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# Assessment of the Criteria Used to Evaluate the Effectiveness of Different Types of Alternative Education Programs in Georgia

Angela Elizabeth Pope

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AN ASSESSMENT OF THE CRITERIA USED TO EVALUATE THE  
EFFECTIVENESS OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION  
PROGRAMS IN GEORGIA

by

ANGELA E. POPE

(Under the Direction of Walter Polka)

ABSTRACT

This study examined the current assessment criteria utilized to evaluate the effectiveness of various alternative education programs within the state of Georgia. The population surveyed included alternative program principals for the year 2005-2006, from a list provided by the Georgia Department of Education.

A survey instrument was constructed based on a synthesis of the existing literature on alternative education programs and was e-mailed to 207 principals within the state. The survey consisted of 20 multiple-choice items and three open-ended questions. Only 25 surveys were returned, which represented a 12.08% response rate. In addition, four principals from within a large metro Regional Educational Service Agency (RESA) district were interviewed, allowing the researcher to gain in-depth knowledge regarding the evaluative criteria utilized at various alternative programs.

This study utilized the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for the statistical analysis of data. Descriptive statistics were calculated and presented for the analysis of quantitative data. Content analysis was used to formulate emerging themes from qualitative data.

Study results indicated from the small population of respondents that most alternative schools were evaluated. The researcher also discovered that overwhelmingly most alternative programs are evaluated by reviewing student academic progress and/or gathering staff and/or student feedback. Follow-up studies are advised to garner higher response rates to determine if the results are similar.

**INDEX WORDS:** Alternative education programs, Evaluation, CrossRoads, Georgia

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## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my mother, Joe Anne Pope. She always had faith that I could accomplish this arduous task. She kept me afloat when I felt like giving up.

Furthermore, this dissertation is dedicated to Michael Pope, who lives vicariously through me. He always told me that he would not allow me to quit because “that would mean that you quit and you are not a quitter!”

Also, I dedicate this dissertation to Van, who listened, supported me, and remained loyal through the commutes, late hours and times when I closed myself off to the world. I am forever grateful. Finally, I dedicate this dissertation to the rest of my family, who encouraged and supported me through it all. I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to all of my nieces and nephews who feel as though they cannot make it. Never give up, and strive for the best!

Above all, I dedicate this dissertation to Jehovah God for allowing me the strength, patience, perseverance and determination to accomplish this task through all of life's trials and tribulations!

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Across our nation, educators, parents, students, and politicians are calling for improvement in our education system. While Americans have always valued education, the implementation of the 2002 No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) has renewed and reinvigorated the public's interest, especially regarding our nation's at-risk students, and has laid the foundation for every child to be guaranteed a basic, fair and equal education (U.S. Department of Education, 2004a). By setting basic reading and math standards, the act seeks to decrease the 24% dropout rate among America's poorest students (Office of Juvenile Delinquency and Prevention, 2005), and it is seen as an important vehicle for addressing the academic deficiencies of historically underserved populations (U. S. Department of Education, 2004b).

Research points to several predisposing factors for students dropping out of school (Hefner-Packer, 1990; Raywid, 1999; Mottaz, 2002). Students who are habitually absent or truant, chronically disruptive, dislike school, become pregnant, display delinquent behavior, and/or demonstrate low academic performance all have a greater probability of dropping out of school (Gold & Mann, 1984; Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack & Rock, 1986; Gavin, 1997; Bock, Tapscott & Savner, 1998; Hellriegel & Yates, 1999). Students who exhibit social or emotional adjustments are also at heightened risk for dropping out (Gold & Mann, 1984) as well as those who have been retained for a second year in the same grade (Ekstrom et al. 1986; Frymier, 1992). The categorization of "at risk" has been used to identify students who demonstrate low achievement: at-risk students have been classified as those who exhibit poor social behaviors, academic

difficulties, attendance issues, discipline problems, and who rarely complete high school (Coleman, 2001; Wehlage, 2001). This population seldom obtains the resources they need from the schools they attend.

Although the above factors are prevalent and widespread in public education today, some educators fail to realize the need for school restructuring to address these problems (Frymier & Joekel, 2004). Many school systems continue to use an approach that is geared towards “one size fits all” (Yatvin, 2004) as opposed to attempting to reach all students (Raywid, 2001). Clearly, this method is no longer viable, as it caters to the students of privilege while the poorer poverty-ridden students’ education may suffer (Yatvin). Educators or school systems that insist on a static system postulate that all students learn at the same time and in the same manner (Hefner-Packer, 1990; Conley, 2002). However, as John Dewey observed, a static system fails to focus on the unique needs that each student brings to school on a daily basis (Dewey, 1906).

In recent years, the increased prevalence of violent episodes and discipline problems has further exacerbated the need for differentiated learning opportunities for students in public schools. As an example, the following eight incidents of school violence that have occurred since the Columbine event of April 20, 1999 highlight major concerns for parents, educators and politicians regarding the plight of public education (Indystar, 2005):

1. November 8, 2005, Jacksboro, Tennessee: An assistant principal was killed and two other administrators were wounded after a 15-year-old student opened fire in a high school.

2. March 21, 2005, Red Lake, Minnesota: A 16 year-old shot his grandfather and his grandfather's girlfriend to death and later went to his high school to kill a security guard, a teacher, five students, and wounded seven others before killing himself.
3. November 24, 2004, Northern Indiana: A 15-year-old high school student stabbed seven of his classmates.
4. May 7, 2004, Randallstown, Maryland: Four teenagers leaving a basketball game at their high school were wounded in a drive-by shooting. A 17-year old student of the school who was involved in an episode over a female later became a suspect.
5. April 3, 2004, Houston, Texas: A shot was fired from a passing car into a school with about 200 students.
6. February 11, 2004, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: A ten-year old lost his life outside of a school due to gunfire between gangs.
7. March 10, 2000, Savannah, Georgia: A 19-year old killed two students while leaving a school-sponsored event.
8. May 20, 1999, Conyers, Georgia: A depressed 15-year old injured six students at Heritage High School.

Incidents such as these have left citizens confused, afraid, and asking what can be done about America's children. Albert Shanker, former president of the American Federation of Teachers, stated in an address that school disorder caused by some is a problem for everyone (1995); furthermore, the results of the *1997 Phi Delta Kappa Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools* revealed that most violence and discipline problems are major concerns of the public, and they identified an interest to remove "persistent troublemakers to alternative schools" (Rose & Gallup). Results of the poll



also reflected that the public continues to think there is no control of discipline issues in America's schools. Although serious crimes among juveniles have decreased substantially in recent years, more than 30% of violent incidents occur at or in transition to school (Office of Juvenile Justice Delinquency and Prevention, 2006). Could alternative education be the answer for this important population of students?

### Alternative Education

A significant amount of research focused on emerging alternative education during the late 1960s to 1970s, but the notion of, alternative schools can be traced even further back to the writings of John Dewey and the Progressive Education movement (Thomas, Sabatino, & Sarri, 1982; Conley, 2002) and the A. S. Neil Summerhill period of education (Thomas, Sabatino, & Sarri). In the alternative school movement of the 1960s and 1970s, parents voluntarily sent their children to alternative schools to give their children varied instruction, smaller class size and flexibility. These schools were greatly influenced by parental involvement and were not required as a form of punishment (Lange & Sletten, 2002). However, within the past few decades, alternative education has come to mean punitive, involuntary assignments to a variety of programs (Foley & Lan-Szo, 2006).

As the newer generation of alternative schools is being developed, there is little clear consensus regarding their definition (Conley, 2002; Lehr & Lange, 2003); most researchers consider them to be places where students receive individualized attention and varied instruction (Conley, 2002; Hadderman, 2002; Wagner, Wonacott & Jackson, 2005) and as viable options to traditional schools for students to learn in different ways and/or in different timeframes (Thomas, Sabatino, & Sarri, 1982; Chalker, 1996; Lange,

1998; Conley, 2002; Mottaz, 2002). In addition, they are often seen as places that have the advantages of a smaller class size (Tobin & Sprague, 2000), a supportive environment, and flexibility (Gold & Mann, 1984; Hefner-Packer, 1990), and that allow students to be innovative, flexible and independent in their learning (Lange & Sletten, 2002). Many alternative schools have their own mission statements and administrative staff, and they often have separate building facilities (Kellmayer, 1995; Raywid, 1999).

As the educational system and students have changed, alternative schools have begun to take on new definitions. Raywid (1994) sorts alternative settings into three categories: Type I, Type II and Type III. Type I alternative schools represent a particular theme or content area. Type II alternative schools are categorized as “last chance programs,” are aimed at changing students’ behaviors (Raywid, 1999), are often punitive in nature, and have been equated with “soft jails”. Students may be assigned to these programs for chronic disciplinary problems, violent incidents, or violating a district’s code of conduct. Lastly, Type III alternative schools focus on some form of remediation, and frequently the students return to traditional schools after attending them. Still, not all alternative schools are easy to categorize, and many may have a mix of any of the three types of programs.

During the past two decades, the phrase “alternative school” has begun to be equated with punitive setting alternative schools (Kellmayer, 1995; Lange & Sletten, 2002) as states and school districts across the United States have been implementing Type II settings to address the growing demands of at-risk students (Lehr & Lange, 2003; Hosley, 2003). In many states, such as Pennsylvania and Georgia, punitive alternative programs or CrossRoads programs were implemented to “primarily serve students who

had been removed from the regular classroom due to chronic disruption” (Hosley, 2003; Georgia Department of Education, 2005, p. 1). The CrossRoads program, one of the available punitive models which may be used in Georgia, provides intensive individual development for students who have been removed from the regular school environment in response to disruptive behavior (Georgia Department of Education, 2003). The CrossRoads model seeks to serve at-risk disruptive students from dysfunctional families; those with poor communication between home and school; and students who believe they have little control, have few or no goals, possess no coping skills, and have little hope for the future (Georgia Department of Education, 2000).

The number of violent incidents, chronically disruptive students, school dropouts, and at-risk students has increased dramatically in recent years (Kellmayer, 1995; Lange & Sletten, 2002). Orfield (2004) has maintained that “dropouts are more likely than graduates to be unemployed, in prison, unmarried, or divorced and living in poverty” (p. 1). The Labor Commissioner of Georgia has stated that students in punitive alternative settings should use those schools as opportunities to change their lives and improve their employment futures (M. Thurmond, personal communication, February 27, 2006). Since the unemployment rate for high school dropouts is significantly higher than that of high school graduates (U. S. Department of Education, 2006), society will face increased social liabilities (Wehlage, Rutter, & Turnbaugh, 1987) if students fail to complete at least a high school education; as a result, there is currently a great amount of accountability placed on educational leaders to ensure the educational environment is conducive to learning and student achievement (Frymier & Joekel, 2004). Educational leaders need to recognize the negative impact students place on society when they disrupt

the learning of others and themselves and be aware that it is critically important to the health of society that students remain in school to complete at least a high school diploma.

Despite the great need for alternative schools, current extant research evaluating these programs has caused politicians, parents, educators and others to question their effectiveness (Mesinger, 1986; Cox, Davidson, & Bynum, 1995; Harnish & Henderson, 1996; Conley, 2002; Lange & Sletten, 2002). Cox et al. conducted a meta-analysis of numerous studies and discovered that alternative schools had a small impact on self-esteem, school accomplishments and attitudes, but none on student behavior. Punitive settings are largely regarded to have almost no impact on negative behaviors, with open admission alternative settings seen as even less effective than targeted programs (Raywid, 1999; Wiley, 2000).) Moreover, Chalker (1994) conducted a study of 27 of Georgia's Secondary Alternative Schools that reflected inconsistencies in program evaluations. Due to the current lack of valid methods to evaluate alternative programs, many students are lost (Reimer & Cash, 2003).

Increased accountability, coupled with the importance of reaching this disenfranchised group of students, calls for the assessment and implementation of proper and effective evaluation measures. Accordingly, this study will assess the criteria used to evaluate the effectiveness of the different types of alternative programs within the state of Georgia by conducting a statewide survey of alternative programs followed by interviews within a large metro Regional Educational Service Agency (RESA) district of Georgia.

### Statement of the Problem

In 1994, Georgia mandated a statewide alternative education program to be overseen by the Georgia Department of Education (GDOE). The Georgia Department of Education developed the CrossRoads program as a categorical grant to supplement the Quality-Based Education (QBE) formula for funding. The objective of the program was twofold:

1. To provide chronically disruptive students, youth committed to a Department of Children and Youth Services (DCYS) facility, and/or non-attending students in grade 6-12 with the social services, individualized instruction, intervention strategies and/or transitions to other programs that they need to become successful students and good citizens in school and in the larger community.
2. To make public schools safer and more secure by removing chronically disruptive students in grades 6-12 from the public school classroom (GDOE, 2000 p. 9).

CrossRoads embodied 89 alternative education programs during its first year of operation in 1994, and today there are more than 200 alternative education programs in operation within the state of Georgia, largely due to new rules and laws being implemented, as well as to students being removed or dropping out of the traditional school environment for various reasons. In 2000, Georgia's alternative education school concept was revised to include both punitive and non-punitive alternative programs within every district. Districts still had to provide at a minimum an alternative program for disruptive students. However, the non-punitive provision has furthered the goals of alternative programs to be utilized as an opportunity to prevent at-risk students from leaving school prematurely and providing a

portion of the social aspects they require to become successful citizens. Currently, the nation has a declining dropout rate (NCES, 2006), and while Georgia's dropout rate of five percent has shown insignificant decreases over the past few years (Georgia Department of Education, 2005), it may begin to rise again as more students are disenfranchised and academic failure is viewed as a result of the chronic disciplinary problems found among this group.

The current assumption is that there are several benefits to having alternative programs to remove disruptive students; however, due to the lack of empirical research on the evaluation of these programs, many educators and policymakers are wondering if students are successful in these placements, and they question the overall effectiveness of these programs. In the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there were not any required formal or uniform methods utilized within the state of Georgia which evaluated the effectiveness of alternative programs in operation (Wiley, 2000). Today, however, the state department of education in Georgia currently has an online self-assessment tool that is available for punitive and non-punitive alternative school personnel, although the voluntary assessment may not be widely used (J. Randolph, personal communication, June 20, 2006). Evaluation practices and student success in those programs are often difficult to measure because students are assigned to alternative programs for varying lengths of times ranging from a few weeks to the entire school year depending upon the infraction, school district, tribunal hearing officer or other circumstances. Given the pressures of increased accountability, continued student violence, and an increase in the number of students assigned to alternative programs, policymakers are inquiring if these settings are satisfying evaluative criteria (Governor's Education Task Force, 2006). To address these questions, this study

examines the effectiveness of the different types of alternative education programs and the criteria used to determine their success by executing a statewide survey followed by extensive interviewing within a large metro RESA district in Georgia.

### Research Questions

The overarching research question addressed in this study is: What are the current assessment criteria utilized to evaluate the effectiveness of various alternative education programs? The following sub questions were used to guide the research:

1. What are the different types of alternative programs/schools within the state of Georgia?
2. What evaluation criteria are currently utilized to assess the effectiveness of alternative education programs/schools?
3. To what extent are these methods of evaluation indicative of alternative education programs' or schools' success?

