have violated general school rules other than infractions for disorderly conduct (i.e.: truant, past compulsory school age, socially inept, or assigned placement from a school employed point system for discipline). However, the principal feels the primary use of the program is for disciplinary reasons. Approximately 75% of student placement is for behavior problems.

Students have shown a desire to learn by improving their academic and social skills performance while at the school. The principal attributes this success to children being in a smaller learning environment with a lower student-teacher ratio. The average daily attendance is approximately 70% percent for students. And some 65% to 70% of the students remain in their home school once they return there from the alternative school.

There are no educational opportunities provided by the program that are different from those offered at the regular schools. Students can neither obtain a diploma nor graduate from this program. The staff consists of 16 school employees of which 50% are licensed educators. The other 50% do not hold a state license, but more than half of them have a college degree. The district is one of six school districts participating in a consorted effort to operate and manage this alternative school that serves grades 5-12. This district serves as the lead district for this alternative school consortium. Student demographics reported are: 76% boys, 91% African-American, and 15% receiving special education services.

Students are placed in the program for a complete grading period; however, if there is a need for a longer stay, a committee composed of teachers, the counselor,

and the principal makes this determination. The exit plan for students to return to their home school warrants a satisfactory report in three major areas: regular attendance, academic improvements, and appropriate behavior exhibited on a daily basis. There is no follow-up plan for students who return to their home school. Once the student serves the assigned time and exits the program, that student is back in the full jurisdiction of the regular home school.

There are a variety of support service sources identified: The Regional Mental Health Agency, local churches, community volunteer programs, private counseling services, and local public programs (Park & Recreation, Boys & Girls Club). Parents are involved in the school's disciplinary process. They must appear to enroll the child in the program, attend parent conferences upon request, and attend at least one open house or family night event for parent training.

Alternative School JAMS

This school site is an off-campus, separate building location. The building has served as an elementary school in previous years. It is quite an impressive site, having adequate space, sufficient staff, and proper set-up to operate efficiently. The grounds are well kept, as well as the inside of the building. The school manages a secured entrance by posting a security officer at the front door and conducting a security check. According to the JAMS school plan, the school's mission is to redirect students to be successful. The school's goal is to improve students' academic performance to meet the state's standards for accountability. The school employs (during a regular school day) eight full-time security officers, who are posted at every

entry/exit doorway. Four of the officers are certified law enforcers. The officers are very visible at main points in every hallway. There is a full-time guidance counselor on site, as well as a part-time social worker and a full-time behavior therapist.

The program has resulted in students' beginning to develop greater self-discipline. The principal states that this behavior is exhibited all the time and that this is a true indicator that students have learned to deal appropriately with conflicts. This observed behavioral change in students is a positive and successful result of behavior modification techniques being addressed on a daily basis. There is an Army Junior Recruit Officer Training Corps (JROTC) Program at the school for middle school students (grades 6-8). It is housed along with fine arts classes in a separate building from the main building. The school does not serve students who have violated school rules in general. Its primary purpose is to address the needs of students who have been identified as having discipline problems at their home school. The principal expressed that at first there was the concern that the alternative school would become a "dumping ground" for regular school discipline problems; however, the reputation and the identity of the program have improved greatly. Students' academic performance improves substantially while they are placed in the alternative school, the principal reports. A smaller learning environment and lower student-teacher ratio are felt to be major contributing factors for this success. Students' social skills are well developed, because of daily sessions conducted by counselors on conflict management techniques.

Documents of the school's profile provided by the principal indicated that there is an 80% average daily attendance for students at this school, and 85% of them

remain in their home school once returned from the program. There are no educational opportunities provided by the program that are different from those offered at the regular schools. Students can neither obtain a diploma nor graduate from this program. The assigned time period for a student's placement in the program varies according to the offense(s).

Of the JAMS's staff, 93% are licensed educators. The remaining 7% of the staff had two years of college, which meets the state's standard for ensuring employment of highly qualified staff members. The school serves grades 4-12. The students are 75% boys and 97% are African-Americans. Approximately 30% of the student body receives special education services. There is a clearly identified exit plan for the program. Counselors, teachers, parents, a case manager, and administrators from both the alternative school and the home school meet to discuss the eligibility of a student's return to the home school. If there is either a discrepancy by the committee on recommendation for a student's placement in the alternative school or an unattainable consensus for the student's return to the home school, a third party is then involved in the process. The third party is made up of the superintendent and school board members. The third party renders a final decision on the fate of students in any given case. The transition plan for monitoring students returning to their home school is managed by having regular meetings between students and the assigned case manager or behavior therapist.

Support services provided to the school's program are few. There was one identified partnership (Adopt-A-School Program) with a local business and the Regional Mental Health Agency provides services to the students. Parents are

involved in the school's disciplinary process. They are required to enroll their child in the program, attend parenting sessions once a month on Tuesday nights, and come to requested conferences as scheduled. Follow-up sessions are required for parents if they fail to attend the regularly scheduled Tuesday night meeting. Parents' failure to report to required follow-up sessions may/will result in the student's suspension from school.

JAMS produced documents that identified well-defined rules and expectations for the program. The school's mission focuses on a commitment to have each student be successful. The environment is conducive for learning, and is well secured to ensure the safety of the faculty, staff, and student body. The curriculum properly addresses the academic studies needed for students to continue their education. Certified teachers are employed to implement the instructional plan on a daily basis. Support services and a monitoring and evaluation system are utilized to render a sufficient and appropriate educational program. The school addresses alternative educational opportunities by providing a last resort for students to remain in school and continue their education who otherwise would be removed from the regular school setting by suspension or expulsion for disciplinary reasons. Besides this second chance offered to students to remain in school and avoid being deposited in the streets unsupervised, there are no other identifiable alternative educational opportunities offered that are different from the regular school's education program.

