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Perceptions of Alternative Center Students on Their Successes: A Case Study of
An Alternative Center in Northeast Tennessee

A dissertation

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

by

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May 2013

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Keywords: At-Risk, Alternative Education, Alternative Center

ABSTRACT

Perceptions of Alternative Center Students on Their Successes: A Case Study of An Alternative Center in Northeast Tennessee

by

Julia E. Decker

This qualitative study examined how students at Science Hill High Alternative Center (AC) perceived their academic success. Eighteen alumni from Science Hill High School Alternative Center were interviewed to examine their perceptions of their success. Choosing 2 alumni to represent each of the 9 programs represented at the AC provided perceptions of 3 emerging themes: (a) relationships, (b) diversity of programs, and (c) personal growth. There were other findings that were noted but not identified as a theme. Other findings involved alumni wanting to reminisce about incidents that occurred and reflect on peers who were in attendance with them at the center.

Some alumni who attended programs other than Graduate On Time (GOT) discussed the need for a graduation component through the Alternative Center. Some said that returning to the main campus was not in their best interest and sabotaged their success in order to remain at the AC, while other alumni strived to return to the main campus as soon as they had met their academic goals. In relating their initial thoughts about attending the Alternative Center for the first time, many had mixed feelings: (a) they did not want to be separated from friends, (b) would they be successful, (c) who really cared if they came to school and were successful, and (d) would they really get to return to the main campus as soon as they met their goals.

Additionally, alumni suggested that students be allowed to stay at the Alternative Center (AC) if it helped them to be better prepared for the workforce or college. Alumni who spoke about

their success said they were better prepared than their peers for college admissions standards, work ethics, and the employment process in general.

DEDICATION

God has truly blessed me with a family that has stood beside me through the years. This dissertation is dedicated to the following special people in my life:

To my parents Anthony and Arita Raso, you have taught me through hard work that all things are possible. Your patience, guidance, and love throughout the many years have given me a foundation, on which I have built my life. I love you both “big bunches,” and thank you for being you, and thank you for allowing me to be me.

To my sisters Roxanne and Ellen, you’re amazing women who have always been there for your baby sister. You’re my best friends and I want thank you both very much for believing in me. I’m not sure if I could have made it without you. I love you both.

To my brothers-in-law Greg and Steve, thank you for being *my brothers*. I am blessed to have you both in my life.

To my daughters Kristina, Renee, and Kimberly, you are the light of my life. You are the driving force in my many successes in life. Thank you so much for all your encouragement, love and understanding through the years. I love you three *from the bottom of your feet, to the top of your head, and everything in between!*

To my sons-in-law Abel, Brent, and Tim, I have entrusted you with my most precious gifts that God has blessed me with, my daughters. Remember it’s the little things that count. Love you three very much.

To my grandchildren, always reach for the stars and never let anyone tell you, “You can’t.” Believe in yourselves, trust in your family, and leave a big foot print, so others can see your accomplishments. I love being your *Gramma!* Love you all *from the bottom of your feet, to the top of your head, and everything in between.*

My daughter by love and choice, Jennifer (Jai), thank you for just being you. I love you very much and am so proud of all your accomplishments.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the late 1960s and in the early to mid 1970s alternative education was a highly marketable movement by educators who were dissatisfied with the traditional curriculum. In a practical sense alternative schooling was simply some place different from the established public or private school in the child's attendance area (Fantini, 1973). As an early advocate of alternative schools, Fantini brought public recognition to schools of choice. He and Raywid (1989) classified schools that emerged in predominately urban areas to try to help struggling minority and poor youngsters succeed in school, alternative schools. Alternative schools began to fulfill the missing elements of traditional education (Glass, 1995), and some educators believed that when students are in a nurturing and supportive environment they are able to thrive academically (Frediana, 2002).

Alternative schools offered students opportunities for success according to the belief that one unified curriculum is not sufficient for all students. These schools emphasized the development of self-concept, problem-solving, and humanistic approaches (Conley, 2002).

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) greatly supported alternative education. This specific funding was designed to prevent student dropout and academic failure. The development of alternative education was based on the idea that some students learn better in an environment structured differently from the traditional public school. Because this endeavor, at the time, was costly and the pressure for accountability was mounting, many of these programs did not last (ESEA).

In the mid-1990s, to satisfy the need for choice and diversity, alternative education regained its popularity in the form of public and private voucher programs, charter schools,

and magnet programs (Conley, 2002). Many nontraditional programs succeeded as alternatives to traditional public education because these programs centered on the whole child by providing emotional, social, and academic support (Conley, 2002).

To further address the problem of students failing, school districts began to look at several strategies to meet the needs of at-risk students (Conrath, 2001). Due to this new focus, academic alternative schools became popular throughout the country. The purpose of creating these alternative schools was to ensure that at-risk students graduate with a high school diploma. These academic alternative high schools were directly related to the increased pressures placed on high school students due to increased testing, higher expectations, and greater academic standards (Lange, 1998).

However, public alternative schools continued to struggle with negative stigmas as dumping grounds or warehouses for at-risk students who were academically struggling, having behavioral problems, or labeled juvenile delinquents. These stigmas of dumping grounds and warehouses for at-risk students are some of the biggest obstacles barring the success of alternative programs (Waxman, 1992).