### Significance of the Study

There has been a significant increase in the number of punitive and non-punitive alternative schools in Georgia since the CrossRoads model was implemented during the 1994-1995 school year. The role of alternative education has increased due to rampant school violence, truant students, discipline problems and various other factors. The conditions in these facilities have attracted the attention of administrators because the students served by alternative programs often become dropouts due to their "at-risk" status. Administrators of alternative education programs have an urgent need to determine if the settings they are administering are adequately addressing the needs of those students attending or if the facilities are simply being used as "holding tanks."

The administrators need to employ adequate evaluation criteria in order to assess the success of students as well as of the overall program so that they can substantiate the effectiveness of alternative programs and justify the continued allocation of funds. A valid evaluation instrument would fill a vital need and allow administrators to sufficiently assess the effectiveness of the school they are administering according to state guidelines and measures.

Policymakers are also examining the contributions of this disenfranchised group of students to society's rising dropout population. The effects dropouts have on society causes untold ripple effects, as they are often unemployed, they have been known to increase social liabilities, and they are frequently poverty stricken. Since state mandates from the governor of Georgia requesting accountability measures are currently being implemented in an effort to improve alternative education programs, the current study may provide preliminary data to policymakers at the state level as they review and update various policies related to alternative education.

This study examines the criteria used to assess the effectiveness of various alternative education programs through a statewide survey of administrators and through interviewing administrators from a large metro RESA district in Georgia. The state of Georgia is comprised of 16 separate RESA districts, totaling over 170 city and county school districts for the state. The districts are geographically distributed throughout the state, and many are located in urban areas. Each of the districts is required to have at least one alternative education program. The selected RESA district accounts for more than 60,000 full time equivalents (FTEs) and serves in excess of five thousand certified staff members. Consequently, the research findings from this area



will permit new or practicing administrators of alternative programs access to valid and relevant information regarding the criteria for and the effective evaluation of alternative education programs.

#### Delimitations

The study has the following delimitations:

1. The study includes only alternative schools within the state of Georgia for the 2005-2006 school year.
2. The administrator, director, or the appointed designee of the alternative education program is the appropriate person to complete the survey and/or interview on the collection of data regarding program effectiveness.

#### Limitations

The study has the following limitation:

1. The study only includes public alternative programs within the state of Georgia provided by the Department of Education. As a result, no other generalizations will be made about alternative programs in other states or in private facilities within Georgia.

#### Procedures

##### *Research Design*

A mixed-method research design was selected because qualitative and quantitative research in conjunction allowed the researcher to use various methods and ideas unique to each method to gain pertinent information about the phenomena under study (Bloom, Fischer & Orme, 1999). Quantitative research is used to provide numerical data to interpret the results from the qualitative aspects of research (Bloom, Fischer & Orme, 1999); the

quantitative statewide survey permitted the findings to be generalizable. Qualitative research allowed inferences and characteristics to be drawn from a significant population of participants (Creswell, 1994) that are knowledgeable about alternative programs within Georgia.

Qualitative research is frequently used in areas when only minimal amounts of information are known about the topic (Patten, 2000). Since little research exists that examines the effectiveness of alternative programs, qualitative research allowed the researcher to generate first-hand knowledge and a heightened understanding of alternative education programs from people working in the field. Interviewing, a form of qualitative research, allowed the researcher to understand how employees of these programs perceive the techniques being utilized to evaluate effectiveness. Consequently, qualitative research provided the researcher an opportunity to be immersed in the environment and gain an accurate understanding of the phenomena or experiences being studied without preconceived assumptions of the subject under scrutiny (Bloom, Fischer, & Orme, 1999; Shaughnessy, Zechmeister & Zechmeister, 2006).

### *Population*

The Georgia Department of Education provided the researcher with a list of 207 alternative programs within the state of Georgia for the 2005-2006 school year. The list contained county names, email addresses and the names of principals for each of the alternative programs within the state. A survey was electronically mailed (emailed) with a cover letter soliciting participation in the study.

Additionally, the Georgia Department of Education provided the researcher with a list of existing alternative programs within the selected RESA district of Georgia for the

2005-2006 school year for the purpose of soliciting interviews. The list contained county names, email addresses and the names of principals for each of the alternative programs in the respective area. Each principal was sent a cover letter soliciting participation, along with an explanation of the interview.

### *Instrumentation*

The survey was based upon an extensive review of the literature regarding the criteria used to evaluate the effectiveness of alternative schools. The survey requested demographic information about the administrator completing the survey such as the number of years as an administrator, gender, highest degree held, and ethnic background. The survey questions were aligned to a specific research question to aid in computation, and the survey design was multiple-choice along with three open-ended questions. Interview questions were parallel to the survey questions. The questions were utilized to obtain an increased understanding of evaluation practices utilized in alternative education programs.

### *Survey*

Quantitative research allows an established theory to be supported by data, it seeks to provide participants that are representative of the sample, and it provides structure to a study (Corbetta, 2003). A survey, a form of quantitative research, is a descriptive method used to gather information from participants. Surveys are a common type of descriptive research and can provide vital information about a particular group being investigated (Leary, 2001). Surveys are widely used and popular due to their ability to reach relatively large groups by selecting sample participants representative of the larger population (Corbetta; Bordens & Abbott, 2005). Researchers can infer trends or characteristics from

the sample and generalize those findings to the larger population (Corbetta). Babbie (1995) recommends the use of standardized surveys because they describe characteristics of large populations, they make samples feasible, they are flexible, and the results are generalizable.

The survey instrument focuses on the elements currently being used to evaluate alternative education programs throughout the state. The instrument was pilot tested among a panel of experts to gain feedback, establish baseline data and content validity before dispersing the survey statewide. After surveys were conducted with principals or their designees in alternative education programs within Georgia, the researcher conducted interviews with selected principals of a metro Georgia RESA district.

### *Interviewing*

Interviewing is a qualitative technique that is useful in new areas of research for obtaining a significant amount of knowledge from a selected few; it allows researchers to collect excellent data and build rapport with participants. Utilizing interviews allows researchers to follow up if necessary to clarify items on the questionnaire that may have created confusion, and permits researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of the unfamiliar while asking probing questions (Glesne, 2006). Utilizing structured interviews enhances continuity and ensures that all participants are asked the same questions, thus reducing the chance of differing questions for each participant (Corbetta, 2003; Bordens & Abbott, 2005).

Four principals were interviewed from a large metro RESA district of Georgia. Interviews were conducted with this group to gain in-depth feedback on alternative programs and the criteria they use to evaluate the effectiveness of the programs they administer. The principals of these programs either operate their own programs or

collaborate with surrounding districts to fund alternative education programs. The selected principals were mailed interview solicitation letters, and each letter had an attached interview acceptance letter to inform the researcher of the respondent's willingness to participate in the study. Respondents were requested to mail acceptance letters in a provided pre-stamped self-addressed envelope or fax acceptance letters to the number listed on the cover letter. The researcher followed up with respondents who did not respond after two weeks by sending them a postcard thanking them for completing the acceptance letter and encouraging them to complete the acceptance letter if they had not already done so.

### *Data Analysis*

The data from this study were computed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) on a personal computer. This software enabled the researcher to increase and simplify the process of data calculation. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the survey; descriptive statistics are those which describe data in a simpler or abbreviated summarized format such as frequency tables, mean, and standard deviation (Sprinthall, 2003). The data obtained from open-ended questions were analyzed through content analysis to observe common themes and patterns among participants. Content analysis is a technique that allows researchers to make presumptions based upon specific information gained from various forms of messages (Shaughnessy, Zechmeister & Shaughnessy, 2006).

### Definition of Terms

Alternative education: an educational program or school designed to provide learning experiences which strive to meet student needs using strategies that differ from traditional educational programs (Hefner-Packer, 1990).

Alternative program: a school that offers varied and independent instruction at no extra cost (Raywid, 1999; Conley, 2002).

CrossRoads: a type of punitive alternative education program originally funded through a categorical grant labeled as such (GDOE, 2000).

Open admission program: an alternative program where students voluntarily attend, and their attendance is not a result of suspension or expulsion (Wiley, 2000).

RESA Districts: local regional districts that provide support to school personnel and staff in an effort to increase student achievement and professional development opportunities.

### Summary

Alternative schools are avenues that offer an at-risk population of students a second chance to succeed in their education. They are intended to provide students varied instruction, smaller class size, flexibility and many other aspects that are conducive to meeting their educational needs. Despite renewed interest in these programs, alternative programs within Georgia and other states are currently being scrutinized due to inadequate evaluation procedures, as there is no standard procedure for assessing the effectiveness of programs that are currently in operation or of those being established. Because there continues to be increased student violence and disciplinary issues that often lead to student offenders being placed in alternative programs, a better understanding of how to evaluate the effectiveness of these programs is important to the researcher and other educational

representatives such as the Georgia Department of Education (GDOE). GDOE could use this as a mechanism to increase the standardization of Georgia's online self evaluation assessment for alternative schools throughout the state. Also, administrators and others may use this research to help increase the necessary criteria to determine the effectiveness of alternative schools that they administer. Furthermore, the data from this study may be useful for alternative education personnel, college faculty and administrators nationwide as they develop agreements and devise plans regarding how to best serve students in alternative education programs. Valid criteria of assessing alternative programs could increase the possibility of higher institutes' fulfillment of educating and training potential alternative program administrators and other personnel in a manner that models real-life occurrences in order to produce effective program results. Subsequently, the importance administrators place on specific evaluation criteria in alternative schools could increase funding, and, more importantly, increase the overall success of students served in alternative education program settings.

The researcher, realizing the importance of the need for at-risk students to continue their education in an environment that increases their chances of success, views adequate evaluation of alternative programs as a vehicle for ensuring that students obtain a portion of the basic skills outlined in the founding objectives of alternative programs within Georgia. Alternative programs are designed to assist students in not only remaining in school, but also in becoming productive members of society. In an effort to accomplish such a goal, during this age of increased accountability, proper evaluation of alternative programs should exist to ensure this population of students does not receive less than an optimal education.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### General Introduction

This chapter presents a review of literature regarding the history of alternative education and its evolution, concentrating primarily on the discrepancies of criteria used to determine effectiveness within alternative education programs.

The general areas of research focus included in this chapter are

- a. a history of alternative education,
- b. an overview of legislation that has affected alternative education,
- c. types of alternative education programs,
- d. the rationale for establishing alternative education programs,
- e. the effectiveness of alternative education programs,
- f. characteristics of effective alternative education programs,
- g. program evaluations, and
- h. an evaluation of the CrossRoads program.

#### History of Alternative Education

Alternative education options have always existed within the American educational system. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, private, parochial and boarding schools were available to provide educational opportunities to families that could afford the associated costs (Young, 1990; Conley 2002). Though a formal education system existed, many parents were dissatisfied and opted for a setting within the religious vernacular or decided to home school students. During this time, grammar schools existed for wealthier families and provided a year-round education for males that



focused on a classical approach. In addition, common schools provided instruction to the middle and lower class of boys and girls. Common schools highlighted the three Rs and developed a curriculum grounded in English (Young). “Dame schools” also proliferated during this period; they were operated by women in their homes and taught students domestic skills. Older males in this period with the intention of seeking specialized training often pursued entrepreneurial school (Young, Conley, 2002). Finally, charity schools existed to serve the disadvantaged and minority students; they were usually funded through missionary and church organizations (Young, Conley).

As public school enrollment flourished in the subsequent years, student expectations and requirements evolved. The high school population increased to 51% by 1930 as compared to only seven percent in 1890 (Young, 1990), and an effort to reform public education was at the forefront of both national and local agendas. The progressive movement of the early 1900s was spawned by an increase in secondary enrollment and a period of industrialization (Young). John Dewey, heralded as the father of both the progressive movement (Young; Tanner, 1997) and of alternative education (Reimer & Cash, 2003) recognized that all students were not on the same level and promoted individuality. Dewey’s pedagogy focused on “child-centered, experiential learning activities and democratic classroom practices” (Young, p. 6). Although this new idea of learning was innovative, the progressive era was short-lived due to its radical views and extreme practices, coupled with the onset of World War II (Young, Neumann, 1994; Lange & Sletten, 2002).

After World War II, there was a renewed interest in public education within America. The Soviet Union launched Sputnik (1957), and public education concentrated

on subject-focused instruction to meet the increased demands placed on students to compete in the face of changing technological advances (Young, 1990; Conley, 2002). Schools were urged to “concentrate on producing subject-matter experts and superior scholars to lead the technological society” (Conley, p. 8).

The progressive movement was reawakened in the late 1960s (Young, 1990; Neumann, 1994) as alternative schools outside of public education were developed in the wake of the *Brown v. BOE* (1954) court decision. Minorities opened community-based schools called Freedom Schools (Lange & Sletten, 2002) in an effort to not succumb to the discriminatory practices found in public schools. Additionally, A. S. Neil’s Summerhill approach was embraced during the Free School Movement (Young; Lange & Sletten, 2002). The era was known for giving “children the freedom to learn and the freedom from restrictions” (Lange & Sletten, p. 9). However, these non-public alternatives were short lived (Lange & Sletten) due to radical views and lack of widespread acceptance (Young).

Non-public alternatives opened the door for public alternatives and were instrumental in demonstrating that an inflexible system could not serve the needs of all students. In 1965, President Johnson signed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and pledged education for all (Young, 1990). Educators within the public schools developed “open schools,” which were the alternative to conventional schools. Open schools celebrated the child-centered approach, encouraged hands-on activities and advanced learning activities that were not subjective in nature (Young). In 1973, the National Commission on the Reform of Secondary Education report suggested that each district provide alternative choices (Conley, 2002) to students, and parents and students

embraced the idea of choice (Neumann, 1994). Educators in America began to seek options for students who were not successful in mainstream schools (Sagor, 1999), and alternative schools began to emerge across the nation in mostly urban and suburban areas in response to a variety of needs (Raywid, 1999). Young noted a decline in open schools due to the wide variety of students being served, including those with low functioning abilities. There were estimates of more than 20,000 alternative programs within the public system (Lange & Sletten, 2002), but during the 1980s there was a significant increase in the number of alternative schools that focused on behavior (Neumann, 1994; Sagor, 1999). Raywid (1999) stated that alternative schools that focused on behavior were prominent because earlier alternatives appeared successful in answering many of society's questions involving new ways of educating difficult populations of students.

### Legislative Impact

#### *National*

During the 1960s several pertinent laws were passed which affected the manner in which students could be treated once they were assigned to or elected to attend a public alternative education school. In one such case, *Gault v. Arizona* (1967), a young male named Gerald Gault was not afforded his due process rights extended under the 14<sup>th</sup> amendment. The 14<sup>th</sup> amendment reads "...no state shall deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws (LaMorte, 2002, p. 433). Prior to *Gault v. Arizona*, these rights were only extended to adults in America. Consequently, this precedent case ensured that juveniles are afforded the same rights and protections as adults under the law (Supreme Court Cases, 2006).

