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**The Affect of High School Disciplinary Alternative Education
Programs On Students with Long-term Multiple Referrals**

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**The Affect of High School Disciplinary Alternative Education
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by

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**The Affect of High School Disciplinary Alternative Education
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Public school districts in Texas are required by law to operate alternative school programs for children who commit discipline infractions in violation of state law or local policy; the programs are called “disciplinary alternative education programs” or “DAEP” schools. The prevailing question driving this study was whether children who spend significant periods of time in DAEP schools are affected differently by their educational experience than the general population of students, who spend little or no time in the schools. This research is guided by the assumption that students who are assigned to DAEP facilities for greater numbers of days will be affected more than students who spend less time in the facilities.

The primary findings from the study indicate that the alternative school has a different impact on the students enrolled, depending on their

social and cultural characteristics. This study identifies three distinct groups of students who matriculate in the DAEP program. The study further describes how the students function and perform in the setting, from the perspective of both students and faculty. The alternative school has an immediate impact on some students, who have good educational values when they come to the campus. They perceive their entire tenure as punishment, and they know from the beginning that they will do whatever is possible to avoid getting repeat referrals. The school has no impact at all on another group of students. These students are extremely obstinate and frequently commit disciplinary infractions while at the alternative school that lead to more serious consequences.

There is a third group of students for whom the alternative school has a substantial impact, which affects the goals they set for themselves and their educational values. These students develop a sense of belonging at the alternative school, and some students said they would have dropped out, if they were still attending school at their regular campus. Regrettably, this positive impact is contrary to the goals at the alternative school, which are to deter kids from committing subsequent infractions, and equip them to be successful on their regular campus.

The study has revealed that no single policy or program can address the various social, cultural and academic needs of all the students

attending the DAEP. The best approach to developing DAEP programs and policies is to use a model that accounts for the differences in social, cultural and academic characteristics of the students attending.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The term, alternative schools, is used to characterize many educational programs with designs specifically for children who cannot have their needs served adequately in their assigned school or a traditional school (Kallio & Sanders, 1999). Schools designed specifically for dropouts have been referred to as “alternative schools,” as well as schools designed for single parents or adult learners (National Safety Center, 1989). Public school districts in Texas are required by law to operate alternative school programs for children who commit discipline infractions in violation of state or local policy; the programs are called “disciplinary alternative education programs” or “DAEP” schools. References herein are to separate and dedicated schools, not to programs that are organized within larger schools. DAEP schools are regulated by Chapter 37 of the Texas Education Code. There are approximately 85,000 to 90,000 students referred to DAEP schools annually (Texas Education Agency, 2000)

This research is a study about characteristics of students who are referred to DAEP schools, and what happens to students as a result of

their tenure in the schools. Students can be sent to DAEP schools for any period of time ranging from one school day to a whole school year.

Students who spend significant periods of time in DAEP schools may be affected by the experience, in a way different from students who spend all of their time in traditional schools. This research seeks to determine whether the students in DAEP schools are affected by that experience, and if so, to determine the nature of the effect.

The development of DAEP programs in the United States was motivated by a number of concerns, some having to do with punishing and deterring certain behaviors thought to threaten school safety, and others having to do with providing an alternative to suspension or expulsion. Recent events in public schools have brought particular focus to the safety of schools (Fleming, et al, 1999). The outbreak of school violence on campuses across the United States has caused policy makers, educators, parents and other stakeholders in the public school system to think more and more about school safety. Parents who send their children to school want to have confidence that the institution will keep their children safe. The importance of a safe school environment is not an issue that is new to teachers and administrators (Kandakai, et al., 1999; Weiler, et al., 1999). School professionals are frequently members

of the community from where the children come. When violence happens in schools, teachers are more likely to be the victims of an incident than any other adults (Hill & Drolet, 1999).

Those most profoundly affected by school violence are the children—the children injured as well as the children who witness the incidents and live with the aftermath (Fleming, et al, 2000). Children who perpetuate the acts of violence are sometimes victims themselves, unidentified or overlooked by the mainstream until they display symptoms of their injury.

Luke Woodham, who killed three schoolmates in Pearl, Mississippi, after murdering his mother, felt like an outcast and reported, “I just couldn’t take it anymore.” Michael Corneal, who shot three fellow students attending a prayer meeting before school in West Paducah, Kentucky, says he felt mad about the way other kids treated him. Mitchell Johnson, a 13-year-old from Jonesboro, Arkansas, who, with his 11-year-old cousin, opened fire on students and teachers in a playground, killing four students and a teacher, says, “Everybody that hates me, everyone I don’t like is going to die” (as cited in Garbarino, 1999, p. 6)

Violence not only poses the threat of physical injury, it also threatens the entire educational process because of the disruption (Hill &

Drolet, 1999). The disruption that a shooting incident can cause sometimes requires school to be closed for days, and the recovery period required before a school community heals can take years (Hoemann, 1999). Disruption from violence is what victimizes schools. Any kind of disruption is harmful to the educational process because disruptions interfere with teaching and learning. Disruptions that result from classroom behavior are potentially as damaging as those that result from school tragedies; the end result is that learning suffers. According to legislation adopted in Texas, schoolteachers have the right to remove students from their class who are documented sources of disruptions. The law attempts to protect other students from disruption by prohibiting disruptive students from being returned to the class without permission from the teacher, unless the reinstatement to class is ordered by a discipline review committee.

When a student is removed for disruption, a principal or an assistant principal makes the decision about the discipline imposed. Administrators are allowed to suspend or expel students who commit certain infractions on or off campus, or refer them to the school district's DAEP. Some of the infractions require students to be expelled or sent to a DAEP, and laws applying to other violations give school administrators

discretion about the penalty imposed. Whether a student is expelled or referred to a DAEP depends on the nature of the infraction and the disciplinary record of the student involved. There is a category of offenses that requires expulsion; however, Chapter 37 prohibits the expulsion of children less than 10 years of age, and the law requires that children under 10 years who are assigned to DAEP programs be separated from other DAEP students.

DAEP policies and practices, like other discipline issues, are motivated by concerns about the safety of students, as well as about the harm caused by disruption to the learning process. Approaches to maintaining discipline have involved policies with several objectives, including (1) making punishments so severe that students do not want to commit subsequent infractions; (2) appropriately punishing students who commit infractions; and (3) preserving the educational environment for the benefit of students whose education is disrupted by students committing discipline infractions (National School Safety Center, 1989). The subject of this study is the statewide policy that requires school districts to develop and operate dedicated facilities for children referred for disciplinary infractions. The policy serves the objective of removing disruptive students so that other students can learn (Leone & Drakeford,

1999). It also serves the purpose of removing potentially violent or dangerous students from the general population and, thereby, providing for a safer school.

Statement of the Problem

DAEP facilities in Texas are only required to provide classes in the basic subjects: English, language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. Texas Education Code, Sec 37.008(l). In addition, they are required to provide a program of study in self-discipline. DAEP schools are not required to have certified personnel, nor do the schools have to comply with laws generally applicable to other schools, except when educating special education students. DAEP facilities are not required to provide classes in advanced courses, or courses necessary to fulfill a student's graduation requirements.

Students can be sent to DAEP schools for any period of time ranging from one school day to a whole school year. Terms can exceed a school year, if a student commits a subsequent infraction. Students who spend significant periods of time in DAEP schools may be affected by the experience, in a way different from students who spend all of their time in

traditional schools. Many districts in Texas have adopted zero tolerance policies, whereby certain offenses will result in strict punishment, typically suspension or expulsion, with no provisions for a second chance. DAEP policies are applied in connection with zero tolerance policies, which is preferable to strict zero tolerance decisions because the result does not mean kids are denied all educational benefits. In fact, many of the infractions listed in Chapter 37, which require a student to be sent to a DAEP school, use to require that the child be expelled. Although DAEP facilities do not require certified teachers or offer the same programs as traditional schools, few would disagree that providing a minimum level of educational services is preferable to complete suspension of educational benefits. Indeed, DAEP policies are commendable in so far as the programs demonstrate a commitment to providing educational opportunities to all children (National School Safety Center, 1989).

A student is required to be referred to a DAEP facility pursuant to Chapter 37 of the Texas Education Code (“mandatory referral”) -- if the offense occurs on school property, within 300 feet of school property or while attending a school sponsored or school related event -- for the following reasons:

- Engaging in conduct punishable as felony;

- Engaging in conduct that constitutes an assault or terrorist threat;
- Selling, giving, delivering, possessing, using or being under the influence of marijuana, a controlled substance or a dangerous drug;
- Selling, giving, delivering, possessing, using or being under the influence of an alcoholic beverage;
- Engaging in crime that is classified as abuse of glue, volatile chemicals, or aerosol paint;
- Engaging in conduct that contains the offense of public lewdness;
- Retaliating against a school employee by harming or threatening the employee.

A student is required to be referred to a DAEP facility, whether or not the offense occurs on or off school property or at a school event, for the following reasons:

- Receiving deferred prosecution for conduct defined as a felony;
- A court or jury finds that the child has engaged in delinquent conduct;

- The superintendent has reasonable belief that the student has committed certain violent felonies, whether or not the student is prosecuted.

A school district has discretion (“discretionary referral”) to send a student to a DAEP facility for any conduct occurring on school property or at a school related event that the district identifies and designates in their discipline management policies. In addition, a student can be referred to a DAEP facility for offenses committed off campus or at events that do not involve school activities, under the following circumstances:

- If the superintendent has a reasonable belief that the student has engaged in conduct defined as a felony, except that certain violent felonies do not leave the district with discretion;
- The continued presence of the student in the regular classroom threatens the safety of other students or teachers;
- The continued presence of the student in the regular classroom will be detrimental to the educational process.

As indicated above, the legislature has painstakingly delineated those reasons that require a child to be referred to a DAEP. However, the reasons that are discretionary, which require districts to adopt policies to provide for removal, are described broadly. Since Chapter 37 of the Texas

Education Code was adopted in 1995, the State legislature has revisited the issue of school discipline during every session. During the 1997 session, the commissioner of education was directed to develop an evaluation system for DAEP facilities; specifically he was directed to “adopt rules necessary to evaluate annually the performance of each district’s alternative education program.” In 2001, TEA developed a statewide evaluation system and prepared a report about the state of DAEP programs and policies.

One of the pivotal questions policy makers need to answer is how much time students need to spend in DAEP schools before the schools are expected to start making a difference. In 2001, TEA proposed an evaluation system for DAEP schools that makes them more accountable for a student’s performance and behavior during a school year, depending on the number of days the student is in the DAEP school. The report on discipline alternative education programs prepared by the Texas Education Agency states that instances in which large numbers of repeated referrals occur for an individual student should be examined on a very specific case study basis (Texas Education Agency, 2001). The variables in this study are number of days in DAEP schools, and the impact on students. This study is not distinguishing between whether the

days are consecutive or cumulative; that is, the study focuses on students who are referred once or twice for large numbers of days, as well as those who are referred repeated times for very short periods. This study attempts to address questions about (1) how much time a student spends in a DAEP school before he is effected, (2) what effects the DAEP has on the student, and (3) whether the effects change or increase as time in the DAEP increases.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to determine the impact of disciplinary alternative education program (DAEP) policies and practices on recidivism and long-term multiple DAEP referrals of high school students.

The guiding research questions were:

1. What are the academic characteristics of high school students with multiple long-term DAEP referrals?
2. What are the cultural and social characteristics of high school students with multiple long-term DAEP referrals?

3. What are the academic impacts of DAEP programs on high school students with multiple long-term DAEP referrals?
4. What are the social impacts of DAEP programs on high school students with multiple long-term DAEP referrals?
5. What are the environmental characteristics of DAEP programs that most notably impact multiple long-term referrals?

Design of the Study

This is a qualitative study about the impact of DAEP policies and practices on multiple long-term referrals, using a single case study design. The findings also have characteristics of a descriptive study. Qualitative data were collected through field observation and interviews. The qualitative data provide the researcher the opportunity to learn about the impact of DAEP schools directly from the students impacted. The research site was a selected DAEP campus in central Texas. Data were collected during approximately four visits to the school district, over a period of four months, from October 2000 through January 2001. Field notes were made during the observations, then coded and analyzed. Observations were made of classrooms, the school office, and in other

locations and settings throughout the school. Interviews were also conducted with administrators, teachers and students in the school. The interviews were tape recorded, then transcribed, coded and analyzed.

In addition to the interviews, numerous documents were reviewed about the school. The documents included handbooks, discipline procedures, correspondence, referral and attendance policies, and other materials that reflect environmental characteristics of the programs.

Importance of the Study

This research will provide at least two very important benefits to educators and policy makers. It will provide a descriptive assessment of actions taken by the state that impact multiple long-term DAEP referrals, and also inform educators and policy makers about how to best use recidivism and multiple referrals data as assessment criteria. It is difficult to find clear examples of Texas programs that are deemed successful. As a matter of fact, there is disagreement about what characteristics should even be used to assess the quality of DAEP programs, specifically, whether to use test scores and other traditional measures, or use nontraditional measures such academic progress, lack of discipline

infractions, or recidivism (Denti & Guerin, 1999). There is even disagreement about the objectives that DAEP programs should embody. The range of objectives include (1) being a holding campus where the student does his time until he is returned to his regular campus, (2) allowing the child to continue progressing academically, (3) providing remediation and social adjustments for behavior problems, and (4) providing support for academic success (Drake, 2000).

Statistics and demographic data referenced in this study were from a database maintained by the Texas Education Agency called the Public Educational Information Management System (PIEMS). Districts have been reporting DAEP information to TEA since the policies were adopted; however, they were required to start reporting information about DAEP programs through the Public Educational Information Management System (PEIMS) in 1997. Longitudinal data about removal of students to DAEP programs is becoming available for the first time. The availability of data has resulted in considerable attention being given to DAEP programs. The State Auditor of Texas produced a sweeping assessment of Discipline Alternative Programs in 1999, which indicates that the majority of districts are not complying with DAEP statutes related to certain infractions. The report also documented that disproportionate

numbers of male, Black, Hispanic, and special education students are removed to DAEP schools.

This study is not so much concerned with the characteristics of DAEP programs, themselves, as it is with the impact of those programs on students who spend time in the facility. The purpose of this research is to study those characteristics of DAEP programs that impact on multiple long-term DAEP referrals. Close examination will be given to how the teachers and principals interact with students while the students are enrolled in DAEP programs.

Delimitations and Limitations

The category of alternative education programs includes a much broader range of facilities than the discipline programs discussed in this research. There are also alternative programs designed for expectant mothers, single parents, adult learners, magnet schools, and children who need a different program of study than what is offered in traditional schools. This study focuses on the narrow category of alternative education programs designed to educate children who have been

removed from their traditional campus for committing a disciplinary infraction.

There are characteristics of DAEP programs other than recidivism that impact on multiple long-term referrals -- student behavior, study habits, attendance, academic improvement -- which could provide sources for productive studies. Those studies would also benefit educators and policy makers; however, conducting research on all of the them is beyond the scope of this project.

The Texas Education Code requires that elementary age students who are assigned to DAEP programs must be separated from children also assigned to the program who are not elementary age. The subjects of this study are those characteristics that impact recidivism in the DAEP facilities with children in high school. The study does not focus on the programs with elementary age students.

Definitions of Terms

Academic Characteristics – A student's level of academic achievement as measured by scores on the TAAS test; a student's grade point average, where applicable; whether a student passes to the next

grade level; whether a student earns credit needed for high school graduation, where applicable.

Academic Impact – The effect on a student from enrollment in a DAEP school, on the following factors: the student's level of academic achievement as measured by scores on the TAAS test; the student's grade point average, where applicable; whether students pass to the next grade level; whether a student earns credit needed for high school graduation, where applicable.

Chapter 37 – The chapter of the Texas Education Code where provisions of state law are located related to safe schools and student discipline, including laws related to alternative settings for behavior management.

Discipline Alternative Education Program (DAEP) – Programs which Texas school districts are required by law to operate for the placement of students committing disciplinary infractions. DAEP students are separated from other students, in a setting separate from their regular school setting.

Disciplinary Infraction – The violation of a school or school districts discipline management policies.

Discretionary Removals to DAEP – Those reasons for which students are removed, when removal is not required by state law because of violations of discipline management policies that the district has chosen to enforce by DAEP placement.

Environmental Characteristics – The types of special services available at DAEP schools -- such as tutoring, training in life skill, social counseling, and emotional counseling -- as well as the discipline policies, and specific instructional strategies and techniques.

Expulsion – The removal of a student from an educational setting and the complete cessation of any educational benefit for the remainder of a school term.

Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Programs (JJAEP) – Facilities that are required to be operated by the juvenile boards of counties with populations greater than 125,000, for the placement of students who have been expelled from school, placed on probation, placed on deferred prosecution, or who have been ordered to attend by a court with jurisdiction (not included in this study).

Low Socio-economic Status – A student whose family or household income is at a level such that the student is eligible, pursuant to federal guidelines, to free or reduced priced lunch.

Mandatory Removals – Those reasons for which students are removed because state law requires DAEP placement.

Public Educational Information Management System (PEIMS) – The electronic data collection system operated by the Texas Education Agency for collecting information from districts throughout the state.

Recidivism – The tendency to relapse into a previous condition or repeat certain behavior that results in subsequent referrals to a DAEP facility.

Referral(s) – The administrative process for placement of students in DAEP facilities for misbehavior.

Social and Cultural Characteristics – The relationships that students have with peers, teachers, and administrators; the manner in which they socialize with each other, with teachers, and with administrators, and the manner in which they interact in their school environment.

Social and Cultural Impact – The effect on a student from enrollment in a DAEP school, on the following factors: the relationships that the student has with peers, teachers, and administrators; the manner in which the student socializes with other students, teachers,

and administrators; the manner in which the student interacts with others in the school environment; and how it makes the student feel.

Special Education Student – A student who has been identified as having a learning disability or a handicap that interferes with a major life function and, as a result, is entitled to special education services and accommodations above beyond what is provided normally.

Suspension -- The removal of a student from an educational setting and the complete cessation of any educational benefit for a temporary period.

Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) Test – The instrument used to assess whether Texas school children at certain grade levels have reached designated levels of academic achievement in reading, language arts, writing, mathematics, social studies, and science.

Summary

The State of Texas has adopted a policy requiring all districts to have DAEP programs. The discretionary and mandatory reasons for which students can be referred to DAEP programs clearly indicate that

policy-makers are concerned with issues of school safety and classroom disruption. Studies have been conducted about the characteristics of effective DAEP programs – to the extent that there is consensus about the definition of effective programs. There is disagreement about the extent to which DAEP facilities should serve as holding institutions, or provide a more enriching and beneficial experience for students assigned to them. The need to understand what types of DAEP programs are successful is of paramount importance (Kallio & Sanders, 1999). The Texas Education Code states unequivocally that the students assigned to alternative schools are entitled to some educational benefits, and there is a vested interest in providing the highest quality education possible.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Students enrolled in alternative education program (AEP) schools have been the topic of literature concerning the characteristics of good alternative education programs, or in the context of recommendations about developing quality alternative education programs. The objective of this review of literature was to collect the thoughts and theories concerning alternative education program designs, including how various models and strategies have affected children. The literature spans a broad category of topics. In this review, categories and sub-categories were identified and named. The body of work was described and placed in sections, facilitating a logical discussion. The first part of this review provides a discussion about the modern history of alternative education programs, including the reasons that policy makers and educators embraced alternative schools as a model for educating students with personal discipline problems. The next section discusses the characteristics that have been identified as comprising good, effective alternative education programs. In addition to discipline programs, much of the literature about effective alternative education programs is from the

perspective of dropout prevention, educating at risk students, and educating special education students.

Modern History

The first forms of American school systems centered around churches and closely connected communities. Tradition, along with basic academic and social skills considered desirable by the adults in society (NSSC, 1989), was taught. In the mid-1900's, the special concerns children were bringing to schools forced educators and policymakers to explore alternative approaches to educating children.

The rebellious 1960's and 1970's are documented to be one of the societal causes leading to the development of discipline alternative education programs, as the model exists today (Sagor, 1989). During that time, teenage children were becoming increasingly defiant of authority, many believing that society as a whole disregarded their concerns. The rebellious youth got everybody's attention during that period because the principal participants were children of privilege. Prior to that time, alternative schools were used primarily for children with disabilities (Gregg, 1999). School boards were now responding to concerns from

different constituencies than the usual problem elements who were already unsuccessful in the mainstream.

During the 1960's and 1970's, variations of alternative school models were also developed for use with students having serious discipline problems (Gregg, 1999). In a poll taken in 1977, 28% of school districts indicated that they had discipline alternative schools (Barrs, Colston and Parrett, 1977, cited in Asher-ERUC/CUE, 1982), and most of them had been created in the context of larger schools, in large or medium sized districts. By 1981, 80% of the nation's largest school districts reported having some form of discipline alternative schools. Sagor (1989) and Asher (1982) both believe that the concerns about youthful alienation and rebellion began raising concerns equal to racial issues, women's rights, and other societal problems. Asher says that the youthful rebellion became a stimulus for educators to finally consider strategic methods of educating children with discipline problems, and for school administrators developing alternative programs within the public schools.

Sagor's historical account about the development of alternative schools in the 60's and 70's is corroborated in literature from that period. Virginia Helm (1979) wrote an article in 1979, discussing the

development of alternative schools as she perceived them since 1971. She describes how at an educational conference that year, she heard discourse for the first time that emphasized alternatives within the public school system as a way of educating students whose needs could not be met in traditional settings. Prior to that conference, Helm indicates that the method for educating such students with special needs was to operate small, experimental programs, and their educational welfare was of little concern.

Influence from Legal Systems

Sagor (1999) identifies several external forces that may have also been motivating the conversation about alternative schools and as “contributing to the respectability of alternatives in education.” Namely, the state courts and the commissioner of education in her state had issued opinions requiring school districts to provide education to students expelled or suspended for more than five days. Interestingly, Helm also believes that many of the news reporters and other writers who produced harsh criticisms about the public school system contributed to the attitudes and ideas that eventually resulted in public school programs

with non-traditional characteristics. Helm predicted and hoped that the alternative schools concept in public schools was developing into more than a movement. She observed that the idea was becoming an integral and permanent part of the public school system. Given Helm's prediction, it is noteworthy, as evident by the topic of this dissertation, that alternative school programs have become an integral part of Texas public schools.

Sagor (1999) and Helm (1979) were also consistent in another respect in their account of the development of alternative education programs. Both of them, although writing 20 years apart, opined that some of the factors driving endorsements for alternative education in public schools came from external sources. In Helm's case, as mentioned above, there were state court decisions and state commissioner of education decisions; however, Sagor reflected on the effect that a decision from the United Supreme Court had on the alternative school movement, called Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka Kansas (1954). This was the landmark case declaring that racial segregation in public schools is illegal.

This document manifested itself profoundly on our public schools. The comprehensive secondary schools that grew out of Conant's (1959) cardinal principles and that was later labeled by Robert Hampel (1990) as America's "last little citadel" was being trashed by an increasing number of youth, as well as a significant number of educators. A.S. Neill's bestseller, Summerhill (1960), and a

slew of books calling for open education for the middle class, were accompanied by other powerful treatises ... that documented the failure of the comprehensive high school and the American education system to serve children who lived in poverty. (emphasis included) (Sagor, 1999)

Alternative schools had previously been used as havens for students disaffected with traditional school, but after Brown, they began to promote desegregation and stop white flight from urban areas (Asher, 1982).

Influences of Political Systems

Other authors made connections to another external force influencing the development of alternative education in public schools (Asher, 1982). The influence came from a federal law passed in 1975 called Education of All Handicapped Children Act, also known as Public Law 94-142. The legislation required public schools to provide retarded, emotionally disturbed, and physically handicapped students with free and appropriate education in public schools, with benefits equal to those provided to other students. The law required districts, for the first time, to introduce teachers and administrators to alternative forms of instruction and delivery, and to implement individual education plans for

handicapped students, using non-traditional educational models within normal school programs. This law forced public schools to confront their failure to address the needs of students with disadvantages resulting from physical, mental, and emotional disabilities more proactively, and with a commitment to provide handicapped students with educational benefits equal to non-handicapped students.

As educators wrestled with the most effective way to comply with Public Law 94-142, they rejected the idea of making deep structural changes to mainstream educational facilities. Instead, public schools developed separate programs for students who had special needs that mainstream programs could not address. Sagor (1999) is somewhat dismayed about whether Public Law 94-142 has achieved its purpose at too high a cost. In the 25 years since the law was passed, a trend of segregation has been documented. This segregation has resulted in the development of subsequent laws requiring mainstreaming of special education students, meaning that they be educated in the same settings as other students, to every extent possible.

The National Commission on Excellence in Education published a document in 1983 called A Nation at Risk. The report brought criticism to bear on the public school system and created a sense of urgency among

officials to provide higher quality in education. Peter Leone and William Drakeford (1999) state that at risk students and those with disciplinary problems were not direct beneficiaries of responses to the federal report; the beneficiaries were primarily college bound students and those who already had the capacity to respond to traditional models of education. Collins (1987) states that the proliferation of alternative schools in the 1980's was attributable to magnet schools and schools within schools. Ironically, according to Leone (1999), responses to A Nation at Risk caused harm to students at risk. The reason being that to achieve higher standards, schools sought to protect the learning environment. They developed alternative programs to respond to disruption, but the programs focused on punitive objectives, and the policies included very little to address the unique needs of students causing disruptions or perceived as discipline problems. In fact, the programs are criticized by Leone because they do not help students through early intervention.

Scholars are in agreement that schools should provide early problem detection and early intervention (Ashcroft, 1999). Special education laws and regulations require proactive approaches for identifying students with disabilities as early as possible, and developing individual curriculums to address those needs. However, where students

with behavior problems are concerned, school districts that offer intensive, individualized services seem to make failure in the mainstream schools a prerequisite to benefiting from such services. Rarely are the benefits of alternative education programs made available as a proactive choice to parents and students before serious problems develop (Leone and Drakeford, 1999).

The alternative school movement was also effected by the adoption of federal legislation in 1997 related to special education students, referred to as the 1997 Amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA) (Ashcroft, 1999). The law allows school administrators to unilaterally place students with disabilities in alternative education programs for temporary periods, not to exceed 45 days. The special education student's individual education plan (IEP) determines whether such a placement is appropriate. Some writers (Sagor, 1999 and Ashcroft, 1999) have predicted that alternative schools may begin to have a larger population of disabled students placed there pursuant to the "alternative interim placement" provision of the 1997 Amendments to IDEA.

In the past few years, there have been a number of alternative school models and programs developed outside the public schools.

While educators continue to debate whether discipline alternative schools should be uncomfortable places that serve to discipline students who refuse to conform in mainstream school, many have recognized that regular schools are simply not designed to meet the needs of all students (Duke, 1999). The charter school movement has encouraged the development of programs to serve the needs of students who are not functional in traditional schools.

Focus on Academic Development and Non-traditional Concerns

There is consensus that in recent years, the number of children being educated in non-traditional programs has been increasing (Guerin and Denti, 1999). Their basic skills are well below grade level, most have a long history of discipline infractions and referrals, and their teachers frequently describe them as unmotivated and uncooperative (Duke and Muzio, 1978; Meyers, 1999). Pellegrini and Myers (1992) describe their experiences and encounters as follows:

...the student[s]...fit the following description: (a) slinking into class as though the room were filled with hydrogen sulfide gas; (b) books and other course work-related materials either forgotten or treated like the droppings from a large, farm animal; (c) posture in class equivalent to that of a creature with no spine or musculature

whatsoever to hold its body in an upright position; [and] (d) whatever visual attention is discernible through a seemingly perpetual scowl, is directed toward absolutely anything other than the assigned task...The essential communication to the instructor seems to be...I hate it here. Nothing academic is even marginally relevant to my life. My attendance here is coerced. If not, I wouldn't come within a hundred yards of this place. (cited by Meyers, 1999, p. 114)

The challenges facing teachers and administrators in alternative schools is to develop models that will address the academic needs of the students, while at the same time giving attention to the need for students in discipline programs to develop social skills and practices that allow them to be successful in traditional school environments. The literature concerning this balance is divided into two categories. The first subsection discusses concepts and ideas documented to address the emotional and social issues children bring to alternative schools, referred to as "non-traditional concerns." The second subsection discusses programs and models said to address the "academic needs" of students in alternative education programs.

Tending to Non-traditional Concerns

Early Intervention. Many of the students in alternative education programs have displayed patterns of what Richard Aschcroft (1999) calls

age inappropriate aggression, meaning that they get angrier than children of like ages and are angry more frequently. The students also seem to exhibit aggression across a wider range of social situations, and persist in aggressive, disruptive behavior for longer periods of time (Harris, 1979, cited in Aschcroft, 1999). Aschcroft suggests that these students need the benefit of more effectively trained teachers.

Writers have expressed concerns about the social, educational and emotional characteristics of children in alternative school programs. Guerin and Denti (1999) reported that according to a study by California youth authorities in 1999, racial minorities accounted for 64% of the students in public alternative schools. Studies also confirmed that as many as 85% of the children in juvenile detention centers were previously in alternative schools, and 75% of the children classified as juvenile delinquents. The youth authorities also reported that the national average of disabled children in alternative schools ranges between 42% and 60%. Other writers have also commented on the percentage of emotionally or mentally disabled students who are in alternative education programs for disciplinary reasons, observing that many have learning, cognitive, and neurological disabilities (Leone, 1994). Guerin and Denti stated that, according to certain studies, mentally or

emotionally disabled students also fare much worse after they have been assigned to alternative or nontraditional facilities. They seem to spend more time in the facility than non-disabled students, and they seem to be subject to more disciplinary sanctions while in the facility.

Early intervention is key, according to Aschcroft (1999) because aggressive behavior at age eight is the strongest indicator that a child will display aggressive behavior as a teenager. Walker and Golly, who also stress the importance of early intervention with violent behavior, generally feel that modern society creates certain “risk factors” for young children that are contributors to violent behavior. Some of the risk factors include poor supervision, lack of parental involvement, harsh treatment, and violence in the media. Children exposed to those factors develop antisocial behavior before even starting school, and the children nowadays begin to do what they see adults do at an early age.

Soleil Gregg (1999) shares a noteworthy perspective about the need for successful transition programs that avoid repeated, subsequent infractions. She recognizes that some students may be so hostile toward teachers, principals and authority figures in their regular campus that they need an alternative setting where strict disciplinary methods can be applied. She continues, however, and suggests that even if the above is

true, there has to come a point when the educational community can no longer afford to reject those students from traditional schools. Instead, Gregg suggests that traditional schools start to develop ways to deal with the diverse needs of such students. Labeling and separating the students in alternative schools, says Gregg, may have the adverse effect of further marginalizing them, reinforcing antisocial peer groups, and compounding the problems discipline alternative education programs aim to solve. Gregg also observed that in two states, there are studies that suggest segregated alternative schools have caused equity problems because minority and special education students are most likely to be referred.