In the summer of 1985 Johnson City Schools, located in Johnson City, Tennessee, designed an alternative program that would meet the needs of their failing high school students. The implementation of the Alternative Learning Program began in October 1985, with one teacher, one assistant, and 15 students. The goals were to:

1. deliver psychological, educational, and environmental services that will facilitate the students' successful re-entry to regular school or other appropriate placement and;

2. support the regular school by providing an alternative placement for students who seriously disrupt the learning environment (Alternative Learning Program Handbook, personal notes, October, 1985).

In the last 25 years Johnson City Schools has continued to: (a) be proactive in the educational investment of all at-risk students, (b) investigate the latest research on alternative education, and (c) implement proven programs and strategies (NAEA, 2010). The Alternative Center (AC) facilitates eight academic programs to meet the needs of Johnson City high school students: (a) the Alternative Learning Program, (b) two special needs self-contained classrooms, (c) Graduating On Time (GOT), (d) General Education Development (GED), (e) Optional High School, (f) AfterSchool 1-5, (g) self-contained seventh and eighth grade classroom, and (h) the Lottery Education Program (LEAP). For students' emotional, social, and psychological needs the Alternative Center provides a full-time mental health counselor, social worker, School Resource Officer (SRO), and an Employability Skills Coach.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to examine how students at Science Hill High Alternative Center perceived their academic growth compared to their academic success or failure at their main campus. At-risk students for the purpose of this study are defined as secondary students who typically display the following characteristics: (a) failing grades, (b) truancy, (c) poor home communication, (d) behavior and discipline challenges, (e) encounter with the juvenile justice system, and (f) poor social skills. Alternative education in the 1960s show a different mindset than in the earlier years. Some schools began using alternative education as a means to educate at-risk youth and not just as a facility to house them for punishment and separation from their peers. Educators were taking into account that some

students learn better in an environment structured differently than the traditional public school and were implementing this idea in to alterative programs. Based on this mindset, the alternative center in Johnson City was structured. Montecel-Robedo (2005) identified problems with dropouts particularly with minority students. She concluded that:

Losing children, particularly poor and minority children, from our school systems before high school graduation has been and is today a defining feature of education in the United States. The future and its assumption that fewer students will graduate than started in kindergarten, is built into teacher hiring practices, into ways in which schools deal with parents and communities, into whether and how schools connect with kids, and into curriculum decisions about which course will be offered and to whom. Student attrition is built into facilities planning and funding decisions. It is time to change (Montecel-Robledo, 2005, p. 21).

The support of the community, central office staff, administrators, and other stake holders has provided Johnson City Schools continued examination of various methods and models that seek effective strategies for increased academic success for at-risk students. This support is based on the understanding that not all students learn best in a traditional academic setting.

Research Question

Eighteen students were interviewed for this study. Two students from each program offered at the Alternative Learning Center are represented. These programs are the Alternative Learning Program, Special Education Self-Contained, seventh and eighth Grade Self-Contained, the AfterSchool 1-5, GED+2, Optional High School, In School Suspension, and Graduate On Time (GOT). The primary focus of this study was to find answers to the

overarching question: “How do students’ perceptions of their academic experiences at Science Hill High School Alternative Center compare with perceptions of their main campus experience?” These students came to Science Hill High School Alternative Center (SHHS AC) from Science Hill High School 10/12 campus, Science Hill High School 8/9 campus, and Indian Trail Middle School, all of which are Johnson City Schools.

Significance of the Study

Johnson City Schools continued to make attempts to reduce the number of students dropping out of high school (Appendix E). Science Hill High School Alternative Center and its previous programs serving at-risk students were developed to enable at-risk youth to complete and work towards their high school diploma. Science Hill High School Alternative Center is a multifaceted program that serves many programs and types of students. Although literature is available describing the types of alternative programs in existence, no studies could be found that specify the relationship of alternative and traditional high schools with student success indicators. Therefore, research is needed that examines differences in the success indicators found between at-risk students in alternative high schools and at-risk students in traditional high school settings. The results of this study may be useful to administrators and teachers when planning and understanding the behaviors of those educating at-risk students in alternative high schools as well as the at-risk students in traditional high school settings. It may also open broader dialogue about teacher-pupil ratio, standards for academic change, school to main campus transition, main campus to alternative school transition, and a school-to-work component.

Scope of Study

This study addressed the research question stated above through qualitative methodology. Students were interviewed using the Interview Guide (Appendix A), which was administered by the researcher. The purpose of the interview was to gather information regarding students' perceptions of their successes or failures while attending their alternative program(s) offered them while in Johnson City Schools. Individual student interviews were the primary source of data collection. Taped interviews were transcribed and hand coded to identify emerging themes. The researcher followed the interview guide with the use of probes to gain further understanding of the interviewees' responses. Informed Consent was obtained from each participant following the rules established by East Tennessee State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The researcher maintained objectivity throughout the student interviews, and an auditor was hired to increase the reliability of the interviews and transcripts analysis.

Statement of Researcher's Bias

As an educator for the past 32 years, I have observed and actively participated in how systems approach alternative programs and at-risk youth. During my 32 years, 17 years were spent as a classroom teacher directly involved with an alternative school setting or program, 10 years were spent as a traditional sixth-grade classroom teacher, and the last 6 years have been as the administrator for Science Hill High School Alternative Center.