Another landmark case that had far-reaching effects on students assigned to alternative education programs was the Education for all Handicapped Children Act in 1975. This act, later renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Act (1990) along with subsequent reauthorizations, placed stringent provisions on public schools which served students in this population. One such provision that pertains to alternative education stated that parental consent must be obtained before changing a student's placement (LaMorte, 2002) due to behaviors that violate the district's code of conduct or other behaviors in an effort to determine whether the infraction was a manifestation of the student's disability.

Moreover, *Goss v. Lopez* (1975) further increased the rights of students in public education who may not have voluntarily agreed to an alternative education program assignment. In the aforementioned case, high school students in a public school in Ohio were suspended for misconduct up to ten days without a hearing. This case was paramount in establishing that students must be given oral or written notice and an opportunity for a hearing before being suspended and/or removed to an alternative education setting (Touro Law Center, 2006). These earlier civil rights legislative acts set the momentum for students' mandatory entry in alternative education programs in the years to come.

In 1994, in the wake of increased school violence and juvenile delinquency, zero tolerance policies and "gun free zones" (Bonilla, 2000) were implemented in response to violations of school rules and policies. Additionally, the passage of the Gun Free Schools Act in 1994 (Bonilla; Gerler, 2004) was more stringent, as it extended a one-year sentence to students that were apprehended with a firearm at school (Bonilla; Gerler;

Florida Department of Education [FDOE], 2005). These aggressive changes in the law prompted most states and local districts to remove students to “last chance” alternative education programs (Chalker, 1996; Lange, 1998).

### *Georgia Legislation*

On January 25, 1994 the Georgia General assembly allocated funds for the establishment of an alternative education program to be overseen by the Georgia Department of Education (Georgia Department of Education [GDOE], 2000).

Consequently, the GDOE formed a categorical grant named CrossRoads to supplement the quality-based education (QBE) formula for funding programs. The funding of an alternative program by funds allocated to CrossRoads was contingent upon the condition that the program serve chronically disruptive students.

However, as Georgia’s student population and demographics changed, alternative school criteria evolved. In 2000, under passage of the A+ Education Reform Act, punitive and non-punitive alternative education programs began to receive funds to address the varied needs of the state (J. Randolph, personal communication, September 1, 2006). The CrossRoads grants were eliminated, and QBE became the sole funding source (GDOE, 2005). The flexibility in funding and re-classification of alternative schools allowed an array of previously unfunded alternative programs such as dropout prevention, teen pregnancy centers and other programs to receive the designation of an alternative education school and its subsequent opportunity to receive funds (J. Randolph, personal communication, September 1, 2006).

### Definition of Alternative Education

Alternative education is grounded in the concept that various students are able to process learning in different ways and at unspecified times (Thomas, Sabatino, & Sarri, 1982; Chalker, 1996; Lange, 1998; Conley, 2002; Mottaz, 2002) and that there is not a single standard method for educating all students (Yatvin, 2004). However, the precise definition of alternative education is a matter of debate. In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of schools geared toward disruptive students (Neumann, 1994; Lange & Sletten, 2002) due to an increase in violence, high school dropout rates, and/or student disruptions. Neumann (1994) states that punitive setting alternative schools deviate from the core ideals of alternative schools, as alternative education was founded on the basis of choice and creativity for those disinterested in conventional school settings (Thomas, Sabatino, & Sarri, 1982; Conley, 2002). Hefner-Packer (1990) defines an alternative program as “an educational program or school designed to provide learning experiences which meet student needs in a positive environment using strategies that may be more structured or less structured than traditional educational programs” (p. 4).

Since a great amount of ambiguity exists regarding the exact definition of alternative schools (Raywid, 1994; Lange & Sletten, 2002; Laudan, 2003), it has become cumbersome to define what an alternative program is or is not. Ultimately, the term applies to schools of either choice or assignment, as Morley (1991) states:

Alternative education is a perspective, not a procedure or program. It is based upon a belief that there are many ways to become educated, as well as many types of environments and structures within which this may occur. Further, it recognizes that all people can be educated and that it is in society’s interest to

ensure that all are educated to at least...[a] general high school...level. To accomplish this requires that we provide a variety of structures and environments such that each person can find one that is sufficiently comfortable to facilitate progress (p. 10).

As a result, the term “alternative school” has come to include a variety of options such as magnet schools, online education, distance learning and other non-traditional methods of education as society and schools have approached the technology age (Wagner, Wonacott, & Jackson, 2005; J. Randolph, personal communication, September 1, 2006). Although there continue to be questions about what constitutes alternative education programs or what does not, the optimum goal of all types of alternative schools seems to be to “use different means to bring everyone to the same end” (Raywid, 2001, p. 586).

#### Types of Alternative Education Programs

As many types of alternative education programs exist as there are definitions. The lack of one broad definition or one “type” of alternative education program is indicative of the early stages of alternative education (Laudan, 2003). In an effort to clarify the term, several classification schemes have been created to categorize alternative schools. Smith (1974) has described the following scheme:

- *Open Schools* provide individualized and organized learning around specific interests within the building or classroom.
- *Schools-without-walls* provide learning experiences throughout the community and offer increased involvement between the school and community.
- *Learning Centers* concentrate resources in one central location of the community, making them available to all students within the area. Learning centers include

magnet schools, educational parks, career education centers, and vocational and technical high schools.

- *Continuation Schools* provide an educational environment for students whose education in traditional schools has been or might be intermittent. These schools include dropout centers, re-entry programs, evening and adult high schools.
- *Multicultural Schools* highlight cultural pluralism and ethnic and racial awareness, and typically serve a diverse student body.
- *Free Schools* emphasize increased freedom for students and teachers. This term typically refers to non-public alternative schools.
- *Schools-within-Schools* involve a small group of students and teachers in a specialized program that is situated within the traditional or conventional school building.

Smith's scheme was the foundation for many other researchers such as Hefner-Packer (1990) and Chalker (1996), who have developed similar categories within the published classification schemes for alternative education programs.

In contrast, Raywid (1994) has developed a method of classification based upon student choice that places students in the three distinct categories of Type I, Type II and Type III programs. Some of the programs are punitive in nature while others focused on remediation. Type I programs have a choice component and use a particular theme or specific subject for delivery of instruction. Type II programs are equated to "soft jails," with settings that are punitive in nature, and where most often students are mandated to, as opposed to electing to, attend. Type II programs are often viewed as "last chance" programs for students as an alternative to being expelled from the traditional school



environment. These programs include in-school suspension programs as well as temporary short- or long-term assignments for chronically disruptive students. Type II programs typically focus on changing the student's behavior, with an academic focus on delivering a basic education. Lastly, Type III programs focus on remediation by providing assistance in social, academic, or emotional aspects of a student's life. The concept of a school as a community is an important aspect of Type III programs. Raywid (1994) asserts that the goals of the three types of programs are to change the student, change the school, or change the system. She further contends that the essential element in determining the type of program is "whether student affiliation was by choice, sentence or referral" (p. 27).

#### Reasons for Implementing an Alternative Education Program

Alternative education frequently serves as a springboard for students who feel they cannot be successful in a conventional school setting (Raywid, 2001). As a result, alternative education programs may have alleviated some of the educational problems in public education by integrating creativity and flexibility into student's educational options.

#### *At-Risk Students*

Students that attend alternative schools are rarely on the path to success (Sagor, 1999; Conley, 2002). Most alternative education programs focus on certain groups of youth, predominantly those considered at-risk (Laudan, 2003). Often those students possess specific social concerns that are in conflict with their academic success. "Kids Count" (1999 in Laudan 2003) described at-risk students as those "who either engage in negative or high-risk activities, or who are growing up with disadvantages that 'limit the

development of their potential, compromise their health, impair their sense of self, and generally restrict their chances for successful lives.” Frymier (1992) conducted a study among 21, 706 school age children in which a scale of thirty-four factors was developed to assess their risk status. Among those surveyed, 25% to 33% were identified as “seriously at risk” (Frymier). Some identified risk factors were suspension from school, retention in the same grade, separation or divorce of parents, or other life events that could cause undue stress or pain for the student. Furthermore, at-risk students tended to demonstrate loss of control, self-esteem issues, discipline problems, drug and alcohol issues, and a lack of earning credit towards graduation (Wehlage, Rutter, & Turnbaugh, 1987; Laudan, 2003), all of which exacerbated existing problems with academic achievement.

### *High School Dropouts*

Various methods are used to calculate America’s dropout rate (NCES, 2006), and the method a researcher selects will determine the outcome of the published dropout rate. For example, the *event* dropout rate estimates the number of students ages 15-24 in public and private school who have left within a single year without completing a high school diploma or General Educational Development (GED) certificate. Conversely, the *status* dropout rate calculates the percentage of students ages 15-24 not attending school who have not received a diploma or GED within a particular time frame (Reimer & Smink, 2005; NCES, 2006). NCES (2006) reported the United States had an event dropout rate of 4% and a status rate of nearly 10%. Event dropout rates have remained relatively stable since 1990, while status dropout rates have decreased.

Although dropout rates are critical indicators of success, socioeconomic status (SES) and race or ethnicity are also related to students dropping out of school (Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, & Rock, 1987). Ekstrom et al. conducted a study which discovered that dropouts are more often found in the Hispanic population than in the African-American population, and more often in the African-American population than in the Caucasian population. Campbell (2004) stated that Hispanics comprise 13% of the total population, but comprise the majority of the dropout population. Hispanic dropout rates are slightly higher than 23%, and generally males are found to be more likely to drop out than females (NCES, 2006).

Ekstrom et al. (1987) demonstrated that disciplinary problems and course failure were strong predictors of students dropping out of school. Similarly, DeRidder (1991) found suspension and expulsion listed in the top three school-related reasons students gave for dropping out of school and/or school failure (Bock, Tapscott, & Savner, 1998). Many students have been labeled and separated into alternative education settings (Young, 1990; Sagor, 1999) in an effort to decrease the dropout rate.

### *Student Behaviors*

Alternative education programs have been developed in many states as a response to disruptive, delinquent, or violent behaviors. Chalker (1996) stated, (Due to the) recent political push to rid our nation's classrooms of violence, weapons, drugs, and disruptive students, school districts have found it convenient to remove problem students from regular classrooms and reassign them to separate alternative schools through screening committees or disciplinary panels. Separate alternative schools have

become the solution of choice due to their self-contained nature and isolation from school campuses (p. 10).

Escobar-Chaves, Tortolero, Markhan, Kelder and Kapadia (2002) report that students attending alternative education programs are almost three times more likely to carry a gun to school. Similarly, in Massachusetts the majority of students in alternative education programs are there for possession of illegal substances or weapons (Gehring, 2004) which contributed to the number of discipline referrals, suspensions, or expulsions a student acquired.

Schools are not only charged with satisfying academic requirements of students they serve, but they must also teach appropriate behaviors that are acceptable in society (Shanker, 1995), for if students are not equipped both academically and socially, they will be unqualified to meet the expectations of society (Shanker). Shanker asserts that students who exhibit poor behaviors frequently begin to display even more inappropriate behaviors if schools react by suspending or expelling them. Schools should make a conscious effort to develop these students' skills, expose them to positive influences, and promote association with non-disruptive peers. Sugai, Sprague, Horner, and Walker (2000) hold that all students should be exposed to a universal intervention system focused on students whether they engage in problem behaviors or not.

Most often, students with behavior problems who are referred to the office experience a negative outcome. Sugai et al. define an office referral as:

...an event in which (a) a student engaged in a behavior that violated a rule or social norm in the school, (b) the problem behavior was observed or identified by a member of the school staff, and (c) the event resulted in

a consequence delivered by administrative staff who produced a permanent product defining the whole event (p. 97).

They note that office referrals are optimum sources of information which indicate change and allow frequent monitoring of disruptive behavior. Tobin and Sugai (1999) also defend the value of office referrals as data for monitoring student behavior. Their study indicates that sixth graders referred for fighting are likely to be referred again in the eighth grade. Similarly, repeated discipline referrals during the sixth grade predict recurring discipline problems in later middle school and suspension in the ninth grade. Furthermore, three or more suspensions during ninth grade are an indicator of school failure, and sixth grade boys referred for fighting more than twice had scant possibilities of being on track for high school graduation. The same predictions were true for girls referred once for harassment. Shanker proposes that, through the creation of alternative schools, more schools could promote learning and achievement for an at-risk population of students.

### *Student Attendance*

While there seems to be no standard definition, assessment or treatment for absentees or truants (Kearney, 2003), the literature points to a number of reasons why students do not attend school (Corville-Smith, Ryan, Adams & Dalicandro, 1998; Kearney & Bensaheb, 2006). Even though there is enormous ambiguity within disciplines as well as across disciplines for defining truancy, two methods of truancy classification have emerged: school personnel typically use the term *delinquent-based truants* and child psychologists often refer to absent students as demonstrating *anxiety-based school refusal behavior* (Kearney, 2003). Kearney and Bensaheb (2006) describe school refusal

behavior as child-motivated refusal to attend school, or as a child having a hard time attending classes or residing the entire day of school. This behavior is usually displayed among students who attend, but leave due to skipping or missing school; are absent for extended periods of time; commit excessive tardiness; and/or demonstrate sporadic attendance followed by pleas and/or disgust in order to remain home.

A study conducted by Corville-Smith et al. (1998) explored the relationships between student attendance, family aspects and school aspects. Findings indicate that students who regularly attend school differ considerably from those who miss fifteen or more days in one semester. Students who are frequently absent have lower academic self-concepts, lower global self-esteem, and are less adept in their social relations as compared to students who attend regularly. Moreover, the researchers discovered that absentees feel that parental discipline is irregular and unsuccessful, they perceive their families as disconnected, and/or they feel little acceptance from their parents. Additionally, absentees are more likely to display antisocial behaviors than regular attendees. However, the most distinguishing difference between absentees and attending students is that absentees show less satisfaction with school and school personnel. Kearney (2003) cites several short term consequences of students being absent from school, including failing grades, legal complications, family problems, social isolation, and distress. Long term consequences of absenteeism comprise juvenile delinquency and dropping out of school, which leads to social and work problems in adulthood (Kearney).

#### Effectiveness of Alternative Education Programs

Current literature on alternative education program effectiveness indicates that academic outcomes for students enrolled in these programs vary widely, and there is

minimal empirical evidence to substantiate that effective alternative education school practices are connected to expected student outcomes (Lange & Sletten, 2002). Lange and Sletten contend that student outcomes must be definitively defined and the measure of “effectiveness” must be determined. For example, should effectiveness be measured by a student returning to his or her conventional school? Should a student remaining in an educational program or displaying appropriate behaviors be a measure of effectiveness? They have recommended that a measure of effectiveness may begin in non-academic areas and then proceed into a traditional approach of evaluation.