Alternative School SCAS

This school site is an off-campus, separate building location. It is a recently renovated building that formerly housed the district's bus shop. It is a small facility, limited in space, but is well-kept and clean. The school's positive climate is evident upon entrance into the building, and pride in success of the school's program is shown by the students' school work and academic awards decorating the halls. The school's mission is to provide a quality, formal education for individuals, particularly at-risk youth, in their community. The school's beliefs are that the most basic and challenging responsibility is to provide for the academic development of students in this school; that students exhibit a wide range of learning capacities, background, needs, and interest; that the educational and behavioral program should be broad enough to enhance the personal, behavioral, and physical needs of individuals in a democratic society, and that a vital part of the mission is to establish a school program which reflects the values, needs, and ambition of the community.

There is a part-time security officer, a full-time school counselor, and a part-time behavior therapist on staff. The principal feels the program has resulted in students developing greater self-discipline; however, there are repeaters to the program. Generally, reports received from principals at the regular school sites indicate that students who have been assigned to the alternative school do not want to return.

SCAS serves students who experience problems [truancy, social indifferences, compulsory school age] in the traditional school setting other than those identified as behavioral or disciplinary problems. Only one-third of the school's referrals and

placements are for disciplinary reasons. The school's primary use is not for disciplinary response to regular school sites. It serves students who are behind in academic studies and those who choose to obtain a general education - GED.

There are several educational opportunities provided by the program that are different from those offered at the regular schools. There is a General Education Development Program (GED) offered to students in this school. Students may enroll in this program if they do not fall under the compulsory school age attendance law; if they are two years behind their expected graduating class; and if they have been deposited by the judicial system. There is also a Fast Track Program offered at this school. This program provides academic instruction for students who fall two years behind in grade level performance, and they want to catch up so that they can return to their regular grade at their home school. Parents may request placement for their child into either of these programs, if the child is deemed eligible. According to the principal, behavioral modification techniques taught to the students contribute greatly to the school's success. The school counselor's daily contacts with students provide adequate guidance for students to plan appropriately for their educational career. Students can receive a diploma upon completion of the GED program. They may also remain in the alternative school to complete regular academic studies, but they must meet all regular education requirements to receive a regular high school diploma. There is a graduation ceremony held for GED graduates at this school. Students who complete regular academic studies at the school are allowed to participate in the regular high school graduation ceremony.

The average daily attendance for students is 95% and, 80% of the students remain in their home school once returned from placement in the alternative school. The total number of employees is six with four licensed teachers and two assistants serving grades 1-12; gender make-up is 74% boys and 26% girls; 50% of the student body is African-American, 50% White; and 3% of the student body is receiving special education services.

Students are placed in SCAS for a complete grading period; however, if there is a need for a longer stay, a committee composed of district administrators (rotating on a regular basis) meets to make this determination. The exit plan for students to return to their home school involves a conference with the alternative school teachers, principal, parents, and the student. An in-depth report is given on the student's behavior and academic status to determine future educational placement. There is no formal transition plan in place for students returning to the home school. The principal reported that this is the weakest link in the program, and feels this breakdown comes from insufficient staffing. However, there are plans in place to address this component of the program as soon as possible. The position for a part-time counselor is being proposed in the fiscal school year's budget to address this matter.

A variety of support service sources are identified: Regional Mental Health Agency, youth court, private and public counseling agencies, city and county businesses, and local churches. Parent involvement is identifiable in the program. Parents must enroll their child in the program, and they must attend conferences upon request. There are no parent training activities offered at this time; however, this is

an area being addressed for immediate development.

SCAS Alternative School exhibits a structured educational program that provides for academic development and behavior modification of students. At this school a safe and orderly environment exist for learning to occur. Small group activity is available to deliver instruction to students who are behind in academic studies. Certified teachers and therapists (verified by personnel report) conduct counseling sessions to rectify inappropriate student behavior. Opportunities for students to receive an education at this alternative school are made available either through the regular school program or the GED program. However, there is a need [expressed by the principal] to improve transition services to students who return to their home school after placement in the alternative school. Support services, parental, and community involvement is evidenced by documents produced by the principal to show regular participation of different agencies, schedules of regular and required parent conferences, and local involvement of businesses.

Alternative School ASOM

This school is located in a separate building, on the high school's campus. It is a building, modern in design, that is limited in space, yet it displays a regular school's environment. The school's mission is to produce educated, responsible citizens who are capable of taking an active role in society. The school's goal is to address the academic, social, and emotional needs of the non-traditional student. There is a full-time security officer on staff. The regular school's guidance counselor provides services to students assigned to the alternative school. A behavior therapist

serves the school through special arrangements made with the Regional Mental Health Agency. A therapist is provided upon request when the need arises. The principal feels students develop a greater self-discipline while at the alternative school because there is a low rate of recidivism. The number of disciplinary referrals for students in the alternative school has decreased significantly. The number of suspensions from the alternative school has also declined. There is a 1% return rate for students not making it once placed back at the home school.

ASOM serves students who have violated school rules in general or those who find themselves in a unique, compromising situation. For example, the alternative school provides educational opportunity for unwed parents, underage parents, students with parental request for placement in the program, court deposited young adults (ages 14-21), and for students who fall short of meeting the traditional high school graduation requirements. However, in the past (prior to this school year, 2003-2004) the school's primary use has been for a disciplinary response to the home schools. Now, only approximately 4-5% of student placement in the alternative school is for disciplinary problems alone.

Students have increased their academic performance by improving their basic reading and math skills. The Accelerated Reading and Math Program is identified as the primary educational source contributing to students' success. There is school documentation as evidence that some students have graduated from the state's assessment category of minimal performance to the next higher category of basic performance. Students' social skills have also improved. Students have developed a stronger, healthier self-esteem, better communication skills, and possess the ability to

manage conflicts rationally.

The average daily attendance for students is 83%. An estimated percentage of students remaining in their home school (once returned from serving placement in the alternative school) is 99%. There are several educational opportunities provided to students that are true alternatives to the traditional academic program. The following opportunities are identified for students to receive an education: GED Program, Internships to complete traditional school studies, Service Learning Program for occupational and vocational development, and a certificate of attendance for special education students. Special education students may work for a certificate of attendance, unless otherwise specified on the child's individual educational plan (IEP).

All school staff members are certified employees. The school serves grades 6-12. The students are 59% boys, 51% African-American, and 20% of the students receive special education services.