I was hired to write and implement the school system's first alternative school program in Johnson City in the summer of 1985. The first official alternative program in Johnson City Schools started in October of 1985, with one teacher, a teacher's assistant, and 15 students in grades 6 through 8. The Alternative Learning Program (ALP) was the first

staffed at-risk program to meet the growing needs of Johnson City School's growing dropout rate. The ideal student for the Alternative Learning Program (ALP) was that student with average to above average academic ability but who for any number of reasons was not able to function in the regular school setting.

The creation of the Alternative Learning Program (ALP) gave a foundation for the next two programs to be implemented in Johnson City. These additional programs, PREP Academy and the PAS Program, would serve the 9th through 12th grades, of Science Hill High School's at-risk population. PREP Academy met the needs of ninth grade SHHS students needing more exposure in the academic areas of basic writing, reading, and mathematical skills. The PAS program (Perform, Achieve, Succeed) was designed primarily for students who had dropped out of school and wished to return to complete their education at SHHS. These earlier programs, ALP, PREP Academy, and the PAS Program set the ground work for Johnson City School's on-going investment into the growth of alternative programs.

For the past 26 years Johnson City Schools has provided alternative programs for at-risk Science Hill High School (SHHS) students. The need for services for this population has continued to grow as the needs of the at-risk students became more diverse: teen pregnancy, academic failure, social and emotional challenges, truancy, socioeconomics, and juvenile delinquent behavior.

My last 6 years' assignment has been the lead administrator for Science Hill High School Alternative Center. In January of 2005 Johnson City's Director of Schools asked me to return to the alternative setting to change the focus and climate of what was being offered at the center. The climate and focus at the time was one of a punitive nature; I was to solicit and

encourage alternative education to be a positive endeavor in working through academic and behavioral change of at-risk youth.

Definition of Terms

The operational definitions in my study are:

Alternative Education

A nontraditional academic program designed to meet students' educational, behavioral, and social needs (Advisory Council for Alternative Education, 2007).

Alternative Programs and Settings

Places and programs where at-risk students were to meet and attain their education. Such programs are found in crumbling inner-city buildings, in strip malls, in older buildings, and in existing schools (Knutson, 1998).

At-Risk Students

At-risk students for the purpose of this study are defined as students who typically display one or more of the following characteristics: a) failing grades, b) truancy, c) poor home communication, d) behavior and discipline challenges, e) encounter with the juvenile justice system, and f) poor social skills (Conley, 2002).

Alternative Schools

A unique place of teaching because of the physical characteristics of the school setting, the structure of the programs, the teachers who willingly take on the most challenging teaching assignments, and the students themselves with their myriad of challenges (Carley, 1994).

Academic Performance

For the purpose of this study, academic performance was defined as the students' passing score on their Gateway (Algebra 1, English II, Biology), End of Course Exams (EOC) (Algebra 1, English 1, English II, Biology, American History), and semester grades.

Tennessee Alternative School Standards

Tennessee Code Annotated Section 49-6-4017(f)(2) requires that "The State Board of Education shall provide a curriculum for alternative schools to ensure students receive specialized attention needed to effectively reform students to prevent them from being repeat offenders."

Credit Recovery

Credit is earned through an on-line program, due to the student failing the class in a traditional classroom setting. [Tennessee Code Annotated 49-6-4017 (f) (2)]

Science Hill High School Alternative Center (AC)

Science Hill High School Alternative Center (AC) is a school set apart from the main campuses that incorporates several programs and that operates under the administration of Science Hill High School: (a) the Alternative Learning Program, (b) AfterSchool 1-5, (c) two special needs self-contained classrooms, (d) 10/12 In-School Suspension program, (e) Optional High School, (f) General Education Development (GED+2), (g) Graduate On Time (GOT), (h) Optional High School, and (i) 7/8th grade self-contained classroom. These programs serve the 7th through 12th grade population of Science Hill High School and Indian Trail Middle School. This meets criteria under the Tennessee Code Annotated 49-6-4017(f) (2).

Alternative Learning Program (ALC)

Approximately 200+ students in grades 9 through 12 are served at the Alternative Center during a school year. The total number of students actively enrolled in the Alternative Learning Program at any one time will vary. This is due to some students cycled in and out of the center during the school year. The average number of students enrolled during the 2006/2007 school year was 95 students; 2007/2008 was 103 students; 2008/2009 was 112 students; 2009/2010 was 122 students. Eight teachers provided instruction solely for the ALP; an additional four teachers transitioned from the main campus to teach one or more courses. Three full-time teaching assistants alternated periods of support to all ALP teachers. (Science Hill High School Alternative Center Handbook, 2010)

AfterSchool 1-5 Program

Placement in this program is by the Science Hill High School administration due to the contractual basic of time the student is in attendance. This program is designed for short-term intervention to meet the needs of 8th through 12th grade students. (Science Hill High School Alternative Center Handbook, 2010)

Special Education-Self Contained Classroom

Students served through an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) are taught by two special education instructors. One instructor teaches 9th through 12th grade students, and the other instructor teaches the 7th and 8th graders; each instructor is provided with a full-time teaching assistant. Each instructor maintains a self-contained classroom with an average of 12 special needs students. (Science Hill High School Alternative Center Handbook, 2010)

Self-Contained Grades 7th and 8th Grade

At the start of 2007/08 SY a self-contained classroom for the 7/8th grade population was started. These students are better served in an environment conducive to their maturation levels. One teacher instructs them in language arts, science, and social studies, and another in math; wellness is an elective class. (Science Hill High School Alternative Center Handbook, 2010)