One of the earliest studies evaluating the effectiveness of alternative education programs was conducted by Duke and Muzio in 1978. Their study investigated the results of 19 evaluations and reports on alternative education programs. The reports and evaluations were obtained from an ERIC document search, and no two evaluations were the same. The study concluded that important variables for measuring gains from participation in alternative education were gains in student attendance, student attitude and self-esteem; however, there have been other findings which concluded that important variables were gains in positive attitude, attendance, and self-esteem (Morley, 1991). Duke and Muzio warned readers to be selective regarding the analysis of the data due to the absence of any systematic evaluation techniques (Gager & Elias, 1997; Wiley, 2000). When they were asked how well alternative education programs educate students, they commented that “the data contained in the 19 evaluations and reports we reviewed do not permit us to answer this question with any degree of confidence” (p. 481).

Barr, Colston and Parrett (1977) presented positive results from their review of six public alternative education programs. The authors summarized findings from schools

which were contacted for an evaluation report; the schools included in the study were evaluated by external or internal personnel. Findings of the study concluded that alternative education program students' achievement performance results were uniform with or higher than those of students in conventional schools. Additionally, students' attitudes toward school were higher, attendance rates increased, and dropout rates and discipline problems decreased. However, the authors cautioned against generalizing the findings of the evaluation due to the discrepancy in the structure and operation of the individual alternative education programs, as well as the fact that those programs were "recognized by authorities in the area...as exemplary programs" (p. 9).

Young (1990) and Laudan (2003) have stated that alternative education programs focus on particular groups of students. Those groups include dropouts, pregnant teens, and suspended or expelled students. Subsequently, alternative education programs could be more effective in specializing in addressing the hardships of a specific group of students rather than designing programs for the general population of student, or, as Lange and Sletten have noted, "An alternative setting may require an alternative means of evaluation" (2002, p. 28).

Cox, Davidson and Bynum (1995) conducted an evaluation of 57 alternative schools utilizing a meta-analytic approach. The evaluations were obtained through ERIC, PsychLit, and the National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS). The results of the meta-analysis assessment of delinquency-related outcomes of alternative education programs concluded that these types of programs have a minimal positive effect on school performance, school attendance, and self-esteem, and showed that alternative education programs have no positive effect on delinquency. Researchers found that the



positive increases in school attitudes and self-esteem were not sufficiently significant to decrease delinquent behaviors. In a similar study, Type II programs or punitive setting alternative education programs were found to be ineffective in changing student behaviors (Thomas, Sabatino & Sarri, 1982; Morley, 1991; Raywid, 1994). Mesinger (1986) added that methods of evaluating alternative programs for behaviorally inappropriate students are poorly designed. Interestingly, programs that target a particular group of students have been shown to have a greater effect than those with open enrollments (Cox, 1999; Raywid, 1999).

Cox (1999) conducted an experimental study with a one-year follow-up component of one alternative education program to determine the effects on delinquency or improvement in students' school performance, school attitudes, and self-esteem. The sample consisted of 83 sixth- through eighth-grade students who were referred due to having "behavioral and/or academic problems" and were at risk of being involved in "criminal activity" (p. 327). Forty-one randomly selected students participated in the program, which included class instruction, individual and group counseling, tutoring and attendance of the alternative program five days per week for an entire semester. A control group of 42 students continued to attend the traditional middle school. Results indicated that students demonstrated higher grades, improved attendance, and greater self-esteem while attending the alternative program, but the improvements dissolved once students reintegrated into their conventional school settings. Cox argued that these findings could have been the result of transportation providers allowing more time for students, which could have increased attendance, of students being graded on progress, not performance as in conventional schools, and of a more secure, supportive and caring environment.

However, the gains Cox noted were not significant enough to influence a decrease in delinquent behaviors, student attitudes toward school, or achievement test scores.

#### Characteristics of Effective Alternative Education Programs

Raywid (2001) has suggested that alternative education programs can catapult a marginal group of students onto a more successful path. Although few empirical studies exist that have assessed the overall effectiveness of alternative education programs, several reports highlight the qualities of “effective” alternative education programs.

One of the most important characteristics of an effective alternative education program is said to be choice (Morley, 1991; Raywid, 1994; Conley, 2002). In programs that advocate choice, students and parents alike are more apt to be involved, loyal and concerned about the success of the program. Another critical factor of an effective program is size. Many acknowledge the benefits of small class size and small total school population that alternative settings offer (Arnove & Strout, 1980; Thomas, Sabatino, & Sarri, 1982; Raywid, 1994; Kellmayer, 1995; Conley, 2002), as smaller class sizes allow students to form closer bonds within the school and they foster personal relationships. A maximum school size of 100 to 125 students for an entire program is seen to help foster a community atmosphere (Thomas, Sabatino, & Sarri; Kellmayer).

Kellmayer (1995) has cited ten characteristics of effective alternative education programs:

1. Size. Smaller class sizes yield a variety of benefits.
2. Location. The setting can have a profound impact on a student’s academic and emotional state.

3. Volunteerism. When students and staff elect to attend alternative education programs, this increases loyalty to the program.
4. Participatory decision making. Parent, student, and community involvement ensures that programs address real needs.
5. Student-focused curriculum. Alternate assessment techniques, such as portfolios or community service projects, are seen as beneficial.
6. Separate administrative units. It is important that leaders be proficient in management, instruction, and politics, and that they work with teachers and students to create a community atmosphere.
7. A clear mission. The mission should be succinct and relay a sense of commitment and group values.
8. Flexibility. Flexibility allows staff members to serve in multiple roles, as when a counselor also serves as an attendance officer.
9. Social services. Alternative programs are often pathways to social services by serving at-risk or disruptive students and providing arrangements for families to receive the services they need.
10. Technology. In equitable programs, students have at least the same technology options as students in traditional settings, cost per pupil ratios are comparable to those of students in traditional schools, and students have access to the same level of services as their traditional counterparts.

Moreover, Fritzsmons-Lovett (2001) has suggested that effective alternative schools must encompass the “3 Cs” of climate, competency and community. The author has defined *climate* as the state of the school which directly affects the needs and

outcomes of students; for example, the climate would relate to low student-to-teacher ratio or a clear mission. *Competency* encompasses both student and staff competency; the staff at an alternative program should be well trained, supportive and committed to the success of the students in the setting, and students should be provided with a curriculum that is challenging and addresses their needs and skill level. *Community* is the internal and external atmosphere of the school; students in programs that emphasize community are expected to build relationships outside of school by being involved in service learning programs or student-lead businesses. The author maintains that these three characteristics need to be interwoven into effective alternative programs to promote both the success of the programs and of the students who attend.

#### Program Evaluation of Alternative Education Schools

Currently, very little research exists that provides clear and consistent evidence of the effectiveness of alternative education programs (Cox, 1999; Tobin & Sprague, 2000). The great disparity in programs, approaches, populations and locations (Barr, Colston, & Parrett, 1977; Cox, Davidson & Bynum, 1995; Tobin & Sprague) has made precise evaluations difficult. The results of studies conducted on effectiveness, such as those by Cox (1999) or Cox, Davidson, and Bynum, (1995) need to be replicated in a variety of settings (Tobin & Sprague). Duke and Muzio (1978) listed several problems associated with the evaluation of early alternative education programs:

- poor record keeping,
- no comparison groups or control groups,
- lack of random samples,
- unreported data on dropouts,

- apologies for impressionistic data regarding findings,
- unclear reasons for conducting the evaluation or report,
- withheld data on cost-per-pupil ratios, and
- lack of follow-up data.

Kellmayer (1995) has further stated that the research bases have been very limited; however, more meticulous research is currently being conducted and is seen to be necessary as the number of alternative programs increases (Cox, 1999).

#### Evaluation of CrossRoads Alternative Education Programs

Jerry Randolph, program specialist with the Georgia Department of Education (personal communication, June 20, 2006), has disclosed that most alternative education programs in Georgia are punitive in nature, and that several models are currently in operation. In 2000, over 14,000 students attended an alternative education program in Georgia (Georgia Department of Education [GADOE], 2000). Most students (42%) were assigned to an alternative education program for disruptive or rebellious behavior (GADOE, 2000). Most often those disruptions (57.5%) occurred within the classrooms (GADOE, 2000). Moreover, students in these programs often returned to the alternative program two or more times after successfully returning to the traditional or home school (GADOE, 2000). The recidivism rate was shown to increase yearly during the 1997-2000 school years. In 1997, the recidivism rate was 22%, as compared to an increase of 28% by the 1999-2000 school year (GADOE, 2000).

Several leaders question whether continued allocation of funds is necessary for such unclear results, and many counties or local school areas are searching for alternative ways to fund (Melancon, 2006) the 1.9 percent of Georgia's nearly 1.6 million student

population being served in punitive alternative education programs (GADOE, 2005). In 2000, under the auspices of the A+ Reform Act, Georgia eliminated the requirement that alternative education be punitive in nature only, and specified that alternative education can receive funding for chronically disruptive students as well as for teenage parents or for those returning from dropout recovery programs. Until that time, Georgia maintained data only on the CrossRoads programs, mainly to ensure compliance for funding under the CrossRoads grant stipulation (Wiley, 2000). Under new stipulations, counties that operate any type of alternative program are encouraged to complete an online self-assessment tool as an opportunity to provide immediate feedback on potential areas of improvement (Jerry Randolph, personal communication, June 20, 2006) and as a mechanism to improve accountability for alternative education programs.

Furthermore, until recently, the state has gathered little data on the specific types or number of other alternative education programs because those programs were overseen by local authorities (J. Randolph, personal communication, June 20, 2006). Consequently, data have been limited or scarce, especially pertaining to alternative schools not designed for chronically disruptive students.

Chalker (1994) conducted a study of 27 separate alternative schools in Georgia to develop a taxonomy of alternative schools and to determine which data schools were using relating to their effectiveness. Site visits and a 12-question survey were utilized to collect data from directors from a list provided by the Georgia Department of Education. Most programs (42%) were shown to be targeted for disruptive students. Directors reported using these areas as indicators of success: academics, return of students to regular school, completion of a diploma or GED, recidivism rates, behavior and

staff/student feedback. Only 60% of those schools included in the study used one of those criteria, and some reported no effectiveness criteria. Chalker revealed several discrepancies. Some of the findings were:

- a. Most facilities did not retain written evaluative data, and most data were anecdotal.
- b. Most programs met the CrossRoads requirements stipulated for alternative schools during the 1994-1995 school year.
- c. Alternative schools in Georgia followed local guidelines for development, planning and evaluation without any state involvement.
- d. Each alternative school had its own identity, rules, and policies, with no networking with other alternative schools within the state.
- e. The number of alternative programs in Georgia is predicted to increase in the future (p. 106).

As a result of the findings from studying 27 separate alternative schools, some of Chalker's recommendations are to collect data to assess program effectiveness which is aligned with the programs' objectives, to disseminate those results, and to encourage directors of other alternative education programs to network in order to ensure a continuity of services being provided to students (p. 107).

In addition, Karlin & Harnish (1995) conducted an evaluation of two CrossRoads Programs in Georgia. The two sites selected for study were deemed "successful" CrossRoads programs; one site was located in a rural area of the state and the other was from a mixed rural and urban area. They concluded that an evaluation of the program was not feasible due to an unclear "definition of success or criteria for measuring success or

effectiveness...although anecdotal evidence supports instances of positive academic and behavioral changes in students placed in CrossRoads Programs” (p. 39). For example, when specific faculty and staff members were asked to evaluate the success of the programs, they often responded that flexibility, community relationships, atmosphere of the program and being able to serve in multiple roles were all critical attributes of a successful program (Karlin & Harnish). Although most data were anecdotal, student gains in academics, behaviors and social skills were also cited as indicators of a successful program.

Karlin and Harnish (1995) have recommended the following strategies to improve the effectiveness of CrossRoads programs:

- a. take a team approach to teaching and learning,
- b. encourage community involvement,
- c. operate from a preventative, rather than punitive, model,
- d. gather data concerning students transitioning from CrossRoads programs to regular school,
- e. conduct more long-term in-depth study of successful alternative schools, and
- f. establish measurable criteria for defining success or effectiveness (p. 41).

The most recent data, which came out of a three-year evaluation, were collected on CrossRoads programs in 2000. Georgia served over 43,000 students at 132 sites during that time period. Findings suggested that during that time the CrossRoads program was typically successful in improving the students for whom the program was designed, although all students assigned to the program were not “chronically disruptive” (GADOE, 2000). For evaluation purposes, an “effective” program was defined as “a



program in which the student's negative outcomes were minimized, rate of absenteeism improved, students' attitudes and behavior improved, and students improved academically" (Georgia Department of Education, 2000, p. 76). The study made one overall recommendation, which was to continue funding of the CrossRoads programs. It also found that CrossRoads programs retain students in school and increase their chances of obtaining a high school diploma.

Seven recommendations emerged from the study. Georgia's leaders in education are urged to:

1. Implement and disseminate program models. There are currently no design standards for CrossRoads programs through which meaningful comparisons can be made.
2. Develop clear program goals.
3. Design programs for younger students.
4. Provide support.
5. Supply appropriate and updated curriculum materials.
6. Provide technology services.
7. Enhance communication (GADOE, 2000, p. 129).

Previous studies in Georgia have been limited and have only included a small number of programs. The above evaluation made comparisons to previous years and provided the foundation for funding future alternative education programs.

#### Summary

The review of literature of alternative education programs shows that these programs vary in scope and effectiveness. In the past few decades, alternative schools

have proliferated in response to increased school violence, dropouts, and increasing needs of at-risk students and a variety of other populations; alternative schools have evolved from a school of choice to one of assignment. The demonstrated success of alternative schools gives rise to the notion that perhaps they are the answer to addressing social issues. Effective programs are described as schools of choice with small student-teacher ratios that lack a punitive aspect, and ineffective programs are described as large programs that are punitive in nature and are designed for the “chronically disruptive” student. The advancement of alternative education, the continuing concern over its effectiveness, and future implications have been summarized by Lange and Sletten (2002):

Alternative schools have evolved from a promise made within the American educational system--the promise to educate all students, no matter their circumstances or educational issues. Since the beginning, alternatives have been difficult to describe in philosophy and practice, and the challenge only grows as alternatives expand across the nation. Those who have watched and supported the movement realize its potential to provide a caring, nurturing, hopeful environment for the success of the many at-risk children. Dramatic stories are told of students who were on the verge of completely dropping out of school and then found the setting and relationships at the alternative schools that allowed them to experience success. As time has progressed, the descriptions of individual programs and discussions of theoretical implications of alternative settings have been necessarily scrutinized for concrete evidence of effectiveness. In

order for alternatives to find a place within the educational system, it is necessary that educators, policymakers and researchers base their judgments on more than anecdote and theory. While research on alternative education does exist, it does not adequately address the many questions that remain. Issues of program character, student description, special education service, and academic outcomes are all in need of systematic, ongoing research. And so, it seems the stage is set for a wave of research addressing the nature, scope, and practice of alternative schools and programs across the nation (p. 30).