Students placed in the alternative school serve a full grading period of 45 days. The exit plan for a student to return to the home school is conducted by a committee composed of the alternative school teachers, the principal, the parents, the student, and the home school's principal. This committee submits to the superintendent a recommendation for notification of a student's return to be delivered to his/her respective school. Special education students' exit plan complies with federal and state laws as mandated by the IEP committee. There is also a transition plan carried out for students who return to their regular home school. These students are monitored by the behavior therapist for a nine week period after they have

returned to their home school from the alternative school placement.

Parents are involved in their child's educational placement at the alternative school. They must enroll the student, attend parent conferences, and participate in parent training. A variety of support services are identified: domestic violence, family crisis, a mentorship program, United Way, and Families First Exchange Club. All sources contribute to the success of the program's operation. They are identified as valuable stakeholders in an invaluable resource.

ASOM clearly states its mission and goals which correlate with the primary purposes of the establishment of the Alternative School Education Program by the state. The school provides a safe and orderly environment on a daily basis and employs a sufficient number of [certified] staff members to implement its educational services. The program addresses both the academic and behavior modification needs of students. Documents produced by the principal indicate that established policy for the school's operation to address student attendance, student placement into the program, assignment period to the program, exit process from the program, and educational opportunities provided for students while assigned to the program is enforced to ensure the program's success. Parents and a variety of support service agencies are involved in the school's activities. These resources are all valuable stakeholders.

Alternative School GASP

This school is an off-campus, separate building location. It was formerly an elementary school. The school's environment and set-up is conducive for student

learning. The school's mission is to educate each student in the least restrictive environment, and eventually prepare the student to reenter the home school, when appropriate. The primary goal of the program is to address the academic, social, and emotional needs of the students within a curriculum and environment where each individual takes responsibility for his/her behavior; and where each individual sees him/herself in control of his/her destiny.

There are two full-time security officers on staff. The guidance counselor from the home school provides counseling for the students placed in the alternative school. There is no behavior therapist on site; however, access to obtain service is readily available. There is an established partnership with the Regional Mental Health Agency to provide behavior modification technique counseling to students. The program has resulted in the students developing a greater self-discipline. The principal feels the smaller school environment and the low teacher pupil ratio are major factors contributing to a student's success at the alternative school.

GASP is designed to address academic, emotional, and social needs of the non-traditional student. Academically, each student is placed in an individualized programmed learning system, which is designed to reduce deficiencies and build basic skills. Reinforcement is applied through positive grading, one-on-one tutoring, and interactions between students and teachers. This program continues the academic classes in which the student is enrolled, or allows the appropriately aged student to opt for GED preparation courses. Instruction addresses specific skill deficiencies in reading, mathematics, and writing. The state curriculum guide serves as the basis of instructional delivery.

GASP serves students who have exhibited problems other than disciplinary conflicts. Approximately 15% are placed for academic reasons, and 85% as a disciplinary response. Students placed in the school have increased their academic performance significantly by developing better study habits, exercising more self-discipline, and managing more responsibly conflicts encountered at school. There is still evidence that a lot more work is needed to help students continue to develop social skills. They need to extend their self-control management skills beyond the school setting and learn how to interact and behave appropriately in society.

The average daily attendance for students is 87%, with 65% of the students remaining in the home school once returning from the alternative school. There is a recidivism rate of 35%. There is only one identifiable educational opportunity (GED) provided for students that is different from the traditional school. Students may receive a diploma upon completion of the GED program, but there is no graduation ceremony held for students who complete the program.

All of the teachers are certified in the area of instruction delivered by them on daily basis, including special education. There are seven non-certified employees; one holds a college degree. The school serves grades 7-12. The students are 55% girls, 77% African-American, and 5% special education.

There is a nine week assignment period for students placed in the program. However, a student receiving special education services is assigned placement duration by the IEP committee. There is a point system for good behavior employed at the alternative school. If a student receives a total of 80 points before the nine week period expires, that student may qualify for an early return back to the home

school. However, the exit plan for a student includes the acquisition of 80 points for good behavior, teacher recommendations, and the principal's stamp of approval.

The transition plan for monitoring students returned to their home school is the program's weakness. The principal stated that this is where some of the students fall through the cracks. This is a very important component of the program that needs further development to be successful. Support services are somewhat limited. These include: The Chamber of Commerce, The Region Mental Health Agency, and partnerships with local businesses. According to the principal, more community support and services are needed to make the program more effective.

Parents are involved in their child's placement at the alternative school; however, this involvement is at a minimum. Parents are required to sign the child into the program, sign a behavioral contract in conjunction with the child upon enrollment, and must sign a student back into school from a suspension.

GASP addresses the academics, social, and emotional needs of children. It provides a learning environment that is safe and orderly for daily operation. Students are educated through adequate curriculum and by certified faculty and staff. The school is designed to provide additional services to students with the assistance of support agencies, local business, and community organizations. The program is also designed to provide alternative educational opportunity for students to obtain a GED. An identifiable monitoring and evaluation system (written policy) directs students' assignment time to the school, the entrance and exit procedures for the students assigned to the school, and a transition plan to follow when students are returned to their home school. This plan allows for continued monitoring of each student's

progress once he/she is placed back in the regular school setting. Parental involvement is required however; the extent of which both the parents and the community are involved in the program needs to improve.

Discussion

Case studies of five school districts considered to operate exemplary alternative schools were conducted. The Alternative School Education Program was to assist students who have failed to make it in the regular school setting. This study examined five alternative schools that were identified by the State Department of Education as operating an exemplary alternative school. These five schools address the eight essential areas identified in the state's guidelines as standards set to establish, operate, and manage the Alternative School Education Program in Mississippi. The five schools clearly: (a) identify the program's mission and goal, (b) provide a safe and orderly environment, (c) identify the program's expectations, (d) identify educational opportunities for students placed in the program, (e) create a workable instructional design, (f) utilize a monitoring and evaluation system for the program, (g) identify support services, and (h) involve parents and the community in its operation.

All five alternative schools' primary mission is to promote [student] behavior modification. There is a consensus among all of the schools' policy to reach a set goal to improve students' academic performance, social, and emotional behaviors. They provide for students an additional opportunity to remain in school and receive an education which was the state's primary purpose of creating this type program. However, the state's program design does not provide a true alternative opportunity

for one to receive an education that is different from the regular education system.