It is important that adolescent antisocial behavior is corrected as early as possible. By grades three and four, the children begin gravitating towards each other, either because of common interest or being rejected by their peers. Those bonds and relationships further distance them from the mainstream, and increase the likelihood of DAEP referrals (Patterson, Reid, and Dishon, 1992, cited by Walker and Golly, 1999). Walker and Golly have developed a program for early intervention to identify children with early signs of antisocial behavior, then intervene with instructional development appropriate for the needs, and enlist the

parents as partners with the schools to teach skills for academic success. The response to the intervention program from all stakeholders has been positive. Aschcroft (1999) suggests that with a dropout rate of around 40% among minority children, and knowing the number of dropouts who live a life of crime and possible incarceration, the post secondary outlook for those students alone should be motivation to see that they develop appropriate social and academic skills.

Barbara Arnstine and Ken Futernick (1999) believe that the end of the 1990's has not been good for the alternative school movement or for children who are at risk. The reason is because of the emphasis being given to basic skills competency tests in many states, including California and Texas. The writers feel that because teachers are required to teach subjects and objectives on standardized tests, they do not have the time and capacity to teach subjects like fine arts, technology, social skills, and civic responsibility. Alternative school students have a greater need for subjects like those above, says Arnstine and Futernick, for two reasons. First, the at-risk students have already been unsuccessful in academics, and they need to have experiences that provide them with opportunities to be successful and dispel negative impressions about school. The second reason is that subjects like fine arts, technology, and

social skills provide alternative education students with training and education in things such as patience, tolerance, team work, and discipline, that will help them be successful in their home school.

Socialization with Faculty and Staff. Teachers and staff in successful alternative education programs make an effort to learn about their students' backgrounds, economic situations, and family conditions. Then they use that information as a foundation for building relationships with students. One of the characteristics of effective alternative schools is a focus on the needs of students from a broader, more holistic perspective than traditional schools (McCreight, 1999). Teachers and staff in successful alternative schools seemed to know their students more intimately than do teachers on regular campuses. Alternative school staff are not hesitant to confront students who are not performing at their potential, or even confront them about choices they make, or gangs and cliques with which they associate (Secada, 1999).

Cheryl Perry and Daniel Duke (1978) conducted a study that compared students' behavior in alternative schools with their behavior in regular schools. At the outset, they recognized that discipline is not nearly as big a concern in alternative schools as it is on regular campuses. They noted that students were rarely seen violating rules or creating

problems, and the records at the alternative school indicated that very few formal sanctions were imposed on students for discipline violations. Perry and Duke concluded that one of the reasons for the difference in student behavior was the classroom climate at alternative schools. They noted that in regular schools, the flow of communication was primarily downward, from teachers to students, because of the large numbers of students and the specialized tasks of the teachers. The communication was routine and the environment did little to encourage discussions about personal concerns.

In contrast, at the alternative schools, teachers set aside time for open discussions and encouraged students to contact them away from the class. At the alternative schools, students were given a share of the responsibility to decide on school rules and the consequences of violations. Successful AEP programs all had staff and leaders who made conscious efforts to deal with the emotional and social development of the children enrolled. The staff members are also reported to be energetic about their responsibilities and committed to their duties. The extra energy has been identified as the difference in modifying poor behavior (NSSC, 1989). Students often referred to their teachers as friends. Perry and Duke believe that promoting positive communication

between teachers and students is the most effective way of controlling misbehavior (citing Kindsvatter, 1978). This includes increasing both the quantity of communication and the quality of the interactions.

Two writers, Gold and Mann (1989), also discussed the need to develop social and psychological aspects of students. They explored the theory that poor behavior was the result of a psychological defense mechanism against low self-esteem. They conducted research involving alternative schools with populations of students who would have been expelled or suspended if they were not in the AEP. The programs were all geared towards academic achievement, as opposed to punishment, and they used unconventional methods for instruction. The schools studied all had declines in problem behavior.

Not all the students at the school responded the same. Gold and Mann found that self-esteem was directly connected to poor behavior. Gold and Mann recommended that programs be geared toward developing self-esteem. The reason being that as the students grow in confidence from their experience in an AEP, they develop a commitment to completing their education. The confidence and commitment stay with the students when they transition back into traditional schools. Confirming Gold and Mann's theory, Guerin and Denti

(1999) identified five elements of a successful alternative school program related to educational objectives:

1. developing self esteem;
2. planning for transition away from the program;
3. teaching coping, social and living skills;
4. involving family; and
5. developing a positive peer culture.

James Garbarino (1999), writing about the moral and social dynamics that lead adolescent boys to commit murder, strongly emphasized the importance of building strong relationships between boys and adults.

Moral development is the process through which children learn the rules of conduct in their society and learn to act upon these rules. But this learning must take place in the heart as well as in the head. Without adequate adult buffering and limit setting, the moral behavior of children is left in the hands of children themselves, where their own feelings and thoughts are the last line of defense. What can adults do to protect boys from negative moral development and teach them good moral sense? First, adults can stimulate the development of empathy. Empathy helps them to connect abstract principals of morality with real-life situations and feelings. Second, adults can protect boys from degrading, dehumanizing, and desensitizing images, [and] corrupting influences on the foundation of moral development, [such as] R-rated films full of horrible violence and aggressive sexuality. Third, adults can stimulate and support the spiritual development of boys." (Garbarino, 1999, p. 6)

Several authors (Wehlage, Rutter and Turnbaugh, 1987) state that one essential quality of successful DAEP programs is that they plan experiences for students through “experiential learning.” The term has to do with education strategies in the schools that allow the students enrolled to improve their social skills by associating with adults in the school on a social level. This allows the students to learn, by example from teachers and administrators, whom they encounter through both teaching relationships, and social relationships. Wehlage states that at risk students in particular need positive social experiences with adults who exemplify the characteristics that adults want to teach. Wehlage goes on to point out that the best opportunities for productive social experiences arise when the students and teachers are involved together in hands on activities, or while doing things like volunteer work at nursing homes. These experiences allow students to be both active and reflective (Wehlage, et al., 1987).

The benefit of building relationships between students and faculty through positive experiences is confirmed in literature about the problems some children have due to feelings of alienation (Firestone, 1989; Newmann, 1981). The literature confirms that children who are struggling with school need to find a greater sense of relevance in

schooling in order to motivate them to perform at higher levels (Arnstine and Futernick, 1999). The reason many students perform poorly and misbehave is because they do not see the relevance of school in their lives.

The other factor identified by Firestone (1989) contributing to student perception of schooling is the availability of career-oriented programs. He suggests that programs such as business, finance, technology, and even junior ROTC need to be made available to a broader range of students. The programs are effective motivators for the students involved; however, those programs are not generally designed to serve discipline problem students or at risk students. Research has verified that alternative education programs using non-traditional programs are more effective at improving students' performance and commitment (Jacobs, 1994).

Extensive Counseling Services. The counseling services at typical schools are adequate for children who have stable parents, role models, or who are generally college bound. Firestone (1989) identifies two factors that can contribute to a student's perception of school and their performance. One of the factors is the availability of good quality counseling. However, the counselors in most schools do not have the

time needed for children who are at risk or have special needs for social counseling. The counselors typically have other duties, such scheduling, committee work, monitoring, and many double as coordinators for parental involvement or tutoring programs.

Louis Downs (1999), writing about the role of counselors in dealing with at risk students, suggests that their job responsibilities need to be more broadly defined for alternative education schools. "The lack of literature pertaining to counselor roles in alternative education suggests that the role is either assumed or unknown (Downs, 1999)." According to Downs, the counselor's role must be expanded to satisfy the growing needs of AEP students. Downs suggests that counselors begin to assume responsibilities such as developing student profiles for kids entering AEP schools, serving as a resource person about the child for teachers and administrators, facilitating the transition of students in and out of AEP schools, and using diagnostic tools to assess special needs that students have.

David L. Lloyd (1997) conducted a study of an alternative education program in the Baltimore County Public Schools, which highlights the benefit of extensive counseling services. The school was located in an area with diverse socioeconomic, racial and ethnic groups, and was

designed for students who were expelled from their home campus for behavioral problems. When each student is referred, they are assigned a case manager and mentor. The case manager helps the student develop a daily educational plan, and also works with the student in such cognitive areas as anger management, conflict resolution, and self esteem.

Developing Transition Plans. Developing a quality program for transitioning students out of alternative schools and back onto their assigned school is a characteristic of successful alternative schools that has been identified by many writers (Guerin and Denti, 1999). One pair of researchers (Duke and Griesdorn, 1999) recommended that every alternative school be staffed with a transition specialist, whose responsibility includes providing services for transition to the alternative school and back to the student's regular campus. The transition specialists' duties include contacting the sending campus to obtain assignments from the teachers and find out how the student was doing before their referral. The specialists is also responsible for providing the student a smooth transition back to his regular campus, and contacting their teachers about progress while in the AEP. Duke and Griesdorn even

suggests that the specialist be responsible for monitoring students' re-adjustment to their regular campus, and offering support if needed.

Similarly, another scholar (Lloyd, 1997) discussed a transition program from the alternative schools in Baltimore County that included a transition process. The first step in the transition process is for the home campus to receive advance notice (3 to 4 weeks) that a student is about to be returned to the campus. A meeting called a "transition conference" is then scheduled between the student, parent, alternative school staff, and the home school staff to develop a plan to make sure that student has a smooth transition back to his home school. During the "transition conference," a schedule is generated for the returning student, the student's achievements at the alternative school are discussed, and the home school staff is given information about how to contact staff at the alternative school, if they need to do so. Finally, counselors are assigned to the alternative school students to offer support and monitor their transition during the first few weeks back at their home campus. Communication between the alternative school and the home campus before, during and after the student returns, is the key component of the transition program.

Interestingly, in a study conducted on DAEP facilities in Texas, only 37% of the districts reported having some type of transition services for students assigned (McCreight, 1999). Some of the districts reported that they provide counseling services to students returning to their regular campus. Other transition services include monitoring students for a period following their return, and providing contact with staff members at the alternative school, who function as a resource for returning students.

Segregation from Traditional School. As Richard Sagor (1999) writes, the issue of segregation in alternative education programs raises many questions addressed in the civil rights case ending racial discrimination, Brown v. Board of Education (1954). Sagor also alleges that the same segregation has occurred with special education children. Can anything separate be equal, when the Supreme Court announced in the above case that separate was inherently unequal? One of his criteria for sound alternative education policy is to discourage segregation, especially when the results divide students according to economics, disabilities, or race. Sagor believes that segregation in discipline programs adds to the problems the students may already have with being labeled. Labeling and separating the students in alternative schools, says Gregg (1999), may have the adverse effect of further

marginalizing them, reinforcing antisocial peer groups, and compounding the problems discipline alternative education programs aim to solve.

Other writers have also commented on the consequences of assigning students to segregated facilities, away from their normal environment. Richard Ashcroft (1999) conducted a study about educators in alternative education programs. He observed that one characteristic of alternative education settings is that when the students become socialized to the alternative setting, with higher levels of attention and stimulation, it can create a problem when they want to return to their traditional setting. After being taught in a restrictive setting, trying to adjust to a large group environment may harm an AEP student's performance during transition.

Chris Argyris (1974) also commented on the segregation of alternative programs from traditional campuses. After conducting a behavioral analysis of teachers and students in alternative schools, Argyris concluded that separating alternative school students in separate environments demonstrated a contradiction in theory. The writer suggested that it is absurd to think that children will be trained to cope

while in a traditional school, when the alternative school environment is by design considerably different.

Isn't the world of the alternative schools, in which the child is to be immersed, a type of socially germ-free world because it is designed primarily around the (presumed) capacities of the student? How does living in a child-centered world help the child learn to alter [his behavior] effectively someday in a world that is not child-centered? How will a student be helped to be an effective problem-solver if the world in which he lives has little relationship to the world in which he is to participate as an adult (Argyris, 1974)?

Even writers who have positive impressions about separating at risk students from their traditional school, suggest that the alternative programs need to be close enough in proximity to the regular campus for the students at the alternative schools to benefit from the services at the regular campus, and so that the district can design effective transition programs for the AEP students to return to their regular campus (Duke and Griesdorn, 1999).

Addressing Curriculum Needs. The curriculum at effective alternative education programs needs to be more creative than at traditional schools (Wehlage, 1989). Studies have confirmed that

improper curriculum placement and inferior instruction are two factors contributing to disruptive behavior. In his description of a model program for at risk students, Wehlage states that the curriculum needs to be individualized, have clear objectives, provides for prompt feedback, and also involve an active role for students. Another report on dropouts stated that the most important thing that an alternative school can offer such students is a personalized curriculum (Secada, 1999).

One of the challenges facing teachers at alternative education programs is developing a model that allows for the variations in achievement levels. The curriculum has to be progressive and adequate, as well as account for remedial help that may be needed for some students. Students in alternative education programs who need help with academics must receive it immediately because the last thing they need is another experience of failure, according to Secada (1999). He says that in the schools that were effective in reducing their dropout rates, there was always an adult or tutor standing by to explain material to students having difficulty. The teachers were always calm, and they frequently took time to explain the lessons with analogies and relate the topics to existing knowledge.

Walter Secada (1999), departs from the position that primary attention should be given to developing social skills and modeling acceptable behavior. Secada's philosophy about the mission of alternative schools is primarily academic oriented. Secada criticizes programs for focusing on basic skills, remediation, and vocational training, and he suggests that more attention needs to be given to balancing the need for remediation with the need for enrichment activities. The major criticism Secada has about the curriculums in alternative schools is that they almost guarantee that students enrolled will lose ground compared to the instruction at their regular school.

Other literature concurs that having individualized curriculums is key to improving the performance of students in AEP facilities (Duke, 1999). Richard Sagor (1999) states that it is unethical for educators to require that students enroll in "programs where one can fairly predict that performance will be below standard." His criteria for equitable educational policies is: "Children from disadvantaged backgrounds should attend schools where the likelihood of academic achievement is no less for them than for their more advantaged age mates." The social and emotional needs of children should not be ignored; however, those needs should not be given attention, to the detriment of the students'

academic achievement. “Whatever differences of ability and interest exist among students, they should all be equipped with that knowledge that has been proven to be liberating and enlightening to the human race. To do otherwise is to handicap some youth with inferior and limiting knowledge (Wehlage, 1986).”

Other writers on alternative education programs (Leone and Drakeford, 1999) have also expressed concerns about the tendency to neglect the academic potential of students in the programs. Peter Leone states that a clear focus on academic learning is a characteristic of the most promising alternative programs because “they combine high academic standards with engaging and creative instruction.” He specifically mentions a principal named Marva Collins, who was the leader in an alternative school for elementary students in Chicago. By promoting high academic standards for all the children in her school, Ms. Collins was able to motivate the students in her school to perform far above what was projected.

William Firestone (1989) acknowledges that high expectations are important, but he qualified the conclusion, stating that a much more expanded view of education is required for children at risk. By in large, the prevailing viewpoint is that appropriate attention needs to be given to

academic development and non-academic development as well (Collins and Tamarkin, 1990). The alternative education programs highlighted as good models are the ones that combine social and academic development in ways that are creative and engaging for the students. Guerin and Denti (1999), in their article about alternative education programs for youth at risk, made mention of a couple of programs to draw attention to the programs' missions. One alternative school, designed for delinquent children, provided an academic program that emphasized activities as a way of learning, while at the same time building inner strength and preparing the students to cope with situations and obstacles they may face in the future. The other program, which was a county juvenile detention facility, tried to create an environment that emphasized community, mutual respect, positive dispositions about school and learning, accountability, and strong academic skills.

Studies of delinquent youth have revealed that one important impact that a successful AEP program has on students is to change their perception of education (NSSC, 1999; Gold and Mann, 1984). Many students are assigned to AEP programs after having had bad experiences in a traditional school setting. Those students are precisely the ones who need extra support from caring teachers, concerned about

their social and emotional development. Carolyn McCrieght (1999) states that one of the worst ways that ineffective DAEP programs impact students is to reinforce negative experiences they have already lived.

Connecting Students With Society. Arnstine and Futernick (1999) conducted research at a school that used a curriculum designed to get children interested in their community and involved in political issues. The program was called the LegiSchool Project. The program was developed around a community or political issue that students chose to study because of their genuine interest. During Arnstine's study, the students were discussing teen pregnancy. A Town Hall Meeting was conducted where students debated the merits of various perspectives on the issue. Prior to the meeting, the students received a packet of literature to give them background information about the issue. Political leaders and lawmakers were invited to the meeting to participate in debates with the students. After the meeting, the students kept track of legislation filed related to the issues, whether the bills become law, and the effect that the laws passed might have on the issue. The study confirmed that many students developed an entirely different perspective about their community and politics.

Another educational strategy that has been shown to have great potential in alternative education settings is Service Learning. Service Learning is a curriculum based on the experiential learning model, that teaches both academic skills and social skills (Meyers, 1999). The students are assigned to perform services in their community – tutoring, working at nursing homes, or clean up projects. Meyers is careful to distinguish service learning from community service projects. Whereas community service gives students the chance to contribute time and effort, service learning goes further. With service learning, the work is tied to the school curriculum, so while planning and doing the work, and after the work is complete, opportunities are provided for the students to reflect on their accomplishment. The reflections may take the form of small group discussions, videos, journals, written reports, photo journal, or any other medium that effectively expresses what the experience means to the student involved.

During reflective periods, the students are encouraged to analyze the broader implications of their work in the lives of people affected, and to think about their personal growth and whether the project has changed them, personally. Research has verified that service learning promotes problem solving skills, social competence, and a sense of purpose

(Bernard, 1991). It also develops the students' capacity for decision-making, collaboration, writing, as well as thinking skills, and pre-employment skills.

Small Class Sizes. Those writing about alternative school programs are in complete agreement that small class sizes and low teacher to student ratios are essential in successful alternative education programs (Duke, 1999; Webber and Sechler, 1987; Secada, 1999; Wehlage, 1987 and Jacobs, 1994). Writers have indicated that the most common characteristic shared by effective alternative schools is their small class size. Wehlage (1987) indicates that small class size facilitates face-to-face communication. It also allows the faculty and staff to communicate and plan with a sense that students are individuals, as opposed to larger schools where authority is centralized with administrators who have little personal connection with students.

Some writers have indicated that school size is an important variable because it has an effect on the goals that teachers set for students, the students' level of participation and effort while in the program, and the role they have in decision-making. Fred Newmann (1981), who wrote about theories for reducing student alienation, indicated that alternative schools should be large enough to provide the

resources needed for students, but at the same time small enough for students and faculty to bond. If alternative schools as a group are found to be making a difference on students, small class sizes may be the most influential factor (Duke and Muzio, 1978)

There are some disadvantages to small classes discovered in research. Duke (1999) states that small classes have meant that schools could not offer some conventional courses, or were limited to a basic curriculum because simple economy-of-scale makes it difficult to justify teachers for specialized, upper division courses. Newmann (1981) recognized the disadvantages of small schools -- they do not allow for individual privacy or inspire collective loyalty. However, he states that the sustained contact among members of the school community is a very effective safeguard against feelings of alienation that some students have on regular campuses.

Program Strategies for Delivering Services. Alternative school literature is replete with comments about the necessity for the schools to use creative, non-traditional educational strategies (Collins, 1987; Combs and Cooley, 1968, cited by Collins, 1987). Therefore, the curriculums used at alternative education programs must be designed different from those in traditional programs. Contrary to traditional

schools, the curriculums in alternative schools must be designed to address the variation in achievement levels characteristic of alternative school populations, and accommodations must be made for students who may need remedial assistance (Wehlage, 1987). Functional alternative education program curriculums must address students' academic, social and behavioral needs, particularly for special education students assigned to the alternative programs (Rutherford and Quinn, 1999).

Some writers have observed that the curriculum models necessary in alternative schools may increase pressure on teaching staff to remain creative in addressing individual needs and engaging students (Firestone, 1989). The studies have confirmed that programs are more effective if teachers are regarded as professionals. Firestone indicates that teachers in districts that have adopted power-sharing or career-structuring efforts benefit from stronger commitments from the teachers. Teachers are reported to have tried new classroom techniques, developed district-wide curriculums and testing programs, and taken more interest in educational issues in the district. Argyris (1974) observes that teachers who are not given professional treatment are reticent to speak out about educational issues, even if they do have

serious concerns. Instead of implementing creative strategies and curriculum models, the teachers in schools not promoting professionalism seem resolved to do things the way the supervisor expects. They take little personal stake in the school's vision or leadership decisions. Instead, the school directors seem to unilaterally design the environment. Conversely, research about schools with a focus on creating a sense of community, reveals that they are more likely to succeed because the administrators, teachers and students all share common expectations for learning (Leone and Drakeford, 1999).

Similarly, in a study comparing the management systems of traditional and alternative high schools in New England, John Nirenberg (1977) concluded that there was a significant difference between the administrative climates at alternative schools and regular schools, and the sense of power that teachers perceive themselves to possess. The alternative schools were less bureaucratic than the traditional schools, and the traditional school environments were more formalized and the decision-making more centralized. The most important conclusion reached in the study was that:

The alternative schools demonstrated the organizational ability to create an environment more conducive to the personal satisfaction of their members than the traditional school.... In the alternative setting the relationship between the individual and the organization

extends beyond identification with goals or roles and into the realm of Maslow's concept of self-actualization, in which the individual becomes personally fulfilled by doing the work of the organization. The ability of the organization to manifest this quality in its members demands an organizational style which is a combination of personal qualities, leadership qualities, and other elements which are also part of the administrative climate. (Nirenberg, 1977, p. 101)

The most effective alternative schools are documented to use unconventional approaches to scheduling and student grouping (Duke and Griesdorn, 1999). The schools consider things such as the age of students, their ability to function in groups, and their attention span. Some schools operate on half-day schedules, run programs in shifts, and offer night programs to accommodate students with child-care issues or who have jobs. The primary motive is to be flexible. One principal obtained a waiver from state law requiring a certain amount of contact hours with students each day (Secada, 1999). The reason for the waiver, interestingly, is because the principal wanted some of her students to stay home from school on days when they could not offer their best efforts. The principal noticed that particular students seemed tired or distracted on certain days of the week because they worked late the previous night. So the principal negotiated an agreement with the students for them to give her their best effort "twenty hours each week."

She was given special permission to calculate contact hours on a weekly basis instead of a daily basis, and then she told the students they could stay home on Thursdays and Fridays when they were tired from closing up the fast-food restaurant the previous night. In exchange, however, the students committed to give the principal their very best during the seven hours a day on Monday through Wednesday when they were at school. The principal also installed washing machines at her campus so students could do their laundry at school.

Other authors who have written about the importance of helping children connect with their school have discussed the benefit of flexible scheduling. Martin Krovetz (1999), who was a principal in an alternative high school, describes how he offered an “opportunity class” for a group of students in his school who were not attending regularly scheduled class. They were required to attend class from 2:00 to 5:00 p.m., daily, instead of during regular hours. The kids were present and on time every day. They enjoyed school more because the kids they disliked were gone home, and in a sense, they had the building to themselves. The students reported that they felt connected to the school for the first time.

The “opportunity class” idea discussed above is part of a model to alternative school programs used by Krovetz (1999) called “resiliency

theory.” This is a proactive approach to addressing at risk behavior that involves first defining problems that underlie a student’s misbehavior, such as abuse, family issues, or poverty, then addressing the problems. Resiliency theory does not mean solving the problems; it means that students are given the support and counseling to deal with the issues and adversity constructively, rather than misbehaving. Krovetz is critical of what he calls “the problem focused model,” because it does nothing to build students’ capabilities, problem-solving skills, personal assets, or to strengthen the environment where the students live. The term, as used by Krovetz, defines a culture that is created on the belief that everyone has the ability to overcome adversity if there are adequate protective factors around them. The effectiveness of the model will depend on commitment from teachers and staff.

Effective alternative schools include processes for parental involvement, community service, and family and group counseling (Glaser, Larson and Nichols, 1992). Some programs require students enrolled and their parents to both sign contracts at the time of enrollment, agreeing to meet certain levels of performance, participation, and to comply with school rules (Duke and Griesdorn, 1999). They also offer supplementary classes in subjects such as conflict resolution, life skills

and group counseling (Guerin and Denti, 1999). Many programs also have social services linked to their curriculum (Leone and Drakeford, 1999).

Allowing Choice in Programs. The consensus is overwhelmingly in favor of allowing students a choice about enrolling in the types of alternative education program they prefer (Asher, 1982; Collins, 1987; Lee and Burkam, 1992). Many students who experience success in alternative education programs prefer those schools to their traditional campus (Duke, 1999). The structure is typically more rigid, but discipline is more relaxed for minor infractions like disruptions in class. Surprisingly, for the above reason, alternative education programs report having proportionately fewer disciplinary problems than traditional schools, even though the student body would suggest otherwise.

Some writers have criticized programs that do not offer problem students the benefit of individual attention and flexible curriculums, before they commit discipline infractions (Leone and Drakeford, 1999). One of the major criticism about “discipline” alternative education programs is that the child is not given a choice in his assignment, which gives the impression that the child’s presence is strictly disciplinary (Gregg, 1999). A study about the choices that parents make in alternative schools

revealed that parents of early grade level children prefer more traditional settings for their children. Whereas, parents of high school age children were more apt to choose schools with specialized programming. Krovetz (1999) and Leone (1999) state that alternative schools should not be used as a “last chance” or punitive measure in response to behavior problems. Instead, the programs should be “a proactive response to the needs of children and families for whom existing school structures are a bad fit.” Newmann (1981), who conducted a study about whether the lack of school choice contributes to alienation, concurs with alternative education literature that endorses more choice in school settings for at risk students. He states that student alienation is shown to be reduced significantly “if students and their parents voluntarily develop and attend schools whose educational purposes they share.”

Discipline and Reform -- a Delicate Balance. There has been some disagreement about the objectives that alternative schools embody related to punishment. Specifically, educators have struggled with finding a balance between the aspects of programs that are supposed to be penal, while at the same time addressing the need to be reformative. Alternative schools must be designed to educate students and prepare them to be successful at their regular campus; however, the purpose of

many public school alternative education programs is to correct misbehavior. Soleil Gregg (1999) and Mary Raywid (1994) list three categories in defining the discipline philosophies of alternative schools. Type 1 schools offer full instructional programs for graduation; they have a personalized whole-student approach to instruction, and they have small classes. Examples of Type 1 programs include magnet schools and charter schools. Type 2 schools are distinguished from the first by their approach to discipline. Those programs are segregated, students are compelled to attend, and only a few basic subjects are offered. Examples include last-chance schools and in-school suspension. Type 3 schools provide short-term services, and the emphasis is on therapeutic experiences to develop social and emotional skills. The schools also offer counseling, access to social services, and academic remediation. The three categories above have some overlap, and some schools have characteristics that cross between the categories. For example, all three types of schools may offer counseling. Conceptualizing alternative education programs in the categories listed by Gregg and Raywid provides a great deal of insight into the choices that educators and policy-makers ponder when developing policies to focus on discipline and academics.

A couple of authors have proposed approaches to combining curriculum and discipline issues that strike a good balance between the competing concerns. Linda Metcalf (1999) suggests a “solutions approach” to solving discipline problems, whereby instead of looking at the deficits that children manifest, attention is focused on their strengths. For example, she tells the story of student who received a failing grade in a class because of a poor final, and as a result, he was disqualified from athletics. There was a big game scheduled, and the teacher, who had noticed the student’s excellent attendance and admirable work ethic, gave the boy a passing grade in the class so he could play in the big game. The solution focused approach also uses a great deal of strategic problem-solving, motivation, and positive reinforcement.

DeVore and Genticore (1999) conducted a study of alternative education programs that employed a model for discipline called Balanced and Restorative Justice (BARJ). The model is based on the principle that alternative programs have the potential to make students into better citizens in their community by focusing on three objectives: (1) community safety, (2) accountability, and (3) competency development. The purpose of the BARJ approach is to help students understand that

when an individual commits an offense, they have an obligation to the person injured as well as to the community.

The model is based on drawing a relationship between each of the three objectives listed above (community safety, accountability, and competency development), and each one is listed at respective corners of a triangle. In the model,

- Community refers to the right that citizens have to live in harmony and safety.
- Accountability refers to the student's willingness to take responsible for the harm caused to victims and the community as a result of his behavior.
- Competency refers to the capacity for students to accomplish a task well, that others in the community will value.

One of the BARJ programs studied by DeVore and Genticore was a juvenile detention center. The school used the BARJ approach to develop the capacity in children to have genuine concern about their community, and to understand how their actions (delinquent conduct, criminal activity, etc.) are contrary to their community's well being. The school used an extended curriculum that included courses about altruism, ethics, law, life skills and career development. Character issues

such as loyalty, honesty, and integrity are highlighted throughout the lessons and modeled by faculty.

The model also helps children understand that even if they deserve to be punished for their misdeeds, they still deserve to be treated with dignity. The BARJ model holds students accountable for their behavior, enables them to make amends to the victims and community, and provides them with the values and skills to be good citizens.

(Bazemore and Umbreit, 1998, cited by DeVore, 1999). The BARJ model is one that represents a different paradigm and an alternative philosophy for administering discipline. The concept of restorative justice strikes a perfect balance between the vital, competing objectives and goals driving DAEP policies. Moreover, the theories underlying restorative justice -- accountability, competency, and community -- are important goals for alternative education programs to consider in setting priorities.

The benefits of connecting youth to their communities is discussed by Sharon Merrill (1999) in her report about a small urban community concerned with deterioration and escalating juvenile delinquent conduct. The community formed a task force that began to conduct research about the need for community involvement in the area, and also make contact with the youth in the community who were

persistently misbehaving. The group then connected the kids who were misbehaving with the community needs. As a result, the community built new parks and received grants to address other needs expressed by youth. They also developed character building and self-esteem activities for the youth. Task force members communicated with teachers regularly about the students involved, making students more accountable for their academics and behavior. Over 95% of the students involved in the project passed their courses. Eventually the committee introduced an incentive program where students also participated in special programs and activities organized by the task force. The project was so successful that a university in the community partnered with the task force to do consulting, research and program evaluations.

Conclusion

This review of the literature provides a historical account of how alternative education programs have grown to become an integral part of our public education system. The review includes observations about political and social forces influencing the alternative school movement and increasing the number of alternative school programs. With the

adoption of federal laws related to special education students, educators have been compelled to accept the responsibility of educating students whose needs cannot be satisfied in traditional school settings.

Educators initially responded to the requirements imposed by special education laws by creating programs to serve the needs of handicapped students, separate and apart from regular schools. In more recent years, however, the alternative school concept has also been utilized to address the needs of students considered at risk, or on the verge of dropping out, and also to provide educational services to students removed from their regular campus because of disciplinary infractions.