In-school Suspension

Science Hill High School's in-school suspension program is housed at the Alternative Center. Students from the main campus are transported to the AC where they will maintain a regular academic routine that makes it easier to return to conventional classes and encourages the students to remain interested and engaged in academic issues. (Tennessee Code Annotated 49-6-4017)

School Resource Officer (SRO)

The Johnson City Police Department provided one full-time SRO whose primary function was to be proactive in assisting with the safety and security of the Alternative Center's students and staff. On-campus crimes are investigated by the SRO. In addition, the SRO coordinated with outside agencies to enhance the students' welfare. Law related classes were taught upon request. All SROs assigned to Johnson City Schools are full-time certified police officers with full arrest power. All SROs have been additionally trained by the National Organization of School Resource Officers (NASRO). (Science Hill High School Alternative Center Handbook, 2010)

Counseling Component

Johnson City Schools contracted with Frontier Health to provide the Alternative Center with one full-time therapist and one part-time therapist. Their services are available to all students and families. The therapists primarily conducted individual counseling, and group therapy was an option when a common need was identified. When a new student is sent to the ALP, the therapist recorded basic information about the student's emotional and social history. Home visits allowed families a connection to the school. The therapists coordinated with community services to provide classes such as family life, tobacco prevention and cessation, and anger management. (Science Hill High School Alternative Center Handbook, 2010)

GED+2

The GED+2 program was designed for students who had a limited number of credits to complete and were within one semester of their 18th birthday. Prospective students were given the GED pretest, and consideration for enrollment was based solely on test scores. While enrolled in the program, students must maintain employment of at least 10 hours a week. Students who passed the GED exam may participate in graduation ceremonies and were awarded a GED diploma. (Science Hill High School Alternative Center Handbook, 2010)

Optional High School

The Optional High School program was designed for students who were at least 17 years of age and were eligible to graduate by the end of the school year. Students must have completed 28 credits, passed the Gateway exams in English, science, and algebra, and shown evidence of 40 hours of community service. These students received a regular Science Hill

High School diploma and may participate in graduation ceremonies. (Science Hill High School Alternative Center Handbook, 2010)

GOT (Graduate On Time)

GOT was for students who were unable to attain the required 28 credits needed to receive a Science Hill High School Diploma. However, these students could still meet the graduation requirements set by the State of Tennessee, which are 22 credits. Graduate On Time made it possible for students to earn a high school diploma with their peers.

GOT also provided additional skills needed for students entering the work force or beginning postsecondary education. (Science Hill High School Alternative Center Handbook, 2010)

Employability Skills Coach

This program connected with students attending the center and main campus while tailoring services to each youth's specific needs. Skills compiled in this program consisted of academic achievement, occupational training, proper social behavior, team building, conflict resolution, positive personal power, work ethic, interest inventories, etiquette, and resume writing. The students working with this program also collaborated with local businesses and the academic community. Through the skills taught these students were able to take part in positive citizenship building service learning activities and encouraged to seek options for occupational skills development. Students also partnered with area resource agencies that conducted lessons in accepting criticism, maintaining sobriety, and goal setting. This program promoted students to be productive, motivated, and educated when they were applying for work; they presented themselves in a manner where the entire community can profit.

(Science Hill High School Alternative Center Handbook, 2010)

Social Worker-Transition Coach

This position enhances and aids the students' transition from the main campus to the Alternative Center and then upon returning to their main campus. The social worker acts a liason between student and school, student and parent, and parent and community. (Science Hill High School Alternative Center Handbook, 2010)

Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine how students at Science Hill High Alternative Center perceive their academic success or failure while in attendance at the center compared to their academic success or failure at their main campus. This study is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 included an introduction of the study, the background of the problem, a statement of the problem, research question, significance of the study, scope of the study, statement of researcher's bias, definitions of relevant terminology, and an overview of the study.

Chapter 2 contains a review of related literature of the issues faced by students who are at-risk of dropping out of high school. The divisions of this chapter include (a) students in danger of dropping out of high school, (b) defining dropout, (c) at-risk students and dropouts, (d) the history of alternative education, (e) alternative schools, and (f) accountability and alternative education.

Chapter 3 is a discussion of the research methodology that was used in this qualitative study, which is that of a phenomenological research design. Also included in Chapter 3 is the information on the data collection process as well as data analysis, which includes identifying themes from the answers of the participating alumni in the interviews. It presents the appropriateness of the research design, the population, assumptions, and limitations of the

data. Chapter 4 includes the presentation of the findings and the analysis of the data used to address the research questions. Finally, Chapter 5 includes the summary of study, recommendations, implications for practice, conclusions, and suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Literature on alternative education is abundant (Beken, 2008; Camak, 2007; De LaRosa, 1998; Fantani, 1973; Foley & Pang, 2006; Franklin, 1992; Lange, 1998, Raywid, 1989), while literature on alternative education written solely for alternative high schools that serve at-risk youth and their academic success is at a minimum. For the purpose of this study research was chosen that directly related to academic programs and achievement that most represented characteristics found at Science Hill High School Alternative Center, located in Johnson City, Tennessee. This information is presented in the following sections: (a) History of Public Alternative Education, (b) Definition of Alternative Schools, (c) Tennessee's guidelines for Alternative Schools, (d) At-Risk Students, (e) History of Alternative Education in Johnson City Schools, and (f) Science Hill High School Alternative Center.