The program's design is an alternative setting that is a modified version of the regular school set-up. Raywid (1999) suggested that it may be the flexibility of the program that leaves it somewhat marginal to the educational mainstream and a fringe rather than a fully accepted member of the educational establishment. Whether through curriculum reforms or different infrastructures, alternative schools attempt to compensate for the political and academic limitations inherent in traditional public schools.

Alternative education has been defined as one way to transform our current systems for educating and reaching all young people. Blankstein (1997) provided research that helps frame the many promising avenues to system-wide transformation that have been employed by successful Alternative School Education Programs. He describes a variety of schooling and programmatic options for youth who do not meet codified norms of behavior or academic success in mainstream settings. Programs that are designed to meet the needs of the whole child and prepare them for their surroundings address promising effective plans and teaching techniques that seek out and build on the remarkable strengths and abilities of children, their families, and the community.

The five alternative schools observed in this study are managed by certified administrators and certified teachers (including teachers for special education) are in place to deliver instruction on a daily basis. There is a counseling component in place to provide guidance and therapy to the students placed in this program. The schools' instructional design addresses the whole child's emotional, social, academic and

behavioral needs.

These five alternative schools provide a safe and orderly environment conducive for learning. Four of the alternative schools employ one or more security officers. The other school provides adequate and sufficient training for its staff to manage crisis situations, and the building principal is a former, certified police officer.

The school districts' program expectations are to maintain and operate an alternative school that enables a student to continue educational studies, and develop positive character and appropriate behaviors. Bauman (1998) reported that in the 1990s the concept for the alternative school did not carry nearly the romance of innovation it once did. Students who attended alternative schools did so not because of the innovative creative curricular approaches, but because they were no longer succeeding in the more traditional school systems. This is true even now for the assignment of students to the alternative school in the state of Mississippi. Each alternative school involved in this study holds the belief that responsible students grow up to be responsible adults and that this behavioral development is the key element that navigates the program's mission.

It is also believed that daily practice of good habits renders positive outcomes for students. Administrators at these five schools could not attest to one ingredient for their students' success, but they do know that practice of good habits to use decision-making skills help them. They also reported that after students have received behavior modification training while placed in the alternative school good choices are made by them to resolve different matters or conflicts they find

themselves confronted with on occasion. And a result of this training to use decision-making skills renders positive consequences for students.

Raywid (1999) suggested that a standard school practice should be developed to render high program expectations, educational opportunities, and quality educational instructions. The program's nature and its prospects for success must be monitored and evaluated on a regular basis. He also recommends that all stakeholders must display a vested interest in the development of the program if it is to avail with success.

In these five case studies educational opportunities for students assigned to the alternative school varied from one school district to another. Three of the alternative schools offer educational studies that are different from the traditional schools. Students at these schools are allowed to complete a General Education Development Program (GED), receive a diploma, and graduate from the alternative school. They may also complete academic studies and other graduation requirements while placed at the alternative school, however, they must return to the home school to receive their diploma and participate in the graduation ceremony. Two schools did not offer any educational opportunities different from the regular traditional school. However, there is opportunity offered by the school district for students to complete a GED. The GED program for each of these districts is housed at a separate location from the alternative school. For one of the districts the program is located at the high school campus. The other school houses its program in a separate building at a different location from both the main school and the alternative school. There is simply a modified learning environment at these alternative schools created for students placed

there as a disciplinary response to the regular school's request for intervention to correct student misconduct of violating the regular school's rules and regulations.

The alternative schools' instructional design is somewhat clone to the traditional school's instructional design. However, it is a smaller school setting that renders behavioral modification training and individualized educational teaching and planning for its students. It provides a curriculum of academic course studies that will allow students to obtain an education either through the GED program or the regular education program. There is no vocational or career track curricula evidenced in any of the five districts' program that would allow a student to receive certification for special skill development or certification.

The five alternative schools observed have in place a monitoring and evaluation system to assess the effectiveness of the program's operation. Documents were revealed to indicate that established policies were in place to manage and operate the schools according to state guidelines. There is a identifiable process established for the entry and exit of students into the program, compilation of demographic student data reports, individual instruction and education plans (IIP/IEP) developed for students assigned to the school, identified support services, and an organization of stakeholders (students, parents, school personnel, community, businesses, and agencies) that collaborates to address six key areas critical to the program's success: academic performance, behavior modification, functional skills, career education, character education, and employability skills. These services are rendered in a learning environment that offers high expectations and support for students to receive an appropriate, free, education.

Schooler (1995) expressed that the alternative school was created to meet the unique needs of students who could not make the necessary adjustments to conform to the traditional, regular school's design. These unique needs range from students who are teenage parents, have high absences from school, accumulate excessive suspensions, directly violate school codes, experience medical problems, have personal hardships, to students who have frequent exhibits of social indifference. Mississippi's Alternative School Education Program is limited to meeting the needs of young people and preparing them to merge into society as educated individuals. Students who are assigned to alternative schools in Mississippi by their school district must meet the state and local program policy requirements before receiving services in the alternative schools (Thompson, 1999). These restrictions prevent the program from offering educational opportunities that are different from the regular, traditional ones, and they dictate the type of students allowed to receive services that will provide for them an opportunity to obtain an education.

Many students who are assigned to an alternative school have unique needs that cannot be totally addressed by resources in the local district. Support service agencies (for many years) have provided supplementary educational opportunities for students through the school system establishment of the alternative school program. Needs of the students and parents are addressed holistically when local districts collaborate with other agencies in their community to provide services for children who have these special needs. Such agency contacts include: The Region Mental Health Agency, The Chamber of Commerce, Boys and Girls Club, Churches, Partners in Education, Community Counseling Agency, Law Enforcement, Department of

Human Services, Youth Court, Tutors, Mentors, Colleges and Universities, and other agencies. Collaboration with these agencies provides additional services to meet the needs of the whole child. Even though some of these services may be offered in the regular school setting there are limitations that place certain restrictions on the school districts capability to provide sufficient services to students particularly when funding is the main issue. And, sometimes other means to provide certain services for students to address their unique needs would be in direct violation of state and federal laws in a regular school setting.