In addition to examining the early development of the alternative schools movement in the United States. This review highlights the research and academic theories related to effective alternative education practices and policies, and examines the characteristics of good quality, effective alternative schools that have been identified in literature. The literature has been grouped into categories and subcategories for the sake of clarity, and for the purpose of conceptualizing, as a whole, the body of literature relevant to alternative education programs.

Among other characteristics, the salient features that undergird effective alternative education programs are small class sizes,

specialized curriculums, and dedicated teachers and staff. The relevant literature also underscores the fact that alternative schools designed for students with discipline problems must undertake to address the special needs of students who no longer believe that school has any relevance to their lives. Educators need to develop methods to change the educational values of students having personal discipline problems, to help them develop productive relationships with adult figures who model the values being taught, and to help them successfully make the transition from the alternative schools to their regular campus.

Educators and policy makers have yet to agree on whether the primary objectives of discipline alternative programs should be punitive, or to provide educational opportunities. Scholars are universally critical of discipline programs that emphasize punishment and reform at the expense of academics. There is no easy answer to the dilemma, and the issue is made more complicated because statistics clearly demonstrate that special education and minority students are referred to alternative education schools in disproportionate numbers. Although the reasons for the referrals are uncertain, scholars agree that students from disadvantaged backgrounds should have the opportunity to attend

schools where the likelihood of achievement is equal to that experienced by their more advantaged classmates.

As indicated in the review of literature and confirmed by the findings and conclusions from this research, one of the most important characteristic of effective alternative education programs is choice -- the opportunity for parents and students to choose the educational program that best serves their need. Special education programs and those designed for at risk students provide students a choice in attending the program where they have the best possibility of succeeding. Unlike policies concerning special education students, school districts are not required to address the special needs of students who are continuously disruptive or to determine whether the regular school is failing to meet their needs. As indicated throughout this research, this writer is suggesting that educators recognize that some students are incapable of being successful in traditional, mainstream school setting; the reasons are beyond their control. Unfortunately, the policies driving discipline alternative education programs require failure as a prerequisite for attendance. These policies demonstrate that educators and policy makers have failed in their commitment to educate "all children," or at least those with discipline problems.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the research design and methodology for the study were described, as well as the manner in which the research for this study was conducted. Commentary on the theoretical framework that undergirds the study was also included in this chapter.

Introduction

The prevailing question driving this study was whether children who spend significant periods of time in DAEP schools are affected differently by their educational experience than the general population of students, who spend little or no time in the schools. It is important to understand that students are referred to DAEP programs for a specific number of days. These are not in school suspension programs, where students are referred for portions of a day, but dedicated facilities with their own staff, administration, and infrastructure. The purpose of this research project was to provide information about the characteristics of students who spend large numbers of days in the facilities, and to

determine how they are impacted by their tenure. The guiding research questions were:

1. What are the academic characteristics of high school students with multiple long-term DAEP referrals?
2. What are the cultural and social characteristics of high school students with multiple long-term DAEP referrals?
3. What are the academic impacts of DAEP programs on high school students with multiple long-term DAEP referrals?
4. What are the social impacts of DAEP programs on high school students with multiple long-term DAEP referrals?
5. What are the environmental characteristics of DAEP programs that most notably impact multiple long-term referrals?

There was no distinction between whether the students are referred to the DAEP one time for 30 days, or referred six times for five days each time. Although some differences between these students may be disclosed, there were no presumptions made.

Presumptions and Foundations

There are no theories driving this research about whether there is actually a distinguishable impact(s) on students in the DAEP schools for large numbers of days, nor whether the impact is desirable or undesirable. However, this research was guided by the assumption that students who are assigned to DAEP facilities for greater numbers of days will be affected more than students who spend less time in the facilities. In other words, if there are distinguishable impacts, then students who spend more time at the facilities are more likely to display effects of the impacts.

This research focuses on the students who are assigned to DAEP programs for large numbers of days during a single academic year or across years, because those students have a significantly different public school experience than students who spend the entire year in conventional schools. Also, one of the issues that policy makers and scholars all struggle with is whether DAEP schools should be held responsible for students who are only at the facility for very few days out of the school year. There is little impact on a child who is assigned to a DAEP for one or two days during an academic year; however, there is

probably a great deal of impact on a student who is assigned to a DAEP for 30 days, 60 days, or even a whole semester. Chapter 37 does not include any criteria about the length of time students should be referred to a DAEP, only whether or not a referral is mandatory or discretionary.

Currently, the state of Texas is developing an evaluation system for DAEP programs. Some of the criteria include test scores and recidivism. Chapter 37 even requires that the evaluation criteria include student performance on assessment instruments required by the Texas Education Code. One of the key issues that the evaluation system developers are struggling with is how many days must a student be assigned to a DAEP school before the school is held responsible for the students poor performance or persistent misbehavior. Similarly, administrators struggle with the issue of degree of responsibility. In other words, the DAEP school that has a poor performing student for five days should not be as responsible as a DAEP facility that has a poor performing student for 30 days.

Research Design

Qualitative research has been affirmed as an effective method for understanding the experiences that people live through, and for collecting reliable data that chronicles those experiences. Qualitative research and inquiry provides a source of data based on the perceptions and feelings of participants as they live through experiences, and the data are collected as participants speak for themselves about the experiences (Sherman and Webb, 1988). Marshall and Rossman (1989) state that one cannot understand human behavior without also understanding the framework within which participants interpret their thoughts, feelings and actions.

Most of the research about alternative education programs has been quantitative, and while quantitative research is valuable, suggestions have been made that qualitative research is necessary to augment the quantitative research (Kallio & Sanders, 1999). This study relied on qualitative data collected through field observations, document collection, and interviews. Data were collected during approximately four visits to the school over a period of four months, from October 2000 through January 2001. Qualitative designs allowed the researcher to

work very close to the data that were collected, and thereby more actively experience the richness of the data (Filstead, 1970). Bogden and Bilken (1982) listed five characteristics of qualitative research lending to the effectiveness of the research method.

1. Qualitative research has the natural setting as the direct source of data and the researcher is the key instrument.
2. Qualitative research is descriptive. The data collected are in the form of pictures, stories, feelings and words, instead of numbers and calculations.
3. Qualitative researchers are not simply concerned with the outcome of research; they are also concerned about the process for collecting data.
4. Qualitative researchers analyze data inductively, more so than deductively.
5. Qualitative researchers are interested in participants' perceptions, the processes by which participants shape their own reality, and the variables that influence those processes. Meaning is of essential concern.

The specific design of this research is a single case study, conducted in a primarily suburban school district in Central Texas, with a

population of approximately 32,000 students. The purpose of this research is to describe accurately the impact of DAEP programs on long-term multiple referrals arising from state legislation related to discipline management. The particular questions driving this study are suited for research through the case study method. The case study has been affirmed as an effective method for conducting research, especially when the researcher desires to understand complex social and cultural issues and phenomena (Yin, 1989). The case study is particularly beneficial for studying people in the context of their experiences. The case study also lays the framework for future research because the researcher is constantly expanding his knowledge through lessons learned from the experiences, stories and lives of participants.

The benefits of the case study method also characterize the shortcomings of the design. The conclusions from case studies carry the risk of oversimplifying phenomena or unrealistically exaggerating issues. In addition, qualitative research in general, and case studies in particular are limited by the sensitivity of the researcher. The reliability of data is determined by the researcher's ability to remain as objective as possible, as well as be accountable and compensate for his or her biases and presumptions affecting the research process. Because the researcher is

the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, the quality of the data are dependent on how effective the researcher is in conducting interviews, making observations, and reviewing documents.

In addition to qualitative methodology, the design principles driving this research are also characteristic of a descriptive study. McMillan and Schumacher (1989) state that descriptive research does not seek to explain relationships, test hypotheses, make predictions, determine meaning, or manipulate variables. This approach is useful in the systematic description of facts and characteristics in a given area of interest.

Research Sites

The district selected for this study is located in central Texas, and it is one of 63 districts in the state classified by the Texas Education Agency as a primarily suburban district. The district has a student population of approximately 32,000, and it is one of 22 districts in the state identified by the Texas Education Agency as having a student population between 25,000 and 49,999, which is the second largest category of district sizes

for the state of Texas. The district is also rated “recognized” according to the state’s accountability system.

The district was selected because it is one of only six school districts in the state of Texas that have all three characteristics mentioned above:

- being recognized,
- having a large student population, and
- being classified as predominantly suburban.

The suburban district selected is recognized for the quality of its schools and for reflecting high levels of student achievement. The school district is also in a state of transition that adds particular relevance to the research. The suburban city has been growing rapidly for the past three years, and the rate is not expected to slow down. Many residents have moved to the suburbs for amenities like quieter neighborhoods and better schools.

The district has 41 schools, including one alternative school campus, four high schools, nine middle schools, and 27 elementary schools. The alternative school under study had an enrollment of approximately 113 students at the time this research was conducted. In the previous year, 1999/2000, the alternative school enrollment ranged

from 22 students to 119 students, and the total number of different students enrolled in the previous school year was 512. The research for this study was conducted during a period when the alternative school has its highest enrollment. The grade level of students at the school includes approximately 47% middle school students and 53% high school students.

The demographics of students by gender enrolled in the alternative school at the time of this research were 74% males and 26% females. In contrast, the district demographics comprised a majority of females. By race, the demographics of students enrolled in the DAEP were 58% White, 26% Hispanic, 15% African American, 1% Asian, and 0% Native American. In contrast, the district demographics reflected 67% White, 18% Hispanic, 8% African American, 7% Asian, and .3% Native American.

There are 40 employees on the faculty at the alternative school, including 21 teachers, three administrators, six instructional support persons, three office staff, and three auxiliary employees. The demographics of the staff by race are 71% White, 13% African American, 13% Hispanic, and 3% Asian. In contrast, the district demographics reflected 90% White, 7% Hispanic, 2% African American, and 1% other.

During the two years preceding this study, from the 1998/99 school year to the 2000/01 school year, the district selected for this study has grown from a population of 28,400 students to 31,500. The issues surrounding the increased population are made more complicated because the demographics of the district are also changing rapidly. In 1998/99, the district was comprised of 71% White students, and in 2000/01 it was 67% White students. Likewise, the district was 7% African American in 1998/99 and 8% African American in 2000/01 and 16% Hispanic in 1998/99 and 18% Hispanic in 2000/01. The percentage of economically disadvantaged students in the district in 1998/99 was 15%, and it was reduced to 13% in 2000/01. However the percentage of Limited English Proficient students in 1998/99 was 3%, but the number increased to 4.5% in 2000/01.

There are considerably more African American and Hispanic families in the district, and for the first time there is even a measurable number of students whose primary language is not English. Since the suburban district draws students from the same population as their urban neighbor, they may eventually have similar characteristics as the larger urban district on its borders. Perhaps this research will help inform

the suburban district and their urban neighbor about how to address the needs of students in their DAEP facilities.

Data Collection

Interviews

The interview was the primary process of collecting qualitative data for this study. Literature reviewed provided information and insight about the benefits of interviews and interviewing techniques (Spradley, 1979). The interview technique was particularly beneficial because the process was used to collect descriptive data in the words of the students impacted by the DAEP schools, as well as teachers, counselors and principals. The interviews added validity to the observations (Bogdan and Biklen, 1991).

The interviews conducted took the form of friendly conversations (Spradley, 1979). The conversations were structured, however, and questions were prepared prior to the interview to give direction to the conversation. Conscious efforts were made to establish a comfortable line of communication with each subject interviewed, and the participants were informed about the purpose of the study and assured that the data

collected would remain confidential. Dispensing with formalities was especially important when interviewing students. This researcher was particularly interested in children with long-term multiple referrals, who had enough exposure with the DAEP to describe the environment and culture fluently, and were able to make distinctions and comparisons to their own campus.

Observations

Observations were an effective method of collecting data for this study, and provided a rich description of the DAEP facilities (Yin, 1989). Observations were made of classrooms, lunchrooms, common areas, the school office, and in other locations and settings throughout each school. The observations were conducted randomly, with some scheduled and some unscheduled. Literature indicates that observations are most effective as a research tool when they serve a formulated research purpose, they are planned deliberately, and they're recorded systematically (Kidder, 1981). Prior to making observations of students, the researcher identified students who were first-time enrollees and students who were known to have been in DAEP facilities previously, or who were there for long periods. One thing the researcher tried to

observe was whether there were any differences in their behavior. Close attention was also given to interactions among students and between students and faculty. Field notes were made during the observations, then coded shortly afterwards and analyzed.

Observations and field notes were important, but were not the primary technique of data collection. The reason observations and field notes were of limited value, is because observations did not tend to reveal a great deal about the students assigned to DAEP programs, the reasons they were at the facility, or the impact caused by their tenure. Although extremely valuable as a general research tool, literature has suggested that observations should be subject to checks for validity and reliability (Kidder, 1981). As one author (Patton, 1990) has stated,

We cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions. We cannot observe behaviors that took place at some previous point in time. We cannot observe situations that preclude the presence of an observer. We cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meaning they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about those things. (p. 196)

Participant Selection

Interviews were conducted with the principal, counselor, teachers, and students in the school. Over 20 teachers and staff were interviewed

from the alternative school, including the principal and a vice principal, the counselor, the special education teacher, one auxiliary staff member, and approximately 15 teachers. Employees were interviewed who had been in the facility for a minimum of two years and most of them had been at the alternative school for more than six years. One of the characteristics this researcher desired in teachers and administrators from the alternative school was a deep understanding about the DAEP environment.

Interviews were also conducted with approximately 20 students enrolled at the alternative school. To the extent possible, an equal number of students were interviewed who were in their first referral to the alternative school and who had been referred two or more times – 11 students were interviewed who had been referred on multiple occasions, and 9 students were interviewed who were serving first-time referrals at the alternative school. The benefit of interviewing students in these two different categories was to learn about the differences between students who have only been referred to the alternative school for short periods or one time, and those who have been referred for long periods and/or on more than one occasion.

Within the group of first-time referrals, the researcher endeavored to interview students with a minimum of 4 days and as many as 45 days enrollment. The purpose of selecting students with at least a 4 to 6 days tenure was to get the point of view of students who were still able to reflect on the beginning of their tenure, but who were over the shock associated with being new. By studying a group of first-time referrals with short tenures (4 to 6 days) and another group with long tenures (25 to 45 days), the researcher had the capacity to learn about the socialization process experienced by students as they spend more time in the school. Data were collected from students enrolled for small amounts of time and large amounts, then comparisons were made to see if any measurable differences emerged related to the length of a student's experience.

Within the group of multiple referrals (those students who had been referred to the alternative school on two or more occasions) attention was given to interviewing students who had different numbers of referrals. Some multiple referral students interviewed had only been referred to the alternative school 2 times, and others had been referred as many as 6 times. The motivation for giving attention to the number of times students were referred was to learn about the impact the

alternative school may have on a students referred on a small number occasions, and how it is different from those referred on many occasions.

A vice principal, three teachers, and one counselor were also interviewed from the sending school with the highest number of students enrolled at the alternative school. The objective of those interviews was to learn about any manifestations and impacts that professionals from the sending schools observed. The scope of the interviews from teachers and staff at the sending schools was relatively narrow.

Document Analysis

In addition to the interviews and observations, numerous documents were reviewed about the school. The documents that were reviewed included the following: records about the credentials of teachers and staff, grade books, enrollment statistics, student class schedules, lesson plans, student data about academic performance, demographic data maintained at the district and from PIEMS data at the Texas Education Agency, district and campus mission statements, handbooks, discipline procedures, correspondence, referrals,

attendance policies, and other materials that reflected environmental characteristics of the programs.

Documents reviewed provided additional information about the policies and procedures discussed with employees, and added validity to data collected from interviews and observations. This stage of design has been identified as an important part of the process of collecting data (Yin, 1989). One particular benefit of document analysis was that the data could be utilized by the researcher at different stages of the research, depending on the lessons from data collected through other methods. (Finnegan, 1994). The methodology was particularly effective for collecting additional data and gaining insight about discoveries made or questions developed during on-site observations and interviews.

Trustworthiness and Credibility of Design and Data

This research design provides for validity and reliability through triangulation (Patton, 1980), which was included by virtue of using multiple sources of data and multiple data collection procedures. The qualitative data were deemed trustworthy through triangulation because this collection process involved several sources: observation, interviews,

and document analysis. Each method of data collection served to add validity to the other. The researcher also used prolonged engagement to add trustworthiness to the study. In fact, the researcher assumed volunteer responsibilities in the DAEP facilities to deliberately provide opportunities for prolonged engagement, namely volunteering to serve on the school's site-based decision-making committee and tutor students. Extensive periods of time were also spent at the site outside of the volunteer roles mentioned above.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe credibility as the process of demonstrating that the inquiry was conducted in such a manner as to ensure the subject was accurately identified and described. Peer reviews and debriefings were also used to provide trustworthiness to this study. Findings and conclusions were reviewed with teachers and administrators at the school studied, and with faculty members at the University of Texas in Austin. This process assured that the research represented the participants accurately, and provided additional trustworthiness by member checking. As an additional form of triangulation, the researcher also made the entire research protocol and process available for external auditing by certain experts, including administrators from the Texas Education Agency

Data Analysis

An audiocassette recorder was used to preserve the interviews conducted. The taped recordings were then transcribed and coded. Open coding was used in the data analysis process for the interviews (Strauss and Corbin, 1990), which entailed first examining the transcripts and identifying general themes present. The general themes were identified and labeled, after which the data were analyzed more thoroughly for the identification and conceptualization of any secondary themes.

The field notes prepared from observations were analyzed soon after being prepared by the use of codes and secondary coding, the same as was used for analyzing interview transcripts.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that data analysis should begin when the very first data are collected, which facilitates the development of a structure for further collection of data. The documents collected were reviewed immediately following each site visit, and field notes collected were also reviewed and summarized. This process was beneficial because it provided direction for the interviews conducted, and allowed for immediate assessments about the quality of the data being collected,

so as to determine whether additional research was necessary about particular issues.

Summary

The research design used for this study was based on qualitative methodologies using a single case study. After the researcher identified a DAEP facility for this case study, qualitative data were collected from the school through observations, interviews, and discussions with administrators, teachers, and students. Documents were also collected, including student data, handbooks, policies, schedules, and discipline records. The data were used to learn about the manner in which environmental and cultural characteristics in the selected school impacted long-term multiple referrals, and to learn about the impact of DAEP schools directly from the students impacted.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND ANALYSES

At the time this research was conducted in the spring of 2001, the alternative school under study had an enrollment of approximately 113 students, having started the school year with 18 students. In the previous year, 1999/2000, the alternative school enrollment ranged from 22 students to 119 students, and the total number of different students enrolled in the school was 512. The research for this study was conducted during a period when the alternative school had its highest enrollment. The grade level of students at the school included approximately 47% middle school students and 53% high school students. It is noteworthy that the alternative school had the lowest number of discipline referrals of all other high schools in the district for the two years preceding the time frame of this research.

The demographics of students enrolled in the alternative school at the time of this research by gender were 74% males and 26% females. In contrast, the district's demographics included a majority of females. By

race, the demographics of students enrolled in the DAEP were 58% White, 26% Hispanic, 15% African American, 1% Asian, and 0% Native American. In contrast, the district's demographics were 67% White, 18% Hispanic, 8% African American, 7% Asian, and .3% Native American. Statistically, there was a disproportionately high number of African American students (13% in the DAEP vs. 8% district wide) and Hispanic students (26% in the DAEP vs. 18% district wide) referred to the alternative school, and a disproportionately low number of White students (58% in the DAEP vs. 67% district wide) referred.

In addition to the above statistics, findings from data also revealed that the disproportionate ratios had increased from previous years. In the year preceding this research, the racial demographic included only 13% African Americans, now up to 15%. Over 64% of the students enrolled in the school were referred for "disruptive behavior," which included arguing/fighting, insubordination and misconduct in classrooms, 14% of the students were referred for drug related offenses, and 5% were referred for assaults.

There were 40 employees on the faculty at the alternative school, including 21 teachers, three administrators, six instructional support persons, three office staff, and three auxiliary employees. Interestingly,

the staff only included one counselor and one social worker. The demographics of the staff by gender were 60% female and 40% males. The demographics of the staff by race were 71% White, 13% African American, 13% Hispanic, and 3% Asian. In contrast, the district's demographics were 90% White, 7% Hispanic, 2% African American, and 1% other. The alternative school had a disproportionately high number of Hispanic staff (13% in the DAEP vs. 7% district wide), and in particular African American staff (13% in the DAEP vs. 2% district wide). The school had a disproportionately low number of White staff (71% in the DAEP vs. 90% district wide).

The chapter is divided into two sections, with the findings from data collected from faculty presented in section one, and the findings from data collected from students are presented in section two

Findings and Analysis of Data from Faculty: The Social, Cultural, and Academic Characteristics and Impacts

Teachers' perceptions about the social, cultural, and academic characteristics of the students referred to the alternative school on repeated occasions and long periods of time are reported in the first

section of this chapter. The faculty was cognizant of several differences in the characteristics among students, and they expressed in-depth opinions about how these differences were reflected in the students' behavior, and how they impacted students overall.

Characteristics

Socialization -- The First Time Experience. The faculty agreed that when students first arrived at the alternative school, they were withdrawn and did not communicate with many students or faculty. Most teachers described the socialization process between both teachers and students in terms of stages.

Well, the brand new students that we get are usually feeling pretty bad at the beginning. And I think also ashamed sometimes. The new ones that have never been here have had crying spells and find it very difficult to accept the fact that they're here. And some of them are already different or may be outcasts at their own school, so they're probably already feeling alienated, as it is, at their home campus. And when they get here they are feeling even more alienated.

Many teachers observed that new students have ideas and stereotypes about what it's like to be at the alternative school that are extremely exaggerated. They think it's like a prison, where you get beat up and raped in the bathrooms. Kids assigned to the alternative school for

the first time are said to have a period of adjustment that takes a minimum of three or four days. The faculty stated that there are usually walls that need to be broken down. Teachers observed that even students who are generally very outgoing, are quiet in the beginning. There was no difference between first timers in the middle school or high school. The first timers at all grade levels take a bit of time to figure out the rules and atmosphere.

The faculty believed the students had misguided impressions of the alternative school when arriving because of misinformation received that characterized the school as a military style, “boot camp” campus. After about two or three days, the students become more comfortable and begin opening up to others because they realize that the alternative school is not like the campus they imagined. As one teacher said, they realize the rumors of a prison are not true, and they start to make friends and figure out who they can hang out with while they are here -- and who they don't want to associate with.

Most teachers stated that the period required to begin breaking down walls between students was approximately two to five days. Some faculty stated that it takes ten to fifteen days for some students to begin conforming their behavior to the rules at the alternative school. Teachers

agreed that not all of the students coming to the alternative school for the first time were quiet. There were some who come to the school with a mission to prove who they are from the beginning. As one teacher described, they want to control situations; "Some of them are scared to death. Others of them approach it with a great deal of bravado. They act like--kind of tough man thing."

Many of the students at the alternative school knew each other from their regular campus. Sometimes the relationship was not close on the regular campus, but even very casual friends on a regular campus found a reason to bond at the alternative school. One teacher described conversations she heard:

I hear them talking about seeing each other in the office. That was their relationship. They would have been called down by the principal and that was the only way they knew one another. Typically they don't come in gangs as friends. But when they get here, it's very interesting. You would think they were best buddies.

Sometimes a group of students are caught in the same act and referred at the same time. For example, there was a large group of boys who were referred because they all were caught smoking marijuana together, and another group of students who were caught drinking together on a school trip. Teachers also observed that students would seem to deliberately commit infractions to be referred to the alternative

school because they know that a friend of theirs has been referred. The students sometimes greeted each other with remarks like, “I was waiting for you.” Also, it was common that when a student arrived at the alternative school, that the student’s boyfriend or girlfriend would be referred a few days later. Teachers also indicated that many of the students believed that once they are referred to the alternative school, it will be hard to keep from getting referred again.

Students who returned to the school repeatedly over long periods would frequently see another student from a previous referral. The teachers mentioned that many of the students had been coming back and forth to the school for years. There was a noticeable difference between first time and repeat referrals. One teacher described the differences as follows:

Let’s say they’re a junior, and they are not repeaters from middle school. They don’t know the ropes. They’re usually very quiet, and very reticent to interact, probably because in their minds they never thought they would be here. And they think they probably don’t belong here. Whereas when a student comes who is a repeater, it’s like they’re -- it’s old home week. They’re very comfortable.

The presence or absence of a group of friends was a significant factor in the type of experience students had during their tenure at the alternative school. Students reportedly had completely different

experiences from one referral to the next, depending on the social group at the campus. Many students had completely different personalities, depending on whether they had a support group of friends. One teacher described the experience of a homosexual student who was referred to the school on more than one occasion.

He came last year and this year. Last year when he came, he had a lot of girlfriends and so that helped him. That helped him fit in. This year when he got here, he didn't have that. And so what I noticed this year was a little -- he didn't care. He didn't try. He did all kinds of attention-getting stuff. He knew people, but he didn't have any friends, like the girls that he hung out with last year. None of them were here. So he didn't have anybody, you know. So he didn't have that bond with some of the girls he knew. So he didn't make it the second time.

One significant impact the alternative school has on repeat referrals is that they make friends with other students with whom they have things in common. Faculty members commented that some of the students at the alternative school were loners at their regular campus. But they developed relationships with other students at the alternative school that were more stable than those friendships from their regular campus. One teacher described the alternative school as a place where the kids had a common ground; instead of having one or two kids they can relate to, they had dozens. Students were sometimes observed to have both positive and negative impacts on their peers. One positive

impact is that the relationships help the self-esteem of some students. Some students come to the alternative school who are borderline suicidal. But as they develop more relationships, they develop more self-identity. As one teacher put it, their personality blossoms. One teacher described the influence that a student had on classmates when the student decided to improve himself and turned his life around.

One student that I had in the 7th and 8th grade influenced other students in a good way. He's a student that I've had for three years in a row. His first year here he was very outspoken and very much in the drug culture and the gang culture. He ended up here twice in one year. He was a leader in the classroom and he had decided to quit doing drugs and -- and help a lot of the other students who were younger who thought it was cool -- to see that it wasn't cool, that it was just stupid and it just messed you up. He decided he was going to change and he did change, and he affected the others by his outspokenness and his leadership. He affected others in a few of the lower grades -- 6th, 7th and 8th, and kind of encouraged them not to do the things that they were doing. You know, not to do the drugs or the marijuana or anything like that because he had quit smoking and had found that it was better for him. He didn't want anybody else to do it.

The negative result that teachers observed about the relationships between students is that they sometimes reinforce the wrong type of behavior. As the students spend time talking to friends about acts of misconduct, or sometimes even planning to do things together, the students become more accepting of their own deviant behavior. One teacher observed that when students arrived for the first time, they were

ashamed to talk openly about what they did to get referred to the alternative school. But the new students soon learned that there were twenty or thirty people who had been caught doing the same thing. The students tended to minimize the behavior. One teacher said that when new students described the reasons they got sent to the alternative school, the students with long tenures would offer them a “high five.” The behavior that the new student thought was undesirable because it resulted in a referral to the alternative school, was suddenly acceptable and even affirmed. Other teachers believe that the negative aspects of the socialization process spread to kids who would not have otherwise had problems. As one teacher stated:

I believe that when the students come to this school, that there's a negative impact on them. There's a great majority of the kids who use drugs here. There are kids who are in trouble with the law. And a lot of kids who come here as sixth graders, I think, just like people who enter the prisons, the students can actually become worse from being in a setting like this.

Other teachers observed that some students act like they are bad for the benefit of other students, but their work and actions demonstrate more positive values. The teachers noticed that some students would openly be critical about getting homework assignments and refuse to do

them. But the same students will get the best scores on the same work they refused to do.

The teachers frequently commented that one positive impact is the friendships that students formed at the alternative school. There are all different types of kids referred to the school, from honor students to gang members. Interestingly, the social opportunities at the alternative school also gave students the chance to get to know people they would never associate with on their regular campus. As one teacher described,

They get to be a little more accepting of groups across the realm than they do on their home campuses. When you have cheerleaders and gang members thrown together for the first time, it's kind of like the movie, *The Breakfast Club*. They find out that they definitely have some similarities, and that some of their fears and some of their apprehensions are not just their own, that they cut across both economic and social lines. So I think with a lot of the youngsters -- I see a great deal of empathy for other people. They begin to sort of put things together; they're not the only ones who necessarily feel a certain way.

The Development of Social Characteristics and Distinctions.

Distinguishable characteristics were identified in students who were only referred to the alternative school one time and those who were referred on repeated occasions. The staff all agreed that certain students who were referred in middle school would very likely be referred again and again, on repeated occasions for the remainder of their public school

tenure. As discussed in the following sections, there are a variety of reasons for the repeat referrals. This particular section of the chapter discusses findings about the characteristics of students at the alternative school, highlighting the differences between three categories.

The categories are divided on the basis of whether students are: (1) unlikely to ever receive another referral or come back because they prefer their regular campus to the alternative school (Type A); (2) likely to receive repeat referrals and be successful at the alternative school because they prefer the school to their regular school (Type B); or (3) likely to receive repeat referrals, but not be successful at all because they don't like the alternative school or their regular campus (Type C).

The first group can be characterized as having a "slip up." They made one mistake or got caught doing something they knew was wrong; they will likely never get another referral. The second group can be characterized as "slipping down." They are the students who have had trouble fitting in at school, and so they find the alternative school appealing. They will likely get a number of repeat referrals in the future, typically for fighting, using profanity, or disruptive behavior. They are not "bad kids," but they have a habit of making bad decisions. The third group is characterized as being on a "slippery slope." They are the students

who do not want to be at school, and have no respect for the staff at their regular campus or the alternative campus. They are typically referred for gang activity, or possession of weapons. In the future, they will likely commit an expellable offense while at the alternative school and be kicked out of school, altogether.

Type A students: Slipped up and never coming back. Some students assigned to the alternative school attach an extremely derogatory label to the punishment. As one teacher described, some kids are very angry to be at the alternative school. "I see them upset, and they can't wait to get out of here." They consider the alternative school to be a worse punishment than they ever imagined would be imposed on them, ever. One teacher described their socialization in terms of anger. She said that a lot of the anger about being at the alternative school remains for these students until they are released back to their regular campus. She said that she wished that more of the students would stay as angry as those in this category.

The kids in this category are typically at the school for tardies, repeated classroom disruptions, or repeated office referrals. They are not usually the students who are assigned for drug offenses or fights, unless it's because of an isolated incident. Several teachers mentioned, by way

of example, a group of cheerleaders who were assigned to the alternative school at the same time. Reportedly, a very large group of the cheerleaders were drinking during a school trip to another city. The students in this category usually are assigned alone, however, and keep to themselves during their assignment.