In 1994, Georgia mandated that all districts establish an alternative education program for “chronically disruptive” students. Later in 2000, the concept was revised to include punitive and non-punitive alternative settings, with the objective being to provide a disenfranchised population of students an opportunity to continue their education. As a result, the literature was examined to describe the various types of alternative programs, reasons for implementation, their effectiveness, and the current state of evaluation of CrossRoads programs.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

The researcher collected data related to the issue of the criteria utilized to evaluate the effectiveness of various types of alternative education programs in Georgia, and an analysis of the data allowed the overarching research question, “What are the current assessment criteria utilized to evaluate the effectiveness of alternative education programs in Georgia?” This chapter reviews the supporting research questions, outlines the methods and procedures to be used in this study, and presents the means of data collection and analysis.

#### Research Questions

The overarching research question in this study is: What assessment criteria are utilized to evaluate the effectiveness of alternative education programs in Georgia?” The following sub questions guided the research:

1. What are the different types of alternative education programs/schools within the state of Georgia?
2. What evaluation criteria are currently utilized to assess the effectiveness of alternative education programs?
3. To what extent are these methods of evaluation indicative of alternative education programs’ success?

#### Research Design

The researcher used a mixed-method research design for the study. This type of research design was selected because using qualitative and quantitative research in

conjunction allowed the researcher to use various methods and ideas unique to each method to gain pertinent information about the phenomena under study (Bloom, Fischer & Orme, 1999). Quantitative research provides numerical data to interpret the results from the qualitative aspects of research (Bloom, Fischer & Orme, 1999), and the statewide survey permits the findings to be generalizable. Qualitative research allowed inferences and characteristics to be drawn from a significant population of participants (Creswell, 1994) that are knowledgeable about alternative programs within Georgia.

Qualitative research is used in areas where only minimal amounts of information are known about the topic (Patten, 2000), and, since little research exists that examines the effectiveness of alternative programs, qualitative research allowed the researcher to generate first-hand knowledge and a heightened understanding of alternative education programs from those in the field. Interviewing, a form of qualitative research, allowed the researcher to understand how employees of these programs perceive the techniques being utilized to evaluate effectiveness. Consequently, qualitative research provided the researcher an opportunity to be immersed in the environment and gain an accurate understanding of the phenomena or experiences being studied without preconceived assumptions of the subject under scrutiny (Bloom, Fischer, Orme & 1999; Shaughnessy, Zechmeister & Zechmeister, 2006). Quantitative and qualitative research combined increased the opportunity for a well-defined study that attempts to control for extraneous conditions.

### Population

The Georgia Department of Education provided the researcher with a list of the 207 alternative programs within the state of Georgia for the 2005-2006 school year. The list

contained county names, email addresses and the names of principals for each of the alternative programs within the state. A survey was electronically mailed (emailed) with a cover letter soliciting participation for the study.

Additionally, the Georgia Department of Education provided the researcher with a list of existing alternative programs within the selected RESA district of Georgia for the 2005-2006 school year to conduct interviews. The list contained county names, email addresses and the names of principals for each of the alternative programs in the respective area. Each principal was sent a cover letter soliciting participation, along with an explanation of the interview.

#### Instrumentation

The researcher devised a survey based upon an extensive review of the literature regarding the criteria used to evaluate the effectiveness of alternative schools. The survey included demographic information about the administrator completing the survey such as number of years as an administrator, gender, highest degree held, and ethnic background. The survey questions were aligned to a specific research question to aid in computation, and the survey design was multiple-choice along with three open-ended questions. Interview questions were parallel to the survey questions. The questions were utilized to obtain an increased understanding of evaluation practices utilized in alternative education programs.

#### *Survey*

Quantitative research allows an established theory to be supported by data (Corbetta, 2003), it seeks to provide participants that are representative of the sample, and it provides structure to a study (Corbetta). A survey, a form of quantitative research, is a

descriptive method used to gather information from participants. Surveys are a common type of descriptive research and can provide vital information about a particular group being investigated (Leary, 2001). Surveys are widely used and popular due to their ability to reach relatively large groups by selecting sample participants that are representative of the larger population (Corbetta; Bordens & Abbott, 2005). Researchers can infer trends or characteristics from the sample and generalize those findings to the larger population (Corbetta). Babbie (1995) recommends the use of surveys because they describe characteristics of large populations, they make samples feasible, they are flexible, and they are generalizable.

The survey instrument focuses on the elements currently being used to evaluate alternative education programs throughout the state; it was pilot tested among experts from the field to establish baseline data and feedback before dispersing the survey statewide. After surveys were conducted with principals or their designees in alternative education programs within Georgia, the researcher conducted interviews with selected principals of a metro Georgia RESA district. Interviews can be useful in new areas of research to gain a great deal of knowledge from a selected few (Glesne, 2006), and utilizing interviews from among the selected few allowed the researcher to follow up and clarify items on the questionnaire that may have created confusion (Glesne).

### *Interviewing*

Interviewing, a qualitative technique, allowed the researcher to gain excellent data and build rapport with participants (Glesne, 2006). Interviews permitted the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the unfamiliar while asking probing questions. Furthermore, utilizing structured interviews enhanced continuity and ensured all

participants were asked the same questions, thus reducing the chance of differing questions for each participant (Corbetta, 2003; Bordens & Abbott, 2005).

The interviews involved four principals from a large metro RESA district of Georgia. Interviews were conducted with this group to gain in-depth feedback on alternative programs and the criteria they use to evaluate the effectiveness of the programs they administer. The principals of these programs either operate their own program or collaborate with surrounding districts to fund an alternative education program.

The selected principals were mailed interview solicitation letters, and each letter had an attached interview acceptance letter informing the researcher of the respondent's willingness to participate in the study. Respondents were allowed to mail acceptance letters in a provided pre-stamped self-addressed envelope or fax acceptance letters to the number listed on the cover letter. The researcher followed up with respondents who did not respond after two weeks by sending a postcard thanking them for completing the acceptance letter and encouraging them to complete the acceptance letter if they had not already done so.

#### *Validity and Reliability of Instrument*

An instrument is understood to be valid when it measures what it is designed to measure (Shaughnessy, Zechmeister & Shaughnessy, 2006). The authors state that validity can be viewed as the "truthfulness" of a measure. In this study, utilizing a survey, the researcher was concerned with content validity. Content validity refers to the extent to which selected questions are representative of the domain from which inferences will be drawn (Bloom, Fischer & Orme, 1999; Corbetta, 2003). Content validity was determined by using the panel of experts from the field to examine the instrument and determine whether the instrument measures the domains it should measure. Feedback provided by



experts in the field may either establish content validity or not (Bloom, Fischer, & Orme, 1999). Content validity was established by the feedback provided from those in the field.

Reliability of an instrument refers to the consistency with which an instrument measures what it is supposed to (Shaughnessy, Zechmeister & Shaughnessy, 2006). Several tests are utilized to assess reliability. The researcher selected Cronbach's alpha because it is used with multiple choice items. Alpha levels may range from 0 to 1, with 1 being perfect reliability. A high Cronbach's alpha level indicates that a survey participant responds reasonably consistently on items in a measure, and all items of the measure are measuring the same concept (Bloom, Fischer, & Orme, 1999). Cronbach's alpha for this instrument was unable to be established.

An underlying assumption with surveys and questionnaires is that respondents are willing and provide truthful responses. This assumption may present issues concerning the accuracy of the responses provided by the participants who chose to answer the survey instrument (Shaughnessy, Zechmeister & Shaughnessy, 2006).

#### Data Collection

Permission from the Georgia Southern University Institutional Review Board (IRB) was secured before surveys were distributed or interviews were conducted because the review board has to review and approve any study that involves human subjects to ensure no unsafe or immoral acts will occur as a result of the study. After permission was granted from IRB, survey packets were electronically mailed (emailed). The survey packets included an introductory cover letter which introduced the researcher; explained the study; requested administrators' participation; and gave brief instructions for completing the survey and how to return it electronically. The packet also had the survey attached. The

survey packets were emailed to each alternative school principal and they were asked to have them completed by themselves or their designees.

Approximately two weeks after the initial email, follow-up reminders were emailed to principals conveying gratitude for participating in the study and requesting completion and return of uncompleted surveys. This email functioned as a reminder for survey participants to complete and return the survey. Those participants who requested additional materials were sent replacement materials. After the surveys were returned, four principals from the large metro RESA district were contacted by letter requesting their participation in the interview.

#### Data Analysis

The data from this study were computed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) on a personal computer. This software enabled the researcher to increase and simplify the process of data calculation. Descriptive statistics such as frequency tables, mean, and standard deviation were used to analyze the survey in order to describe data in a simpler or abbreviated summarized format (Sprinthall, 2003). The data obtained from open-ended questions were analyzed through content analysis to observe common themes and patterns from participants; content analysis is a technique that allows researchers to make presumptions based upon specific information gained from various forms of messages (Shaughnessy, Zechmeister & Shaughnessy, 2006).

## Summary

This chapter describes the methods and procedures that were used in assessing the evaluation methods utilized in Alternative Education Programs in Georgia. This study was conducted using principals or their designees for the 2005-2006 school year, and the principal or designee responded to a multiple-choice survey which gathered information on the methods each school uses to evaluate the program. Each participant received a survey packet via email included a cover letter and copy of the survey. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Specific findings and in-depth data are presented in Chapter IV.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to examine the current assessment criteria that are utilized to evaluate the effectiveness of different types of alternative education programs by executing a statewide survey followed by conducting interviews within a large metro RESA (Regional Educational Service Agency) district in Georgia. In order to accomplish this purpose, the study posited three research questions, which are as follows:

1. What are the different types of alternative programs/schools within the state of Georgia?
2. What evaluation criteria are currently utilized to assess the effectiveness of alternative education programs/schools?
3. To what extent are these methods of evaluation indicative of the alternative education programs/schools' success?

The instrument entitled *Alternative Education Survey* was administered to examine the effectiveness of alternative programs and the criteria used to determine their success. The survey also provided open-ended responses to elicit perceived strengths and weaknesses of the programs as well as suggestions for improvement. The survey was mailed electronically (emailed) to 207 principals of alternative education programs in the state of Georgia. Of the 207 electronic surveys sent out, 25 respondents returned completed surveys, yielding a 12.08% response rate.

This chapter is organized into two sections: Quantitative Findings and Qualitative Findings. The section on Qualitative Findings has two subsections. Section 1, "Open-Ended Survey Questions," is an analysis of the open-ended question in the on-line survey

taken by principals or designees. Section 2, “Interview Data,” is an analysis of the structured interviews conducted with selected metro area RESA principals. Themes that emerged from the interviews were analyzed to understand principals’ perspectives regarding the evaluation of alternative education programs.

### Quantitative Findings

#### *Description of the Sample*

The results of the analysis used to answer the research questions developed for this study are presented in this section. To efficiently address the research questions, survey data were collected and summarized into tables that provide the frequencies and percentages of survey responses. Demographic variables regarding alternative school administrators are presented below in both tabular and narrative form. Demographic information was collected for the following categories: (a) years in the school district (b) age, (c) gender, (d) highest degree, and (e) race/ethnicity.

Table 4.1

#### *Gender of Respondents*

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Female	14	56.0
Male	11	44.0
Total	25	100.0

The mean number of years respondents worked as an alternative school administrator or principal was 4.39 ( $SD = 3.04$ ), with a median of 3.00. Of the respondents to the survey, 14 (56.0%) were females and 11 (44.0%) were males (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.2

*Race/Ethnicity of Respondents*

Race/Ethnicity	Frequency	Percent
African American	7	28.0
Caucasian	18	72.0
Total	25	100.0

Slightly less than three fourths (72.0%,  $n = 18$ ) of the respondents were Caucasian and slightly more than one fourth (28.0%,  $n = 7$ ) were African American (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.3

*Highest Degree of Respondents*

Highest degree	Frequency	Percent
Bachelor's degree	2	8.0
Master's degree	2	8.0
Specialist degree	16	64.0
Doctorate degree	5	20.0
Total	25	100.0

As shown in Table 4.3, two of the respondents surveyed (8.0%) hold bachelor's degrees, two respondents (8.0%) hold master's degrees, sixteen respondents (64.0%) hold specialist degrees, and five respondents (20.0%) hold doctorate degrees (see Table 4.3).

The interview participants in the study were comprised of three males and one female. Two of the males and the sole female was African American; the remaining male was Caucasian. Three of the participants hold Doctorate of Education degrees, and the fourth holds a Specialist in Education degree. The average estimated age for the participants was 45, and the median number of years for an administrator was 4.5.

Table 4.4

*Age of Respondents*

Age	Frequency	Percent
25-34 years of age	2	8.0
35-44 years of age	6	24.0
45-54 years of age	13	52.0
55 plus years of age	4	16.0
Total	25	100.0

Survey respondents were asked to provide their age in the following categories: 25-34 years of age; 35-44 years of age; 45-54 years of age; and 55 plus years of age. Two survey respondents (8.0%) were in the 25-34 years of age category; six respondents (24.0%) were in the 35-44 years of age category. Thirteen respondents (52.0%) were in

the 45-54 years of age category; and four respondents (16.0%) were in the 55-plus age category (see Table 4.4).

#### *Research Question 1*

Research Question 1 asked, “What are the different types of alternative education programs/schools within the state of Georgia?” In an effort to ascertain the characteristics of alternative education programs, several questions were asked.

Table 4.5

#### *Alternative Education Program Types*

<u>Program Type</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Cross Roads	13	52.0
Magnet	1	4.0
Performance Learning Center (PLC)	4	16.0
Other	7	28.0
Total	25	100.0

Table 4.5 shows that slightly more than one half (52.0%) of the survey respondents indicated CrossRoads as the type of alternative education program and slightly more than one fourth (28.0%) indicated Other program types.



Table 4.6

*This School Serves Mostly*

Response	Frequency	Percent
Truants	1	4.0
Expectant Mothers	1	4.0
Dropouts	3	12.0
Chronically Disruptive	15	60.0
Alcohol and Drugs	1	4.0
Other	2	8.0
All of the Above	2	8.0
Total	25	100.0

Table 4.7

*This Program Serves*

Response	Frequency	Percent
High School Students only	6	24.0
Middle and High School Students	18	72.0
Other	1	4.0
Total	25	100.0

Table 4.8

*The Approximate Teacher-Student Ratio is 1 to*

Response	Frequency	Percent
8-15	18	72.0
16-23	5	20.0
24-31	1	4.0
32-39	1	4.0
Total	25	100.0

Table 4.9

*The Maximum Number of Students This Program Can Serve*

Response	Frequency	Percent
Under 100	13	52.0
101 – 125	5	24.0
126 – 150	1	4.0
176+	5	20.0
Total	25	100.0

*Note.* The 151-175 category garnered no responses and was eliminated.