Parent involvement and community support is present in all five of the schools to some degree. The schools are involved in an on-going process to provide more parent training workshops and regular school meetings that will directly involve parents in the decision making process for their child's educational plan.

Summary

Alternative schools were created to address various problems that educational systems incurred when attempting to meet the unique and individual needs of children. It was the intent of this research study to serve as initial research on the Alternative School Education Program in Mississippi. The Mississippi Department of Education (SDE) identified ten alternative schools as exemplary in their operation of the Alternative School Education Program. There are 158 school districts in the state. Only ten alternative schools were recognized by the state for their compliance with eight areas [standards] deemed necessary to operate effective alternative schools. Out of the ten identified by SDE five Mississippi School

Districts' alternative schools were visited to examine their operation of the program. Eight areas: (a) clearly stated and focused school mission, (b) a safe and orderly climate, (c) program goals and expectations, (d) alternative educational opportunities, (e) a quality instructional program, (f) a program monitoring and evaluation system, (g) support services, and (h) parental/community involvement) indicated in the state's guidelines to operate an effective alternative school were used to evaluate each alternative school's approach to manage this program.

All five schools properly identified, with printed documents, the program's mission and goals. Each school has a certified administrator, certified teachers, and adequate support staff employed at the school to achieve the stated mission and goals of the program.

Four of the alternative schools are located in a separate building, off the main campus. The other alternative school is located in a separate building on the main campus. One of the school districts serves as the lead district in a consortium for six different school districts. All five alternative schools' facilities are clean, safe, functional, and commensurate with other facilities provided by the local school district to students who attend regular schools. The alternative schools serve both elementary and secondary levels (grades 1-12). In each school's set up the student teacher ratio for classrooms did not exceed the state's required ratio of 15:1.

The Alternative School Education Program in each district addresses the needs of students that typically cannot be met in a regular school program. Each school district's program provides limited non-traditional education opportunity. Three of the school districts offered the GED program at their alternative school

while the other two provided this program either at the regular high school setting or at a different location altogether. Nevertheless, these schools serve as an adjunct to a regular school, and are distinct in their set up, rules and regulations from the regular education, special education, or vocational education programs as prescribed by the State Department of Education.

Instructional plans at all five alternative schools provide a full-day attendance with a rigorous workload and minimal non-instructional time. At each school career orientation is viewed as an integral part of assisting students with preparation and planning for their future educational career. However, none of the schools offered a plan or track for career or vocational studies to students placed in their school.

Each alternative school addresses character education by conducting learning activities and counseling sessions for this trait development. Approximately one third of the school day schedule at each school is devoted to behavior modification training for students. At the five schools these behavior training sessions are conducted by certified behavior therapists and/or guidance counselors.

Each alternative school's curriculum and instructional methodologies address the needs of the students through individual and small group instructional planning, which emphasize academic performance, behavior modification, functional skills, and career education. All five schools provide adequate instructional staff to ensure the continuing education of students and classroom supervision at all times.

These five alternative schools conduct the evaluation of the students' progress at regular intervals according to policy and the students school records are maintained properly for reporting purposes. Each alternative school has established policy and

procedures for the placement of students into the alternative school and exit from the school. The administrator at each school indicated that a committee is comprised of a minimum of three members (i.e., principal, teacher, counselor and a special education teacher, when applicable) to carry out the referral process for students to return to their home school. The parent or guardian of the student is required to be present at both meetings. The student is also privileged to attend both meetings.

The school districts' Alternative School Education Program is a part of an annual evaluation report developed at the local level and submitted to the State Department of Education. This report allows each school district to review and revise its alternative school design and make the necessary changes needed for improvement. It is an on-going process of school improvement. The five school districts' alternative schools were found to be in compliance with state guidelines operating effective, exemplary alternative schools. They each addressed the eight specific areas deemed as required standards set by the state to create this type program.

Rules and regulations at each alternative school have been developed and disseminated to students assigned to the program and to their parents. This information is given upon the initial placement of a student into the alternative school. The schools each provide a motivated and culturally diverse staff, counseling for parents and students, parent conferences, and administrative support for the program. The schools each utilize support services that are provided by the local school district, state and federal government, i.e. Special Education, The Region Mental Health Agency, Boys & Girls Club, Department of Human Services, Law

Enforcement, and the local community.

All five alternative schools required parents to enroll their child in school. Parents are also required to attend a minimum of two parent conferences during a student's assigned time to the program.

Education is at the top of the list of priorities and concerns in almost every poll of issues facing society. The involvement of not only parents but also political and community leaders, religious and business leaders, and ordinary citizens in our schools is crucial to school success. These five alternative schools engaged community involvement as much as possible. This component of the program is viewed by the administrators as the "make it or break it" indicator for their school's success. Parent and community involvement in the education of children is a key principle that increases their chances to succeed as productive, well educated individuals. All stakeholders are involved in the process to create good school programs which reassure society that free, appropriate, and sufficient educational opportunities are being provided to children for them to obtain an education.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter begins with a summary of the literature, the research design, and the case study findings. These are followed by conclusions drawn from the study and recommendations.

Summary

Alternative schools have stood for very different things, and they have been designed to function quite differently from one another. However, the main focus of this program's design was to render services to students ensuring the availability for them to receive an opportunity to become educated. The primary establishment of this type school was to address various problems that educational systems incurred when attempting to meet the unique and individual needs of children. One of the most famous alternative schools was Summerhill (England), which was started in the 1920s by A. S. Neil. It was widely cited as a model of alternative education and was a school designed to allow opportunities for experiential learning of democratic skills. The school's mission was to promote citizenship, encourage children to participate in decision making about the things which affect their lives, and without emphasis on academics, develop citizenship strengths such as tolerance, assertiveness, patience, knowledge, and understanding. Bauman (1998) suggested that addressing the needs

of the whole child with an emphasis on education for democratic citizenship did the pupils and society a service.