History of Public Alternative Education

Alternatives to traditional public education have existed in nearly every country in the world (Young, 1990). In the early 1800s, with early American educational reformers such as Amos Bronson Alcott and Francis Wayland Parker (Leiding, 2008), alternative public education sees changes as Americans and immigrants begin to move west. Historical significance can also be traced to 1925 (Gable, Bullock, & Evans, 2006), when ideas were rooted in the belief that alternative programs for at-risk students were considered a way of dealing with students who were troublesome or wayward. Luecker (1994) and Morley (1996) stated that the dual goals of alternative schools were to eliminate disruptive students from the

regular classroom without removing them to the streets and allowed them the opportunity to stay in school until they had earned a high school diploma.

The 1930s and 1940s brought about the progressive movement led by educational philosopher John Dewey that contributed to the conception of alternative education as it is known today. Dewey wrote that alternatives should focus on experimental learning, and that students learned best by doing. This movement was the shift from teacher-centered education to student-centered education. Dewey (1922) stated:

A person using the problem-solving approach and the experimental focus of scientific method to govern their own life is the building block of how reasonable and ethical organizations operate. Schools should be child-centered with the curriculum and instruction tailored to facilitate the development of the individual (26).

While the 1950s continued to see the need to individualize students' education, the passing of the National Defense Act of 1958 brought this theory to its knees. In 1957 the perception of public education began to change. Between the Cold War, the launch of Sputnik, and the National Defense Act of 1958 this era had turned public education into a *manufacturing plant* (Leiding, 2008). During this era, "schools were cold, dehumanizing, and irrelevant institutions largely indifferent to humanity and the personhoods of those within them" (Raywid, 1989, p.551). The Civil Rights Movement became the change agent on how alternative schools were to be molded to fit a struggling society; it highlighted the growing injustice that mainstream education had created. Public education could no longer close its eyes to poverty, racial discrimination, and the public's inability to equally prepare every child for an education.

The 1960s emerged as a time for great advancement in alternative school development; these schools were going to reach students with *concepts of progressive education* (McGee, 2001). Alternative programs began to evolve under Lyndon B. Johnson's

War on Poverty. Afterschool programs were also opened to meet this growing need of student poverty and inequality; it became a place to even the playing field for those less fortunate. By the end of the late 1960s alternative schools resurfaced with a greater effort to meet the needs of less fortunate students (Lange & Sletten, 2002) and were considered the place to be for at-risk students (Tobin & Sprague, 1999). This period of time would hold the distinction as the *grass-roots endeavors* (Franklin, 1992) that laid the foundation for the alternative movement that met the needs of the at-risk student.

Raywid (1994), one of the first to study alternative schools, made three distinct observations in the way alternative schools had been defined: (a) alternative schools of this period, including Freedom Schools that excluded or alienated major sections of the poor and minority population, would no longer be tolerated, (b) alternative schools had been designed to respond to a group not educated by the regular program and environment, (c) not all students learn best in the same context.

Other historical alternative schools followed and public school systems designed their own alternatives to conventional education beginning with Open Schools (Miller, 2009). The Open School allowed for the opening of many other types of alternative programs at all levels of education. According to Miller (2009) and Young (1990) these programs were designed to center education on the whole child:

- Schools without Walls- emphasized community-based learning; allowed for members of the community to come into the school to teach and mentor students.
- Schools within the Walls- intended to make larger schools into smaller communities of belonging; smaller communities were based on a particular

theme; individual groups were designed to meet educational needs and interests of students.

- Multicultural Schools- designed to integrate culture and ethnicity throughout the curriculum; some schools had a diversified student body, and some catered to a specific ethnic group.
- Continuation Schools- used as an option for those who were failing in regular schools because of pregnancy, grades, or other personal issues; these schools were less competitive and more individualized; they catered to the student who was in need of remediation and at risk of dropping out of high school.
- Learning Centers- offered the student vocational and technical training, in addition to the regular curriculum.
- Fundamental Schools- emphasized a back to the basics approach in reaction to the lack of academic rigor perceived in the Free Schools; seemed to be the schools where discipline problems occurred at a greater percentage.
- Magnet Schools- developed in response to the need for racial integration; theme based curriculum to attract diverse groups of students.

Lange and Sletton (2002) stated the definition of alternative schools tapered as the open schools of the 1960s began to close, and the focus of alternative schools became more conservative than creative because the vast majority of students were performing below grade level.

In a quandary to meet the vast needs of failing youth and differences in alternative programs, the 1970s and early 1980s began to see alternative programs specializing to meet the academic and behavioral needs of school age youth (Raywid, 1999). Students, parents,

communities, and other educational stakeholders considered alternative schools to be progressive. McGee (2001) reported that alternative schools emerged as havens for disaffected youth disenfranchised by traditional curricula. Early alternative programs were the answer to a failed traditional system that tried to fit all students into one category. The tendency in these early years was to fault the system and not the student. By encouraging these alternative schools to be creative, have freedom of expression, and teach to the diverse learning styles of their students, these schools were creating a venue for student success. These students served by alternative schools in the 1970s and 1980s considered attending an alternative school not only acceptable but were honored to be a part of a program where they could be successful.