Students in this category do not generally become talkative, either in class or during lunch. They socialize and blend in, but one teacher remarked how they never form the bonds with students and teachers, as do other students (discussed in the following section about Type B students) who find the alternative school environment comfortable. The students really prefer their regular campus where they have friends, and they never really begin to act as though they belong at the alternative school. These students also prefer the freedom that they have at their regular campus, such as wearing their own clothes, and socializing more frequently during the school day. As one teacher said,

They are just waiting for the last day, so they can go back to their home campus, or just get out of here period. It's not always that they are going to feel more comfortable at their regular campus. It's just that they know this is not the place they are going to stay on a long-term basis. I guess, knowing that, they don't have much ownership as to what goes on here or the relationships with the other students.

In one sense, being referred to the school on just one occasion effectively prevents this category of students from receiving repeated referrals. Students in this category do not generally need to be at the alternative school for long before they begin to experience an impact. They know from the first day that this place is not for them. As one teacher stated, "The impact has been made the first day they walk in the door." Those students think, "I don't like it here. I can't wait to get back home. I will do whatever they tell me, as long as I can leave here." The relationships between teachers and students in this category do not develop much past academics.

Type B students: Slipped down and landed on her/his feet. There is a special category of students at the alternative school who have been referred to the school repeatedly since the time they were in middle school, until they were in high school. Many of the students in this category find the alternative school more comfortable than their regular campus. The students are said to feel like it is "OK" to be at the alternative school. As one teacher put it, "Those are the students that we know we will see again because they have already accepted the environment." When they are referred in subsequent years, they are glad to be attending the alternative school instead of their regular campus.

This category of students is the primary focus of this research; they are referred for long periods of time, on multiple occasions, over several grade levels. Unlike the category discussed immediately above, these students are pleased with their experience at the alternative school. They still want to be in school, but they have experienced difficulty or had to struggle at their regular campus. They no longer consider the alternative school to be punishment. When first referred, however, these students were also very angry about being at the school. However (to the disappointment of many teachers) the students in this category do not stay angry enough about their assignment to the alternative school for the experience to be an effective deterrent. By the time these student leave to return to their regular campus, they have learned to like the campus. Their tenure at the alternative school is likely the first time they have been happy in a school setting in a very long time.

The teachers commented that the alternative school helps the self-esteem of the students attending because they experience success in academics. A great deal of the social interaction between teachers and students at the alternative school is centered around academics. The interaction is not always occurring in the classroom, however. The

importance of academics is reinforced constantly, during all social encounters.

The students are glad when they get repeat referrals to the alternative school. Many of them are referred repeatedly between sixth and tenth grade, and the students find a support group at the alternative school they don't have on their regular campus. According to teachers, these students are likely to commit infractions, purposefully, to get referred to the alternative school because they prefer the school to their regular campus, or their friends have been referred to the alternative school. The teachers observed that these students develop a sort of ownership of the alternative school. They find a niche for themselves at this campus, and start to develop a sense of individuality that they do not have at their regular campus.

The children in this category epitomize an inherent conflict that results from the alternative school; one teacher described it as a "positive-negative." The positive aspect of this characteristic is that students find a home at the alternative school and begin to form an attachment to the school that they don't have at their regular campus. They begin to develop confidence in their learning ability, and experience success in their schoolwork. The negative impact of the effect is that the

students want to return to the alternative school environment. The teachers reported having a conflicting relationship with these students. When the students return, the teachers are glad to see them again. At the same time, however, the teachers are disappointed to see the students again.

The teachers' description of their relationships with these students resembles a mentoring relationship. When they return, the teachers greet them with the attitude that they will all make the best of the time the students spend at the alternative school. Teachers admit to treating them a little differently, by giving them more attention with academics. The teachers make a trade off with students in this group. As the students become more comfortable with the teachers, they tend to ignore the normal teacher-student protocol. The teachers overlook a lot of remarks and conduct that would get most students sent to the office at a regular campus. Teachers believe that some students are happy to return because they need the positive, emotional and academic growth they acquire at the alternative school. The growing process is not always smooth, but the faculty is willing to give them the extra attention and reinforcement they need.

Type C: Slippery Slope and Sad Outlook. There is another category of students that is characterized as being almost impossible to reach. As opposed to the students discussed immediately above, who like the alternative school because they feel at home there, these students don't like the alternative school any more than their regular campus. Their beginning relationships are similar to the category above. As the students are referred repeatedly, over time, however, the relationships deteriorate. The teachers stated that when the students in this category start getting referred in 10th grade, they don't do what anybody says. Students in this category don't typically get the same sort of latitude that "Type B" students get when they are referred repeatedly between 6th and 10th grade. Unlike the mentoring type of relationship that teachers have with "Type B" students, the relationship with this group is more disciplinary. As one teacher said, "We try very hard to be consistent and document to the point that the system takes care of it."

The students are not successful at their regular campus or at the alternative school. The students in this group keep coming back to the alternative school, even though they don't like the school, the reason being that they don't like their regular campus, either. The staff agreed that both "Type B" and "Type C" students would deliberately do things to

get referred to the alternative school. There was a rule, however, that if a student received a new referral within fifteen (15) days of returning to their regular campus, they were automatically put in Level Zero, a detention at the alternative school that was more punitive. The students understood the system well enough to wait the exact number of days before committing a subsequent infraction, so as to avoid an extended Level Zero assignment. Many students were reported to wait until the sixteenth day after they are sent back to their regular campus, then go to the principal and call her or him a profane name.

The students in this category take the attitude that they own the place and that none of the rules apply to them. They have a “tough guy” attitude, and they are slow to conform to the academic and social expectations. Many of the students never completely develop a sense of belonging at the alternative school. They tend to commit infractions that cause them to be expelled from the alternative school and sent to the County Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Program (JJAEP). One teacher was sympathetic in her description. She believed that the students in this category might see themselves as failures, so they misbehave as an excuse for avoiding academic responsibility.

Impacts

The findings confirm that the impact is mixed with positive and negative results. Generally, the most notable impact occurs with students who begin getting referrals in middle school and continue getting referrals through high school. The faculty was in agreement that the school does not have much of an impact on some of students who need a different educational setting, such as the “Type C” students discussed above. The faculty was doubtful that those students would ever be successful in school. Similarly, there was consensus that the school only has a minimum impact on the students who are successful on their regular campus, such as the “Type A” students discussed, previously. That group knows they do not want to be at the alternative school.

This study verifies that “Type B” and “Type C” students are both correctly classified as long-term multiple referrals. The findings of this study reveal unequivocally, however, that the group impacted the most by the school is “Type B.” They are the group of students who still want to be in school. They are the students who keep coming back to the alternative school because they like it better than their regular school. The impact of the school on “Type B” students while they were at the alternative center was generally good. While at the alternative school, the students received

good grades, developed good relations with the faculty, and they did not get into trouble. Unfortunately, the positive impacts identified did not transfer back to the students' regular campus.

In the section that follows, the characteristics of the alternative school that have the most notable social, cultural and academic impact on students are discussed separately. The first part of this section is a report about the characteristics attributed to the way that faculty and staff approach their responsibilities. The second part reports on findings about how structural components of the alternative school program impact students. Included in each discussion are findings about the impact that the particular characteristics have on students fitting the profile for this study.

Staff Driven Impacts -- Open Channels of Communication. The staff was consistently mindful of the benefits of promoting open channels of communication with students. One impact from the open line of communication is that students are more likely to share problems and issues with teachers instead of repressing the feelings. This provides the faculty and staff with particularly valuable opportunities to help the students. One teacher described how students frequently come to her after having an argument with another teacher in the school. "They say

that Mr. or Mrs. so-and-so really made me mad.” The teacher gets the student approaching her to think about things from that teacher’s point of view. For example, sometimes the teacher asks students to think about how they would react, as a teacher, if a student used profanity toward them -- like they had done to the teacher who made them angry. The teacher said most students are surprised to learn that it is actually against the law to “curse a person out,” and that they can get a ticket or get arrested.

One middle school English teacher developed a journal writing assignment as part of her normal curriculum that had a significant impact on her students. The assignment usually required students to write about a humorous or impersonal subject, but occasionally the students were assigned to write about their innermost thoughts and feelings for a project. The tool was an excellent way to develop writing fluency, but an even more important benefit came from the information that students shared in their journals. The journal assignments provided the staff with information to intervene and avert a number crisis. Several kids wrote about gang fights they were planning, or about friends whose safety or lives were in danger. The staff discovered kids who were being abused

from the journal assignments, and they discovered two kids who wrote about being on the verge of committing suicide.

Teachers described the open nature of the communication at the alternative school as helping students understand the consequences of their choices. Most of the students referred repeatedly to the alternative school began to realize that their problems were the result of choices they made. The teachers said that a significant amount of their time was spent helping students understand the difference between right and wrong. The teachers recognize that they can successfully teach students the difference between right and wrong, even if they cannot influence the choices they make. Teachers talk to the students openly about the dangers of doing drugs. One teacher extended an invitation for her students to bring someone to class who does drugs. She did so because she heard students talking about how they can smoke marijuana and still be successful. The teacher told her class to convince her it was possible. She said that if they knew somebody who smoked marijuana all the time and was successful, she would like to hear from them. Until then, the teacher told the class she did not believe it was possible. As of this writing, nobody has taken the teacher up on the invitation.

One primary reason students at the alternative school open up to teachers is because they can afford to be more relaxed about the boundaries. The communication was frequently described by faculty to be less formal than that which is typical between teachers and students. On some occasions, the boundaries were almost erased. As one teacher described,

I'm told everything. And sometimes I have to say there are some things that the teacher just doesn't want to know. The kids share about their drug use, about parents, and abuse and that type of stuff. They say everything. They tell me everything. Of course, I report it, if its illegal or whatever. And I tell the kids, "Are you telling me that because you know I'm going to report it?" And sometimes I think they are because they feel safe.

One teacher commented about how she allowed her class to actually "say a couple of dirty words" in class. She described one lesson where profanity was the main topic of a class discussion. The lesson was about censorship, so the teacher asked the class to interpret some of the language in popular rap music. The teacher instructed the class to bring music to school that had been labeled with parental warnings. (Parental consent forms were also executed.) She brought her CD player and after listening to some music, the class discussed the meaning of the songs -- who was speaking to whom, why certain words were used,

and in what context the song was written. The teacher explained that, as a result, the students attached meaning beyond the profanity.

Several teachers discussed how the level of communication at the alternative school provided them opportunities to encourage kids who may have never received encouragement on a traditional campus. Other teachers discussed how the level of communication at the alternative school had an impact on grades because the teachers felt more at liberty to question excuses students typically give for not doing work. There is more pressure from teachers to simply do the work, and the teachers are intolerant of excuses. As one teacher describes,

When many kids don't do work on a regular campus. A regular campus teacher assumes they didn't want to do it. They lost it, or whatever. Here, I'll say, "Couldn't you have done it on the bus this morning or while your were sitting in the cafeteria?" I try to give them some alternatives.

As another teacher described,

You can badger them. You can get after them. They don't take offense anymore, after they break down the walls. You're able to chew on students and to encourage them -- not just pick on them - - to encourage them to work. I don't know if they can do that at a normal school.

Another characteristic of the communication between teachers and students at the alternative school was tolerance. Teachers were not offended by remarks and public displays that might normally have

caused a teacher embarrassment or been offensive. For example, several students in the school staged a contest and made a banner for one of their favorite teachers who was known for being strict. The banner read: "Hater of the Year." The kids suffered no discipline for the banner. In fact, the teacher who received the banner considered it a term of endearment. The teacher is very proud of being the "number one hater," and apparently he is appreciated by students and staff.

Being tolerant included taking care not to misinterpret student conduct. The staff made a team effort to notice when a particular student was having a bad day. The staff frequently shared information with each other about how a particular student was feeling, and discussed whether a student's behavior might be as a result of personal problems. As one teacher described,

The dialogue between teachers and students provided a means to learn what students have been through and try to turn their life around. Whereas on a regular campus, they'd be lost in the shuffle, ... we have smaller numbers on a campus like this, so you can establish a rapport with the student and find out what the real problem is, to help him. The good thing about this campus is every one of the teachers tries to work with students to establish a rapport that makes a positive impact.

All the teachers agreed that it was important for the students to know that the teachers identified with them. The teachers talked about the

importance of bonding, and how important it is for the students to feel that there is someone whom they can trust. The teachers believe that kids recognize the teacher who, as one of them put it, “acts a fool.” They know the ones who talk a good game, but do not “perform” in the classroom. The teachers were in agreement that the students “know who cares,” and “they know who they can go to.”

Throughout their interviews, the alternative school teachers made it clear that they were not being critical of teachers and administrators on traditional campuses. The teachers spoke with empathy about the different circumstances that teachers on traditional campuses and alternative schools confront. They understand regular campuses have different priorities. The regular campus faculty is prohibited from openly discussing topics like drug use, premarital sex, crime, or suicide. They recognize classroom dynamics in traditional schools simply do not allow for the type of interaction that teachers have at alternative schools.

Staff Driven Impacts -- Educational Focus. The teachers were adamant about making sure that educational achievement was a priority at the alternative school. The teachers were well aware that students believed assignments at the alternative school were easier than at their regular campus. They disagreed. The teachers were all in agreement

about the school setting high standards for students. One teacher stated, “We have decided that this is high school. It’s an alternative school, yeah, but we ain’t watering down anything. We’re expecting you to give me high school quality work. And if you don’t give it to me, you don’t get the grade. You earn it or you don’t get it. And that attitude and the high expectations have really made a difference.” Faculty members were mindful about the need to balance high academic standards with the fact that the campus is supposed to be a disciplinary program. Although the teachers maintained both priorities, they uniformly placed high academics first.

The teachers all stated that the students thought the work was easier because they received a great deal more hands-on assistance with learning. The teachers all stated that they covered the same basic curriculum as at regular campuses. There were some occasions when teachers provided extra support for students who were not on grade level or who were struggling with the curriculum; however, there was nothing easier about the curriculum. The difference in success rates at the alternative school came because the classes typically had less than ten students, instead of thirty, like on regular campuses. The smaller classes allowed the teachers to provide direct instruction to the students. As many teachers described, they get to know the students on a personal

and individual basis, and they have the chance to go the extra mile for students and try different ways to help the students learn.

The students performed better because the instructional process, itself, involved opportunities for the students to practice what they learn, immediately after the concept is taught. The students were required to complete many worksheets and other exercises during class time, as part of the instructional process used by most teachers. The teachers noticed that in class the students would vocalize that they did not care about school, but the most vocal students would do the best job on an assignment. The teachers believed that students learned the value of education because their work usually improved.

The teachers invested considerable time teaching the value of education and making students comfortable with the educational system. The teachers felt they were sometimes more of a counselor than a teacher, and all of them agreed that they needed to be a combination of both. It was important to the teachers that their students build confidence in their academic abilities. One of the objectives of the Social Skills class was to teach the students to value education and recognize the benefits of college. The Social Skills teacher described one of her ongoing efforts as follows:

I had one kid who just left. He's a senior at McNeil. I've been trying so hard to get him to go to college. When he left the alternative school last time, I had him convinced to go to ACC. Every day I would ask, 'Rod, are you going to go to college? What did you decide?' I told him he will be wasting his talent if he doesn't go to college. When they tell me they want to get their G.E.D. I ask, 'Why? Why?' So I had a military guy come in from the Marines to explain that you can't be in the Marines if you've got a G.E.D. You can't join the Army if you've got a G.E.D. A lot of jobs you can't get because you have a G.E.D. They didn't know that.

Pride was one of the values that teachers constantly associated with academics. They thought it was essential that the students take pride in their accomplishments, especially the middle school students. The teachers believed that many students do not get this type of reinforcement. One teacher described their efforts at the alternative school as the difference between expecting a student "not to fail" and expecting them to "succeed." One middle school teacher developed a project for students to complete that involved a number for self-esteem building assignments. The objective of the project was for the students to produce a portfolio reflecting their character and accomplishments at the alternative school. The portfolio was then available for the students to show to their teachers on their regular campus or to their parents. The assignments in the portfolio included a personal statement from each student that was addressed to their teachers at their regular campus.

The statement was so the teachers on the regular campus would understand the students, and also to compel the students to look at themselves from the teachers' perspective. Completing the portfolio also required the students to get references or letters of recommendation from teachers at the alternative school. Many of the students were pleasantly surprised by the positive things teachers said about them.

To build pride and self esteem teachers contacted parents when a student showed promise or did outstanding work. The parents were typically reluctant about talking at first because they thought the teacher was calling with bad news. The benefit of the calls was that it encouraged parents to compliment their child on his schoolwork and to talk about her or his education. The benefits were seen in the positive attitude students displayed when they told their teacher their parents had talked to them about the call. The teachers believed there was value in the child and their parent having dialogue about the child's accomplishments. As one teacher described, when parents get calls like the one described and share it with a student, it helps to connect the parent, the child, and their school together.

One way teachers at the alternative school were able to encourage learning, which is not available to teachers at regular campuses, is by

penalizing students more severely for poor performance. The normal consequence for poor classroom performance is a bad grade. At the alternative school, however, the students would not only get a bad grade for not doing the assignment, they would also get sent to the office or be denied points toward their discharge. Most of the discipline referrals on students at the alternative school involved academics, such as failing to do an assignment or disrupting class. As one teacher stated, they can change values because the students are forced to do the work.

Not all of the findings about the academic impact of the alternative school were positive. There were teachers who believed that some of the students suffered academically when they returned to their regular campus. Some teachers believed that because the students at the alternative school came from so many different campuses, it was impossible to make sure that all of them would be at the same place as students on their regular campus. It was inevitable that some of the kids would be behind or lost when they returned to their regular campus. As one teacher described, some students were punished doubly.

A few teachers were pessimistic about the capacity of the alternative school to have an impact on students' educational values. They felt that if students did not like school, it was difficult to change their

sentiments unless there was a lot of reinforcement from the students' parents and home. One teacher believed that the majority of students who left the alternative school and were successful at their regular campus did so because they disliked the alternative school so much that they would do anything to avoid returning. The teachers observed that the chances of reaching students in middle school were better than in the high school. The positive impact the alternative school had on students in middle school did not last through high school. Most of the students referred repeatedly between the sixth and tenth grades did not graduate, and they rarely accumulated enough high school credits to move past being a freshman or sophomore. However many of them did obtain a GED or enroll in the school district's education program for young adults.

Staff Driven Impacts -- Team Membership and Role Players. There was also a major impact on students with multiple referrals as a result of the teamwork mentality shared between members of the faculty. The faculty members were proud of their camaraderie, and they all recognized the importance of communicating with each other about students. The faculty meetings included long discussions and comparisons about how individual teachers approached infractions, to make sure that the students received consistent consequences. As one teacher put it, they

all agreed upon how rules were interpreted and applied because they “butt heads together and think about the students.”

Many teachers discussed how the staff as a group is focused on helping students. As one teacher stated, “We talk a lot about the things we need to do to get so-and-so kid on the road. I think it’s the cohesiveness of people together caring.” As another teacher described, “It makes an impact for teachers to actually be a team, and to see these kids as people that can be helped. A lot of times, when we see a student struggling, we talk about it. You know, so-and-so is doing ‘this’ in my class. This is what I have done.” The teachers agreed that the kids knew about their efforts, and they knew the difference between adults who cared about them and those who did not. Teachers stated that they have formed special relationships with each other because of the small number of teachers in the school. The teachers all had individual and different personalities, and they used their personalities in different ways to affect the lives of students. The faculty was composed of individuals who fit perfectly into special roles, and they worked in harmony to have a positive impact on students.

Some of the faculty members recognized that they were perceived as strict, and they accepted the role as a necessary element of the

school. The strict teachers explained that they could not have been effective with the students at a regular campus using the same tactics, because they would not have had the opportunity to break down the walls of communication with the students. There was more than one teacher playing the role of strict disciplinarian. As discussed, there was a contest conducted among the students to choose the “Hater of the Year.” The teacher who won the contest was actually awarded with a banner during a celebration in his honor. The first runner up for “Hater of the Year” refused to acknowledge the winner of the contest, claiming that regardless of the results, he was still the “number one hater.”

Teachers commented how faculty members frequently butted heads with each other. The conflicts became heated, but even those disagreeing with each other believed their adversaries had the best interest of the children in mind. The teachers respected each other’s abilities. They all believed their colleagues were good at their jobs. Many of them commented proudly about the fact that the least tenured teacher on the campus had seven years experience.

Programmatic Driven Impacts – Security Measures. Certain aspects of the design of the alternative school are verified to impact students with long-term multiple referrals from the moment they walk

through the door. The school is required to exercise certain security measures. Several teachers observed that the metal detectors have an impact on students, socially and culturally. They observed that some students were not used to having to go single file, in a line to get to school. After passing the metal detector, the students were also required to empty their pockets of all objects. The school maintained strict rules about the items that students were allowed to carry with them to school. The teachers observed that many students were not accustomed to being searched, and when they were required to turn their pockets inside out for the first time, the experience was humbling. The teachers also agreed that the dress code (blue jean/pants and white shirt) acted to discourage students from being referred to the alternative school. The impact of not wearing clothes was particularly noticeable in “Type A” students (discussed earlier).

Program Driven Impacts – Small Student Ratio. The teachers in the alternative school were in agreement about the small teacher-student ratio having a great deal of influence on the student relationships. One impact of the student-teacher ratio was that it made for smaller class sizes. Teachers indicated they were better able to communicate with students because of the smaller class sizes. “You can talk to the

students,” one teacher explained. “You can encourage them.” The student-teacher relationships were described as less formal than the relationships at traditional campuses. One alternative school teacher explained that they “don’t worry much at the opportunity center about being called ‘Miss.’” She said that the students just “put it all together.”

Another impact of the small size that made discipline more effective was that the students and teachers got to know each other more intimately than on regular campuses. The teachers believed that when students were disciplined, the students sometimes tolerated the punishment better because they were still being treated like individuals, as opposed to the student feeling the discipline was because of a preconceived bias. As one teacher described, “they know that when the teacher is trying to direct them in the right direction, or trying to get them to learn, or trying to get them to follow rules, the students know that it is in their best interest.” The teachers also believed that the nature of student teacher relationships made for respect, even if students disagreed with a punishment. Similarly, teachers believed that the students learn to trust teachers who applied discipline consistently.

The student teacher ratio was reported by many teachers to have an academic impact as well as an impact on the social relationships

because of the small class sizes. The teachers explained that the reason students are able to do better work is because they have smaller numbers to educate. The teachers who compared their experiences at regular campuses and the alternative school indicated that the entire dynamic of a class changes when the numbers are small. Many teachers stated that in large classes, if the teacher is not focused on a part of the room where a disruption occurs, such as yelling or profanity, she may not know for certain which student did it. Or if a group is screaming or arguing in a large class, she may be able to reprimand the group, but she cannot effectively correct the individual's behavior that may be the most responsible. By contrast because there are so few students in classes at the alternative school, teachers have the opportunity to address behavior one-on-one. As one teacher described,

Like in a class of forty students, one of them can throw a spit ball. They can cuss. Or they can yell out. You don't know who did it in a very large class. The teacher may see it; she may not. But in a small class [like at the alternative school], you're not going to have all of that stuff. Nobody's going to be hitting you [with spit wads] or cussing you out – the teacher's going to know.

Teachers reported that they could maintain discipline in a small class, not only because of the ability to correct behavior, but also because of the opportunity to forge relationships that help avert undesirable

behavior. One teacher described how, with only eight students in her class, she can “develop a rapport” with the kids that goes beyond the discourse that occurs between teachers and students on a regular campus. “The classes are smaller,” one teacher described. “They (students) get to know their teachers, and [the teachers] recognize them as individuals, so they get a little bit more special attention than they do at their – on the bigger schools.” Several teachers mentioned that because the number of staff is about 15, as opposed to 60 at their regular campus, students become acquainted with all of the teachers at the alternative school, not just the five or six teachers in their classes. One teacher explained, “Again, I’m going back to the idea that this is a small campus. It’s like a small little town where everybody knows everybody. It doesn’t matter that he’s not in the same classroom. He might be in the hallway. He might be out on the basketball court, whatever.”

One very important impact of the small student-teacher ratio was described in terms of actual contact with students. One teacher stated that she actually gets a chance to make personal contact with each student, everyday, instead of only making contact with them once a week. Another teacher explained that students not only get to know the teachers socially, the teachers also “have time to go that extra mile and give

[students] that individualized attention that fosters a positive relationship with the teachers and students.” Teachers who had worked on traditional campuses discussed how important it was at the alternative school to know every student. Another teacher talked about the feelings of investment.

I think our teachers tend to take more ownership because we do have such smaller groups of kids. I think we’re more like an elementary school in that respect that our teachers tend to take more ownership, versus a large high school where the teacher may be seeing 150 kids a day. The regular campus teachers may be fantastic teachers, doing handsprings, but just the sheer volume of the students; they can’t take the time to get to know every single one of them. ... Because of that sense of ownership, I think the kids feel like they belong here and sometimes I think that is missing on a larger campus. You know, and again, I’m not dissin’ (disrespecting) the teachers or anything like that on the home campuses.

There were several examples of discourse and conversations that transpired during class at the alternative school that the teachers stated would never have occurred at a regular campus. One regular campus teacher confessed that with as many as 150 different students, it is impossible to remember the names of all of his students. One alternative school language arts teacher said that one day a student started talking aloud in class about a novel he wanted to write and planned to finish in his 20’s. He also talked about a famous writer, who started a novel when

he was eight years old and finished it in his 20's. The teacher describing the scene believed that if she had been on a traditional campus, she would never have learned about a very important source of motivation for this student. The student wrote a very, very good story, says his teacher.

The teachers believed that relationships built between teachers and students in the small school structure had pronounced impacts that potentially benefited the students beyond the alternative school. One teacher said,

We can build relationships. And these kids need to know how to do that with authority figures. Because there is such a mistrust with authority figures, even with parents, police officers, teachers. Here [they] learn to trust those figures. They learn that not all teachers are bad. Not all cops are bad.

Program Driven Impacts -- Level One. All students begin their tenure at the alternative center in a classroom setting called "Level One." The idea of Level One, as one teacher described, is to make the students disciplined and to teach them protocol and proper behavior. The students remained in the same room for the entire school day, except during lunch. There was a homeroom teacher assigned to Level One, and other teachers rotated through the class teaching different subjects. The Level One affected the socialization process at the school because the setting was extremely controlled. All students arriving spent their first five days in

Level One. There was no talking allowed, at all. The standard tenure was five days; however, all students had their behavior monitored by a point system. If the students did not commit behavior infractions, they accumulated points. When the students accumulated enough points, they were moved to regular classes. However, if they committed too many infractions, a student's tenure in Level One could be extended for additional five-day periods. The impact that Level One had on the socialization process was that it made forming relationships difficult. The reason being that the students only had a chance to make friends and talk while they were on the school bus or at lunch.

Program Driven Impacts -- Social Skills Class. A special class designed to build social skills was described as an important part of the program at the alternative school. This class was a required part of the curriculum beginning with Level One. The teacher for the class designed the curriculum to encourage students to think about the social effect of certain behavior.

The Social Skills teacher reported observing how students tended to brag about the conduct that got them referred to the alternative school. She knew that some of the kids bragging about drugs, for example, came from good families, and that they had not experimented with drugs as

much as they claimed. So she made it a practice to have students introduce themselves when they arrived; she allowed them the time to talk about the behavior and the reason they were referred to the school. As expected, some of the students boasted about their negative behaviors, and other class members encouraged the boasting. The teacher observed that the introductions allowed the students to get the need to boast out of their system. She believed students did not feel the need to continue to boast in the hallways after being given the limelight in class. More importantly, the teacher used the introductions to force students to analyze their misbehavior. The activity gave students the chance to think about why they did things like use profanity with a principal, when they knew it would get them into trouble.

Many students did not want to introduce themselves when they arrived. However, other students were encouraging and supportive. The socialization process in the school was influenced by the introductions because all of the students had to expose themselves. Some of the kids were referred to the school for having sex in the bathroom, and others had been advised by their attorney not to say anything to anybody about what they had done. As students were forced to analyze their classmates' introductions, some of them commented how their classmates'

decisions were not smart ones. At the same time, the students reflected on occasions when they made the same decision or mistake. The teacher believed the students benefited from the introductions by analyzing experiences from different perspectives.

The social skills class was also influential in the race relations. The teacher said that when she arrived, she observed that there was a lot of tension between the races. She said that the races all sat together on the same side of the class, and when the students were asked to get into circles, different races sat in different circles. She decided to develop a cultural awareness curriculum and conducted activities that helped the students to get to know each other. The class discussed a different culture every month, focusing on a significant historical event related to the culture. They would also discuss various contributions to society made by people from different cultures. The entire Social Skills curriculum was structured with activities that encouraged open discussions.

Program Driven Impact – Structure and Rules. Teachers stated that the emphasis on discipline and structure at the alternative school made the environment desirable for some students. The teachers believed that the students were more comfortable at the school because

of the rules they were required to follow, and the consistent manner in which the faculty imposed discipline. There were two distinct components of the structure impacting students with long-term multiple referrals: (1) the school's written rules and regulations, and (2) the structure imposed by teachers who enforced the rules and regulations. Both aspects of the school's structure were reported to have a positive impact on students because the structure guaranteed that the students had a very clear understanding about the expectations for her or him.

One element about the structure that impacted the students was the discipline rules. The school operated on a point system whereby the students were required to acquire a specific number of points prior to the end of their term. The students received a specific number of points for each day's attendance. If an infraction was committed the students lost points. The points were tallied on cards, which were issued to the students, then completed by faculty and returned to the administration. If a student did not acquire the required number of points, his tenure at the school could be extended. In addition to losing points and getting a tenure extended, students could also have their referral extended for committing subsequent infractions while at the alternative school. The school had rules against the same type of misconduct as is prohibited at

regular education campuses; however, there were also many other rules and disciplinary infractions that did not exist at regular campuses.

Teachers believed that some students with long-term repeated referrals preferred being at the alternative school because they liked the consistent application of rules. The teachers believed that although the students disliked the rules themselves, they liked the results of the rules because they knew what to expect every day when they came to school. The faculty worked deliberately and methodically to make sure that all of the rules were applied consistently and strategically. During staff meetings, a number of discussions centered on how rules were enforced. The teachers compared how they enforced rules with respect to specific students, to make sure that they were consistent. They also talked a lot about how certain rules were enforced throughout the year and generally among the students.

The teachers believed that the students felt safer in the alternative school because the consistent enforcement of rules eliminated many issues and sources of stress that they experienced at their regular campus. The teachers believed that students were not as affected by cliques because everybody in the school was very similarly situated. The teachers also believed that requiring all the students to wear a uniform

consisting of blue jeans and white t-shirts added to the sense of comfort that many of the students found appealing. They believed that by neutralizing the social issues associated with the kind of clothes students wore, the alternative school made for one less issue to compete with academics.