Table 4.10

*Students Served During the 2005-2006 School Year*

Response	Frequency	Percent
Under 100	8	32.0
101 – 150	8	32.0
151-200	2	8.0
201 – 250	2	8.0
251+	5	20.0
Total	25	100.0

Table 4.11

*Approximate Per Pupil Cost*

Response	Frequency	Percent
Under \$9,000	18	72.0
\$9,001 - \$10,500	2	8.0
\$10,501 - \$12,000	3	12.0
Above \$12,000	2	8.0
Total	25	100.0

As shown in Table 4.6, the alternative education programs/schools served mostly chronically disruptive students (60.0%). The vast majority of alternative education

programs (72.0%) served middle and high school students (see Table 4.7). Almost three-fourths of the alternative education programs (72.0%) had teacher-student ratios ranging from 1:8 to 1:15 (see Table 4.8). [Georgia's funding class size is 1:15, but the maximum class size is 1:18 (GADOE, 2006).] Slightly more than one half of the alternative education programs (52.0%) could serve a maximum of 100 students (see Table 4.9). During the 2005-2006 school year, almost one third of the alternative education programs surveyed (32.0%) served less than 100 students, while slightly less than one third (32.0%) served from 101 to 150 students (see Table 4.10). Less than three-fourths of the alternative education programs (72.0%) had per pupil expenditures under \$9,000 (see Table 4.11). [Georgia's per pupil expenditure is \$7,896 (GADOE, 2006).]

#### *Research Question 2*

Research Question 2 asked, "What evaluation criteria are currently utilized to assess the effectiveness of alternative education programs/schools?"

Table 4.12

*Reasons for Removal of Students*

Reason	Count	Percentage of	Percentage of
		Responses	Cases
Lack of attendance	6	25.0	50.0
Expulsion	5	20.8	41.7
Department of Family and Children Services	4	16.7	33.3
Dropout	5	20.8	41.7
Jail	4	16.7	33.3
Total	24	100.0	200.0

(*Note.* This is a multiple response question. Thirteen respondents did not respond to the question.)

Among those respondents who indicated an increase during the 2005-2006 school year of the selected population of students, Table 4.12 shows that 25% were removed for lack of attendance and 21% were expelled.

Table 4.13

*Evaluations Conducted by*

Response	Frequency	Percent
Independent evaluator	4	25.0
Alternative school personnel	1	6.3
District/system personnel	9	56.3
Communities in Schools	1	6.3
Other	1	6.3
Total	16	100.0

Almost two thirds of the alternative programs (64.0%,  $n = 16$ ) had been evaluated. Nine of the alternative programs (56.3%) had been evaluated by school district/system personnel and four (25.0%) by external evaluators. One alternative education program (6.3%) was evaluated by alternative school personnel; one (6.3%) was evaluated by Communities in Schools; and one (6.3%) was evaluated by other personnel (see Table 4.13).

Table 4.14

*How Often Is Your Program Evaluated?*

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yearly	13	81.3
Twice a Year	2	12.5
Every 3-5 Years	1	6.3
Total	16	100.0

Among those respondents who indicated that their alternative education program was evaluated, thirteen (81.3%) indicated that programs were evaluated yearly (see Table 4.14). Moreover, 85.7% of respondents reported that evaluation data were written up in the form of formal evaluation reports.

Table 4.15

*Evaluation Criteria*

Criteria	Count	Percentage of	
		Responses	Cases
Student grades/academics	18	14.3	81.8
Student's return to home school	13	10.3	59.1
Attendance	18	14.3	81.8
Portfolio	4	3.2	18.2
Completion of GED	12	9.5	54.5
Recidivism rates	11	8.7	50.0
Behavior	17	13.5	77.3
Service learning project	7	5.6	31.8
Staff/student feedback	17	13.5	77.4
Online state assessment	7	5.6	31.8
Other	2	1.6	9.1
Total responses	126	100.0	572.7

(Note: This is a multiple dichotomy table. Three respondents did not respond to this question.)

Respondents were asked which, if any, of the listed criteria were used to evaluate program effectiveness. Table 4.15 shows that 14.3% used student grades/academics and attendance, while 13.5% used behavior and staff/student feedback.



Table 4.16

*Student Outcome Measures*

Outcome Measures	Count	Percentage of	
		Responses	Cases
SAT scores	10	10.0	41.7
ACT scores	5	5.0	20.8
EOCT	23	23.0	95.8
GHSGT	24	24.0	100.0
CRCT	18	18.0	75.0
ITBS	14	14.0	58.3
MAP (Measures of Academic Progress)	5	5.0	20.8
Other	1	1.0	4.2
Total responses	100	100.0	416.7

(Note: This is a multiple dichotomy table. One respondent did not respond to the question.)

Respondents were asked which, if any, student outcome measures the facility obtains. Table 4.16 shows that 24% obtained Georgia High School Graduation Tests (GHSGT) results, while 23% obtained End of Course Tests (EOCT) results. Eighteen percent of respondents also obtained Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT) and 14% obtained Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) results. It should be noted that the test results reported are among the state mandated assessments.

Table 4.17

*Are Selected Student Outcomes Used to Evaluate Program Effectiveness?*

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	15	62.5
No	9	37.5
Total	24	100.0

(Note: One respondent did not answer this question.)

Respondents were asked if any of the student outcomes measures (listed in Table 4.16) were used to evaluate the program's effectiveness. Sixty-three percent of respondents indicated "yes" (see Table 4.17).

*Research Question 3*

Research Question 3 asked, "To what extent are these methods of evaluation indicative of alternative education programs'/schools' success?"

Table 4.18

*Student Outcomes Used to Evaluate Effectiveness by Frequency of Evaluation*

Response	Frequency of Evaluation			Total
	Yearly	Twice a Year	Every 3-5 Years	
Yes	10	1	1	12
	<i>83.3</i>	<i>8.3</i>	<i>8.3</i>	<i>100.0</i>
No	2	1	0	3
	<i>66.7</i>	<i>33.3</i>	<i>.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>

(Note: Numbers in italics are percentages. Other respondents either did not answer or their program was not evaluated.)

When respondents who indicated that student outcomes were used to evaluate the effectiveness of alternative education programs are compared across the frequency of evaluations with respondents who did not use student outcomes to evaluate effectiveness, 83.3% of respondents within the “Yes” response category evaluated their programs annually compared to 66.7% within the “No” response category (see Table 4.20). These data in turn were used to rate the overall effectiveness of alternative education programs. Most respondents stated that the student outcome data were used to evaluate the effectiveness of the program they administer. These data indicate that alternative schools may be effective according to the student outcome data gathered to evaluate program effectiveness because they are evaluated more often than programs that do not use student outcome data.

Table 4.19

*Student Outcomes Used to Evaluate Effectiveness by Type of Evaluator*

Response	Independent	Alternative	District/	Other	Total
	Evaluator	School	System		
	Personnel	Personnel	Personnel		
Yes	3	1	6	2	12
	<i>25.0</i>	<i>8.3</i>	<i>50.0</i>	<i>16.7</i>	<i>100.0</i>
No	1	0	2	0	3
	<i>33.3</i>	<i>.0</i>	<i>66.7</i>	<i>.0</i>	<i>100.0</i>

(Note: Numbers in italics are percentages. Other respondents either did not answer or their program was not evaluated.)

When those respondents who indicated that student outcomes were used to evaluate the effectiveness of alternative education programs and those who did not use student outcomes to evaluate effectiveness are compared across type of evaluator, 25.0% of respondents within the “Yes” response category used an independent evaluator compared to 33.3% within the “No” response category (see Table 4.21). Gager and Elias (1997) stated most programs were elevated by someone’s own judgment.

*Student Outcomes Used to Evaluate Program Effectiveness and Criteria Used for Program Evaluation*

Table 4.20

*Variations in Student Outcomes Used to Evaluate Effectiveness and Evaluative Criteria*

Criteria	Student Outcomes Used		Total
	Yes	No	
Student grades/academics	13	4	17
	76.5	23.5	14.7
Student's return to home school	7	5	12
	58.3	41.7	10.3
Attendance	10	6	16
	62.5	37.5	13.8
Portfolio	4	0	4
	100.0	.0	3.4
Completion of GED or diploma	11	0	11
	100.0	.0	9.5
Recidivism rates	6	3	9
	66.7	33.3	7.8
Behavior	11	5	16
	68.8	31.3	13.8
Service learning projects	7	0	7
	100.0	.0	6.0

Table 4.20 (*Continued*)

Criteria	Student Outcomes Used		Total
	Yes	No	
Staff/student feedback	12	3	15
	<i>80.0</i>	<i>20.0</i>	<i>12.9</i>
Online assessments	7	0	7
	<i>100.0</i>	<i>.0</i>	<i>6.0</i>
Other	2	0	2
	<i>100.0</i>	<i>.0</i>	<i>1.7</i>

(Note: The numbers in italics are percentages. Percentages and totals are based on responses. As this table details a multiple dichotomy analysis, where cells are independent, no statistical tests of significance are appropriate.)

Among respondents who used student outcome measures to evaluate their alternative programs for effectiveness, all (100.0%) used (a) portfolios, (b) GED or high school completion rates, (c) service learning projects, and/or (d) online assessments and other measures, while 80% used staff student feedback (see Table 4.20). When program effectiveness is compared to specific student outcomes, the results are very different than when scrutinized alone. For example, when program effectiveness was isolated (Table 4.15), the results varied. Four other criteria emerged as the evaluative criteria of a program: grades/academics, attendance, behavior and staff/student feedback. Program evaluative criteria variability was highlighted by Lange and Sletten (2002), who have

observed that specific student outcomes must be linked to specific measures of success or effectiveness to increase the likelihood of a valid measure of evaluation. Discrepancies in data lead to inconclusive data on program effectiveness for alternative education programs.

### Qualitative Findings

In addition, respondent open response comments were grouped into specific categories. Through this method of analysis, significant themes emerged from the perspectives on program strengths and weaknesses and suggestions for overcoming program limitations.

These questions included the following:

1. What do you think are the major strengths of the program?
2. What do you think are the major weaknesses of the program?
3. What do you think can be done to reduce the limitations of your program?

#### *Program Strengths*

For program strengths, the first theme to emerge from respondent comments was the use of an individualized, self-paced curriculum such as NovaNET and Plato. The second theme to emerge was committed and dedicated staff, i.e. “teachers who chose to work in an alternative school.” The third theme was collaboration between alternative school teachers and regular teachers regarding instruction as well collaboration among alternative school staff members. The fourth theme to emerge from respondent comments was the low student-teacher ratio in the alternative school environment. The fifth theme to emerge was a smaller, more structured environment. The sixth theme to emerge was strong administrative leadership and support. The final theme to emerge was

the academic support; several respondents, for example, listed tutorials, mentoring and counseling services (drug and alcohol, substance abuse), and parent conferences.

### *Program Weaknesses*

For program weaknesses, the first theme to emerge was inadequate funding. The second theme to emerge was lack of parental involvement. The third theme to emerge was inadequate staff; for example, one respondent stated, “There are too many courses and too few teachers.” The third theme to emerge was student attendance and mobility. The fourth theme to emerge was the influx of students with “chronic” behavioral problems as well as underachieving students. One respondent also commented on the lack of district provided transportation for students, while two other respondents indicated that site location (being away from the main campus) was perceived as a weakness. Yet another respondent indicated that a weakness was that the majority of student work was done on computers or in modules with no homework assignments.

### *Overcoming Alternative Education Program Limitations*

Respondents listed numerous resources that were needed to overcome some of the program weaknesses cited. These included: 1) resource learning centers; 2) content area and special education teachers and paraprofessionals; 3) partnerships with technical schools and higher education institutions; 4) parent educator or parent liaisons assigned to the alternative school; 5) voluntary attendance or open enrollment; 6) free transportation; 7) more support from central administration; 8) better communication between the alternative school and system administration; and 9) new or renovated facility.



### *Interviews*

Structured interviews were conducted with four metro RESA alternative education administrators during the last week of February 2007. The method used to obtain the interview data was described in Chapter III, as were the methods used for data interpretation. Through these personal interviews, the researcher hoped to obtain a better understanding of alternative education program evaluation.

Parallel questions were asked in each interview session, and an interview protocol was used to guide the interviews. The identities of the participants have been disguised; pseudonyms were used to protect confidentiality.

### *Analysis of Interview Data*

There are five sources qualitative researchers use for classification systems to organize data. The researcher may use “(a) the research question and foreshadow problems or sub-questions, (b) the research instrument such as an interview guide, (c) themes, concepts, or categories used by other researchers in prior studies, (d) prior knowledge of the researcher, and (e) the data itself” (McMillian & Schumacher, 2001, p. 467).

For the purpose of organizing the data for this study, the researcher used themes to organize and guide this section. The major themes that emerged during the interviews were (1) curriculum, (2) program characteristics, (3) evaluative criteria, and (4) resources.

### *Curriculum*

Most alternative programs utilized a computer curriculum that allowed students to work at their own pace. Mr. Johansen, Mr. Jones, and Mr. Jamison all used NovaNET.

They remarked that “the system allowed several students to work on various assignments or subject areas at once.” Ms. Johnson’s alternative program uses Plato, another self-paced curriculum, which allows students to “do their work on the computer.” Raywid (1994) maintains that the individualization of learning and differentiation practiced in alternative education facilities enhances learning opportunities.

Alternative programs strive to engage the learner in new and innovative ways. “For instance, we have a student taking French 2 and French 1, but we have no one here certified to teach French. So we use *Rosetta Stone*, a French program that’s online...so these students can do it online and get the credit,” stated Ms. Johnson. Moreover, Mr. Johansen also uses additional online curriculum services to address the needs of the learner within the population of students in his alternative setting. “We use Georgia’s virtual school to supplement NovaNET, and have students enrolled in courses that are not available here.” Mr. Jones added, “Even though we still use NovaNET, it does not cover everything. We still have to supplement.”

#### *Program Characteristics*

Most respondents administered punitive alternative programs. Three-fourths of interview participants were principals of a CrossRoads facility. “My facility is strictly punitive. We have students that are displaced from their base school because of drugs, weapons, or behavior problems.” Another stated, “It is set up for students that have violated the county’s school district code of student conduct.” All CrossRoads setting principals served “chronically disruptive students in sixth through 12<sup>th</sup> grade.”

The remaining respondent was principal of a Performance Learning Center (PLC). Mr. Jamison stated,

The major difference between our program and a punitive setting would be that students aren't assigned to the program. Once you are making the setting where students are choosing to be a part of it versus being mandated to be a part of it, it changes the whole atmosphere of the school. Discipline problems go way down; attendance goes way up; academic performance goes way up. We are actually un-graded, even though for reporting purposes obviously we do have to keep grade level for different reporting purposes, but the school is not graded. We have students 16 and older or have completed a year of high school. The reason for that is we are not a feeder school for middle school. We want students to go to their assigned high school and have a successful experience. But for those that do not and fall in the cracks, those are the students that seek us out as another option."

Raywid (1994) stated Type II or punitive setting programs made no improvement in student behaviors, dropout rates, etc. which they were designed to address. Moreover, Mr. Jamison's account points to the reason alternative programs were originally constructed (Young, 1990). Georgia Department of Education (2000) and J. Randolph (personal communication, June 20, 2006) stated punitive setting programs were the largest number of alternative programs in Georgia.