The phrase alternative school suggested student options or a second chance rather than compulsory, involuntary schooling (McGee, 2001). Many well-known authors provided clarifications regarding alternative schools. These included Raywid, Fantini, and Barr, Colston, and Parrett whose writing told “about the promise and relevance of alternative options for students with public education not only as a natural extension of national democracy, but as a necessary tool for renewal within the schools” (as cited in Miller, 2009, p. 10).

School vouchers, the financial assistance given to parents to choose a particular school for his or her child, was a controversial issue in the 1990s. Money designated for public education was to be redirected to charter schools and private schools that encouraged differing pedagogies and even religious content. While the public wanted the best education for all students, how to fund that education was debated (Leiding, 2008).

Many students who were not succeeding in regular high schools were being referred to alternative schools or programs. Behaviors indicating student failure were documented by poor grades, truancy, disruptive behavior, suspension, pregnancy, or similar factors associated with early withdraw from school (Paglin & Fager 1997). Raywid (1999) suggested that alternative schools focus on teaching the basics to increase the success of failing and disruptive students across the board. Alternative schools and programs continue to be a forum to meet the needs of the at-risk student with a clear emphasis on the dropout prevention rate.

Alternative schools and programs in the early part of the 21st century are more academic and student focused due to emergence of legislation. Educational systems began to face many challenges, including demanding legislation such as Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) in 2004 and the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2001. With the passing of these two acts, schools cannot afford to miss meeting the demands of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). These acts mandate the same standards for all students regardless of exceptionality and may be contributing to the increased number of students being placed in alternative educational programs or the formation of more alternatives (National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES]).

In 2001 the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) was employed by the Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program and the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services to launch nationally a questionnaire pertaining to the availability of public alternative schools and programs, enrollment, staffing, and services for students at risk of educational failure. Although there is no single common definition for alternative schools and programs (Lange & Sletten 2002), of the 1,534 public school districts represented in the survey, NCES only included those alternative programs geared towards students who were at risk of

educational failure and spent at least 50% of their time in these educational institutions. The survey resulted in the following, for the 2000-01 school year:

- Overall, 39% of public school districts administered at least one alternative school or program.
- Urban districts, large districts (those with 10,000 or more students), districts in the Southeast, districts with high minority student enrollments, and districts with high poverty concentrations were more likely to have alternative schools and programs.
- Public alternative schools and programs numbered 10,900 for that year alone.
- Of the districts surveyed 88% to 92%, offered alternative schools and programs to their high school students.
- As of October 1, 2000, 612,900 students were enrolled in a public alternative school or program.
- Overall, 12% of all students in alternative schools or programs were special education students with Individual Education Programs (IEPs).
- Within the last 3 years, 54% of the districts with alternative schools and programs reported that the demand for enrollment exceeded their school or program capacity (NCES, 2002).

Students' enrollment in public alternative schools and programs are highly unpredictable. Students are removed from and returned to regular schools on an individual basis. Most public alternative schools and programs set goals to transition students back to their home school as soon as the student is prepared to do so. Some students return to their

home school being *less at-risk*, and some students return to the alternative school or program, by choice or decree (NCES, August 2002).

The National Alternative Education Association (NAEA, 2009) was formed in 2002 to enhance the quality of alternative education across the United States. This volunteer organization is dedicated to information sharing, professional development, best practices, public policy, and advocacy for alternative learning and teaching. Created in 2002 through the efforts of several officers from the original Safe Schools Coalition (SSC), and the inevitability of the Safe Schools Coalition decision to disband, its officers were determined to continue the much needed work that had been started and created as a national professional association dedicated to alternative educators and alternative education options.

Currently alternative schools have the reputation as existing for the sole purpose of accommodating those students who are at a greater risk of dropping out of high school or who had become too disruptive to remain in a traditional educational environment (McGee, 2001; Raywid, 1989). But according to Leiding (2008), he believed the reality of alternative education had a much wider and greater positive future than McGee. A positive future for alternative education lies within the commitment from parents and teachers who believe the at-risk student deserves a rigorous and relevant education equal to their peers. Leiding (2008) states this is a testimonial to the parents and teachers who have committed to a true and diligent education for these at-risk students.

With the current focus on preventing high school dropouts and addressing the needs of students identified as at-risk in the early years of school, the National Dropout Prevention Center identified alternative schooling as one of the 15 effective strategies to helping at-risk students achieve their high school diplomas (Kleiner, Proch, & Farris, 2002). With that in

mind and in an effort to enhance the quality of alternative education in all 50 states, the National Alternative Education Association (NAEA) had identified and crafted 10 exemplary practices in the field (Appendix B). It is imperative to acknowledge the field of alternative education as a fast growing and evolving discipline that continues to gain credibility and respect (Gable, 2006).

Definition of Alternative Schools

The definition of alternative school has caused controversy as early as 1978 (Leiding, 2008), and according to Kleiner et al. (2002) there is disagreement within the alternative community on what distinguishes alternative schools or programs, what characteristics define these schools and programs, and what are the best practices to apply when teaching the at-risk student in an alternative setting.

Schargel and Smink (2005) indicate that alternative schooling provided for potential dropouts a variety of options that could lead to high school graduation. These programs paid special attention to the individual social needs of students and allowed students to obtain academic requirements needed for a high school diploma. Leiding (2002) stated that community stakeholders started to acknowledge the validity and vitality of alternative schools and programs and the roles those programs played in the success of students who failed in the traditional setting. These alternative schools and programs brought creative and diverse programs to meet the needs of all students; stakeholders to these programs thought *outside the box*.