Raywid (1999) suggested that it may be the flexibility of the alternative school program that leaves it somewhat marginal to the educational mainstream and a fringe rather than a fully accepted member of the educational establishment. He also noted that historically, alternative schools connoted choice, but many came to be seen as a last chance for some before dropping out of school. According to Bauman (1998), the existence of alternative schools has allowed legislators, policymakers, and many educators to avoid the necessity of making any significant reforms to the institution of schooling. It is of importance to examine within the larger social context, the function of alternative schools and their effectiveness in such an unequal formation of a large section of society. The struggle of the alternative school program to maintain its survival has somewhat dwindled and the alternative school concept that challenged the infrastructure and political agendas of traditional public schools seemed to be disappearing. Bauman stated that in the 1990s the term alternative had re-emerged, but in the late 1990s, the concept did not carry nearly the romance of innovation it once did.

A review of the research revealed the ideologies of many groups, supporters, and political forces condering the existence of the Alternative School Education Program, and whether the program's design works well for the purpose of its establishment. Bowers (1997) noted that this country has run the gamut of improving education for children by setting national goals, executing specific initiatives, and by vocalizing assurances, all with the idea that Americans will be second to none in the

education industry. Alternative education describes a variety of schooling and programmatic options for youth who do not meet codified norms of behavior or academic success in the mainstream (traditional) setting. The research identified 11 alternative school programs that exemplified customizing schools to meet the unique needs of children (After School Program, Learning Unlimited Program, PEP Texas, Buechel Metropolitan High School, Bay-Arenac, Riddle Ranch, PEP Ohio, Dallas County Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Program, John H. Martyn High School, Duling Alternative School, and Houston (Texas) School).

Raywid (1999), Thompson (1999), and Taylor (2002) investigated correlates or characteristics of effective schools. A commonality discovered in their research was that there are eight areas or indicators identified as critical to the success of school reform. They are: (a) a clearly stated and focused school mission, (b) a safe and orderly environment for learning, (c) high expectations for students and staff, (d) alternative opportunities, (e) instructional design, (f) frequent evaluation and monitoring, (g) parent/community involvement, and (h) support services. Alternative education was established by Mississippi law to serve as a learning alternative placement of students who have had difficulty adjusting to regular classroom environment or who have experienced disciplinary problems in the classroom or school (Thompson, 1999). These identified needs guided the state in designing an Alternative School Education Program that would offer special services to its clients. The mission of the program, according to Thompson, is to promote the broad areas of (a) academic performance, (b) behavior modification, (c) functional skills, (d) career education, (e) character education, and (f) employability skills in learning

environment that offers high expectation and high support.

Five Mississippi School Districts' alternative schools were identified as exemplary by the State Department of Education. Each alternative school was visited to determine if the Alternative School Education Program met the eight indicators of compliance. These eight indicators are: (a) a clearly stated and focused school mission, (b) safe and orderly climate, (c) program goals and expectations, (d) alternative educational opportunities, (e) quality instructional program, (f) a monitoring and evaluation system, (g) support services, and (h) parental/community involvement. The eight indicators [standards] were used to evaluate each alternative school's protocol.

All five schools properly identified, with printed documents, the program's mission and expectations. There is a certified administrator, teaching staff and other staff assigned to the school to achieve the stated mission and expectations of the program.

Four of the schools are located in a separate building, off the main campus. The other school is located in a separate building on the main campus. The schools' facilities are clean, safe and functional, and commensurate with facilities provided to other students by the local school district. The student teacher ratio for classrooms did not exceed the state's required ratio, 15:1.

The alternative schools serve both elementary and secondary levels. The programs address the needs of students that typically cannot be met in a regular school program. It provides limited non-traditional education opportunities. The schools serve as an adjunct to a regular school, and are distinct in their set up, rules

and regulations from the regular education, special education, or vocational education programs as prescribed by the State Department of Education.

Instructional plans provide a full-day attendance with a rigorous workload and minimal non-instructional time. Career orientation is viewed as an integral part of assisting students with preparation and planning for their future educational career. A general education development track is also offered to students at these alternative schools. Approximately one-third of the school day schedule is devoted to behavior modification training for students. These behavior training sessions are conducted by certified behavior therapists and/or guidance counselors.

Curriculum and instructional methodologies address the needs of the students through individual and small group instructional planning, which emphasize academic performance, behavior modification, functional skills, and career education. Adequate instructional staff is assigned to ensure the continuing education of students and classroom supervision at all times.

Evaluation of the students' progress is conducted at regular intervals according to policy and the appropriate school records are maintained for reporting purposes. Student placement into the alternative school and exit from the school is based on established policy for referral due process. A committee is comprised of a minimum of three members, i.e., principal, teacher, counselor and a special education teacher, when applicable. The parent or guardian of the student to be assigned is required to be present at both meetings. The student is also privileged to attend both meetings. The districts' Alternative School Education Program is a part of an annual evaluation report developed at the local level and submitted to the State Department

of Education. This report allows each school district to review and revise its alternative school design for improvement. It is an on-going process of school improvement. The five school districts' alternative schools were found to be in compliance with applicable laws and State Department of Education guidelines for operating an effective, exemplary alternative school.

Rules and regulations which address the unique needs of students placed in this program have been developed and disseminated to parents and students. The schools provide a motivated and culturally diverse staff, counseling for parents and students, parent conferences, and administrative and community support for the program. The schools utilize support services that are provided by the local school district and the state and federal government, i.e. Special Education, The Region Mental Health Agency, Boys & Girls Club, Department of Human Services, Law Enforcement, etc.

All five alternative schools required parents to enroll their child in school. Parents are also required to attend a minimum of two parent conferences during a student's assigned time to the program.

Conclusion

An examination of five exemplary alternative schools in the state of Mississippi (identified by the State Department of Education) indicated that the Alternative School Education Program when implemented according to state guidelines (that address the eight areas established as critical indicators [standards] necessary to operate an alternative school) can produce effective, quality alternative

schools. These five alternative schools having earned the respect from the SDE as operating an exemplary program were carefully designed to meet the unique needs of children placed in this type school setting which provides for them a second chance to remain in school and continue their education.