Most principals disclosed small teacher-to-student ratios for the alternative program they administered, with most programs not surpassing a 1 to 13 ratio. However, one program, Mr. Jones', exceeded the teacher-to-student ratio. "Sometimes it's 1 to 25 to 30. It changes daily. Most times, it's a bit too much." Additionally, Mr. Jones' program was overpopulated with over 200 students, but the program could only hold 140 students. The maximum enrollment for the remaining two punitive settings was thirty. Additionally, the PLC could "hold 105 students, but due to flexibility we can hold 140 students."

GADOE (2000) states there is great variability between programs, but most have teacher-student ratios of 1 to 18 with a maximum enrollment of 100. Mr. Jamison stated

that they employ a teacher-to-student ratio of 1 to 15 because of “best practices” that PLC’s implement to increase student learning. “Best practices” are common themes that are incorporated throughout all performance learning centers to increase student learning while they are enrolled. Some of those “best practices” are

We have a position here at the school called a social services coordinator. And her responsibility is to help students deal with any outside influences that keep them from being successful. We have a nursery, too. That’s not true of all schools, but it does allow us to remove the barriers for those that have children that may prevent them from getting a high school diploma. So those are some of the best practices.

### *Evaluative Criteria*

Principals used many identified criteria to evaluate their schools, with the most prominent criteria used being attendance: approximately 50% of the respondents stated attendance is one of the main factors for evaluating the program they administer. In fact, in Mr. Jamieson’s program, “The students who are enrolled are in the 95% attendance range. We must meet that standard because of our attendance policy; they have to make 95% of the days or they can be dismissed.” GADOE (2000) indicated that attendance is an important facet of determining effectiveness within alternative education programs.

Additionally, student and staff feedback continue to be an integral part of determining whether a student has been successful in a program and if the program as a whole has been successful. As Mr. Jamieson stated, “The most important indicator we get is the feedback from our students. Each year and each semester, we survey our students on the climate of the school, and it has always been positive.” Mr. Jones stated, “I like to gather faculty feedback to see how well we have done. I like to get the student’s view as well to allow various perspectives on how well the school is doing.”

Standardized tests were another criteria principals utilized as a method to evaluate their programs. “I look at those that fare well on EOCT, Georgia high school graduation tests and CRCT is the bottom line one for middle school” stated one respondent. Also, principals in the punitive settings all made similar remarks regarding observation of behavior as a viable evaluative measure. One principal stated, “We have students that go away every nine weeks, and if they don’t return, that is a good sign.” Another said, “The primary indicator for me is the number of students that successfully make the transition back to their base school without coming back to me. That is an indication of success!”

### *Resources*

Principals reported a lack of resources to adequately address the varied needs of the population of students that they serve. “Often time teachers are teaching two to three or more courses within the same classroom in an effort to cover all of the subject areas,” stated Mr. Johansen. This sentiment was shared by all four of the interview participants. Moreover, Mr. Jamieson added, “we are looking for another curriculum because our teachers have discovered that the one we have is not sufficient. They often have to supplement it with other materials.” Mr. Jones added,

Because prerequisite skills are not there, the teachers have to go back and bridge those gaps before some of the students can actually get on NovaNET because it’s on grade level and some of the courses are highly challenging. We constantly have to go back and find additional resources for these students. That can be very, very challenging.

The individualization of an alternative setting requires additional teaching staff and funding to appropriately supply the needs of all students regardless of mandatory assignment or self-referral. Principals mentioned needing additional staff to adequately teach the various courses that students were assigned. One CrossRoads principal stated,

We have one middle school teacher who teaches all the content areas for middle school, and we have a fulltime parapro that assists in the high school classroom, and we have one PE teacher that teaches both middle and high school students while they're here. Teachers come in from the two high schools and other locations to work with students here. We do not have our own staff.

Another remarked,

I think one of our biggest challenges is personnel, because up until this year, we did not have a science or a math teacher, but we had students that were taking those classes. So we had a full-time high school teacher, a full-time middle school teacher, and a paraprofessional.

Principals were also concerned about the amount of space they had to properly teach students in the alternative education programs. Ms. Johnson stated, "They keep sending them to us until we just run out of space. Basically, we have run out of space. We had to take a book room and knock out a wall." Mr. Jones added,

the very first issue that comes to mind is the overcrowding issue. All students value their space. When we have overcrowded classrooms I'm always very much concerned. Some of these students might not be getting the attention that they need and it's a very real concern.

Lehr and Lange (2003) contend that most alternative education programs have become "dumping grounds" for students, and that students are often placed in these programs for unspecified periods of time.

### Summary

The researcher analyzed data from the survey instrument to provide an answer to the overarching research question. The researcher was able to ascertain that more alternative schools are evaluated, but evaluations are not mandated, rigorous nor thorough. Most alternative schools continue to be evaluated on anecdotal data such as the students' return to the home school or improved or unimproved behavior. Additionally,

most respondents did not utilize the online state assessment to assist in evaluating programs.

Respondents who participated in the interviews conveyed their perceptions of alternative education programs and how their respective school analyzed effectiveness. Respondents were selected from a large metro RESA district and interviews were conducted within the confines of each principal's school. Further discussion about the findings, conclusions, and recommendations will be discussed in Chapter V.

CHAPTER V  
SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND  
RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter is a summary of the study, analysis of the research findings, discussion of research findings, and conclusions discovered from those findings, as well as the implications and recommendations based upon the data gathered.

The intent of this study was to examine the criteria used to assess the effectiveness of various alternative education programs. The research questions include: (1) What are the different types of alternative programs/schools within the state of Georgia? (2) What evaluation criteria are currently utilized to assess the effectiveness of alternative education programs/schools? And (3) To what extent are these methods of evaluation indicative of alternative education programs' or schools' success?

The study was completed through the use of surveys and structured interviews with four principals from a large metro area RESA district. The survey was constructed by the researcher utilizing data from the literature. The survey consisted of 23 multiple choice and short answer questions. Surveys were emailed to 207 principals of alternative education programs in Georgia from a list supplied by the Georgia Department of Education.

Interviews consisted of parallel questions to the survey. The researcher scheduled interviews with principals at their respective schools. The interviews were audio recorded, stored in a secured location and transcribed by the researcher. In an effort to ensure the confidentiality of the principals, their schools and respective districts, participants were coded with pseudonyms throughout the study. The completion rate for



the recorded interviews was 100%, and the data were analyzed by the researcher before the findings were reported.

The survey allowed the researcher to gather general data as it related to alternative education programs, which allowed the researcher to make some broad assumptions (Creswell, 1994). Furthermore, on-site interviews with participants allowed the researcher to become immersed in the environment, view facial expressions and other body language. The structured interviews ensured continuity among all four participants (Corbetta, 2003).

### Analysis of Research Findings

Several findings emerged from the study; the major finding was that most alternative education programs included in this study were evaluated. This finding is in contrast to the literature, which states that most programs are not evaluated for effectiveness (Raywid, 1999; Tobin & Sprague, 2000). However, the survey responses were limited, which suggests that it is possible that the population of respondents who responded to the survey is very meticulous in developing an outstanding program. On the other hand, those that participated in the interview portion of the study had a 75% response rate of “no” or “I evaluate it myself” when asked if their program was evaluated. Those participants reported some form of evaluation, but no formal evaluation where specific requirements had to be met existed. Only one program, the Performance Learning Center, had a formal evaluation where an outside individual conducted monthly evaluations from a rubric for principals to follow.

Other findings include (1) most programs continue to use grades, academics and attendance to evaluate program effectiveness; (2) programs continue to use anecdotal

data as a determining factor to evaluate effectiveness; (3) principals indicated most programs continue to be designed for chronically disruptive students and follow the CrossRoads model; and (4) most principals reported a lack of resources for the students that attend the alternative education program.

The researcher is hopeful that the cornucopia of information obtained from this study allows other stakeholders such as other educational leaders, parents, teachers, politicians and others an opportunity to develop adequate evaluation measures for these practicing and emerging facilities. The researcher will articulate the findings to interested individuals via articles, conferences, publications, professional development opportunities and other avenues that allow the dissemination of the results.

#### Discussion of Research Findings

This study focused on Georgia alternative education programs principals during the 2005-2006 school year. The principals had a multiple choice and short answer survey. Additionally, four principals of a large metro area RESA district were selected to conduct an in-depth interview.

#### *Types of Programs*

Results of the quantitative study revealed most alternative programs in Georgia serve chronically disruptive students. Most respondents (60.0%) stated they administered a program for chronically disruptive students and 52% of programs were of the CrossRoads type. This study reinforced the findings of the GADOE, which discovered most programs in Georgia are designed for chronically disruptive students and serve those in sixth through 12<sup>th</sup> grade (2000). Moreover, most alternative programs are punitive in nature (Raywid, 1999; Sagor, 1999; Laudan, 2003). The results of the

qualitative analysis were consistent with quantitative findings. Three-fourths of the interviewees administered CrossRoads settings for chronically disruptive students with a population of sixth through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. In addition, there is a growing number of other types of alternative education programs that target the “at-risk population. Some of those programs are Performance Learning Centers (PLC) or evening school programs. In this study there were 28% of other alternative programs in Georgia. This finding supports the data there are a growing number of alternative programs in which many participants are mixing strategies to concentrate on a variety of objectives and needs (Raywid, 1994; Laudan, 2003; J. Randolph, personal conversation, 2006).

#### *Evaluation Criteria*

The second research objective focused on the evaluation criteria used to assess effectiveness. This study concluded most principals continue to use grades, academics, and attendance to evaluate their programs. Chalker (1994) concluded in his study of 27 alternative programs that most directors used at least one of those criteria to evaluate effectiveness. Furthermore, GADOE defined the “effectiveness” criteria for CrossRoads utilizing the aforementioned components (2000). Additionally, behavior and staff/student feedback continued to be vital assets to determine effectiveness. Principals of this study reported 14.3% of the above criteria as a method of evaluation. Karlin and Harnish (1995) discovered in their study that behavioral gains and anecdotal data were great indicators of success in an alternative program. Interestingly, while Duke and Muzio discovered most alternative programs had poor evaluation practices in 1978, the quantitative portion of this study refutes that notion. This study found that 64% of the programs reported being evaluated (Major Finding). Additionally, 85.7% of respondents

reported that evaluations were written even though Chalker (1994) cited most programs as not having written evaluative data on the program being administered. During interviews with principals of a large RESA district, 75% disclosed that there existed no formal or mandated evaluation of their program, which agrees with the literature that states most programs have no systematic or formal evaluation in place (Gager & Elias, 1997). One principal had some form of evaluation in place to assess necessary changes or goals for the program she administered, another principal said, "I evaluate the program," while the Performance Learning Center principal had a formal mandated evaluation that was conducted on a monthly basis by a Community in School representative. This principal also had a rubric to follow to allow for ease of understanding and consistency. Clearly, the alternative education movement is changing, and these changes have forced principals to change their roles and evaluation practices within public education.

#### *Success of Programs*

The third research objective was to determine if there were a relationship between the outcomes used to evaluate the program's effectiveness and the success of the program. The study found that success was determined by anecdotal data and various other criteria such as student and teacher feedback. Karlin and Harnish (1995) stated in their study of alternative schools in Georgia that anecdotal data was an enormous portion of the ways participants' measure success for schools. Furthermore, Lange and Sletten (2002) and Karlin and Harnish (1995) contend in their studies that effectiveness must be defined before student outcomes can be measured. Though many schools employed student outcome data as a mechanism to measure success, there were still other factors that weighed in the decision to label a school as successful or "effective." Mesinger

(1986) has stated that evaluations must be properly designed for this particular population of students. The data analysis of the quantitative findings shows that the success of a program is determined by the completion of a GED or diploma, portfolios and/or service learning projects when student achievement outcome data is collected. Even though this data was limited and all participants did not provide data, this finding supplements the authors' arguments that alternative measures must be designed to evaluate this particular group of schools (Raywid, 1999; Lange & Sletten, 2002). Moreover, the literature states more empirical studies must be developed and past studies must be replicated before alternative education schools' success can be measured or determined (Cox, 1999; Laudan, 2003). Alternative education is still in its infancy; therefore, an enormous amount of the data presented in the literature focuses on characteristics of programs that may be essential to their success (Kellmayer, 1995; Laudan, 2003).

### Conclusions

Although it is commonly assumed that alternative education programs are not evaluated (Chalker, 1994), the major finding of this study has refuted that notion. The results show that although there is some form of evaluation occurring in alternative programs, much of it is neither systematic nor formal. However, these questions remain to be answered: What are the specific components of effective a program? Moreover, does solely evaluating a program make it either successful or effective?

The first research question sought to describe the different types of programs within the state of Georgia. This study concurred with the literature in that most programs were punitive in nature (Neumann, 1994; GADOE, 2000), although there are a growing number of other types of programs such as Performance Learning Centers or evening

schools. Chalker (1994) predicted there would be an increase in CrossRoads settings due to the growth of disenfranchised students. In fact, the Georgia Department of Department of Education (2000) recommended in their three year study to continue funding of CrossRoads programs. Also, standards and designs were encouraged to be disseminated to facilitate evaluative criteria within these facilities (GADOE, 2000). Consequently, the second research question number two asked, “What evaluation criteria are currently utilized to assess the effectiveness of alternative education programs/schools?” This study, supported the literature, found that most alternative settings in Georgia use attendance, academics or grades and anecdotal data or staff/student feedback as measures to evaluate program effectiveness (Karlin & Harnish, 1995; GADOE, 2000). However, the researcher discovered inconsistencies in data collection at many of the alternative education programs. Duke and Muzio (1978) reported inconsistencies in data collection as one of many problems associated with the proper evaluation of alternative programs. Therefore, the final research question asked, “To what extent are these methods of evaluation indicative of alternative education programs/schools’ success?” The findings of this study uncovered there was great variability among programs which prevented explicit measures of effectiveness. Cox (1999) has observed that decreasing program variability is an important factor in contributing to the precise evaluation of these programs. Furthermore, GADOE (2000) suggested implementing design standards for programs to decrease variability among programs. This study also discovered principals may have evaluated programs; however, it may have been using their own logic or criteria (Gager & Elias, 1997). Consequently, no consistency or systematic scheme was utilized to determine important components. This system of evaluation has been the

reason the data on program effectiveness have been inconclusive (Duke & Muzio, 1978). Additionally, Chalker (1994) has suggested that programs should align with each other to develop opportunities for directors to collaborate and share information as opposed to each program developing its own set of goals and objectives. The success of alternative education in Georgia, as an educational reform, can only be determined by the implementation of valid evaluation measures. Based upon these findings, it can be concluded that these programs are often not the top priority of a school district's budget, which is consistent with the literature that many alternative settings are "dumping grounds" (Lehr & Lange, 2003) and holding tanks for students, not places designed for their educational growth. Many principals disclosed that they were working with constrained resources such as a shortage of teachers or lack of funding that served to limit the success of their alternative programs. Laudan (2003) has stated that "a single school or program is being expected to handle too much *educational diversity* (one that regular schools are unable to handle well) and this may be setting the programs (and their students) up for educational failure" (p. 15).

### Implications

Based upon the review of available literature and research findings of the study the following implications can be drawn:

1. The Georgia Department of Education should be interested in the results of this study, which can be used as the basis for implementing a mandated statewide evaluation tool that encompasses some of the aspects that principals mention they are currently utilizing.