Raywid (1990) stated that alternative schools functioned very differently from one another because each was created for different reasons. Researchers showed that alternative schools can be classified into four different groups (Foley & Pang, 2006; Lehr & Lang, 2003;

Leiding, 2008; Powell, 2003; Reimer & Cash, 2003). Each one of these alternative schools possessed specific positives and negatives for student achievement:

1. *Type I-Schools of Choice*: This is the foundation of the charter and magnet schools of today. They represented a type of alternative school that was departing from the traditional setting. These types of schools were innovative in their programs and represent a restructured type of environment that made school challenging and fulfilling. This type of school was for those students who were self-selecting this type of program and who were in search of innovative and creative learning.
2. *Type II- Last Chance Schools*: These were schools for students in danger of expulsion due to chronically disruptive behavior, drugs, fighting, or school violence. They focused on behavior modification with minimal attention to pedagogy and curriculum. They were not schools of choice and held that the maintenance of discipline and control were more important than curriculum, creativity, and innovation. These schools might have been residential.
3. *Type III- Remedial Programs*: These types of programs were a remediation for students' failures: academics and/or behaviors. Students attending these schools were removed from the regular high school setting in order to regain academic success and learn to change negative behavior. Once the student succeeded he or she would re-enter their main campus setting. These programs revolved around the modification of students' negative behaviors while promoting academic achievement. While the environment was structured and the focus was on remediation, emphasis was on the school itself as a community.

4. *Virtual Schools*- Since the introduction of the Internet, traditional alternative high school programs for at-risk students have been supplemented and in some school systems replaced by virtual schools. In virtual high schools students have the opportunity to receive online instruction continuously through the day, 7 days a week. Allowing the Internet to be the source of education for high school students facilitates the social and family issues that most at-risk students face in their daily lives (Smith, 1990). It allows for those students who are homebound, are working fulltime, and are parents to continue their education at their pace and time frame.

DeBlois and Place (2002) stated that alternative schools should have smaller class sizes in order to allow students to create a stronger sense of community. Additionally, alternative schools should have a curriculum that is based on real-life applications as well as being innovative in the use of technology (Wolk, 2000). It is important to keep in mind that schools should maintain a positive relationship with outside organizations in order to provide at-risk students with life skills training (Barr & Parrett, 1997; De La Rosa, 1998; Lange & Sletten, 2002). For the vast majority of students the link between school and the work force is missing. Students rarely have a good idea of the necessary skills required for an entry-level position. School-to-work programs are the missing link between the inside of the school walls and the work force. This type of program would be able to provide at-risk students with a high level of accountability and informal mentors at the work site (Lerman, 1996).

Alternative programs showing success with their at-risk population provided appropriate assessment and support service programs to meet the needs of their students (Kim and Taylor, 2008). These assessments needed to be associated with social and emotional needs (Fulkerson, Kubik, & Lytle, 2004; Kallio & Sanders, 1999; Kim & Taylor, 2008) to

include drug or alcohol interventions, health evaluations, individual and group counseling, conflict resolution, tutoring, and mentoring components. Alternative high schools must maintain an environment that is conducive to learning for these at-risk youth. Kallio and Sanders (1999) introduced three main themes that were apparent from an earlier study of alternative education. First, no school can be truly effective when it is considered a dumping ground. Second, alternative education programs rely on individual instruction and small classes to promote success. Third, success of students in alternative schools seems correlated to the organizational format of the schools and the uniqueness of the individual student; given all students are worthy of dignity and respect no matter their choice of school.

Teachers play an integral role in the nation's alternative schools and programs (Barr, Colston, & Parrett, 1977). Providing the at-risk student the best effective and qualified teachers allowed the student a better chance of academic success. This staff should include: strong and capable leaders; excited, energetic, competent teachers with multiple teaching styles; staff who are highly trained and carefully selected; and an innovative presentation of instructional materials with an emphasis on real-life learning (Kallio & Sanders, 1999; TN Standards, 2008). Alternative education is not a *piece program*; it is multifaceted state Fulkerson et al. (2004). It is also expensive and demanding, but the outcomes of student success no matter how small are in large what make the alternative programs successful.

Tennessee Guidelines for Alternative Schools

The Tennessee Advisory Counsel for Alternative Education (2007) stated the term *alternative education* had always referred to nontraditional public and private educational settings where parents could choose their child's education if the *public school* did not meet the needs of their child.

According to Kallio and Sanders (1999) and Tennessee Standards (2008) alternative programs should have curriculum developed in response to needs of the student population. Each group stated that to meet this curriculum realignment it would have to include the following expectations: (a) a balance between mandated curriculum and the special needs of the student, (b) a focus on social skills development, (c) incorporate student ideas in curriculum design, and (d) include career awareness and exploration. With the inclusion of these elements the school's program became beneficial to the students. These elements provided content, processes, rigor, and other concepts needed to develop the students' future career goals.

A school program that is beneficial to students engages them in and leads them through varying processes to critical thinking and synthesis of the concepts and content. However, a school program that is not beneficial to students is behavioristic, positivistic, and reductive (Kim & Taylor, p.68, 2008).