The teachers contributed to maintaining structure at the alternative school by consistently enforcing disciplinary rules and maintaining strict order within their classrooms. All of the teachers considered themselves to be strong disciplinarians, although there were differences in the way that the teachers described their styles of discipline. For example, some teachers indicated they did not believe it was necessary to be authoritative in order to be strict. They described themselves as strict, but also flexible. Some even mentioned that their colleagues might consider them relaxed with discipline. By contrast, some teachers indicated that their style involved initially being tough and setting the guidelines for what they expected. Some teachers indicated that they let students know unequivocally that they set the rules and controlled how the rules were enforced. As one teacher described,

When students come to my class, I tell them that this is not a democracy, this is a dictatorship and I am the dictator. That means you will do it my way and there are no options. We have no discussion about it. But now that would not be the attitude that I

would take if I were in a regular high school. We would have a democracy.

Although the teachers all recognized that they had different styles, all the comments about the differences were premised with expressions of appreciation for each other and made in the context of mutual respect.

The teachers also impacted students in the way they decided selectively to enforce certain rules. Many of the teachers commented that they were sometimes selective about who they disciplined. Occasionally, the faculty was aware of a student who was experiencing a lot of stress due to a personal problem, so they relaxed the rules for the student. Students who returned repeatedly were generally given more latitude, once they built enough trust and credibility with teachers. Interestingly, the teachers all indicated that they allowed students to use profanity and other language that is generally unacceptable, without consequence, depending on the circumstances. They stated that when a student showed himself to be especially obstinate and unruly, the rules were applied more strictly. The “Type C” student discussed in other parts of the study, those being the ones who are basically unreachable and don’t want to be reached, were required to comply more strictly with the rules.

The teachers indicated that they were more attentive than teachers on a regular campus in knowing when a comment from a student was malicious and deserving of discipline, or when the student was actually trying to say something meaningful. One teacher stated that many times students say something in the alternative center that might only be perceived as “noise coming from the back of the classroom,” if the same thing were said in a regular school. The teachers told many stories about remarks students made that were borderline disrespectful. But instead of reacting with discipline, the teachers pursued a dialogue with the student. (I was reminded constantly that the teachers did not mean their remarks on this subject to be a criticism of the teachers on regular campuses. All of the teachers were quick to inform me that they knew those teachers had more students and many more additional responsibilities than at the alternative school.)

Findings and Analysis of Data from Students

The first part of this section is a report of findings related to students assigned to the alternative school for the first time. This group is referred to as “first-time referrals.” The second part of the section is a

report of findings from data related to students who have been referred to the alternative school on more than one occasion. This group of students is referred to as “multiple referrals.” The benefit of presenting the data in these categories is to focus the study on the differences between students who have only been referred to the alternative school for short periods or one time, and those who have been referred for long period and/or on more than one occasion.

In the section that focuses on first-time referrals, no students who were in their first days at the alternative school were selected for the study. The students interviewed have tenures of a minimum of four days and as many as 45 days. The purpose of selecting students with at least a four to six days tenure was to get the point of view of students who could reflect on their first days, but who were not still in the beginning of their adjustment. Those students are still in the beginning of their tenure, but over the shock. In addition, the group of first-time referrals interviewed included a sample of students who have been at the school considerably longer, 25 to 45 days. By studying a group of first-time referrals with short tenures (4 to 6 days) and another group with long tenures (25 to 45 days), the researcher has the capacity to analyze the socialization process experienced by students as they spend more time in the school.

In the section of this chapter that focuses on the students with multiple referrals, the data were analyzed with attention to the number of different occasions the students have been referred to the alternative school. The motivation for giving attention to the number of different referrals is to learn about any impact the alternative school may have on students referred on repeated occasions, and how it is different from those referred on only one occasion. The information and data provided by the students give insight into the socialization process from the perspective of new students, as well as from the perspective of students who have extended tenures in the alternative school, and also from the perspective of students who have had repeated referrals to the school.

First-time referrals

Social, Educational and Cultural Characteristics and Impacts. The presentation of findings about first-time referrals is centered around the number of days the students had been attending the alternative school. The objective was to highlight information about the socialization process experienced by new students in the alternative school as they become acquainted with staff and other students. The data from these students were presented in two parts. The first part is a series of brief descriptions

about the background of the students interviewed. The biographies were designed to present a snapshot impression of each student. The biographies include discussions about the following characteristics of each student: (1) relationships with staff and other students (social and cultural characteristics); (2) degree of self esteem, including family influence and whether they consider themselves a good student (social and cultural characteristics); (3) educational values, including academic performance and whether school is important (academic characteristics); and (4) degree of impact on the above areas, if any, as a result of their tenure at the alternative school.

The biographies are followed by a more in-depth presentation of the particular data that were responsive to the research questions guiding this study. In the latter part of this section, (1) the students' peer relationships and then (2) their relationships with faculty were discussed. Both discussions include findings about how those relationships have impacted educational values of students with first-time referrals.

Student Biographies. The following backgrounds of first-time referrals were ordered according to the students with the fewest number of days in the alternative school to the ones with the most. Biographies

are included for all the students interviewed, except for one 7th grade student whose data was identical to another student's.

Leon A. Leon is an 11th grade student who has been at the alternative school for approximately four days. Leon was referred to the alternative school for pulling the fire alarm without reason. He says that he has had some problems at his regular campus because of the "clique" with whom he associated. He has been suspended three or four times for minor offenses. He says that his friends have gotten into trouble and been referred to the alternative school in the past. In fact, he was surprised to see one of his best friends in orientation. One of Leon's friends told him that he would be at the alternative school with Leon in a couple of days.

Leon likes only one of the teachers at the alternative school. He does not feel he can talk to the alternative school teachers like he can some of the teachers at his regular campus. Leon gets A's and B's in class. He likes all the teachers at his regular campus and has never gotten into any trouble in class; all his problems have had to do with things he did in the halls, during breaks or between classes. Leon believes that the principals at his regular campus have labeled him because of the other students with whom he associates. Leon does not

intend on coming back to the alternative school again, but he says he may get another referral if one of the teachers or principals at his regular campus starts to “mess with him” like they do his friends. He says that one teacher deliberately agitated one of his friends who returned from the alternative school, until his friend “snapped.” He also said that the principals seemed to pick on his friends who returned from the alternative school. The principals were always looking at them, telling them to get to class, walk straight, or get out of the hallway.

Leon considers himself a good student and a role model for his friends. He says there have been a number of occasions when his friends were about to have a fight with some other kids or do something wrong, but he talked them out of it by explaining that it was pointless, and they would “do nothing but get in trouble.” Leon knows that education is important and that it he “can’t do anything without it.” He even knows that the math he learns is beneficial to him. He says, “They wouldn’t be giving it to us if it wasn’t going to help us, somehow.”

Emmett R. Emmett is an 11th grade student who has been at the alternative school for approximately four days. He was referred to the alternative school because he received too many disciplinary office referrals; they were for persistent misbehavior and disrespect. He

recognized a lot of friends and acquaintances from his regular campus when he came to the alternative school. In fact, he thought most of the students in Level One were from his high school. Emmett knows that education is the key to life and it will get him ready for the “real world.”

Emmett gets A's, B's and C's in class. He considers himself a capable student, but admits that he does not always apply himself. He has gotten all A's at the alternative school because the work is much easier. Emmett says that he wants to “do his time” and get out of the alternative school. He says that the school has not had much of an impact on him, except that he has learned that when he gets back to his regular campus he needs to “just be quiet” sometimes. He gets along with the teachers from both campuses, but says he sometimes just gets mad and goes overboard. He recognizes that the reason he was referred to the alternative school is his own fault. He says that when he returns to his regular campus he will try to control what he says. He will not always try to get the last word when being reprimanded by a teacher. He will just “do his lessons and be quiet.” He says he is going to try to do everything in his power to stay away from this place.” Emmett concedes that the alternative school has some good qualities. Surprisingly, he says there are a lot of things about the alternative school that he likes, a lot.

Regardless of that, he repeatedly said (6 or 7 times) he “just doesn’t want to come back here.”

Donald L. Donald is in the 9th grade and he has been attended to the alternative school for approximately four days. He was originally referred to the school for being in possession of a knife while at school. He and a friend left campus without authorization, and when they returned, the principal noticed that they smelled like marijuana and searched them looking for drugs; that is when they found the knife. Donald says his grades are mostly borderline (C’s and D’s); he passes some classes but fails some, too. He says that he knows he can do better, but he does not do his assignments most of the time. He says he talks too much and he “is not at school a lot of the time.” Donald says he has come close to being referred to the alternative school in the past. He has been to juvenile court for skipping class and is currently on court supervision for skipping.

The alternative school is not like Donald thought it would be. He thought there would be more people trying to start fights and more violence. Surprisingly, there are more fights and more violence at his regular campus. He says that there are more “haters” on the regular campus. There are groups of students that “hate” other groups. For

example the “skaters” (kids who roller blade and ride skateboards) hate the “preps” (rich kids), and the “gangsters” (kids into drugs and jewelry) hate the “rednecks” (kids who like country music and race-car driving). Donald says, “It’s just if you hate someone at the regular campus, it lasts all year, and everybody hates everybody.” Donald says he likes some of the teachers at his regular campus because they make class fun and joke with the students; he dislikes others. He says he has not gotten to know the teachers at the alternative school.

Helen A. Helen is in the 8th grade and has been at the alternative school for approximately five days. Helen was referred to the alternative school for being in possession of drugs. She said the drug was a prescription drug called Zoloft; however, she received an alternative school referral because someone told the principal that she had cocaine and she was sniffing it with a friend. Her best friend is in Level One with her. Helen considers herself a good student. She has gotten all A’s and a couple of B’s, and she admits that she usually does not try her hardest. She is taking French and advanced science classes. Helen says that her mom encourages her to work harder and try to get all A’s, instead of settling for B’s. Helen thinks the work at the alternative school is a little too easy.

She wants to get back to her regular campus as soon as possible so she can associate with her old friends. Helen says she dislikes having to ride the bus for an hour going to and from school. As a result, she does not get home until after 5:00 p.m., and she has no time to spend with her friends. Helen says that being at the alternative school has made her appreciate school more and appreciate what teachers try to do for her. She also says it has made her appreciate her friends more.

Helen gets along with the teachers on both campuses, but she likes the teachers at her regular campus more than those at the alternative school because she thinks the regular campus teachers “care more.” She doesn’t think the alternative school is “that bad” a place because the students “leave you alone.” She says she likes not having to worry about things like whom she is seen with and fashion trends.

Reginald A. Reginald is a 9th grade student who has been assigned to the alternative school for six days. This is his first time at the alternative school in this district, but he has been in an alternative school in another district on about four occasions since the 6th grade. Reginald was referred to the alternative school for a theft occurring at school. He says that his past referrals were due to him losing his temper and doing

things like throwing objects at a teacher. Reginald is determined to stay out of trouble in this new district.

Reginald says he has avoided a lot of interaction with students at the alternative school because he just wants to stay on track and get back to his regular campus so he can “take care of business.” Reginald says this is the first time he has gotten into trouble since he started high school this year. (This interview was conducted in mid February.) He knows that in the past he got in trouble because of his own behavior. He believes he has matured a great deal, and he wants to be more responsible. Reginald’s dad lectures him about getting along with teachers and about his behavior, and one of the reasons he wants to improve his behavior is so his dad will allow him to go hunting and have more privileges.

Reginald also wants to make a career out of professional athletics, and he knows that he needs to complete high school for that to be possible. He says that college is not something he is thinking about, much because the kind of athletic career he wants does not require a college education. One of the ways Reginald has matured is that he now perceives himself as a role model. He realizes the middle school students at the alternative school consider some of the older kids as role

models; however, they are not the kind of role models he follows, or the type he wants to be. He said that one of the reasons he does not associate with kids at the alternative school is because they do not care what people think about them or have any pride. Reginald mentioned his little sister, and said that he wants to set a good example for her because he has seen what can happen to girls who get off on the wrong track and get pregnant or involved with drugs.

Luke H. Luke is a 10th grade student who has been at the alternative school for approximately six days. Luke was referred to the alternative school for being under the influence of marijuana. He has good relationships with teachers from his regular campus and the alternative school, but he thinks the teachers at the alternative school treat everyone like they are troublemakers. Luke says he has not been very social since coming to the alternative school because he just wants to get out of the alternative school. He says he hopes he never comes back.

Luke says he has always thought that school was important, but admits that he is a bit lazy sometimes. He says he might go to college, but he does not really know. One of the impacts that the alternative school has had on Luke is to make him aware of how serious the teachers and

principals are about education. Experiencing how the district reacted to his infraction and how serious they take education has made Luke understand just how important school is. He says that if the teachers and faculty at his regular campus had ignored the fact that he was under the influence of marijuana at school and looked the other way, he would have felt like they did not care about education. Luke says he has also been impacted by the behavior he has observed in other kids at the alternative school because of examples of bad behavior. He now understands why it is not a good idea to talk back to teachers, disrespectfully. He does not think the kids who do that are being “very smart.” Being at the alternative school has made him realize that he needs to shape up.

Carlos N. Carlos is a 10th grade student who has been at the alternative school for approximately 25 days. Carlos was referred to the alternative school for smoking marijuana. He says that he was just driving in the car where everybody else was smoking, but he was not actually smoking, himself --not this time. Carlos admits to smoking daily and indicates that he was rarely sober while at his regular campus. He thinks he learns better when he is high. He does not get high at the alternative school because he knows that the punishment will be severe

(juvenile detention center). He knows he needs to graduate from high school, but he has no plans for college—he plans to join the military.

Carlos says he feels much more comfortable with the teachers at the alternative school than with those on his regular campus. He likes that the alternative school teachers are willing to talk to the class about subjects that teachers on the regular campus will not talk about (sex, drugs, and choices). Although this is only his first time at the alternative school, Carlos feels like the teachers here care more about “meeting the needs” of their students. He mentioned a couple of times that he would have benefited from substance abuse counseling, but the faculty at his regular campus never took the time to give him information about counseling or group meetings that he knew were available. Carlos believes the teachers at the alternative school have had a tremendous impact on him. He says they have helped him understand how bad things can get if he does not start to change. Carlos says he even likes the uniforms and rules at the alternative school because they help him learn about responsibility. He gave a lot of praise to the science teacher who ordered several pieces of equipment solely for him to use for an experiment. He had never had a teacher make him feel special before. Carlos said he would like for the alternative school science teacher to

replace the teacher at his regular campus. He also likes the social skills class because of the discussions.

Carlos says he has a lot of problems paying attention in class at his regular campus, so he is going to try to get the regular campus teachers to be more open minded about having classroom discussions. He said that he wished the teachers at his regular campus would do more of the things that the ones at the alternative school do to make class fun, instead of just lecturing, letting students take notes, and then giving assignments and tests. Carlos says that he is going to try a lot harder in his classes on account of the teachers at the alternative school, even when he gets back to his regular campus.

As much as he praised the alternative school, Carlos said that he wants to get back to his regular campus. He considers it a shame, however, that he could not have his needs met at the regular campus, and that he had to come to an alternative school to get the motivation and guidance he needs to be successful.

Linda C. Linda is a 12th grade student who has been at the alternative school for about 30 days. Linda was referred to the alternative school for possession of marijuana. She says that she was not actually in possession of anything, but she was with another group of kids who

were smoking, and they all got caught together. There are no charges pending against her, but the school still referred her to the alternative school. Linda refers to herself as an “alphabet student,” meaning her grades range from A’s to D’s.

Linda did not like teachers at the alternative school when she first arrived, but she says she has gotten acclimated to them. She even likes the alternative school teachers who are considered strict because she thinks they are being strict to make the students “not want to come back.” She also has good relationships with teachers from her regular campus. In fact, since she was referred to the alternative school, one of her regular campus teachers has called and come to visit her during lunch. Linda sees her tenure at the alternative school as a learning experience. She knows that she will never be referred again. She says that the experience has taught her that she needs to be careful about the people with whom she associates.

Linda admits that being at the alternative school has changed her personality because she has picked up some new “mannerisms.” She says she is a lot more talkative and “louder” than before because of the influence of a close friend she met at the alternative school. She said that the things she dislikes most about being referred to the alternative

school is having to go to a different bus stop and wear a uniform. Linda says she lives in a “sort of uppity, rich, white neighborhood,” and the neighbors have realized that she attends the alternative school. She was very disturbed because one of her sister’s friends is not allowed to play with her sister, on account of her being at the alternative school. She is being raised by a single mother and accepts the responsibility of being a role model for her little sister. Linda’s mother has taught her that education is the key to life and to having a lot of self-esteem. Linda is adamant about not allowing this experience to change her outlook. She says she has already been accepted into a college for the performing arts, where she plans to attend next year.

Henry I. Henry is a 10th grade student who has been at the alternative school for 45 days. He was referred to the school for a theft committed on campus. Henry has been suspended in the past for tardiness, but he has never been to an alternative school. Henry knows that education is important, and that it is difficult to get anywhere without it. However, Henry says that school is not a priority for him. He finds school boring, although he also admits that he is somewhat lazy. Henry wants to go the community college after high school, and perhaps transfer to a university after that.

Henry says that he likes the teachers at the alternative school better than his regular campus because they give less work and are nicer. He says that one of the impacts that the alternative school has had on him is that it has made him more serious about his work. Henry has a conflict. He wants to go back to his regular campus and see his friends. At the same time, he thinks it is better at the alternative school. He has noticed how other students are treated differently when they return from the alternative school; therefore, he is afraid of what he will face when he returns to his regular campus.

Collective Findings -- Student Relations. The students referred to the alternative school for the first time indicated they were quiet in the beginning of their tenure. The reasons given for being quiet varied. The students were unanimous in stating that the Level One structure made it difficult for them to make friends or build relationships with other students in the beginning. Since they were not allowed to talk or turn around in their seats (according to students) during Level One, students only had an opportunity to get acquainted on the school bus and during lunch. Some students were quiet because they did not care to make friends with any of the kids at the alternative school; they just wanted to complete their referral and get back to the regular campus. Some students said they

were still angry about being referred to the alternative school in the first place. Others said that they were trying to adjust to the new rules and wanted to avoid getting into more trouble. Some said they had heard horror stories about the alternative school, and one girl said that she just cried a lot.

Regardless of the reason for being quiet in the beginning, the students said that they generally loosened up after a few days and started to build relationships with other students—after realizing that the alternative school was not as bad as they thought. The first-time referrals who had been at the school for a while said that they could tell a student who was arriving there for the first time from ones who had been referred previously because the first-time referrals were quiet and shy. By contrast, a student who had been at the school before was very talkative and loud from the moment she or he arrived.

First-time students indicated unanimously there were friends at the alternative school they knew from their regular campus. The students mentioned seeing friends from their regular campus in orientation and in Level One. A couple of students said that they were surprised to see one or more of their best friends in orientation with them. One student said that when he was originally referred, one of his friends teased him about

it. Then at orientation, he saw the same friend, who had been referred a day later. One student said that his girlfriend was in Level One with him because they had been referred together when they both got caught with marijuana. But he said they could not do anything in Level One but nod and make faces at each other. As stated frequently, it was difficult to get to know students in Level One due to the talking restrictions.

All of the students seemed to be impressed by the fact that kids were referred to the alternative school for different types of infractions. There were many students referred for being tardy too many times, and others for more serious infractions like possession of drugs and weapons. Most of the kids stated that there were some kids in the alternative school who should not have been referred. The kids did not think students should be referred for excessive tardiness, which they believed to be one of the more common reasons.

Almost all of the students indicated that it was easy to make friends at the alternative school. They stated that the kids were generally nice to each other. The students said the kids at the alternative school got along together extremely well, considering the differences between some of them. One of the reasons it was easier to get to know students was because of the small classes. The students at the alternative school also

felt a sense of camaraderie because many were referred for the same reasons, and even if they had committed different infractions, they were all in “the same boat” while they were at the alternative school. The students said that some of the classes included a lot of open discussions that allowed them to learn about each other. There were a few students who had no desire to get along with the kids at the alternative school. Some of the kids stated that the way other students acted was a good example of how “not to be.” One in particular felt like the kids at the alternative school did not care about their image or have enough “self pride.” This particular student had been referred to an alternative school in middle school and was determined not to “slide back into that world” now that he was in high school.

One student said he had trouble making friends because he did not understand why some kids had more social standing than others, suggesting that there were some cliques at the alternative school. The high school students, in particular, indicated that there were some gang-related problems at the alternative school, such as threats. Several of the high school kids said they would watch what they said, or whom they talked about because there were students at the alternative school who would fight the first chance they got. The kids stated, however, that there

was not nearly as much of a problem with fights occurring at the alternative school as there was at the regular campus because students who got into trouble at the alternative school knew they could be referred to the Juvenile Detention Center. Gangs seemed to be more of an issue with the high school kids than with the kids in middle school.

Most of the first-time referrals stated that they had made friends at the alternative school with people whom they would never have associated with at the regular campus. For example, one of the first-time referral students in high school, who was generally quiet and considered straight-laced, had become very good friends with another girl who had been referred to the school on repeated occasions. They both stated that they would never have associated together on their regular campus, but since meeting at the alternative school, they had become the best of friends. One of the pair, who said she used to be quiet, admitted that she had picked up some of her friend's "mannerisms." She said she "used to be quiet, but now she was loud." They both said, unequivocally, that they would stay friends after leaving the alternative school. (Interestingly, this same pair of friends was mentioned by another student who was interviewed. The student being interviewed was making a point about how the school sometimes changes students. He stated that the

straight-laced one in the pair had really changed since coming to the alternative school. He said that since becoming friends with the other girl, the straight-laced one was a lot more talkative and “louder” than she used to be.)

Many students indicated that the primary reason they wanted to get back to their regular campus was to be with their friends. One student said that he did not even want to make any friends at the alternative school, all he wanted was to get out. Most of the students indicated they were selective about the students with whom they associated at their regular campus. A couple of students said they associated mostly with cousins. Some of them indicated they deliberately avoided associating with certain types of students at their regular campus because there is not a lot of mixing outside their social groups or cliques. Most of the high school age students indicated that their relationships with friends had not changed since coming to the alternative school because they still saw their friends after school and on weekends. One student indicated that on the same morning of our interview, a friend had brought a valentine card and candy to her house on his way to school. She said the guy knew she would not be getting any valentines at the alternative school. It really made her feel good, but she was concerned about losing contact with her

friends. The students generally felt like their really good friends would still be their friends when they returned to their regular campus.

Although the relationships may not change, permanently, the large majority of students thought it might be uncomfortable, at first, after they returned to their regular campus because they would not be informed about current events. Just being away would mean they would not know “who was doing what.” Some first-time referrals made reference to other students who had been at the alternative school as a reference for what it would be like for them. They, themselves, didn’t know where the other students went. Usually, there were rumors about the kids getting sick, having transferred, or worse. One first-time referral who had been at the alternative school for about 30 days said that since she was referred, she had been told that other kids thought she had committed suicide. The students were generally confident that after a while, when they had had time to catch up on everything that had happened during their absence, the relationships they had with friends at their regular campus would be the same as before they were referred to the alternative school.

The students frequently made reference to the cliques that existed among students at their regular campus. They explained that there were all sorts of cliques for different types of students

I got a lot more friends over there than I do here. I think there's more violence over there, anyways. It's just if you hate someone, it lasts all year, and basically, everybody hates everybody. Well, it's like, groups hate groups. There's a group of people here that hate this group and all that stuff, like skaters and preps and that kind of stuff. I hang out with preps and rednecks. All the gangsters, they hate rednecks.

The students all agreed that they liked the alternative school because there were not as many cliques among students. They explained that because the alternative school had such a small number of students, it was difficult for the students to form cliques. The students also said that cliques were less likely to develop because everybody had to wear the same clothes.

Some of the high school age students indicated that they were bothered by the fact that there were drugs offered to them at the alternative school. One student said she was approached her first day at the alternative school and invited to get high after school. She stated that it was a shock to her because at her regular campus they had a greeting committee that welcomed her with a gift bag of information, and at the alternative school she was welcomed with an invitation to get high. There were one or two students who admitted that they liked to smoke marijuana and drink. One of the students indicated that there was rarely a period on his regular campus when he was not high. The students

indicated that they did not know of anybody who possessed drugs at the alternative school, but they knew of several kids who possessed drugs while at their regular campus, on a daily basis. All of the students agreed that there were actually fewer students at the alternative school who came to school under the influence or in possession of drugs than at their regular campus. The students agreed that the fear of being sent to Juvenile Detention Center was an effective deterrent, keeping kids from coming to the alternative school under the influence.

Collective Findings -- Teacher Relations. Most of the new students stated that they had not had the opportunity to get to know the teachers at the alternative school because of the Level One atmosphere, but what little they knew left an unfavorable impression. They stated that the teachers who came to the Level One class mostly gave them worksheets to complete and walked around the classroom helping students who raised their hands. The students said that the teachers at the alternative school were stricter than at their regular campus. Many of the students felt as though the teachers at the alternative school treated all of the kids referred to the school as if they were “bad kids.” Some of them felt like the teachers were strict because it was necessary in order to deal with the troublemakers. Several of them commented about how quickly the

teachers at the alternative school would take points away or send a student to the office. A couple of the new students said the teachers made them feel like criminals or that they were around police officers.

The most interesting aspect of the criticism about the alternative school teachers was that new students made a direct correlation between teaching ability and social relationships. Many of the students who expressed negative impressions of the teachers at the alternative school also indicated they were poor at teaching. The newer students, in particular, felt that most of the alternative school teachers did not care about teaching. They stated that because the alternative school teachers used worksheets and rarely took time to “teach,” it was difficult to get to know them. The science teacher was one notable exception to this general impression. The students all talked about how much they liked the science teacher because of the way he conducted class. One student, in particular, offered praise for the science teacher because the teacher had ordered some equipment especially for him to complete an experiment using cultures. The student said it was the first time any teacher had done anything like that for him. He said it made him feel really special. The student said he later found that the science teacher did things like that for a lot of kids.

The first-time referrals who were assigned to the alternative school for a longer period (25 to 45 days) had more favorable opinions of the teachers at the school than those who were relatively new (5 to 10 days). One student said he felt like the teachers at the alternative school explained things better than at his regular campus. He stated that the teachers at his regular campus were not willing to answer questions like at the alternative school. He said that the regular campus teachers “really didn’t care” whether all the students learned or not. Another student at the end of his 45 day tenure said he liked the alternative school teachers better because they were more friendly. He said they gave less work and they were nicer about helping students. Another student with about 30 days tenure, said that she liked the teachers at the alternative school because they were more “open” than those at her regular campus. The same student said that when she first arrived, she did not like the teachers at the alternative school, but she said she likes them now. As a matter of fact, the student said she liked all the teachers at the alternative school, even the ones who were particularly strict. The student said that she even understood why some teachers are so strict and treated everybody in the school like they are “bad kids.” She said they did it on

purpose, “but they irritate you like that so you won’t want to come back, anymore.”

All of the students indicated that teachers at the alternative school were more open to talking about topics that teachers at their regular campus would never discuss. Some of the students said the alternative school teachers treated them like adults. Even during class, students were allowed to talk about ideas that they never could have discussed on a regular campus. Some students said they would have gotten in trouble on their regular campus for asking some of the questions they did. A couple of students believed that teachers on their regular campus would be afraid to discuss issues like sex, pregnancy, or drugs because they would be afraid of getting fired. Some students described the teachers at their regular campus as “stand-offish.” By contrast, the characteristic attributed to many of the alternative school teachers was approachable. The students felt that the teachers at the alternative school were people they could “go to” about anything. Many students said they wished they had alternative school teachers at their regular campus. Some of the students indicated that they also had teachers at their regular campus with whom they felt close. One of them talked about a teacher from her regular campus who had come to visit her at the alternative school during

lunch, and who had called to talk to her on several occasions since she was referred to the alternative school.

The first-time referrals had different ideas about what their relationships with teachers would be like when they returned to their regular campus. Some of them did not feel like their relationships would be any different. The teachers who liked them before would still like them, and those that did not like them would still not like them when they returned. Students of all ages expressed concern that some of the teachers at their regular campus would treat them differently. Some first-time students gave accounts about other students they knew at the regular campus who returned from the alternative school. One student described how a teacher kept “picking on” a friend of his until the friend snapped one day and “cursed the teacher out.” Other students told about how teachers at the regular campus refused to give some kids a second chance if they committed subsequent infractions, and how they were punished more severely than other kids committing the same infractions. One student talked about an occasion when he and another kid were caught doing the same thing. He was given in-school suspension, but since the other kid had just come back from the alternative school, that kid was given another 30-day referral. The kids were concerned about

making the transition back to their regular campus because of the consequence of being “labeled” as a troublemaker. Interestingly, in spite of their concerns about being labeled, most of the first-time referrals thought the problems would be temporary, and that in time their relationships with staff would eventually be the same upon returning to their regular campus.

A number of the comments by first-time referrals confirm a few of the observations discussed earlier with faculty members about different character types of students. Most of the first-time students had Type A characteristics. Some students stated repeatedly that all they wanted was to do their time and get out of the alternative school. One student said he was going to “walk on eggshells” when he returned to his regular campus. Others said that they hoped to get back into athletics, and some said they just wanted to be able to see their friends again and wear their own clothes. One student talked about his younger sister and how he wanted to be a role model for her and did not want to set a bad example. Other students realized they were role models for other kids.

There were a couple of students who had traits attributed to Type B students. One student said that he hoped he would not be referred again, but he believed that it would only be a matter of time before someone

caused him to lose his temper. Another first-time student said he knew nobody would give him a second chance. And most notable, one student said that he was not sure he wanted to return to his regular campus. The student said that he liked the alternative school teachers better, and the work was easier, but he was also concerned about teachers labeling him an “alternative school kid.” The student said that he wanted to get back to his friends from his regular campus, but he also wanted to stay at the alternative school because this school was comfortable and he knew what he was facing when he got back to his regular campus.

Multiple Referrals

Social, Educational and Cultural Characteristics and Impacts. One objective of this study was to learn about the impact of the alternative school programs on students characterized as multiple referrals. The previous section of this chapter reported on the findings related to the category of students defined as “first-time, long-term referrals,” those student who have been at the school for an extended time (25 to 45 days) with only one referral. The following section of this study is a report of the findings related to the students characterized as “multiple referrals,”

those students attending school at the alternative school who have been referred previously on one or more occasions.

The objective of collecting data from students with multiple referrals was to learn about the socialization process for students who return because of subsequent referrals. The multiple referrals interviewed range in grade levels, number of referrals, and frequency of referrals. Some students received several referrals within the past year or two. Some had been referred once or twice a year, beginning in middle school (the 6th to 8th grade), and continuing until high school. The students interviewed had at least two referrals and as many as six. The students ranged from 7th –12th grades. Some of the high school students had been referred regularly during those grades. The objective of focusing on students according to their grade level was to learn about the socialization process and impact of the alternative school on students who were referred to the school repeatedly across grade levels. The data also offered insight into social, cultural, and educational characteristics of those students who spend a significant period of their school experience in attendance at the DAEP schools.