2. Georgia lawmakers should be interested in this study, as many principals mentioned being constrained by low funding or few resources for the students they serve. Additionally, many respondents mentioned that their programs struggled with having too few teachers and too many courses to teach.
3. The data presented in this study indicates there continue to be growing disciplinary issues in public education. Therefore, all stakeholders such as the Georgia Department of Education, Board of Regents, community members and the like should be interested in this study to review policies to plan appropriately for this disenfranchised group of students.
4. With major discrepancies between punitive alternative settings and Performance Learning Centers evaluations, the Georgia Department of Education should investigate why the latter is required to have monthly evaluations and the former is not mandated to have at least a yearly evaluation.
5. The implementation of valid evaluation practices could have an impact on the increasing dropout rate and the staggeringly low graduation rate in Georgia which affects Georgia schools' accountability under the No Child Left Behind Act.

#### General Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made, with the intent of facilitating an improved evaluation of the alternative programs in Georgia:



1. A formal evaluation and accountability system for all alternative programs in Georgia that takes into consideration the most salient factors unique to each distinct program should be developed and established. This accountability system is necessary because the recidivism rate is typically high for those assigned to punitive alternative programs, and those that elect to attend non-punitive settings are successful.
2. The Georgia Department of Education should conduct yearly training on utilizing the evaluation tool. Many principals did not have access to previous years' data because they were new or programs were newly established. This training could promote awareness about the various programs and could raise the knowledge base about properly evaluating alternative education programs, interpreting the results, and disseminating the results.
3. The Georgia Department of Education should consider classifying and devising an evaluation tool for all alternative programs since the programs are all categorized under alternative education. This will remove any ambiguity and place high standards on students in all alternative education programs.

#### Recommendations for Further Research

Based on the review of literature and the findings of this study, the following recommendations for further research are made:

1. This study should be replicated in another state and findings compared to those found in Georgia

2. This study should be repeated, with extensive attempts made to include all alternative school principals about the evaluation of the school they are administering
3. A study should be conducted on the implementation of the new standard mandated alternative education evaluation tool(s).

### Concluding Thoughts

As a Georgia CrossRoads program administrator who has been in alternative education since 2000, the researcher believes alternative education is the school system's last opportunity to connect with a significant portion of a disenfranchised group of students. Alternative education allows students to learn in a smaller, controlled environment; however, often the opportunities that environment affords are lost, because programs become overcrowded, which in turn makes them ineffective. Because the percentage of dropouts in Georgia continues to increase, as does the national dropout rate, the Governor's Task Force and other entities are evaluating alternative education programs and the techniques used for funding purposes. Unfortunately, not all individuals view alternative education as a means to produce "good citizens". As administrators in these unique programs, we must evaluate programs and produce results that substantiate the great work that alternative education is capable of producing.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A  
ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION SURVEY

## Alternative Education Survey

### Part I: Experience and Background

1. How many years, including the current school year, have you worked as an alternative school principal or administrator? \_\_\_\_\_
  
2. What is the highest professional degree you hold?
  - a. Bachelor
  - b. Master
  - c. Specialist
  - d. Doctorate
  
3. What is your gender?
  - a. Female
  - b. Male
  
4. What is your age?
  - a. 25-35
  - b. 36-45
  - c. 46-55
  - d. above 55
  
5. What is your ethnic background? (select only one)
  - a. African-American
  - b. Asian
  - c. Caucasian
  - d. Hispanic
  - e. Native American
  - f. Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

### Part II: School Data

Please complete items 6-16 by placing an (X) beside the best answer

6. What type alternative education program do you administer?
  - a. CrossRoads
  - b. Magnet
  - c. PLC (Performance Learning Center)
  - d. Other, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

7. This school serves mostly:

- a. Truants
- b. Expectant mothers
- c. Gifted/talented
- d. Dropouts
- e. Chronically disruptive
- f. Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

8. This program serves:

- a. Elementary school students only
- b. Middle school students only
- c. High school students only
- d. Middle and high school students
- e. Other, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

9. The approximate teacher ratio is 1 to \_\_\_\_

- a. 8-15
- b. 16-23
- c. 24-31
- d. 32-39
- e. above 40

10. What is the maximum number of students this program can serve?

- a. Under 100
- b. 101-125
- c. 126-150
- d. 151-175
- e. Above 176

11. How many students were served during 2005-2006 school year? (unduplicated)

- a. Under 100
- b. 101-150
- c. 151-200
- d. 201-250
- e. Above 251

12. What is the approximate per pupil cost?

- a. Under \$9,000
- b. \$9,000-10,500
- c. \$10,500-12,000
- d. Above \$ 12,000



**Please place an (X) under the appropriate column**

13. Please indicate if there was an **increase** or **decrease** during the 2005-2006 school year in the removal of the following population of students compared to the 2004-2005 school year:

	Increase	Decrease
a. Lack of attendance	_____	_____
b. Expulsion	_____	_____
c. Department of Family and Children Services	_____	_____
d. Dropout	_____	_____
e. Jail	_____	_____

14. Is your school evaluated?

- a. Yes  
 b. No (Skip to # 18)

15. Evaluations are conducted by:

- a. Independent evaluators  
 b. Alternative school personnel  
 c. District/system personnel  
 d. Other, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

16. How often is your school evaluated?

- a. Yearly  
 b. Bi-yearly  
 c. Every 3-5 years  
 d. More than 5 years

17. Is evaluative data written?

- a. Yes  
 b. No

**Please complete items 18-19 by checking (X) all answers that apply.**

18. Which, if any, of the following is used to evaluate program effectiveness?

- a. Student grades/academics  
 b. Student's return to home or traditional school  
 c. Attendance  
 d. Portfolios  
 e. Completion of GED or diploma  
 f. Recidivism rates  
 g. Behavior  
 h. Service learning projects  
 i. Staff/student feedback  
 j. On-line state assessment  
 k. other, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

19. Which, if any, of the following student outcome measures does your facility obtain?

- a. SAT scores
- b. ACT scores
- c. End of Course Tests (EOCT)
- d. Georgia High School Graduation Test (GHST)
- e. Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT)
- f. Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS)
- g. Measures of Academic Progress (MAP)
- h. Other, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

20. If any of the items were selected in #19, are they used to evaluate the program's effectiveness?

- a. Yes
- b. No

**Please provide your written responses to the following:**

21. What do you think are the major strengths of your program?

22. What do you think are the major weaknesses of your program?

23. What do you think can be done to reduce the limitations of your program?

APPENDIX B

ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL CONSENT LETTER



COLLEGE OF EDUCATION  
DEPARTMENT OF LEADERSHIP,  
TECHNOLOGY & HUMAN DEVELOPMENT  
POST OFFICE BOX 8131  
STATESBORO, GEORGIA 30460-8131  
TELEPHONE (912) 681-5307  
FAX (912) 486-7104

COUNSELOR EDUCATION  
EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP  
EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION  
INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNOLOGY  
SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY

January 19, 2007

Dear Alternative Education Program Principal:

My name is Angela E. Pope. I am the Assistant Principal at the Clarke County Alternative Education Program and a Doctoral student at Georgia Southern University. I am studying the criteria used to evaluate the effectiveness of alternative programs in Georgia as part of the requirements to complete the Ed.D. degree.

This letter is to request your assistance in gathering data by administering a survey. I am requesting that you complete the attached survey so that your school's information can be included in this study. Your responses will remain totally confidential. Your participation is greatly appreciated and will improve the quality of my study.

If you have any questions or concerns about this proposed research project, please contact me at (706) 224-4531 or (706) 543-8865. You may also contact me via e-mail at [apope172@charter.net](mailto:apope172@charter.net) or [popea@clarke.k12.ga.us](mailto:popea@clarke.k12.ga.us). Additionally, you may contact my academic advisor, Dr. Walter Polka via e-mail at [wpolka@georgiasouthern.edu](mailto:wpolka@georgiasouthern.edu) if you so desire.

A copy of the results of this study will be available upon request. Your immediate response to the survey will allow the results to be tabulated as quickly as possible. I want to thank you in advance for your assistance in completing this study in a timely manner.

Respectfully,

*Angela E. Pope*

Angela E. Pope

## SURVEY INSTRUMENT DIRECTIONS

### CRITERIA USED FOR EVALUATING ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAMS

This survey is designed to better understand the criteria used to determine the effectiveness of alternative programs within Georgia. There are only a small but growing number of alternative programs, so your participation in this survey is imperative. The responses you provide will provide insight and guidance into what variables are utilized as effectiveness criteria in alternative programs throughout Georgia.

Your confidentiality regarding your responses to this survey will be assured. Your e-mail address will be destroyed upon return of your survey. Your name will never be placed on the survey and your responses will only be reported in aggregate form.

In the event you oversee **more than one distinct** alternative program site or program, please complete one survey per each site or program. However, if two or more counties/districts combine to provide alternative program services for **one type** of alternative setting, only one survey should be completed.

Upon opening the survey, it is essential that you place an “X” beside the appropriate response as indicated by the directions within the survey. The last component of the survey requires typed responses to the final three questions. When the survey is complete, save it as “AEP Survey” and return the survey only via e-mail as an attachment to: [apope172@charter.net](mailto:apope172@charter.net) .

Please complete the entire survey and e-mail it within the next three working days. Should you have any questions or if any problems arise as you complete the survey, please phone (706) 224-4531 and leave a message. I will respond to your question(s) within one working day.

Thank you for time and effort.

APPENDIX C  
IRB APPROVAL LETTER

Georgia Southern University Office of Research Services & Sponsored Programs		
<b>Institutional Review Board (IRB)</b>		
Phone: 912-681-5465		Administrative Annex P.O. Box 8005 Statesboro, GA 30460
Fax: 912-681-0719	Ovsrigh@GeorgiaSouthern.edu	

**To:** Angela E. Pope  
172 Herring St.  
Athens, GA-30601

**CC:** Dr. Walter Polka  
P.O. Box-8131

**From:** Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs  
Administrative Support Office for Research Oversight Committees  
(IACUC/IBC/IRB)

**Date:** January 10, 2007

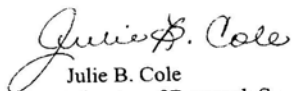
**Subject:** Status of Application for Approval to Utilize Human Subjects in Research

After a review of your proposed research project numbered: **H07128**, and titled "**An Assessment of the Criteria Used to Evaluate the Effectiveness of Different Types of Alternative Education Programs in Georgia**", it appears that (1) the research subjects are at minimal risk, (2) appropriate safeguards are planned, and (3) the research activities involve only procedures which are allowable.

*Therefore, as authorized in the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, I am pleased to notify you that the Institutional Review Board has approved your proposed research.*

**This IRB approval is in effect for one year from the date of this letter.** If at the end of that time, there have been no changes to the research protocol, you may request an extension of the approval period for an additional year. In the interim, please provide the IRB with any information concerning any significant adverse event, **whether or not it is believed to be related to the study**, within five working days of the event. In addition, if a change or modification of the approved methodology becomes necessary, you must notify the IRB Coordinator **prior** to initiating any such changes or modifications. At that time, an amended application for IRB approval may be submitted. Upon completion of your data collection, you are required to complete a *Research Study Termination* form to notify the IRB Coordinator, so your file may be closed.

Sincerely,



Julie B. Cole  
Director of Research Services and Sponsored Programs

APPENDIX D  
LITERATURE MATRIX



Table D.1

*Study Relating to At-Risk Status*

<b>Study</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Design/Analysis</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
Frymier (1992)	To assess risk among school age children	21,706 students within 276 schools	Protocol Instrument/ Factor analysis	-1 in 4 had three or more daily risks -1 in 10 had five or more daily risks

Table D.2

*Study Relating to Dropouts*

<b>Study</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Design/Analysis</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, and Rock (1987)	Factors related to students dropping out of school	30,000 National students	Longitudinal	Academic and social factors contribute to student dropout

Table D.3

*Study Relating to Student Behaviors*

<b>Study</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Design/Analysis</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
Tobin and Sugai (1999)	Interventions to prevent violence and discipline problems	526 high school students	Longitudinal/archival data	Discipline referrals in grade 6 should prompt an intervention with preventive measures

Table D. 4

*Study Relating to Student Attendance*

<b>Study</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Design/Analysis</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
Corville-Smith, Ryan, Adams and Dalicandro	Relationship between student attendance, family and school	54 high school students/ 54 teachers	Questionnaire/t-tests	Absentees show less satisfaction with school than regular attenders

Table D.5

*Studies Relating to the Effectiveness of Alternative Programs*

<b>Study</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Design/Analysis</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
Duke and Muzio (1978)	To determine effectiveness of alternative schools	19 evaluations and reports	Descriptive	No degree of certainty
Barr, Colston, and Parrett (1977)	To determine effectiveness	6 evaluations	Summary/ Descriptive	Students' performance was on level with regular high school counterparts in cognitive achievement
Cox, Davidson and Bynum (1995)	To determine effectiveness	57 evaluations of alternative schools	Meta-analysis/ Descriptive	Small effect on school performance, attendance, and self-esteem, but no effect on delinquency
Cox (1999)	To determine effectiveness	83 6 <sup>th</sup> -8 <sup>th</sup> grade students	Experimental with one year follow-up	Improvements in the alternative program, but dissolved once students returned to regular school

Table D.6

*Studies Relating to CrossRoads Evaluation*

<b>Study</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Design/Analysis</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
Chalker (1994)	Develop a taxonomy of Alternative Programs in Georgia and data pertaining to effectiveness	27 schools	Survey/Site visits	-Limited data pertaining to effectiveness -Most schools were punitive
Karlin and Harnish, (1995)	Evaluate “successful” factors of program	2 schools	Exploratory/ Qualitative case study	Several factors related to success (community involvement, social service, etc.)
Georgia Department Of Education (2000)	Three year evaluation of CrossRoads to determine benefits	132 schools	Surveys Interviews Site visits	Instrumental in keeping disruptive students in school

APPENDIX E  
SURVEY ITEM ANALYSIS

<b>Survey Question</b>	<b>Research</b>	<b>Research Question</b>
6	GADOE, 2000	1
7	GADOE, 2000	1
8	GADOE, 2000	1
9	Thomas, Sabatino, & Sarri, 1982; Kellmayer, 1995	1
10	Thomas, Sabatino, & Sarri, 1982; Kellmayer, 1995	1
11	GADOE, 2000	1
12	Kellmayer, 1995	1
13	GADOE, 2000	2
14	Chalker, 1994	2
15	Chalker, 1994	2
16	Chalker, 1994; Wiley, 2000	2
17	Chalker, 1994	2
18	Chalker, 1994; Karlin & Harnish, 1995; GADOE, 2000; Raywid, 2000	2
19	Duke & Muzio, 1978	2
20	GADOE, 2000	2
21	Karlin & Harnish, GADOE, 2000	3
22	Karlin & Harnish, 1995; GADOE, 2000	3
23	Karlin & Harnish, 1995; GADOE, 2000	3