The five alternative schools properly indicated that a clearly and focused school mission had been established for their program's operational plan. Each school's administrator could identify its program's intention by referring to school policy, school literature, and from personal recall the school's mission. All five schools are clearly focused on the journey to provide for children an additional opportunity to remain in school and receive an education.

The alternative schools' environment is safe, orderly, and conducive for learning. There is an identifiable plan of security in place at each school to ensure the safety and order for daily activities. There are licensed administrators on site at each school to direct and lead the schools' daily operations and management.

Each alternative school has established goals that support the program's mission and expectations. The program's goals are developed, reviewed, and revised on a regular basis providing a plan of action that endorses the school's mission.

Alternative educational opportunity exists in three of the schools' settings. These alternative schools provide academic studies that will allow children to complete general education development studies and receive a diploma upon graduation from this program. However, there is no evidence of any other type of vocational or career opportunities offered in any of the schools that would allow

students to complete their studies and graduate with either a diploma or a certificate.

Instructional design for all five schools to deliver academic and educational studies is carried out on a daily basis by qualified, certified staff. The schools operate a daily schedule according to state standards for teacher-student ratio, instructional time per day, access to counseling services, and referral opportunities to other agencies to assist students with their needs.

The districts' program for the alternative school is reviewed and revised on an annual basis for school improvement. The alternative schools are evaluated for effectiveness by the local district and then as a component of the state's accountability system for school districts compliance with state law to begin this program as mandated in the 1993-94 school year.

All five alternative schools obtained support services from other agencies or groups to supplement their school's services. These additional services provided assistance with meeting the unique needs of the students placed in these schools. Participation from these agencies and groups [in many ways] allowed for the schools capability to address the needs of the whole child.

Parents are required to enroll their child in the alternative school once the student has been assigned by the regular school or youth court. There is a minimum number of parent conferences scheduled by each school that require parents to attend. Parents are also directly involved in their child's educational plan. They must attend the required exit meeting to return a student to the regular home school after completing assignment in the alternative school.

The operation of the Alternative Educational School Program in each district to meet state standards is what makes a service learning project worthwhile. The state's intent (Thompson, 1999) to establish alternative schools to provide an additional opportunity to students to remain in school, receive behavior modification, and continue their educational career is a validated service when school districts are found to be in compliance with state standards. The five alternative schools visited promote academic performance, behavior modification, functional skills, career education, character education, and high expectations and support. Taylor (2002) affirms that a good service learning project or an effective school ties to academic, meets a real community need, and involves all stakeholders in the design, implementation, and evaluation process.

These five alternative schools address the needs of students that typically cannot be met in a regular school setting. They offer a smaller school environment that is conducive for learning. The environment allows for a smaller teacher-student ratio for instructional delivery. It also creates more opportunity for students to experience success in their studies if they are deficient in basic educational skills. This instructional effort is done through special programming that is designed to remediate and/or strengthen basic skills in the areas of reading and math. Character building skills and conflict management skills are key components installed into the schools instructional design to promote good decision making skills. These two components directly address behavior modification that is one of the essential elements to the program's design to equip students with the necessary behavioral skills to avoid suspensions and expulsions from the regular schools because of failure

to conform to the rules and regulations.

Programs designed to meet the unique needs of children do exactly that when they are implemented effectively. The Alternative School Education Program in five school districts in the state of Mississippi was found to be in compliance with state standards to fulfill their obligations to render additional opportunity for students to remain in school and continue their education.

Recommendations

Each alternative school was examined for educational opportunity sufficiency and appropriateness through the assessment of eight essential areas identified as indicators in the state's guidelines to create and operate the Alternative School Education Program: (a) clearly stated and focused school mission, (b) a safe and orderly climate, (c) program goals and expectations, (d) alternative educational opportunities, (e) a quality instructional program, (f) a program monitoring and evaluation system, (g) support services, and (h) parental/community involvement. The following recommendations are suggested:

- (1) The expectations of the Alternative School Education Program to provide educational opportunity and to meet the needs of students should be inclusive of students other than those who have violated school rules and identified as "discipline problems" and sent to the alternative school.
- (2) The State Department of Education should study other state's alternative school program designs as identified and discussed in the literature and revise the design of Mississippi's Alternative School Education Program to meet the needs of young

people appropriately and sufficiently.

(3) Alternative educational opportunities need to increase beyond the general education development track and include occupational/vocational skill development opportunities, and a more flexible enrollment policy, i.e. age.

(4) Students should be allowed to enroll and complete an education at the alternative school without dropping out of regular school.

(5) The alternative schools' monitoring and evaluation system needs to address more effectively the transitioning of students back to their home school.

(6) The State Department of Education and local school districts should monitor the districts' placement policy closely for assigning students to the alternative school in order to prevent any one particular group from creating a disproportion between it and other factors of the school district's composition.

(7) A follow-up study should be conducted to examine the remaining 153 Mississippi school districts for compliance with state standards particularly those that address the eight areas identified as critical indicators to implement and operate an exemplary alternative school.

(8) The State Department of Education should assign a special committee to revisit the state's Alternative School Education Program's purpose and revise it to better meet the needs of the public school system. This is an immediate need.

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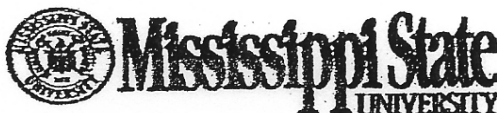
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APPENDIX A
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD LETTER
OF APPROVAL



September 13, 2002

Teresa Price
P.O. Box 54
Okolona, MS 38860

Re: IRB Docket #02-240 - "The Alternative Education Program: Does This Customer Service Work Well in the State of Mississippi?"

Dear Teresa:

The above referenced project has been approved via expedited review for a period of September 13, 2002 through August 15, 2003 in accordance with 45 CFR 46.110 #7.

If additional time is needed to complete the project, you will need to submit a *Continuing Review Request* form prior to July 15, 2003. Additionally, any modification to the project must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to implementation. Any failure to adhere to the approved protocol could result in suspension or termination of your project. Please note that the IRB reserves the right, at anytime, to observe you and any associated researchers as they conduct the project and audit research records associated with this project.