The multiple referral data are presented in the same format as the data on “first-time referrals.” The first part of this section is a series of

brief background sketches and biographies about the students interviewed. The biographies were designed to present a snapshot impression of each student. The biographies include information about the following characteristics of each student: (1) relationships with staff and other students (social and cultural characteristics); (2) degree of self esteem, including family influence and whether they consider themselves good students (social cultural characteristics); (3) educational values, including grades and whether school is important (academic characteristics); and (4) degree of impact on the above areas, if any, as a result of their tenure at the alternative school.

The biographies are followed by a more in-depth presentation of the particular data that were responsive to the research questions guiding this study. The latter part of this section provides a discussion of the students' peer relationships and their relationships with faculty. Both discussions include findings about how those relationships have impacted educational values of students with multiple referrals.

Student Biographies. The following biographical sketches of multiple referrals are presented in order of the students in the lowest grades to the students in the highest grade levels.

Omar B. Omar is in the 7th grade and this is his 2nd time at the alternative school. He was referred both times for assault. Omar says he wants to go college, and he wants this to be the last time he is referred to the alternative school. On his regular campus, Omar received C's, D's and F's, but at the alternative school, he received A's and B's. The reason, Omar says, is because at the alternative school, the teachers help students more with the work assignments.

Omar had an extremely favorable impression of the alternative school. He said the teachers were a lot nicer to him when he returned for his second referral than he thought they would be. He was pleased that the alternative school staff did not criticize him when he returned, and that the teachers seemed to be a lot more approachable than they were when he began his first referral. Omar especially liked the way that the alternative school teachers constantly corrected him. He preferred to be told when he was doing an assignment the wrong way, rather than to complete the assignment and then be told to do it over or get a bad grade. The alternative school teachers made Omar want to attend school. He liked it better at the alternative school because during his second referral, he was allowed to help teachers with various tasks, and the

teachers gave a lot of rewards for positive behavior. Omar said the alternative school teachers made him feel important.

The teachers make you feel important. Make you just want to, like, try harder and, like, sometimes you get rewards here. At my other school, we don't get rewards. You do, like, a lot of work – like, hard, straight working half the period, or like three-fourths of the period and then the rest you get to play on the computers. They'll let you do jobs for them, and you got sodas and candy and stuff. They try everything. Try to teach you and everything. Some kids just don't care. I think it helps me a lot more.

The teachers also tolerated things that were not tolerated on the regular campus, such as kids yelling and arguing with each other or even teachers, and they let the students get away with “play-fighting” and horseplay.

Omar believes that he was treated unfairly by the teachers and faculty at his regular campus when he returned after his first referral. He stated that the offense he was currently referred for committing was not actually an assault. The offense involved twisting his girl friend's arm behind her back. He and his girlfriend were horse playing in the hall, when one of the assistant principals saw them. He says he was not given a second chance because he had something called a “pre-alternative school letter.” This letter meant that if he was sent to the office

for anything within a certain timeframe, he would automatically be referred back to the alternative school.

Regardless of the positive aspects about the alternative school, Omar was adamant about not wanting to return. He did not like having to wear uniforms instead of his own clothing, nor did he like having to ride a different bus because it embarrassed him when he passed other students attending the regular campus. During this 2nd visit, Omar had been at the alternative school for about 25 days when he was interviewed, and he said he was tired. He reflected positively on the alternative school, however. He said that the relationships he developed with teachers at the alternative school made him want to work harder and do more with his life. Choosing which school he preferred was difficult for Omar. He said there are more good things than bad things about the alternative school, but he still does not want to come back. Omar mentioned several times that he wished he could take the teachers at the alternative school back with him to his regular campus.

Henry C. Henry is a 7th grade student who was referred to the alternative school for fighting. This is his third referral. The first referral was for writing a story about an inappropriate subject matter, and the second referral was for sending pornographic pictures to a vice-principal.

Both previous referrals were last year, when Henry was in the 6th grade. Henry says he sent the pornography to his vice principal, after he pulled up the site from in the school library, because he wanted to prove a point about the schools failure to monitor students' use of the Internet. He says his parents don't want to talk about it.

Henry says he use to get B's at his regular campus, but since returning from his first referral, he now gets C's and D's. Henry believes that education is important, and he considers himself a smart student. He boasted about being in the talented and gifted language arts classes, and about being in accelerated math. Henry liked his regular campus because the teachers were not as strict about things like talking in class, and he did not like the dress code at the alternative school. He was apprehensive about returning to the regular campus, however, because he was fearful of the way staff at the regular campus would treat him. Henry talked at length about the difference in how he was treated by teachers and staff when he returned to his regular campus after his first referral. He said he was given lots of extra work, and he would get into trouble for things that were previously overlooked. He said he had lost many, many friends. He also said that a lot of the kids at his regular campus teased him after he returned from the alternative school. They

gave him a nickname, which became widely known. Henry said his regular campus was much more enjoyable before he started getting referrals to the alternative school.

Henry preferred the alternative school to his regular campus; however, he was equally critical of both. He was very critical of the education he was receiving at the alternative school. He said there was no learning taking place. He stated that students referred to the alternative school get punished twice, once because of the days spent at the alternative school, and again because of the damage to their education. Henry said he did not believe the alternative school was about education, at all; it was about punishment. Henry was not fond of either campus; he didn't like the alternative school because of the curriculum, and he didn't like his regular campus because he was labeled as an alternative school kid and mistreated for having received referrals. As a result of his experiences at both campuses, Henry said he has become very angry at the whole educational system.

Isaac M. Isaac is a 7th grade student who was referred to the alternative school for fighting. This is his second referral; the first one was about five months before this interview, for shutting off the electricity to a portable building at the school. Isaac takes accelerated math at his

regular campus, which is not offered at the alternative school. He generally get A's and B's, but his grades dropped when he returned to his regular campus. This made Isaac angry. His grades are important because he wants to go to college, and he believes this will effect his high school transcript. Isaac's parents grounded him for getting into trouble, but didn't get too angry.

Isaac has good relations with teachers at his regular campus, and he likes the alternative school teachers, too. He indicated that some teachers and faculty at his regular campus treated him differently after he returned from the alternative school the first time; they did not give any warnings, like before, or second chances. Isaac does not like the alternative school, in general. He believes the curriculum is inadequate in comparison to what is offered at his regular campus.

Isaac says this will be the last time he is referred to the alternative school. He does not like the rules because they make it easier for him to get into trouble and harder to goof off, nor does he like being away from his friends. He also thinks the food is disgusting.

Allen D. Allen is in the 8th grade and he was referred to the alternative school for possession of drug paraphernalia. This is Allen's second time being referred to the alternative school. His first referral was

for fighting. Allen gets C's on his regular campus and he gets A's and B's at the alternative school. He says he wants to go to college some day. He thinks the work at the alternative school is a lot easier than at the regular campus, but he would rather be at his regular campus.

Allen gets along with teachers and students at both campuses, although he says that it was hard getting to know the alternative school teachers when he first arrived. He misses his friends at the regular campus, but he gets along well with the students in the alternative school because they can all relate to one another. He mentioned having been treated differently at his regular campus after he returned from his first referral, but his primary concern was that he might have disappointed his teachers. He hoped that the regular campus teachers would not treat him differently when he returned, and he planned on putting forth an effort to win back their respect.

Allen does not think that the alternative school is about trying to give students a good education; he thinks it is about imposing discipline. He is bothered by the dress code and particularly by the metal detector. He likes the classes at the alternative school because they are only 45 minutes long, but he doesn't like the curriculum. He says that when he returned from his first referral he had a hard time catching up on the

course work. He misses his school and he does not think he will be coming to the alternative school again.

Mary U. Mary is a 10th grade student who has been referred to the alternative school two times. She was referred this most recent time for possession of marijuana. Her first time being referred was in the 8th grade. Mary has been diagnosed with a learning disability, and is currently receiving special education services. She says that some of the special education programs offered at her regular campus are not offered at the alternative school, but the school is providing her services according to state and federal law. She generally gets B's and C's, but her grades dropped after she returned to her regular campus following her first tenure.

Mary says when she returned for her second referral, she recognized a lot of teachers and students from the first time. Mary feels that the teachers at the alternative school understand and care. She did not get along with them the first time she was at the alternative school, but they have been much nicer since she returned. She believes the teachers are now stricter than they were when she was at the alternative school two years ago. She believes that some of the alternative school teachers are too strict; however, she recognizes that the behavior of

students makes it necessary. School is important to Mary, but she has no intentions of going to college, right now. She is comfortable at the alternative school, but she misses being able to wear her own clothes, and she thinks the rules are too strict.

Mary says that she does not like the impression that many people have about the alternative school. She does not like it that many people feel the kids at the alternative school are all “screw ups.” She said, “Just because you’re here, that means that you didn’t do too well at your home campus, or whatever. So it’s almost implied that you’re, you know, you’re a screw up. So it’s almost just like labeling you. You’re a bad kid because you’re here. It’s not a normal school. It’s an alternative school, so you’re bad.” Mary believes that the school provides a true opportunity for students.

Amy K. Amy is in the 10th grade and she was referred to the alternative school for fighting. This is the 6th time that she has been assigned to the alternative school. The first time was in the 6th grade. Amy said she was scared the first time she was referred, and she was quiet like most students because she didn’t know what to expect. When she returned for subsequent visits she was more comfortable, and now she actually prefers the alternative school to her regular campus.

Amy has good relationships with some teachers at her regular campus, and she was particularly fond of her gymnastics coach. They had contact away from school, and the coach also kept in contact with her while she was at the alternative school. She did not get along with the new coach, however, and she was eventually kicked off the gymnastics team. She said some of the staff treated her different when she returned from the alternative school, and cautioned her about not committing new infractions. Amy says that, generally, the teachers at her regular campus did not make her feel like they wanted her to be there. Like most students, she said the alternative school had not had a significant affect on her relationships with other kids. However, she had made friends with another girl in the alternative school, Linda C. who is one of the first-time referrals included in this study. Amy said Linda was a very positive influence because Linda made good decisions, and Linda helped her make better decisions, too.

Amy's impressions about the teachers on the alternative school were entirely positive. She said that they made her feel like she was wanted, and that the teachers frequently made great sacrifices for the students. Amy said there were not many teachers on her regular campus who go the same length.

The alternative school makes me feel a lot different about school, I mean, to know when I come here, I look forward to coming, I mean, seeing people's faces and seeing my friends, you know, and the teachers. It makes me feel a lot better than I was going to the regular campus because I wasn't really going to the regular campus. I would just leave, you know. I'd just go have -- have fun, you know. But here, people just make you feel wanted, like you belong. You're not the only one out there who makes mistakes.

She felt that the teachers at the alternative school were people whom she could approach with needs and problems, and that if she had questions, those teachers would respond truthfully and candidly. Like many other students, Amy made mention of the Social Skills teacher, and the occasions when the teacher had given advise about extremely delicate matters. She said she even called the Social Skills teacher just to chat sometimes; for example, they talked for hours when Amy was home sick for 3 days.

Amy says she knows that she is smart, but the teachers at her regular campus always made her feel like she was "dumb." She says she chose not to try and show them she was smart. She said she did not turn in many of her assignments nor did she study for tests. Amy also admitted that she skipped a lot of classes at her regular campus for no good reason, just to go have "fun with friends." She believes she could get straight A's if she wanted, but she is satisfied with B's, which she

makes without even studying for tests. Amy realizes the above decisions are “not a good quality.”

Amy says she now has specific goals to be a probation officer like the Social Skills teacher at the alternative school, after she finishes school. She says the alternative school has made her want to stay in school; whereas, before she was considering dropping out and getting her GED. She knows she cannot become a probation officer with a GED. Amy says she use to believe that staying in school meant giving up things in life and making sacrifices, but now she understand that there are greater rewards. “At the alternative school, I think that it's made me feel like I don't have to give up on everything to get what I want. If I just stick it out and finish school, then everything's going to be okay, you know. I can get a good job, get good money, live my life like I'm supposed to.”

Amy does not like the reputation that the alternative school has for being a horrible place, where all the students are involved with drugs and gangs. She has learned that those things are not true. She knows that education is important. She always has. However, Amy said she “use to know it in her head, but now she knows it in her heart.” The alternative school has helped her understand that her life can become extremely difficult if she does not start to make better decisions. Her experience at

the alternative school has given her a great deal of confidence, and she feels like she can accomplish anything.

I used to think that I wanted to drop out and get my GED, or whatever because I couldn't ever get along with the teachers or anybody, but here, it makes me feel that I can accomplish anything, if I want it. If I want to, I can do it, you know. And I don't have to let everybody get in my way. The teachers talk to me about things, and they give me insight on a couple of things, you know, things that I should do if something goes wrong or, you know, just advice on life, itself.

Dylan U. Dylan is in the 10th grade and he is at the alternative school for the 2nd time. He was referred for possession of marijuana. Dylan gets A's and B's at his regular campus, but he has been getting all A's at the alternative school. He says that his grades slipped when he returned to his regular campus after his first referral to the alternative school, but he went to tutorials and they improved. School is important to him, but not a major priority. He thinks he will go to college because he realizes that his life is ahead of him, and he needs to be prepared for the future.

Dylan had mixed relations with teachers from the alternative school and his regular campus; he liked some and disliked some in both schools. He had friends at his regular campus, but associated primarily with a small group he called his "clique." He did not like the way that

students at his regular campus associated in cliques, and he felt that there were more fights at his regular campus for that reason.

Dylan spoke at length about some of the impacts and impressions the alternative school made on him. One of them is that he attends class at the alternative school more regularly than he does at his regular campus. Dylan said that if it were not for the teachers at the alternative school and the consequences of skipping class, he would not have been at school for the interview he was giving me. He does not want to get into trouble for skipping class at the alternative school because the consequences are more serious, being sent to a juvenile detention center. He gets to class on time and he doesn't "horse around" while he is in class. Fortunately, this fear also keeps Dylan from getting into as many fights as he does at his regular campus. Dylan said that he is "pretty sure" that he will be referred to the alternative school again for fighting at his regular campus, even though he really doesn't hope to come back.

The most significant impact Dylan says the alternative school has had on him is that it has given him time to think. He says that when he is at his regular campus with his friends around, he does not seem to care

as much about the things he should, like the value of school and the consequences of misbehavior.

It sort of shows you, after you've been here for a while, like, how you got to grow. You can't be this way the whole -- your whole life, you know....Basically, when you come here, you know how you're all isolated and stuff. It makes you think like, like, what school is really about, you know. When you're at regular school, it's like, you don't care because you have all the freedom in the world....But when you come here, it makes you think like what school is really about and what you really need it for. At home school, you're just tempted to mess up. You're like, you see people. You see places. It's like oh, 'we're going here'. 'We're going to skip.' Should I go, or not?....Over here, it's like, you ain't got to worry about people talking mess. You ain't got to worry about no boyfriend and girlfriend kind of crap. You ain't got to worry about, like -- a bunch of stuff, you know. Just go to school. Get everything out of the way that you need to become what you want, you know?

The alternative school made him slow down because he did not have to worry about "cliques" or getting into fights. He said that the Social Skills class started making him think about some of the real benefits of getting an education and what he wants to be in life. He said he never use to feel as calm as he does at the alternative school, not at his regular campus or anywhere else.

When Dylan talked about returning to his regular campus, his remarks were ambivalent. He said he wanted to go back, but he did not know if he could be successful. He said he was never really in class much when he was at the regular campus. In addition, since this was his

2nd referral within a short period, Dylan said he felt he had been at the alternative school for so long that he had gotten use to it, and he felt like it would be “weird” going back to his regular campus.

Dylan said that during his second tenure he has started to realize that if he continues to make bad decisions in school, it will eventually catch up with him and the consequences will get worse. He gives a lot of credit to the Social Skills class for the educational values he has developed. What’s most profound, however, is that Dylan says that he would have never learned these lessons if he had not come to the alternative school. He said he would have probably graduated and received a diploma, but he said he would never have had the wisdom to accompany the diploma.

Thomas S. Thomas is an 11th grade student and this is his 4th time being referred to the alternative school. He was referred all four times for fighting. The first time was in the 7th or 8th grade. In addition to referrals to the alternative school, Thomas has also been suspended from school a number of times. Thomas says he was failing his classes at his regular campus, and had only accumulated five credits towards the 11th grade. Since being referred to the alternative school this semester, he has

accumulated 9 more, for a total of 14. Thomas said that with 14 credits, he was thinking about enrolling in a special program for young adults.

Thomas liked teachers at both campuses and disliked some of them at both. He felt that the alternative school teachers cared more about the students, also that the teachers and faculty on the regular campus were sometimes less inclined to give him any margin for error when he returned. He kept his friends at his regular campus. When Thomas came back to the alternative school on subsequent referrals, he always knew students from the last time he was at the school. He said it felt like being in the same classes. He identified with the students at the alternative school because they all had problems in school. Thomas believes that education is important because he “can’t go anywhere without it.” He is also starting to realize that he cannot “clown” all his life.

Thomas admitted that his behavior on his regular campus was not good, and he skipped class regularly. Thomas said that he was more likely to get in trouble at his regular campus because there was nobody to hassle him about misbehaving, like at the alternative school. In addition, he said that his friends from his regular campus were a major distraction because they were always tempting him to misbehave. Most of them had cars, and it was difficult for him to make good decisions

when he was invited to go somewhere. Thomas said he was rarely at school for a whole day at his regular campus, in contrast to his attendance rate at the alternative school, which has been perfect. He bragged, proudly, about the fact that he now comes to school “everyday.” “Everyday!”

Thomas has a very strong attachment to the alternative school. He says that he has gotten use to being at this campus so much that he no longer feels comfortable at his regular campus. Since 7th or 8th grade, Thomas has been going back and forth to the alternative school. He said that he has been at the alternative school for this entire school, except for a couple of months. He was also at the alternative school all of last year, except for the first three months. He says that he may go back to his regular campus and do well for a short period, but within five or six weeks, he always winds up being sent back to the alternative school for some reason. He says he has a hard time adjusting whenever he is sent back to the regular campus.

I'll probably go back over to the regular campus for a little while, before I come back here because I ain't really been in my school, you know. I've always been here. I'm not really used to being -- I'm not used to being at regular high schools. I'm -- almost all my high school years, I've been in alternative programs. It's going to be hard to adjust, you know, longer classes, bigger campuses, walking around, people just always on you. I've tried several times.

But I keep coming back. But maybe this time I will have a better chance, probably.

Thomas says he would prefer to have long-term referrals of 30 days or more when he is sent to the alternative school, instead of short referrals of just 10 days. Thomas says that for the most part, he hates his regular campus. He says the only thing he regrets about not being there is that he misses out on dances, eating better food, and wearing his own clothes.

Thomas was also complimentary of the vice principal at the alternative school. Thomas had some problems at the alternative school that required him to go the office for discipline referrals. He described the vice-principal as fair, and somebody who listened to all sides of a story before making a decision about whether to discipline. He believed that the vice-principal at the alternative school had a similar background as the students there and identified with students on the campus. He said this administrator was the only reason he was not kicked out of the alternative school, and he said he wished he could have a vice principal like that at his regular campus.

Thomas was critical of the teachers at his regular campus because they did not put more effort into making sure that students

learned. Ironically, he was critical of teachers on his regular campus because they use to let him sleep in class. He said they would let him pass out for a whole class period, then just fail him for the class. Thomas appreciated the teachers at the alternative school who “hassled” students about doing their work. He said that hassling was good.

Thomas liked the alternative school teachers because they always made sure that the work that was assigned, was completed by the end of class.

He liked the way that teachers at the alternative school gave assignment and then showed students how to do the work by giving them two or three examples. Thomas said that teachers at his regular campus gave notes then handed out work assignments and expected students to do them. Thomas was even complimentary of the one or two alternative school teachers all the students considered strict, because he thought being strict was necessary to keep enough control in the classes for students to learn. He said the teachers may not be nice all the time, but they know their stuff.

More than anything else, Thomas 's attachment to the alternative school was on account of his belief that the teachers really cared about him. The staff made Thomas want to do something with his life; whereas, at his regular campus all he wanted to do was quit. He appreciated the

rewards that the alternative school teachers gave to motivate students, but even more than that, Thomas appreciated how the teachers demonstrated that they cared by the way they related to students. He said the alternative school teachers seem to talk to him about life and how to make better choices in life. Knowing how much the alternative school teachers cared about him made Thomas think more about his decisions.

Thomas was grateful for the relationships he had with teachers at the alternative school. He said he might have eventually gotten his diploma even if he had not come to the alternative school, but he says that would not have the “wisdom that he now has to show for it.”

It makes you feel like you're coming to school -- now you got a reason to come. Like the regular campus, it don't matter. I go to school and then think, 'I don't want to be here', you know. Here, it's like I'm here, but I'm kind of, like, I enjoy it because they give us, like -- they push us. If we do good during the week, they'll do something for us at the end of the week. They pressure us to reach that goal, to do good. I probably would have gotten to graduate, but wouldn't have a thing to show for it, really, no, like, wisdom or nothing. Like wisdom, no wisdom to show for it. Like for me, now it's like I got a goal, you know. And I'm trying to -- I'm trying to just get that paper. And after I get it, you know, I'll feel good about myself.

Ivy C. Ivy is an 11th grade student who was referred to the alternative school for being under the influence of marijuana. He said he was smoking at the bus stop; he didn't know it was considered school

property. This is Ivy's second time being referred to the alternative school. He was sent the first time for inappropriate behavior with a girl. His grades range from A's to D's. at his regular campus, but he has been getting A's at the alternative school. Ivy says he does better at the alternative school because they teach the lessons in "smaller chunks." They give him a little bit of work to do, then help him do it. He says this makes the subject matter easier to learn, but the teachers still give him the instruction he needs. Ivy thinks that education is important, and he plans to go to college.

Ivy gets along with teachers and students on both campuses. He is more fond of the teachers at the alternative school because he feels they are more approachable. He even understands that the strict teachers at the alternative school are simply trying to impose discipline and make students not want to return. He believes that sooner or later all the students who received multiple referrals will learn to like the alternative school teachers. Ivy said that the alternative school made him want to try harder and made him want to be more successful. Ivy was recently given an award for good behavior. He was honored as student of the month at the alternative school. To win the award, he had to have at

least 85% attendance and not commit any disciplinary infractions. The prize for student of the month was a computer.

Adam D. Adam is in the 12th grade and this is his 4th time at the alternative school in the last 13 months. He was referred this time for possession of marijuana, and his previous referrals have been for fighting. Adam considers himself a smart student. He gets A's at his regular campus and at the alternative school, but his grades on the regular campus have dropped since his first referral. He is in Honors classes at his regular campus. School is important to Adam and he plans to go to college.

Adam has come to know the teachers at the alternative school. He also has good relationships with teachers on his regular campus, but he says he is not very close to any of his teachers. He gets along with students at both campuses. Adam use to associate with honor students at his regular campus, before he was first referred to the alternative school. But he says that has changed. Adams parents are very upset about the trouble he has been having, and he says that they are constantly "bugging" him about his decisions.

Adam says that he has experienced different treatment from staff at his regular campus, since he was first referred to the alternative school.

He says his teachers act like they didn't want him in school anymore, and an administrator told him that if he committed any type of infraction, he would receive another alternative school referral. Adam plans to try hard not to get into any more trouble when he gets back to his regular campus, but he says he does not have a good feeling about being successful. He said he has learned not to talk as much, and he will stay away from the students who have been involved with problems and trouble in his past. He said he tried the last two times, but things just didn't seem to work out.

Collective Findings -- Student Relations. The students indicated that they were quiet during the beginning of their first tenure at the alternative school because they did not know what to expect or because of the image they had about the alternative school. Students indicated that when they arrived at orientation and Level One, they recognized other students whom they knew from their regular campus. One of the high school age multiple referral students indicated his girlfriend was at the school with him, and another middle school student said that his best friend was on the campus. The multiple referrals also indicated that Level One made it difficult to make friends because talking was prohibited. After about five days, the students realized how the rules operated and began

to “loosen up.” After about two weeks, the students begin to know the teachers and become friends with other students. When they arrived for the subsequent referrals, the multiple referral students said they were much more relaxed on account of knowing the teachers and knowing the expectations.

The students all agreed that it was easier to meet people at the alternative school than at their regular campus, even though students at the alternative school had different personalities. One of the reasons is because the students identify with each other. They were all referred for discipline problems and were being punished. They can relate because they are all “mad,” either mad about being at the alternative school, itself, or mad at the teacher or principal who referred them.

Most of the students said that they missed their friends at the regular campus. They also stated that the regular campus was made up of many cliques, which made it difficult to get to know different types of student, like at the alternative school. There are cliques for preppies, gangsters, skater, and different races. The students associated with the same friends as when they were on their regular campus. As one student put it, “I still hang out with my clique.” Their friends did not treat them differently, because their friends had been assigned to the alternative

school on some occasion. Two students serving their second tenure indicated that their friends thought it was admirable that they had been referred to the alternative school, although the students, themselves, thought it was “stupid.” The multiple referrals also said that their relationships with close friends at their regular campus would not be changed, but that they might have to do some catching up on events transpiring during their referral. One student on his second tenure said that students who didn’t know him thought he was new to the school. One middle school student, on his third referral, indicated that he had lost a number of friends.

As students were interviewed, they identified themselves as being in certain groups; one said he was a preppie, one a redneck, one an honor student. But at the alternative school, they all looked the same. The multiple referral students indicated that the uniforms required of students eliminated some issues because different cliques were not identifiable as easily. One student believed that kids at the regular campus were not genuine; he said they were “fake.” He believed when students were at the alternative school, they were less concerned with being part of a clique, and more like themselves.

When multiple referral students arrived on subsequent referrals, they recognized a number of students from previous tenures. One eleventh grade student who had been referred four or five times since he was in the eighth grade said that every time he came back he recognized the same students as during the previous referrals. He said that it was like being in the same classes because most of the students were the same. The students become accustomed to interacting with each other, as they would in a class at their regular campus, and the students start to develop an identity as a group. Interviews conducted with faculty revealed that the atmosphere of the school can differ from one period to another, depending on whether there are certain students at the school. The multiple referrals all indicated they have met many people at the alternative school whom they now consider good friends.

The multiple referral students indicated that when a new student arrived, it was possible to tell after the first week whether he was the type whom they would see at the alternative school again. As one student described, you can identify the ones who will never be back because they spend their whole tenure in a corner, real quiet, waiting to get out. "There's people that are here, you know, they're just here to do their little time, like they're here to do their little sentence, their 40 or 30 day

sentence, and they're all quiet the whole time, until they're out. And you'll probably never see them again.”

The multiple referrals also felt like there were some students who should not be assigned to the alternative school, considering the nature of the infraction committed. Students who committed serious infractions were surprised that there were others assigned for tardies, minor disruptions, “horseplay,” or frequent office referrals. The multiple referral students frequently described their relationships as primarily good influences. A number of students said they had developed relationships at the alternative school that would continue after their tenure. One pair of friends interviewed included a first-time referral who had been at the school for 90 days, and another girl who had been referred to the alternative school on five or six occasions. The first-time referral had admittedly become “louder” on account of her friend’s influence, which she and other students agreed was not positive. However, the multiple referral also mentioned that the first-time referral friend had been a positive influence on her. She said that her friend tries not to do “stupid” things, which helps her to avoid doing “stupid” things, too. The multiple referral does not have to worry about getting into trouble with this friend.

Although making friends was not described as a problem, students indicated that they did not like the way some students conducted themselves. There was a group of students described by the other alternative school students as displaying an elevated level of misbehavior – a group of “super” discipline problems. The students described how some kids are extremely disruptive in class and disrespectful towards teachers. Even students who realized that they, themselves, were discipline problems described another, more extreme category of misbehavior displayed by some students. There were incidents described where a desk was thrown at a teacher, items were stolen, and open acts of disrespect during class. Some students had reputations for being drug users, and even coming to the alternative school while intoxicated or under the influence of drugs.

This group of “super” discipline problems were apparently not afraid of being sent to the juvenile detention center, which was a sufficient deterrent to avoid getting into further trouble for 95% of the students at alternative school. The number of “super” discipline problems is not large, one out of five classes may have a student who fits this category. Some of their classroom disruptions irritated the students interviewed. One student indicated that this group was a bad influence on other

students because they make it difficult to pay attention. Another high school student said he thought they were being “idiots.” One 7th grader said, “They make you act bad, too.”

Some of the multiple referrals in high school indicated that it was necessary to be cautious about offending certain students who were prone to retaliate, violently. One female student said that she had some trouble making friends because the other girls were territorial about their relationships. She also found it necessary to watch who she talked about to avoid fighting. Several students mentioned that some kids at the alternative school tried to physically intimidate others. Many students characterized the behavior as bullying. A couple of high school students expressed concern about the behavior of bullies towards middle school students. Some differences are not accepted, and students with unconventional characteristics were subject to more teasing and attention than at a regular campus. Mention was made about a gay student referred to the alternative school who had particularly difficult problems on account of abuse from other students.

The students indicated that fights were more common on their regular campus. One student serving his fourth referral indicated that he had been attacked twice by the same group. Another student on his fourth

referral said he expected to get into a fight as soon as he returned to his regular campus. The violence associated with the regular campus had to do with differences that were not as obvious or evident at the alternative school. The students indicated that they did not have to worry about a lot of the problems they had with other students on their regular campus.

The middle school students indicated more frequently that there were differences between the relationships with students at their regular campus and at the alternative school. The students said that at their regular campus there were not as many students talking about drugs, planning to steal, or talking about other offenses they committed. One student said he just walked away from students when they were talking about those subjects. He expressed concern, however, that when new middle school students are assigned to the campus, they are more likely to be exposed to the conversations and influence. The student liked his regular campus because the kids there tried to help him to stay out of trouble.

Collective Findings -- Teacher Relations. Starting relationships with teachers at the alternative school was difficult because of the Level One structure. Students said they tried not to make the teacher mad, sat quietly and did their work. Most students with multiple referrals, who had

gotten to know the teachers at the alternative school described them as approachable and caring. Students said the alternative school teachers talked about subjects that regular campus teachers might be afraid to discuss. The multiple referrals thought the alternative school teachers cared more about their problems.

They care more about what, you know, if we have a problem, and it's a problem about sex or drugs or something, you know, they could care less as long as they're helping us. Teachers at the -- at our home campus, you better go talk to a counselor. Go find your parents. You can't -- they won't do stuff like that. I wish we had the teachers from the alternative school at my regular campus.

Several students mentioned how the alternative school teachers made them feel important because they gave the students rewards and did things for the students, individually, to enrich their school experience.

Some of the students in high school were able to appreciate why the teachers most students considered strict acted as they did. A couple of students said that they had to be strict because of the behavior of some of the students in class. One said that they are probably angry after the first class, and ready to write referrals the rest of the day. But she couldn't blame them. The students understood that the strict teachers were doing their job to make kids learn. One student indicated that the strict teachers taught them about respect and how to avoid conduct that

gets him in trouble, a lesson he would have never learned had it not been for the teachers who “like to hate.” He said that sooner or later the new students who disliked the alternative school teachers now, would start to like them.

The multiple referrals appreciated the reception they received from teachers at the alternative school when referred on subsequent occasions. Most of them said that they thought the teachers would fuss at them when they returned or give them a lecture. However, the teachers said very little about the students returning. The teachers might say something about being disappointed, but the students felt the alternative school teachers gave them a “clean slate” every time they were referred. As one multiple referral student described. “I didn’t really get along with them, all that much when I was here last time. But, you know, when I see them now, I just say, ‘Hi’ to them. I don’t know if I have them in Level one or two, or not. I don’t have them. But I just say, ‘Hi’ to them and stuff. They remember me.”

The multiple referrals also indicated that the alternative school teachers were much nicer to them when they were referred on subsequent occasions. Many students were surprised that the teachers remembered them from the first visit, and even more surprised at how

well they got along with teachers. Whereas, during the first referral, the teachers were strict and enforced rules against everything, on the second referral, the teachers were more relaxed. There did not seem to be a need to indoctrinate the students returning. The multiple referrals were allowed to perform special assignments, get special privileges, and one student even said that a teacher use to come get her out of Level One to help with projects. The beginning of a student's second or third tenure was not the same as the beginning of his first tenure.

Several students who had been referred to the alternative school about five or six times, and probably found the alternative school more comfortable than their regular campus, did not believe the teachers on their regular campus actually cared about whether they learned. A couple of students were rather critical of the regular campus teachers because they were not more aggressive in getting them to conform. One student was critical because his regular campus teacher use to let him sleep in class; whereas, the alternative school teachers would continuously wake him up.

One characteristic of teachers from the alternative school and the regular campus that students found appealing was that the teachers listened to students' problems and talked to them about concerns from

outside school. Students liked teachers whom they could talk to about their problems, and students frequently described themselves as feeling comfortable around their favorite teacher. The students spoke about how the teachers at the alternative school seem to help more and motivated them to want to try harder to be successful. A number of students said they wished teachers from their alternative school could come back with them to the regular campus.

The multiple referral students spoke favorably of the Social Skills class teacher. They liked that she joked with them and that her class was fun. Another quality the students liked about the Social Skills teacher, and other favorites, was that she informed them in direct terms when she thought they were doing something unacceptable. Many of the students said they appreciated being corrected by teachers, instead of being surprised when they received the consequences of misbehavior. The students also commented frequently about occasions when they had received recognitions and awards on account of having good behavior. As did the first-time referrals, the multiple referrals were also very fond of the Science teacher at the alternative school. There was also a police officer assigned to the school whom the students spoke favorably about. One student said he was a “pain in the butt” when they first met, but now

she thinks he is “cool.” Many students said he bought them lunch occasionally and they considered him their friend.

Some of the multiple referrals said they had had an experience on their regular campus, after their first tenure, when the teachers and faculty treated them different from before they were referred. Students indicated that they were given warnings after returning to their regular campus that if they committed even minor violations, they would be referred to the alternative school. Some students reported being told they were on “probation” for a period after returning to their regular campus, during which they would be watched more closely than normal. The students said that principals seemed more prone to refer them the second time than they did the first. Some said that the staff started to treat them normally again, after they had been back at the regular campus for a while. Interestingly, although most of the kids expressed a feeling of being labeled, only two of the multiple referrals felt that the incident leading to their current referral was on account of labeling.

Not all the teachers at the regular campus treated multiple referrals different after their first referral to the alternative school. A couple of students got new teachers the first time they returned, and some said teachers thought they were new students, or treated them like nothing

had happened. Students said their favorite teachers did not hold it against them. One student was concerned that he had disappointed the teachers on his regular campus. He hoped that they would not treat him different, and that he could earn back their respect. One high school student, on his 4th referral in three semesters, stated that he hoped to continue being involved in the theatre program at his school. Another talked about a gymnastics coach from her regular campus who use to call her on the phone or visit her at the alternative school to have lunch. The coach even gave the student her pager number.

Some students in this group did not consider the teachers in the alternative school to be competent. Students criticized the alternative school teachers because they rarely conducted lessons for the entire class in lecture format. The students stated that the teachers just handed out work sheets and then walked around the room helping students and answering questions for kids who raised their hands. Ironically, some of the students with multiple referrals who seemed more comfortable at the alternative school considered their regular campus teachers lazy because they lacked the qualities criticized above. The students with multiple referrals did not like the regular campus teachers because they

spent all of their class time lecturing or “giving notes,” and spent little or no time helping students actually do their work.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS OF DATA FROM OBSERVATIONS AND DOCUMENTARY SOURCES

Many of the findings from student and faculty data were confirmed with data from observations and documents reviewed. Moreover, in most cases, the findings from observations and reviewing documents enhanced the findings from student and faculty data, and reinforced the perceptions of participants who were interviewed.

(1) The curriculum observed to be used in math classes by teachers at the alternative school was generally on grade level with classes at regular campuses. However, findings from classroom observations and student assignment that were reviewed revealed that in most cases, the alternative school classes were not as far along in the curriculum as classes on regular campuses.

Many students were observed to complete their assignment very quickly, before class was over, as if the work was beneath their academic level, and some of them were observed sitting with nothing to do. Data

from observations also revealed that the alternative school did not have library resources comparable to those on regular campuses; however, the alternative school did have computer labs and technology available for students, comparable to what is available on regular campuses.

Data from student records revealed that students performed better at the alternative school, but their grades dropped when they returned to their regular campus.

(2) Data from observations during student orientations and Level One classes revealed findings about the socialization process at the alternative school. Parents were required to attend orientation with students. During the first day of orientation, some students were observed speaking to other student and greeting them as if they already knew each other. Some students chose to sit with other kids with whom they were acquainted, and their conversation and facial expressions indicated they were friends. During Level One classes, students were observed to be quiet most of the time, and they appeared to be focused on completing assignment given by the Level One teacher. Students were only allowed to talk after raising their hand for the teacher to come help with an assignment. Students who spoke out of turn were quickly corrected for even the slightest violations.

(3) Classrooms were observed at each grade level included in the alternatives school, 6th grade to 12th grade. The data from classroom observations revealed that the average size of classes at the alternative school was 8 to 12 students. The classes were larger in the 6th, 7th and 8th grades than in higher grade levels. Grade levels at the school were sometime combined, for example 11th and 12th graders were in the same math class, and 6th and 7th graders were in the same English class; however, different curriculums were used for each grade level. On account of the small class size, students received a considerable amount of personal instruction.

Classroom observations, grade books reviewed and lessons reviewed revealed that students were given a large number of worksheet assignments to be completed during class, under the supervision of teachers. They were given very little homework. There was very little lecturing by teachers. Instead, teachers spent the majority of class time moving about the classroom and helping students complete assignments that were given. Students raised their hand when they needed help, and the teacher came to their desk. Unfortunately, there were occasions when several students needed help at the same time,

and some students were required to wait several minutes with their hand raised before teachers could give them attention.

(4) Data from observations conducted during faculty meetings and site based decision-making committee meetings revealed that the staff was deliberate in the way they exchanged information about issues that were affecting individual students. Teachers invested considerable time at meetings discussing behavior patterns of specific students, and sharing ideas about the underlying reasons why certain students misbehave. For example, during the first staff meeting attended by this researcher, the staff spent approximately fifteen minutes discussing an individual student who had committed a disciplinary infraction the week before. The teachers discussed the experiences each of them was having with the student, including insight about personal issues contributing to the student's behavior, and how each of them was addressing the misbehavior. The teachers' first priority was to make sure that they were all being consistent. They also developed detailed strategies to collectively address misbehavior. As stated earlier, the whole staff spent about 15 minutes talking about the problems related to one individual student. The teachers had similar discussions about at least two or three such students during each of the three staff meeting

observed. The quality and results of their dialogue reminded this writer of meetings required pursuant to federal law, when educators develop individual education and discipline management plans for special education students.

(5) Findings from personnel documents reviewed confirmed finding from interviews that the faculty was very highly trained, experienced and motivated. All of the teachers were certified in their respective subject, and the least experienced teacher had been an educator for 6 years. Some teacher had as much as 16 years experience. All of the teacher had experience teaching at traditional campuses and at alternative schools, and many of them had entered teaching from private industry. Observations further revealed that the teachers were committed to high levels of productivity and performance. During this research, the teachers were working on their own, applying for a grant to get funds for developing a parental involvement program at the alternative school.

(6) Data from observations in classrooms, the computer labs, and in common areas revealed that normal protocol for relationships between students and teachers was extremely relaxed. Students were observed speaking to teaches in loud tones of voice and using language (including mild profanity) that would probably not be accepted at regular

campuses. Students were observed eating with teachers during class, performing errands for teachers and completing special projects. Teachers frequently allowed students to have privileges like those described above, as rewards for good behavior. The standard protocol was relaxed in both directions. Teachers were observed addressing students in ways that might be considered offensive if the remarks were made by a teacher from their regular campus. For example, one observation included a conversation between a student who was in the hall between classes, and a male teacher who was confronting him. The teacher pointed his finger at the student and after the student came to a stand still, the teacher just stared at him for about five seconds. The student exclaimed, "What!" The teacher asked, "What are you doing?" After the student explained that he was running an errand for another teachers, the teacher approaching him replied sarcastically, as if he did not believe the student, "Yeah, right." The student uttered a couple of word in his defense and continued down the hall. After the student left, the teacher confessed that student was really a good kid, and that he was always running errands for teachers. The teacher was just giving the student a "hard time." This observation was mindful of a father-son

relationship, and very similar to the interactions I have with boys at my church, under similar circumstances.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Social, Cultural and Academic Characteristics and Impacts

There are many parallels between the findings and conclusions developed in this study, and the literature discussed in Chapter Two, which related to drop-out prevention programs, educating at risk students and special education students, as well as discipline alternative education programs. As indicated throughout this chapter, this research confirms that the benefits of small school structures, low student-teacher ratios, and good relationships between students and teachers are equally as important to the success of discipline alternative education programs as they are to the success of alternative education programs for drop-out prevention and special education students. The findings and conclusions from this research have particular relevance for educators and policy makers who wish to address the particular needs of students who are referred repeatedly to discipline alternative schools, and inevitably spend a large part of their public school experience in alternative schools. As the conclusions and recommendations illustrate, this study confirms that long-term multiple referrals benefit considerably

from having prolonged personal relationships with teachers and faculty, which include open and candid communication about matters of concern to students. The literature existing also confirms the benefit of close teacher-students relationships. Another very important finding and conclusion of this study, which is also confirmed in the literature, is the benefit of providing a choice for students whose needs are not satisfied in traditional school environments.

The first section of this chapter is a summary of the findings from data related to the academic impacts. The focus of the second section is the social and cultural characteristics and impacts.

Academic Impacts

The alternative school has a mixed academic impact on students enrolled at the school; the impact on some students is positive, and the impact on others is negative. Students assigned to the alternative school indicated that they had grades at all levels in the range. One multiple referral on his fourth term was an honor student with straight A's. A first-time referral in the school for about 30 days had grades that ranged from A's to D's. And still another first-time referral had failed two classes

during the most recent six-week grading term. Although there were no firm conclusions to be made about the performance of students prior to their first referral, there were several conclusions that emerged about the impact of being referred to the alternative school on the academic characteristics of students with long tenures and multiple referrals.

All of the students assigned to the alternative school received better grades while attending the school. There are a number of reasons for the improved performance. The explanation given by most students is that the work is easier at the alternative school than on their regular campus. Several students indicated the assignments they received at the alternative school were a review of material they already learned at their regular campus. Research, including review of lesson plans and observations, confirmed that the assignments were generally on grade level. However, teachers indicated that they might not be as far along in the curriculum at the alternative school as are the regular campus teachers, which would confirm student accounts of the work being easier or appearing to be a review. In addition, teachers admitted to digressing from the curriculum, if they encountered a student who was not on grade level and was in need of a remedial curriculum. Students not on grade level would fail on the regular campus; therefore, to the extent that

students below grade level are graded on remedial work instead of receiving the grade level curriculum, findings further confirm that assignments at the alternative school are easier.

Teachers at the alternative school, on the other hand, believe the explanation for students getting higher grades has to do with the impact of the small school structure and low student to teacher ratio. The teachers at the alternative school said they endeavor zealously to maintain academic standards for students equal to the regular campuses in the district. They expressed a source of pride in their commitment to refrain from lowering the academic standards at the alternative school or lowering their expectations for students. The alternative school teachers indicated the reason for why students perform better at the school is because they receive more hands on, personal instruction than on their regular campus. Findings confirm that teachers generally distribute assignments to students in class and give a brief explanation for completing the work. The teachers then spend almost all of their class time answering questions for individual students who raise their hand. Findings also confirm that there are only 8 to 10 students in classes at the alternative school; therefore, students receive a great deal of individual attention.

The teachers' opinions are consistent with research discussed in Chapter Two indicating that the reason for improved academic performance at the alternative school is on account of the small classes and low student-teacher ratio. Credible studies have indicated that one of the most important characteristics of effective alternative school programs is a low student-teacher ratio. Research corroborates that smaller classes facilitate more face-to-face, direct communication between teachers and students (Wehlage, 1987). Students get the benefit of more assistance with the specific difficulties they may have with assignments, similar to the kind of support provided in tutorial sessions. Research about the benefits of small classes parallels the findings in this study about why the small class size at the alternative school has a positive impact on students enrolled.

Grades also improve for students because of the academic impact resulting from the school structure and rules that penalize students in "nonacademic" ways for failing to complete assignments. At the alternative school, students not only received low grades for not completing assignments, they received other types of punishment not imposed at their regular campus. Students were denied points for not completing assignments, and they could potentially have their referral

extended. In addition to punitive measures not available to regular campus teachers, the teachers were extraordinarily persistent in motivating students to complete their assignments. Observations confirmed that teachers sometimes walked the class and looked over students' shoulders while they were completing assignments. To quote one teacher, students were "badgered" into academic performance.

One of the more disturbing educational impacts of the alternative school revealed through findings from faculty, and especially from students, is that when students are discharged from the school and return to their regular campus, their grades drop. The students interviewed said that they were behind in their classes when they returned to their regular campus. This finding would confirm that the curriculum at the alternative school is behind the regular campus and, therefore, easier to students who are working at grade level when they are initially referred to the alternative school. Teachers in the school commented on several occasions that students could benefit from a transition process that involves sending assignments for students to the alternative school from teachers at their regular campus.

This study defines academic impact to include a student's educational values, or how a student values the benefits of an education

and obtaining a high school diploma. The findings confirm that one of reasons for improvements in grades is because many of the multiple referrals adopt good educational values while at the alternative school. A number of students indicated that as a result of their experience with teachers at the alternative school, they have set specific goals for themselves and learned to appreciate why it is necessary to get a good education. For example, one student wants to be a probation officer because of the Social Skills class teacher. Other students said the alternative school has impressed upon them that their life can be extremely unpleasant if they don't get a good education.

The combined findings from faculty and students suggest that the reason students perform better at the alternative school is because of a combination of the factors mentioned above: easier work, more hands-on instruction, more pressure to perform, and better educational values. Regardless of the reason for why some students get higher grades, the academic impact on students who return to their regular campus and perhaps never have repeat referrals is undesirable. As stated earlier, the alternative school has a mixed academic impact that's negative for some students and positive for others. The academic impact of the alternative school on multiple referrals is generally positive, in that they get higher

grades and learn to appreciate school. However, the academic impact of the alternative school on students at their regular campus is one of the most troubling findings that resulted from this study. The findings confirm what scholars have said about one of the disadvantages of small size, that being that course offerings at alternative schools are limited because of economy-of-scale (Duke, 1999). Students and staff acknowledged that the alternative school is not able to offer foreign languages and many advanced subjects that are available at traditional campuses. Those students are accurately described by faculty and students as being punished twice: once because they are referred to the alternative school, and again when they return to their regular campus and find themselves behind in all their classes.

Initial Socialization Stage

The initial socialization experience is similar for students who are only referred to the alternative school once, and those who eventually become multiple referrals. New students are quiet in the beginning of their tenure during their first referral. The reasons for being quiet vary. Some students are angry at faculty members, or about the circumstances

leading to their referral. Some are embarrassed. Some of them simply do not want to form relationships with teachers and students at the alternative school, so they withdraw into a shell and wait until they can return to their regular campus. The faculty members believed that most students were quiet in the beginning of their first tenure because they are scared, which is true of some; however, the findings do not confirm that to be a predominant reason for students being quiet. Only one student indicated that her reason for being quiet was fear. It is unlikely that fear is a predominant reason for the kids being quiet, because the findings indicate that they usually have friends whom they see during orientation.

The socialization process is affected a great deal by the restrictions of the Level One class. Students are assigned to Level One for five days, initially, but the time can be extended for misbehavior in or out of class. There is no talking allowed in Level One, which was confirmed by students and faculty to make it difficult for new students to develop relationships with other students or teachers. During a student's tenure in Level One, the best opportunity to develop relationships with students is during lunch or while riding on the school bus to and from school.

Developing relationships with teachers during the Level One class is almost impossible. This difficulty is confirmed by observations and descriptions of the structure, which provides very little opportunity for students to know teachers. Additionally this finding is confirmed by the fact that the first-time students enrolled at the school for four to six days all said they had not gotten to know the alternative school teachers, or had unfavorable impressions of the teachers. In comparison, the first-time referrals enrolled from 25 days to 45 days all stated that they had good relationships with the alternative school teachers, and expressed an appreciation for the teachers who are willing to discuss extremely sensitive topics like sex, drugs, and pregnancy. The students enrolled for four to six days had not experienced the same opportunities to build relationships with teachers as those enrolled 25 to 45 days.

Faculty relationships start to develop as students encounter teachers during class. Some classrooms provide forums where students begin to explore relationships with their teachers because the curriculum and lessons include open discussions. Students also approach teachers between classes, and after school about private issues and questions, and they also talk to the teachers during breaks at school and

call them on the phone from home. The classrooms only set the stage for students to begin having relationships with teachers.

First-time students start to open up after approximately ten days. They start to develop relationships with other students first, then with faculty and teachers. Relationships are easier to develop with students because there is a sense of empathy among the students, and they have some appreciation for what each other is going through. The relationships developed between students on the alternative school are influenced substantially by the fact that most students already have friends or acquaintances at the school. The stress typically associated with beginning school in a new place is substantially reduced. This is supported by findings from students who were asked about problems getting to know other students, to which they all indicated they already knew somebody. In some cases, students who are caught committing an infraction together are referred at the same time. It is not unusual for a student to have his best friend or girlfriend assigned to the alternative school at the same time. The presence of a good friend immediately gives students a feeling of security and belonging within the student body.

Although students associate with small numbers of friends at their regular campus, who generally have similar personalities or interests, students at the alternative school make new friends with kids that have different personalities and interests. The students' social relationships are not restricted by the presence of social groups and cliques that are present on regular campuses. The school is basically too small to have cliques like at a regular campus, and the students have less stress on account of the way social boundaries blend together. This conclusion is supported by findings from the faculty and students. Faculty stated that they believed students experienced less stress at the alternative school, and students indicated they have less to worry about at the alternative school because of the rules. The small number of students facilitates the development of friendships across social lines. During their tenure at the alternative school, students apparently ignore the rules of social interaction that influence whom they associate with at their regular campus. The labels attached to students because they have certain interests (skaters, preppies, and gangsters) are not applied at the alternative school. This result was characterized as a positive by every student interviewed.

Students indicated that because of the dress code and the absence of cliques, they did not have to worry about things at the alternative school that they did at the regular campus. The standard dress (blue jeans and a white shirt) also makes it easier for the kids to form relationships across social boundary lines. The social impact of small class sizes and the dress code is confirmed by faculty and students. Both groups agreed that social standings and cliques are difficult to identify at the alternative school because everybody is the same. Students have difficulty determining to which clique or group another student belongs, when they are all dressed the same. In addition, since students cannot express themselves by dressing or develop their identity from the kinds of clothes they wear, students are forced to find more intrinsic forms of self-identity.

The Development of Social and Cultural Identity

After a period of 10 to 20 days, the initial socialization stage, students begin to reflect on their tenure at the alternative school, and they form conclusions about the school and begin to display certain social and cultural characteristics. Some of the students continue to keep to

themselves, and others form lasting relationships with teachers and students. The social and cultural characteristics adopted by students after the initial socialization stage determine the academic, social and cultural impact from the alternative school. In other words, the alternative school will have a different impact on students who keep to themselves, than it does on kids who bond with faculty and students. A careful analysis of the findings from faculty and student data reveal the following conclusions about the social and cultural characteristics and impacts of student who derive (1) an immediate impact, (2) no impact, and (3) a lasting and substantial impact.

Findings from faculty and students confirm that the alternative school has an immediate impact on some students. As one faculty member stated, some students have good educational values when they come to the campus, and they perceive their entire tenure as punishment. The findings confirm that the school has no impact at all on another group of students. These students are extremely obstinate and, unfortunately, commit disciplinary infractions while at the alternative school that lead to referrals to the juvenile detention center or JJAEP and more serious consequences. There is a third group of students for whom the alternative school has a significant and long lasting impact. The data

confirms that some students set professional and academic goals for themselves, and they learn to appreciate the value of education in connected to the “real world”. These students develop a sense of belonging at the alternative school, and some students said they would have dropped out, if they were still attending school at their regular campus. Regrettably, since some students like the school, this positive impact is contrary to at least two goals at the alternative school, which are to deter kids from subsequent infractions, and provide for their success on a regular campus.

Students Immediately Impacted -- Social and Cultural Characteristics of Students

Some students referred to the school consider the alternative school to be extremely unpleasant. These students have never been in trouble of this magnitude since they started school. They are disturbed simply by having to attend a school that is designated for disciplinary purposes. After the initial socialization period, they learn to tolerate attending the school, but they only develop casual relationships with students and faculty. These students know, emphatically, that they want to go back to their regular campus. These students never develop

meaningful relationships with other students at the alternative school. They get along with everybody and they are well behaved, but they never make any personal connections with the alternative school. These conclusions are supported by the findings from faculty about the social characteristics of “Type A” students, discussed in Chapter Four, as well as by the findings from students. The faculty indicated that Type A students never form bonds. The students indicated that they could immediately identify first-time referrals within their first days who were never going to get repeat referrals. They are socially characterized as keeping to themselves and waiting to get back to their regular campus.

Many of the students in this groups know that the alternative school is not where they want to be from the moment they have to stand in line to pass through the metal detector to begin their school day. They also are determined to do everything in their power to avoid returning. This category of students represents a success for the alternative school, to the extent that one of the school’s goal is to create an effective deterrent for students to avoid committing subsequent discipline infractions. The alternative school has an immediate impact on this category of students, which occurs within the first five days, if not the first day. The impact on high school students who never get repeat referrals is more of a

reinforcement of values and attitudes the students already possess. Because the middle school students are still subject to influences from peers and role models, the deterrent impact is more likely to make the middle school students change bad habits, stop associating with the wrong people, or just start to think about their decisions. The high school referrals, however, have customs and values that are already fixed. Their experience is more likely to be an affirmation of what they already know.

Students Not Impacted -- Social and Cultural Characteristics

Faculty members described some students at the alternative school as being impossible to reach. These conclusions are supported by findings in Chapter Four related to “Type C” students. This group is accurately defined as multiple long-term referrals; however, their relationship with the faculty and staff at the alternative school is generally unpleasant. Teachers generally endeavor to form mentor relationships with students referred repeatedly between middle school and high school. With some students, however, the mentoring efforts are not embraced, and the students’ responses are to continue escalating the same behavior that caused them to be referred. The teachers and faculty have little or no personal relationships with students in this category, and

the teachers' relationship with these students is mostly authoritative. These students do not like their regular campus any more than the group discussed in the following section, for whom there is a positive immediate impact from the alternative school. However, the difference is that they do not like the alternative school, either.

The social and cultural characteristics of these students are difficult to pinpoint. Although most relationships were described as authoritative, other teachers were less critical of students in this category. One faculty member believed they were experiencing frustrations from failing at academics, and as a result, misbehaving. The relationships that teachers have with students in this group are best described in reference to a continuum. Teachers and faculty initially seek mentoring relationships and open channels of communication with students referred to the alternative school. At the point they realize that efforts to cure misbehavior with certain students are not productive, the teachers and faculty will progressively enforce campus rules more strictly. Efforts are made in the beginning of these students' tenure, and probably during the first or second referral, to form a mentoring relationship. But teachers assume less of a mentor role and more of a authoritative role as these students adopt certain, Type C, social and cultural characteristics.

The findings from student data discussing kids with “super” discipline problems also confirm certain conclusions about the way kids in this category relate to other students. Students described the socialization process with most students as pleasant. They got the chance to meet kids with different interests and backgrounds from their own. The exceptions to the overall positive social and cultural characteristics of alternative school students, had to do with kids who were involved with gangs and had propensities for violence. Students in this category did not have social relationships with other students that are typical of the alternative school. Some kids interviewed described how they were careful to avoid some associations, so that they would not get into a fight. They also described being put off by some kids who were so disrespectful of teachers during classes that they disrupted others who were trying to learn. Students interviewed said they stayed away from kids who were likely to cause them to get referred to the juvenile detention center. Some interviewees avoided other students who invited them to do drugs.

The students characterized by teachers as impossible to reach, and by other students as “super” discipline problems, have support groups at the alternative school. Faculty and student data confirm that

students who are determined to get into more trouble develop relationships with other kids with similar interests as their own – whatever they are. The students are heard by faculty making plans for what they will do after school, such as fighting, stealing and doing drugs. At least one faculty member thought these students were prevalent, suggesting that almost all the students at the school plan their illegal acts during school hours. Although findings confirmed that some students at the school develop relationships around interests having to do with illegal activities, students with those relationships are in the minority.

Although these students make up a very small percentage of the total student population at the alternative school, there are enough of them to have an impact on the social and cultural environment, to such an extent that students are cautious about whom they offend or whom they befriend. Middle school students are influenced more than high school students by these problem students, because they are impressionable and more likely to have trouble making good decisions. Students described how the middle school students made role models from some of the older students, and how some of the older students were bad influences. Fortunately, the findings also confirm that there are

students at the alternative school who have determined to be good role models for younger kids, and make an effort to persuade students at the alternative school from making similar decisions and mistakes as they have made.

Students Substantially Impacted -- Social and Cultural Characteristics

Teachers and faculty described a category of students at the alternative school who developed a deep attachment to the school. Some students consider the environment considerably more comfortable than their regular campus. While students generally perceived the alternative school as a punishment, this group of students considered it perfectly acceptable to be at the school. This group is also accurately defined as multiple long-term referrals, like the students discussed in the previous section, who are not impacted by the alternative school. These students fit the description of the kids discussed in the section of Chapter Four related to “Type B” students.

The social characteristics of these multiple long-term referrals are different from the students discussed above, for whom the alternative school has no impact. One similarity is that both groups dislike their regular campus. The difference, however, is that these students grow to

like the alternative school and successfully transition their social attachment towards the teachers there. The students who make the transition of social attachments also differ in respect to educational values, in that these students still consider education to be important and have a desire to be in school. The other group of multiple long-term referrals have much less of a concern about staying in school. The conclusions about the differences in social and cultural characteristics between the two groups are supported by the findings from faculty related to Type B and Type C students. They are also supported by findings from students related to how “super” discipline problems behave with teachers while in class. Both sets of findings confirm the unfortunate reality that some multiple long-term referrals, who by definition are alienated from their regular campus, never have success at the alternative school, either.

There were minor impacts from the alternative school on the relationships that students had with friends from their regular campus. With only a few exceptions, the students’ relationships with kids from their regular campus did not suffer as a result of their assignment. There was a more noticeable impact on the students in middle school than in high school. One honor student and one middle school student said they

had lost friends because the group they associated with before being referred to the alternative school no longer wanted their company. However, all the other students said that they still kept in touch with their friends, after school and on weekends. Most of the students said they would not lose friends as a result of the referral. The only impact on relationships is a short term one that comes as a result of not communicating with friends daily, at school. When students return to their regular campus, there is a period of adjustment with their friends, when they have to catch up on events that have transpired during their absence. The impact that the alternative school has on the relationships with faculty, however, is tremendous.

This category of students does not begin their tenure with having the kind of attachment to the alternative school that is described above. The social and cultural attachment process occurs in stages, through which they develop social relationships with teachers and faculty, and, as a result, develop a sense of belonging and pride in the alternative school. The most substantial impact of the process is that the students begin to consider the teachers at the alternative school to be more trustworthy than the regular campus teachers. The findings confirm that, over time, the alternative school teachers assume a more prominent position in

some students' education. The students start to perceive the alternative school teachers as role models. The alternative school teachers make them want to do better. In other words, the students begin to substitute relationships with alternative school teachers for the relationships they should be developing with teachers on their regular campus. These findings are characterized herein as a "transfer of social attachments" away from the teachers on the regular campus, followed by a development of meaningful social relationships with teachers on the alternative school.

The transference of social and cultural attachments does not begin immediately. The process occurs in stages: (1) stage one is called environmental acceptance, when student begin feeling comfortable; (2) stage two is when students develop a desire and appreciation for the communication with teachers; (3) stage three is when students learn to appreciate the teachers' abilities to teach; (4) stage four is when students start to believe teachers at the alternative school care more.

The first step in the transition occurs towards the end of Level One, when students start to realize that the alternative school is not as bad a place as they believed. They start to relax and find a support group among peers, some of whom they may have known from their regular

campus. This is the first step in the transition of social and cultural attachments; the students begin to perceive the alternative school environment, itself, to be acceptable.

This first step is supported by findings from students in their first four to six days. After a few days, they begin shedding preconceived notions. They realize the alternative school is “not like they thought it would be,” it is “not that bad,” or that there are “some things about the alternative school [they] like.” This period, which this researcher calls the “environmental acceptance” stage, is only one step in process, whereby students transfer social attachments to teachers at the alternative school. The reader should note that many students experience this stage who do not become multiple referrals (i.e., Type A students), and who maintain social attachments with teachers on their regular campus. As confirmed in findings discussed in Chapter Four related to Emmett R. and Helen A., many students who reach the environmental acceptance stage still want nothing more than to get back to their regular campus.

The next step in the process leading to the transfer of social attachments is when long-term multiple referrals develop a desire to communicate with teachers at the alternative school about sensitive issues (drugs, sex, pregnancy), and recognize that a forum exists at the

school to talk to teachers about these issues. The findings from faculty data confirm that the teachers at the alternative school deliberately establish and maintain open channels of communication with students at the school. This stage is when students begin to value the communication process the teachers and faculty have developed.