Please refer to your docket number (02-240) when contacting our office regarding this application

Thank you for your cooperation and good luck to you in conducting this research project.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tracy S. Arwood".

Tracy S. Arwood
Regulatory Compliance Officer

TSA/jm

cc: File

Office for Regulatory Compliance

P. O. Box 6223 • 300 Bowen Hall • Mailstop 9563 • Mississippi State, MS 39762 • (662) 325-3294 • FAX (662) 325-8776



**CONTINUING REVIEW
REPORT FORM**

PI Name: Teresa M. Price
Address: P.O. Box 54
Okolona, MS 38860

02-240 The Alternative Education Program:
IRB Docket # Does This Customer Service Work Well
Project Title: in the State of Mississippi?
Expiration date: August 15, 2003

Advisor: Dr. Dwight Hare

Funding status: Awarded Pending Not awarded No cost study
List agency:

1. Number of subjects involved in the project (to date, if ongoing): Not Active
2. Were there any adverse events or unanticipated problems?
 YES, Provide a detailed statement:
 NO
3. Number of subjects who withdraw from the project: NA
4. Were there any complaints regarding the project?
 YES, Provide a detailed statement:
 NO
5. Is there any new information since the last IRB review that might impact the Board's understanding of the risks or benefits?
 YES, Provide a detailed statement:
 NO
6. Has the project been modified since the last IRB review? YES NO
 YES, Have all changes been submitted for IRB approval: YES NO
 NO
7. Are you still collecting data? YES NO Have Not Begun
8. Are your remaining activities confined to data analysis? YES NO
9. Projected end of project (data analysis complete): March 2004
10. Please attach a current consent form. Have Not Begun Study as of date

Teresa M. Price
Principal Investigator

7/9/03
Date

Research Advisor (if applicable)

Date

OFFICE USE ONLY	
<input type="checkbox"/> Administrative	Approved: <u>Kay Arwood</u> Date: <u>7/9/03</u>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Expedited	New expiration date: <u>6/15/04</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> Full Board	



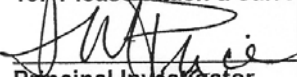
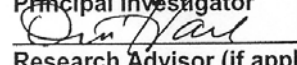
**CONTINUING REVIEW
REPORT FORM**

PI Name: Teresa Price
 Address: PO Box 54
 Okolona, MS 38860
 Advisor: Dwight Hare

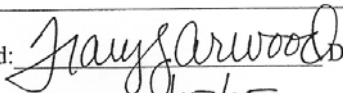
IRB Docket #02-240
 Project Title: Alternative Education Program
 Expiration date: June 15, 2004

Funding status: Awarded Pending Not awarded No cost study
 List agency:

1. Number of subjects involved in the project (to date, if ongoing): 6
2. Were there any adverse events or unanticipated problems?
 YES, Provide a detailed statement:
 NO
3. Number of subjects who withdrew from the project: none
4. Were there any complaints regarding the project?
 YES, Provide a detailed statement:
 NO
5. Is there any new information since the last IRB review that might impact the Board's understanding of the risks or benefits?
 YES, Provide a detailed statement:
 NO
6. Has the project been modified since the last IRB review?
 YES, Have all changes been submitted for IRB approval: YES NO
 NO
7. Are you still collecting data? YES NO
8. Are your remaining activities confined to data analysis? YES NO
9. Projected end of project (data analysis complete): 12-04
10. Please attach a current consent form.


 Principal Investigator

 Research Advisor (if applicable)

5-11-04
 Date
5-11-04
 Date

OFFICE USE ONLY	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Administrative	Approved:  Date <u>5/17/04</u>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Expedited	New expiration date: <u>1/15/05</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> Full Board	

APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

**Interview Questions
Eight Areas Addressed
Mississippi's Alternative Education Program
Exemplary/Successful Alternative Schools**

A. Clearly stated and focused mission

1. What is the alternative school's mission?
2. What are the goals of the alternative school's program?

B. Safe and Orderly Climate

1. What is the employment status of a Security Officer? Part-time_____, Full-time____ or None _____
2. What is the employment status of a school counselor? Part-time_____, Full-time, or None_____?
3. What is the employment status of a behavior therapist in the school? Part-time_____, Full-time, or None_____
4. Has the program resulted in students developing greater self-discipline (indicated by a low rate of recidivism)? EXPLAIN:

C. Program Expectations

1. Has the alternative school served students who have violated school rules in general (such as high absenteeism, conflicts conforming to the traditional school setting, socially unique, etc.) rather than only one group identified as "discipline problems"?
2. Has the alternative school basically been used **excessively** as a disciplinary response to home schools?
3. What percentage of student placement is a result of disciplinary problems? _____
4. How have students significantly increased their academic performance?
5. How have students significantly increased social skills?

6. What is the monthly Average Daily Attendance Percentage for the alternative school? _____
7. What is an estimated percentage of students remaining in their home school once returned from serving or placement in the alternative school_____?

D. Alternative Educational Opportunities

1. What educational opportunities (besides traditional academic studies) are provided by the alternative school?
2. Are there any students attending or have attended the alternative school and received either of the following diplomas, if so how many?
 - Regular high school diploma_____
 - An occupational/vocational diploma_____
 - A general education development diploma
(GED)_____

E. Instructional Program

1. What percentage of the alternative school staff is certified? _____
2. What percentage of the alternative school staff is non-certified?

3. How many certified Special Education Teachers are on staff at the alternative school_____?
4. Has the alternative school served a broad range of students? Please identify:
 - What grade levels are served? _____
 - What is the gender makeup? _____ boys girls_____
 - What is the ethnicity composition? African Americans _____
Whites_____ Hispanic_____ Other_____
 - What is the percentage of Special Education students served? _____

F. Monitoring and Evaluation System

1. What is the time assignment period of a student placed in the alternative school? _____
2. What is the exit plan to return to the home school?
3. What is the transition plan for monitoring students returned to home schools?

G. Support Services

1. What agencies provide support services for the alternative school?

H. Parental and Community Involvement

1. How does the community support the alternative school's services to students?
2. In what ways has the alternative school resulted in more parents being involved in the school's disciplinary process?