The findings confirm that students reach this stage of the process at different times during their tenure. The process usually begins after the students have been attending the school for 20 to 30 days. The Level One structure makes it difficult for first-time referrals to begin this stage, until they move into the mainstream classes. The findings confirm that almost all the students in the beginning of their tenure at the alternative school (still within the first 10 days) consider the teachers less caring than those at their regular campus, or they indicated that they had not gotten to know the alternative school teachers. By contrast, the first-time referrals who have been at the school for as many as 25 to 45 days complimented teachers at the alternative school for their candor, and their willingness to engage the classes in conversations that would never transpire at their regular campus. Students who reach this stage believe that regular campus teachers avoid discussing important social issues because the topics are considered inappropriate for classroom discussions, and

students believe the regular campus teachers are afraid they will get fired. The findings discussed earlier confirm that the Social Skills class is an instrumental part of the social attachment transfer process.

Closely connected to the stage where kids start to value the communication process, is a stage where they start to appreciate teachers at the alternative school for their ability to teach. Findings confirm that most students are critical of teachers in the beginning because the teachers give worksheets to students and then provide them with individual instruction and assistance with the worksheets, instead of teaching by lecturing to classes. The students initially criticizing teachers also believe that the curriculum at the school is too easy, and the teachers are less competent than ones at their regular campus. Over time, however, some students come to appreciate the style of instruction used by teachers at the alternative school. This conclusion is supported by findings related to Thomas S., who was critical of his regular campus teacher for just giving lectures, then handing out work assignments. He liked the alternative school teachers because they hassled him about completing his work and didn't allow him to sleep in class. Similarly, findings from Omar B. confirm that some students prefer to get help while they are doing an assignment, instead of receiving a bad grade after they

have done it incorrectly. In addition, findings related Ivy C. confirm that students appreciate the instruction they receive at the alternative school because the teachers give them lessons in “smaller chunks.”

Students at the alternative school who reach the stage where they value the communication process between teachers and start to appreciate the teachers’ instructional abilities and style, enter the final, most crucial stage in the process of transferring their social attachment to teachers at the alternative school. In the last stage of the process, the students start to believe that the alternative school teachers actually care more about them than the teachers at their regular campus.

It is worth noting that none of the findings confirm that teachers at the alternative school or the regular campus actually care more than the other. Teachers at the alternative school who made comparisons to regular campuses reminded this researcher, constantly, that they were not being critical of their counterparts. The alternative school teachers, most of whom had taught on a regular campus during their career, understood that teachers at the regular campus do not have the same priorities and objectives as they do at the alternative school. Students in the beginning of their tenure at the alternative school believe the regular campus teachers care about them more. But students who developed a

sense of belonging at the alternative school believe that the alternative school teachers care more about them. Whether one group of teachers actually cares about students more than another group is a matter of perception.

The conclusions and recommendations related to the “transfer of social attachments” that students with long-term multiple referrals in the alternative school experience parallels the research and literature discussed in Chapter Two of this study. Scholars have confirmed that students develop better self-esteem when they form lasting bonds with teachers and faculty (Gold and Mann, 1989). Students learn the social skills needed to function on their traditional campus more effectively when they have role models with whom they identify and whom they encounter through both teaching and social relationships. Long-term multiple referrals, particularly, are impacted positively when they have meaningful social experiences with teachers who exemplify the characteristics the students need to learn. As reported in the relevant literature and confirmed in this study, in order to motivate them to perform at higher levels, students who are struggling in traditional school environments need to discover that school is relevant to their lives (Arnstine and Futernick, 1999).

One of the most significant conclusions drawn from this study is that students believe that teachers who care about them will make sure that they learn. Students in the process of transferring their social attachments to alternative school teachers make a direct correlation between a teacher's instructional practices and the relationships the teachers have with students. In other words, one of the ways teachers demonstrate that they care is if they care about teaching students. This is confirmed with findings from students who believed that alternative school teachers cared because they give kids the most assistance with their assignments. Likewise, students believe the regular campus teachers care more because they do more lecturing and appear more active in classes.

The stage at which students start believing alternative school teachers care more about them is connected with the stage when they start to value the channels of communication with teachers. The findings confirm that the open channels of communication at the alternative school have a tremendous impact on the academic, social and cultural characteristics of students enrolled in the school. Data from students and faculty confirm that normal protocol for student teacher relationships are relaxed at the alternative school for students who are transferring their

social attachments to teachers at the school. The students indicated that the alternative school teachers start to treat them more like adults. They can go to the alternative school teachers about problems and issues that are extremely personal. Also, the students appreciate the alternative school teachers' willingness to honestly and candidly answer questions about sensitive issues. In summary, students start to believe that alternative school teachers care more about them because the teachers have open channels of communication. Similarly, the students begin to value the open channels of communication as they come to believe that the alternative school teachers care about them.

The Cultural Attachment Paradox

Under normal conditions, a group of teachers would get a lot of satisfaction from knowing students enjoyed their school so much that they wanted to attend and from knowing their influence affected students positively. As evident by the findings and conclusions discussed below, however, this is not the case with teachers at the alternative school. Ironically, the social attachment between teachers and students that would represent an extraordinary success for most campuses is

contradictory to the alternative school's primary goals, and it merely presents teachers on the alternative school with an inherent conflict. A conflict for which this researcher finds no easy answers.

The teachers had mixed feelings about the tendency of students to prefer attending the alternative school over their regular campus. They were happy to have had a positive impact on the students and they valued the relationships; however, teachers at the alternative school hoped to never have the students in a class again. As one teacher described, "I always tell them it's a great school. It's wonderful here, and the teachers really care about you. But this is not the best place for you. The best place for you is out in the real world." The students in this category are generally "Type B" students, discussed earlier. When students developed an attachment to the alternative school, the result was opposite from what the staff desired. In essence, the tendency for students to become attached to the alternative school presented a conflict, one that can be aptly characterized as a "cultural attachment paradox."

The paradox is that educators are naturally pleased whenever students find the school environment attractive and responsive to their needs. That being true, it then becomes difficult to rationalize why educators are not pleased because students at the alternative school like

being at the school. The answer, of course, is that the alternative school teachers want their students to be successful at their regular campus. Ultimately, an educator's highest priority is that their students have successful school experiences. Teachers at the alternative school do not believe they have succeeded with their students, unless those students are successful at their regular campus. Many teachers compared their goal for students to a mother bird teaching her baby birds to fly by pushing them away from the nest. They also used images like cutting a chord, or loosening the students from an apron string.

The qualities that make the alternative school an attractive environment for many students make for an inherent conflict with the overall objective of the school. Given the relationships that the staff members develop with students, and the effort that they devote to making sure the children are priority, it is natural that the students will find the school environment desirable. The objective of the teachers is that their students will never be referred again. However, the impact that teachers have on the students makes them want to return to the school. When students returned, the teachers are happy to see them, but they are unhappy to learn that the students have received another referral.

The cultural attachment paradox is embodied by a particular quality of student who, for one reason or another, is repeatedly referred to the alternative school from the earliest grade possible (6th or 7th grade), until he or she reaches tenth grade or goes to high school. This is the group of students described elsewhere who do not like it at their regular campus, and commit infractions recklessly to be referred back to the alternative school. They are the group of students who present teachers with the inherent conflict of being glad to see them, and sad to see them, at the same time. The teachers stated that they have more impact on this group of students in middle school than when they come back in high school. The teachers are able to help the students in middle school, but as they come on repeated occasions and get to high school, the alternative school is less effective.

The faculty agreed that students at their regular campus are sometimes treated differently if they develop a pattern of repeated referrals to the alternative schools. Regular campus faculty interviewed did not believe they were biased; however, they admitted that they were relieved when certain students who returned from the alternative school received a repeat referral. Some faculty admitted that once a student has been referred to an alternative school, the student might be watched

more closely. Sometimes students who were referred to the alternative school previously were not given as much leeway as one who was never referred.

Students who have a 6th through 10th grade tenure in alternative schools were said to have problems adjusting upon returning to their regular campus, and have difficulties making the transition and being successful at their regular campus. The alternative school faculty indicated that they made deliberate efforts to teach the students how to conduct themselves when they returned to their regular campus. Faculty at the alternative school and the regular campus indicated that the students would benefit from some assistance to help them deal with the stress of returning to their regular campus. There is a process to coordinate the transition of special education students between the alternative school and regular campus because of state and federal law for special education students, but there is no process for helping mainstream students when returning to their regular campus from the alternative school. Some faculty said that it would be beneficial if some of the characteristics and aspects of the alternative school were duplicated at the regular campuses.

The conclusions and recommendations related to the need for programs to help students transition back to their regular campus also parallel the conclusions reached in literature discussed in Chapter Two of this study. Researchers recommended that every alternative school be staffed with a transition specialist, whose responsibility includes providing services for transition to the alternative school and back to the student's regular campus (Duke and Griesdorn, 1999). Scholars suggest that transition specialists contact sending campuses to obtain assignments for students in alternative schools from teachers at their regular campus, and get other information about how the student was doing before their referral. The specialists should also be responsible for helping the student make a smooth transition back to his regular campus, by contacting their teachers about progress the students make while at the alternative school, and then monitoring students' re-adjustment to their regular campus, and offering support if needed. As stated in Chapter Two, only 37% of school districts in Texas report having some type of transition services for students assigned to alternative schools (McCreight, 1999).

Several teachers at the alternative school described efforts on their part to help students leaving the school make the transition at their

regular campus. The teachers waged their own battle against the Cultural Attachment Paradox with creative ideas to help their student's transition successfully. For example, one teacher gave students an assignment to prepare a portfolio of themselves that included references from parents and teachers, examples of work, and a personal statement. The portfolio was prepared for the student to take back to their regular campus and present to teachers. The "cultural attachment paradox" characterizes the most important reasons revealed in this research why students are referred to the alternative school on repeated occasions. The impacts of this phenomenon are numerous and this particular subject is a worthy topic for additional research.

Cross-Analysis of Student and Faculty Data

As a prelude to the recommendations that follow and to underscore some of the conclusions reached in this study, particular attention and notice should be taken about a number of fundamental issues upon which both students and faculty agreed. It is also beneficial for policy makers and educators to make note of some of the issues about which the students and faculty disagree. As discussed throughout

this chapter and highlighted in the following recommendations, the review of literature in Chapter Two parallels many of the findings and conclusions reached in this study. As discussed in the recommendations that follow, applying the information from existing literature to the findings and conclusion from this study offers considerable insight for policy makers and educators about the priorities and objectives discipline alternative education programs should embrace.

Students and faculty both agreed that the open channels of communication maintained by faculty at the alternative school had a tremendous impact on the students. The findings confirm that the communication process at the school included open discussions about issues affecting students in a personal way. Faculty and staff indicated they encouraged students to talk to them about personal matters, including drugs, sex, family problems, gangs, and other subjects that teachers at regular campuses tend not to discuss. Teachers at the alternative school indicated that regular campuses have so many students that teachers don't get to know them all as intimately as they do at the alternative school. There is not a Social Skills class at the regular campus, which facilitated a lot of discussions, and the alternative school

students believed that teachers at the regular campus were afraid of being disciplined if they talked about certain subjects. At the alternative school, these subjects were not usually discussed during class, except for the Social Skills class; however, teachers and faculty welcomed students who visited them before and after school or during breaks. The students all indicated that they appreciated the open channels of communication maintained with teachers. Many students recognized the positive impacts of having good relationships with teachers at the alternative schools. They were pleased that the alternative school teachers treated them like adults. Some students set specific career goals for themselves as a result of their relationship with a teacher, and others had come to appreciate the value of an education in ways they never would have, if not for teachers at the alternative school. The students described the teachers as people they could “go to” to talk about anything.

The combined findings from student and faculty data also confirm that the alternative school had a mixed impact on the students enrolled, depending on whether they fit the characteristics of Type “A,” Type “B,” or Type “C” students, discussed in the findings and analysis of faculty data. On Type “A” students (described in the analysis of faculty data as

“Slipped Up and Never Coming Back”), the school has an immediate impact. On Type “B” students (described in the analysis of faculty data as “Slipped Down and Landed on Her/His Feet”), the school has a substantial and long lasting impact. On Type “C” students (described in the analysis of faculty data as “Slippery Slope and Sad Outlook”), the school has no impact.

Many students described a category of students with Type “A” characteristics (immediate impact and never coming back) who could be recognized as soon as they enrolled at the alternative school. Students interviewed said they could identify other students whom they knew would “never be back” after four or five days. Students and faculty agreed that the Type “A” students were the ones who stayed withdrawn even after getting out of level one; they never talked much in class, and even though they socialized with students and teachers, they never developed any close relationships. They were usually referred for being tardy to class too many times, or because of an isolated incident when they were in the wrong place at the wrong time. Frequently, students fitting the Type A profile were in High School when they were referred for the first time.

One of the students interviewed who fit the Type A profile was Emmett R. Emmett was being referred for the first time for being sent to

the office too many times, and he was in the 11th grade. He said all he wants is to “do his time” and get back to his regular campus. The alternative school has some good qualities, but Emmett repeated six times while being interviewed that he does not want to come back.

Another student interviewed fitting the Type “A” profile is Linda C. When interviewed, she was in the 12th grade and completing her first referral for possession of marijuana. She says she does not smoke, but she was with other students who were smoking, and who admitted that the marijuana was theirs, but she was referred for being with them. Linda recognized that she had become more talkative and “louder” since being at the alternative school, and the change was not entirely positive. Linda said she did not like the way that adults in her neighborhood treated her when they learned she was attending the alternative school, and the assumptions they made. She is proud of the example her mother (a single parent) has set for her and wants to make her mother proud. Linda said unequivocally that she knows she is never coming back to the alternative school. She had already been admitted into a college for the performing arts at the time of these interviews, where she planned to attend the following year.

The findings and analysis from student data also corroborate the findings and analysis from faculty data regarding Type “B” students, for whom the school has a substantial and long lasting impact. The faculty members interviewed stated that there is a category of students whose needs are satisfied at the alternative school more effectively than at their regular campus. They still want to be in school, but they can not fit in at the regular campus. Their self-esteem is nurtured at the alternative school because of the mentor relationships, the opportunities to be successful, and the open channels of communication with teachers and staff. They find a niche for themselves and develop a sense of ownership at the alternative school. Those are the students whom the teachers and staff know they will see on repeated occasions. They are the subjects and the cause of the “cultural attachment paradox” discussed previously.

Similarly, findings from students interviewed suggest many of them feel more at home at the alternative school than at their regular campus. The similarities in findings from the faculty and students data related to Type “B” student is best illustrated by the comments from students interviewed, who fit the profile of a Type “B” student.

The repeat referrals who fit the profile of a Type “B” student may be relatively easy for the reader to identify. Omar B. has been referred two

times. He says the alternative school teachers make him feel important and make him want to try harder. He likes the alternative school better because they will tolerate profanity, horseplay and other minor disciplinary infractions better than teachers at his regular campus. This is only Omar's second referral, but he wants to take the teachers from the alternative school back with him to his regular campus.

Mary U. is a special education student in the 10th grade who also fits the Type "B" profile. She has been referred to the alternative school two times. She thinks the teachers at the alternative school are more understanding and caring. Mary is more comfortable at the alternative school, even though she can not wear her regular clothes, and she does not like the impression that many people have about the school, that it's a place for "screw ups." Mary believes that the alternative school provides a real "opportunity" for students.

Similarly, Amy K., a 10th grader who has been referred six times, said the alternative school teachers made her feel like she was wanted and made sacrifices for students. Amy said she looks forward to coming to the alternative school, and that seeing the teachers and other students at the alternative school made her feel better than she felt on her regular campus. Amy said she skipped class at her regular campus and did not

“try very hard.” She likes the alternative school because she cannot get away with skipping, and she knows that if she does not do her work she will be punished by losing points and privileges. She has a very close relationship with the social skills teacher, and on account of that teacher’s influence, Amy has set a goal to become a probation officer. Amy has learned a lot of lessons at the alternative school, things she says she “use to know in her head, but now she knows in her heart.”

Other examples of students fitting the Type “B” profile include Dylan U., a 10th grade student at the school for the second time, both times fighting. He likes the alternative school because it gives him the time to “think.” Whereas at his home school he has to worry about too many things, like cliques, girlfriends, and people “talking mess.” Likewise, Thomas S., an 11th grader who has been referred 4 times since the 6th grade, said that he rarely goes to all his classes, except when he is referred to the alternative school; here, he comes to school “everyday.” He said he has been at the alternative school so much that he feels out-of-place at his regular campus. Thomas has a hard time adjusting when he gets back to his regular campus, and after a few weeks, he gets another referral.

The biographies of repeat referrals in Chapter Four include other examples of students fitting the Type “B” profile, and their stories corroborate findings from teacher data about the capacity of alternative schools to meet students’ needs that can not be satisfied in traditional settings. However, the reader is also strongly encouraged to reexamine the findings and biographies of first-time referral students. The data from first-time referrals are also valuable for the purpose of corroborating the findings from teacher and faculty data. In addition, examining the student data from first-time referrals reveals characteristics that serve as predictors for determining whether a first-time referral may become a repeat referral.

One example of a first time student who fits the Type “B” profile is Carlos N., who was referred to the alternative school for smoking marijuana. He said he feels more comfortable with teachers at the alternative school because they talk about subjects that teachers at his regular campus cannot discuss. He said the alternative school teachers care more about meeting his needs, and that he has never had teachers that made him feel “special.” He expressed disappointment about not having teachers at his regular campus like those in the alternative school, who give him the help he needs to be successful.

Another example of first-time referral interviewed who embodied the Type “B” profile is Henry I., who was referred for an alleged theft committed at school. Henry says he likes the alternative school because the teachers give less work and offer more help. He wants to go back to the regular school and see his friend. At the same time, he believes things are better for him at the alternative school. He has been suspended in the past, but never sent to an alternative school.

Still another first-time referral meeting the Type “B” profile is Reginald A., a 9th grader who was referred for fighting. He moved to the district at the beginning of the current school year. Although this is his first time being in an alternative school in this district, he has been referred to alternative schools in previous districts four times since the 6th grade, mostly for fighting. It is notable that Reginald says he is finally learning from his repeat referrals. He is more determined to take “care of business” since starting at a new school, and he is determined not to develop a pattern of repeat referrals in his new district. He is also motivated to improve his behavior because he wants to be a good role model for his little sister.

Each of the first-time referral students mentioned immediately above has academic, social and cultural characteristics that the teachers

and faculty interviewed attribute to Type “B” students. Most of the students acknowledge that the alternative school is better for them. Few educators would disagree about the location where the students’ needs are better served, as the students describe the differences between their experiences at the alternative school and their regular campus. Although the students will, unfortunately, be referred for discipline problems before having their needs served at the alternative school, in the long-run, they may be the better for it. The findings lead to an inescapable conclusion that the students will probably return to the alternative school as “long-term multiple referrals.”

The combined findings from student and faculty data also confirm that there is a category of students for whom the alternative school will not have any impact, also characterized as Type “C” students. These are the students who do not like the alternative school any better than their regular campus. Frequently, the students commit infractions while at the alternative school that result in more serious consequences, such as them being referred to a juvenile justice alternative education program (JJAEP).

The students interviewed corroborate the findings from faculty data about the characteristics of Type “C” students. Several students made

reference to other students whom they avoided because they knew the other students were involved with drugs, into gangs, or because they were prone to fighting. This category of students is described by this writer as “super” discipline problems; they are not afraid of being expelled completely from school, or being sent to the JJAEP. Student data indicate that some students at the alternative school are so disruptive that they make it difficult for others to pay attention in class. The faculty and staff indicated that they do not have the same kind of communication and relationships with Type “C” students and Type “B” students. Although both groups are “long-term multiple referrals,” rules are enforced more strictly with Type “C” students, and they do not enjoy the mentoring relationships that teachers have with Type “B” students.

One example of a student fitting the Type “C” profile is Henry C, a 7th grade student on his third referral. He was referred once for submitting a story about an inappropriate subject matter, and once for sending pornography to a vice-principal over the Internet from the school library. Henry was equally critical of his regular campus and the alternative school. He said the students and teachers at his regular school mistreat him when he returns to his regular campus, so he is apprehensive about returning. At the same time, he has no respect for

the teachers and staff at the alternative school, and he thinks the school is designed to punish kids rather than give them an education. As a result of his experiences at both campuses, Henry said he has become very angry at the whole educational system.

Findings examples of Type “C” students in the data is more difficult than finding examples of Type “A” or Type “B” students. One reason is that student participation in the interviews was completely voluntary, and Type “C” students are less likely to volunteer. Another reason is that students who possibly fit the Type “C” profile are likely to be more guarded than other students about expressing themselves candidly. The researcher also cautions educators and policy makers about the risk of attaching labels to students that are overly rigid. Overall, the findings from student data and faculty data about the characteristics of Type “A,” “B,” and “C” students, and the impact on those students from the alternative school, are closely parallel.

The data from students and faculty related to academic performance and impact are consistent in some respects. Both groups indicated that students performed better at the alternative school than at their regular campus. Both groups also agreed that when students returned to their regular campus, academics performance suffered and it

was poorer than before the referral. Both groups also agreed that students were usually behind their peers in the curriculum when returning to classes at their regular campus.

The students and faculty disagreed about one important aspect of the academic impact of the alternative school. All of the students assigned to the alternative school received better grades while attending the school. The explanation given by most students is that the work is easier at the alternative school, and that it was a review of material they already learned at their regular campus. Teachers at the alternative school, on the other hand, believed the explanation for students getting higher grades had to do with the impact of the small school structure and low student to teacher ratio. They indicated the reason students perform better is because they receive more hands-on, personal instruction than on their regular campus.

Observations and documents reviewed by the researcher offer insight about the reasons why students do better academically at the alternative school. Observing classrooms and reviewing lesson plans indicated that lessons were on grade level, but the alternative school teachers were not as far along in the curriculum as classes at the regular campus, which would confirm student accounts of the work being easier

or appearing to be a review. In addition, teachers admitted to digressing from the curriculum if they encountered a student who was not on grade level, which was confirmed in observations.

The above observations confirm the findings from student data about improved performance. However, other observations also confirm the findings in teacher data about the impact on academics from the small classes and hands-on instruction. Teachers generally distributed assignments to students in class, gave a brief explanation for completing the work, then spent almost all of their class time answering questions for individual students who raised their hand. Observations also confirm that there were only eight to ten students in classes at the alternative school; therefore, students received a great deal of individual attention.

The combined findings from observations, faculty data and student data suggest that the reason students perform better at the alternative school is because of a combination of the factors mentioned above: easier work, more hands-on instruction, more pressure to perform, and better educational values. Regardless of the reason why students get higher grades at the alternative school, the academic impact of the alternative school on students at their regular campus is one of the most troubling findings that resulted from this study. Those students are

accurately described by faculty and students as being punished twice: once because they are referred to the alternative school, and again when they return to their regular campus and find themselves behind in all their classes.

Recommendations for Policies and Administrators

The following recommendations are offered for the benefit of administrators and policy makers. The recommendations are each directly related to findings and conclusions from this study, and also reflect a practical application of the principles established in the relevant literature. The citations to findings and literature, and the recommendations are not intended to be exhaustive. Instead, the collection of suggestions, considered together or individually, merely represent one example of how policy can be applied in a practical feasible method to provide for higher quality education for students attending alternative schools.

The first recommendation is that DAEP schools offer at least three different curriculum models from which students can choose, consistent with suggestions from scholars that curriculums be personalized

(Secada, 1999). One model is for kids in advanced classes, who choose to earn credit for advanced courses while in a DAEP. Those kids will get most of their assignments from teachers on their regular campus, work independently, and have the option of attending tutorials before and after school, if they choose to keep pace with the class on their regular campus. A different model is needed for kids working on grade level. They should be given the chance to keep pace with their regular classes, by getting a weekly report from their regular school teacher on what was covered in class, and then be given the choice of doing extra work to keep up. A third model is needed for the students working behind grade level. They should be given remedial help, with instruction at an accelerated pace, while at the alternative school. They should also set tangible goals to accomplish. When the students return to their regular campus, they should be given the option of continuing to receive remedial help until they reach the goals identified at the alternative school.

This recommendation responds to the findings and conclusions in this study that confirm there are different types of students at the alternative school with different academic needs. The academic characteristics of students range from honor students to those marginally passing. One of the most disturbing conclusions from this study is that

students' grades drop when they return to their regular campus from the alternative school. This recommendation applies research and literature confirming that alternative schools should have curriculums that address students' academic, social, and behavioral needs (Rutherford & Quinn, 1999). This study confirms that there are at least three categories in which the social and cultural characteristics of schoolchildren in DAEP schools can be divided. The study also confirms that the schools need to respond differently to make sure there is a positive impact on the children in each category.

Students said that they wished they could have teachers and faculty from the alternative school back at their regular campus. The second recommendation is that students be given the opportunity, by choice, to enroll in a program that satisfies their needs, that does not require them to be referred for a disciplinary infraction. Having a choice in where they attend school is most important to those students who still want to be in school but who just can't seem to function in a traditional environment.

As discussed in the previous chapter, students at the alternative school being studied have a wide range of needs. Some students know that they belong at their regular campus, and they need very little to

discourage them from getting into trouble again or committing another infraction that will get them referred to the alternative school. Other students have such a rebellious attitude and basic dislike for school, that they will not be successful at their regular campus or at an alternative school. Then, there is a category of students who still believe that school is important, and who experience success while enrolled at the alternative school, but who never manage to emulate the same success when they return to their regular campus. This latter group of students are the ones for whom educators and policymakers should provide a third option, something in between being required to attend a traditional school that does not satisfy their needs, or being required to attend an alternative school designed for discipline purposes, and which carries with it the stigma of being labeled the school for “bad” students. Scholars (Asher, 1982; Collins, 1987; Lee and Burkman, 1992) have agreed without dissent that when students are given a choice in where they attend school, they approach school with more commitment to perform well, and parents are more involved and supportive.

Educators have recognized that some students have needs that are best satisfied in programs specially designed with those needs in mind. Choices in programs are traditionally provided to other categories

of students for whom the traditional school environment is no longer suitable. For example there are special programs available for teenage mothers, for adult learners, and most notably for special education students. Those students are allowed the option to choose programs that are suited to their needs, without the stigma of first being earmarked for disciplinary sanctions, and without the feeling that they are being punished while in attendance at the special program. The most important conclusions and recommendations growing from this study involve the need for public school systems to provide a less stigmatizing, more positive alternative for the “type B” long-term multiple referrals, who want to be in school, but whose needs are not satisfied in traditional school organizations.

Recommendation number three is that all schools be required to develop a transition program to help students make the adjustment back to their regular campus. The transition should be supervised by guidance counselors and include counseling sessions. Faculty and students agreed that one reason students are referred to the alternative school repeatedly is because of the difficulty making a transition back to their regular campus. Some elements of the program should be mandatory. The program should include components such as: writing personal

statements for teachers at their regular campus, alternative school teachers and regular school teachers exchanging work samples and reports, students getting recommendations from alternative school teachers, attending half-days or alternate-days at the alternative school, regular meetings between students and liaisons from the alternative school, and providing a forum for students to accept responsibility for their wrongdoing and make amends with any faculty who were affected by the students' misconduct. This recommendation draws from a body of literature reporting on the benefits of getting children to understand the consequences and relevance of their behavior to other people and to their community (DeVore and Gentilcore, 1999). The recommendation also applies research about the benefit of students connecting with adults (Wehlage, Rutter, and Turnbaugh, 1987), and applies research about the role that quality counselors can have in addressing the needs of students in alternative schools (Downs, 1999).

The fourth recommendation is that students enrolled in DAEP schools be given the opportunity to keep pace with the material covered in classes at their regular campus. Research confirms that high academic standards in alternative schools are also an effective means for addressing discipline problems (Leone and Drakeford, 1999).

Currently, State laws exist for alternative schools that make an exception to the teacher certification requirements, curriculum requirements, and graduation requirements. Some students cannot continue taking advanced level classes, language classes, or Honors classes because they were referred to a DAEP school. If the policies driving the laws related to DAEP programs are to keep children in school, then the students should be provided the same educational opportunity at DAEP schools that they would get in any other schools.

While economy-of-scale makes the goals seem unreasonable, a great deal can be accomplished with policies requiring an “academic transition” component in alternative school programs that involve communication between the regular campus and the alternative school. State laws could provide that students referred to DAEP schools are entitled to have assignments sent from their regular campus, if they choose. Students in advanced classes should have the option to receive a curriculum comparable to what she or he receives on her or his regular campus. Currently, students referred to DAEP schools may be punished twice: once when they are physically segregated from their regular campus, and again when/if they are denied the educational opportunity they would receive at their regular campus.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study has raised questions and issues that suggest the following subjects for additional research.

1. Students and faculty describe a level of stress that kids experience at their regular campus that does not exist at the alternative school. Findings from this study reveal the existence of at least three sources of stress. These sources are called the three C's: cliques, clothes and classes. The characteristics and impact of those sources of stress would make for a very important study -- for the benefit of alternative schools and regular campuses.
2. A study needs to be conducted about the impact of DAEP schools on the group of long-term multiple referrals whom faculty describe as impossible to reach, or Type C students, and who are described as "super" discipline problems. It would be worthwhile to study the social and cultural characteristics of those students, in depth, to determine how they can be motivated to complete high school.
3. A more in-depth study needs to be conducted about the difficulty that students in alternative education schools have with making the transition when returning to their regular campus. The students and faculty at the regular campuses are a source of worthwhile data for such a study.

Conclusion

Assumptions were made at the beginning of this study that the results would have benefits for policy makers, who are responsible for

writing laws and establishing statewide guidelines for the implementation of Discipline Alternative Education Programs. In addition, assumptions were made that this study would have benefits to the district where the research was conducted, by providing it with valuable data and information about the impact of DAEP programs on students with long-term multiple referrals.

This study identifies three distinct groups of students who matriculate in the DAEP program. The study further describes how the students function and perform in the setting, from the perspective of both students and faculty. This study has raised more questions than have been answered. The real benefit of this study is the information it provides teachers, faculty and others who touch the lives of the children attending alternative schools. There were over 20 students interviewed for this study and 20 faculty members. The data that were most important were not the insight that students and faculty had to offer about trends and patterns of social and cultural impacts. The most important data were the stories the people told. Not only did every person tell a couple of stories about themselves, they had stories to tell about other people, too. Some of the stories had similarities, but no two stories were alike. Although the questions I asked were about social, cultural and

educational impacts, the answers I received were about the role that the alternative school played in student's lives.

I heard stories about fear and shame, and I heard stories about resolve and pride.

I heard stories about giving up, and I heard stories about getting motivated.

I heard stories about isolation and loneliness, and I heard stories about companions and friendship.

I heard stories about lessons taught, and I heard stories about lessons learned.

I heard stories about dropping out, and I heard stories about fitting in.

The stories began to have more significance as this research moved to a conclusion because it was during that period when one compelling truth (as I see it) emerged. The impact of the discipline alternative education program on any individual student is as unique as that student's experiences, and as compelling as the story she or he has to tell.

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