In 2000 the Tennessee Governor's Advisory Council for Alternative Education was formed to meet the needs of the growing at-risk population throughout the state. The Advisory Council is a multi-discipline committee comprised of 10 members including the following: parents of children attending an alternative school or of children who have attended an alternative school, teachers, principals, members of local boards of education, community representatives, and a member of the Tennessee Alternative Educators Association. Under ST.C.A. §49-6-3404, the Advisory Council is charged to do the following (Tennessee Board of Education, August 22, 2008; Final Reading Item: IV. E.):

- Consider any issue, problem, or matter related to alternative education presented to the Governor, the Commissioner, or the State Board of Education, and offer advice;
- Study proposed plans for alternative education programs or curricula to determine if the plans or curricula should be adopted;
- Study alternative education programs or curricula implemented in Tennessee schools systems to determine their effectiveness. Study alternative programs and curricula in other states to see if implementation in Tennessee would be appropriate;

- Make recommendations concerning rules of governance for alternative schools;
- Make an annual report to the Governor, the education committees of the Senate and the House of Representatives, the Commissioner of Education and the State Board of Education on the state of alternative education in Tennessee.

Tennessee's Alternative education programs, models, and standards were established through the Governor's Advisory Council under T.C.A. §49-6-3404. This Advisory Council is responsible for developing standards and benchmarks for alternative programs across the state. These standards were approved and adopted by the State Board of Education and were revisited by the Alternative Council to update and ensure the standards reflect current research and best practices being employed by other states.

The Alternative School Program Standards for the State of Tennessee according to Tennessee Code Annotated Section 49-6-4017(f)(2) required that "The State Board of Education shall provide a curriculum for alternative schools to ensure students receive specialized attention needed to effectively reform students to prevent them from being repeated offenders." (p. 1) The Alternative School Program Standards provided nine Tennessee State standards (Appendix C), the mission statement, definition of students being served, and the application of six principles that allowed for barriers to be removed in order for these students to succeed (Appendix D).

The State of Tennessee's mission to effectively serve the at-risk population in an Alternative School setting is to intervene positively with students who currently are not succeeding in traditional school environments. The student populations identified are:

1. Students who have violated school policy in regards to zero tolerance;
2. Students with multiple rule violations;
3. Students who have been suspended for a period greater than 10 days;
4. Other students whose assessments have demonstrated inability to make decisions, low capacity in resiliency, poor self-management, lack of respect and self-esteem, poor interpersonal and social communication skills, inability to work with others, poor negotiation skills, lack of responsibility for self and

others, inability to work cooperatively, poor organizational skills and inability to follow instructions (Alternative School Program Standards, p. 1).

According to Williams and Riccomini (2006) students who have a continued sense of failure and do not have the opportunity to feel achievement are more likely to drop out of school. Helping at-risk students develop positive self-esteem may be one of the most difficult but rewarding goals of an alternative school or program (Salend & Sylvestre, 2005). The greater sense of accomplishment and self-worth an at-risk student feels, the greater the likelihood of the student graduating from high school, and the lower the chances are of the student becoming disengaged, disruptive, or volatile.

At-Risk Students

The term at-risk became routine with an on-going debate about students, families, schools, and educational policy (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983; Pallas, Natriello, & McDill, 1989). Traditionally society had used the term at-risk as an arbitrary label for students who were likely to drop out because of undesirable educational experiences such as low academic achievement, poor school attendance, and grade retention (Johnson, 1997).

Hughes and Taylor-Dunlop (2006) emphasized that adolescence was one of the most difficult ages characterized by a period of rebellion where youngsters were trying to make sense of who they are and the world that surrounded them. This period became critical for the adolescent because the demands came from many directions: from their own physical development, from family and peers, and from the environmental settings of the community. Family influence, dependency on peers for social approval, and a variety of other conflicts made this part of the teenage experience extremely difficult and prone to conflicts (Ianni, 1989).

The term at-risk as applied to students essentially related to the high level of probability associated with a student dropping out of school (Kellmayer, 1995). There were a variety of factors that contributed to students dropping out of school and they included: truancy, drug use, multiple class failures within a school year, failing or being held back a grade level, poverty, violent tendencies, antisocial behaviors, chronic disruptive behavior et al. (Acker, 2007; Camak, 2008; Foley & Pang, 2006; Hill, 2005; McArdle, 2003; Wiley, 2002; Zimmerman, 2003). Just as there were a large number of characteristics used to determine a student's classification of at-risk, there is research regarding various ways to meet the needs of these students.

Conrath (1986) in his book *Our Other Youth* takes the common factors identifying at-risk students and does an analysis of each factor. Referring to at-risk as “defeated and discouraged learners” Conrath (p.12, 1986) describes them as:

having low self-confidence, having a deep sense of personal impotency, helplessness and lack of self-worth; they are avoiders; they distrust adults and adult situations; they have a limited notion of the future; they usually lack adequate educational skills; most come from unstable homes; they are impatient with routine, long-time sitting, listening and classrooms with little variety; they learn best through practical application; and they do not see a relationship between effort and achievement.

Ultimately risk factors that have identified at-risk youth have contributed to the accepted belief that being at-risk is a naturally-occurring social problem not requiring scrutiny or evaluation. This lack of critique of being at-risk has produced negative consequences for the youth labeled as such and has led to inaccurate perceptions of these youth (Kim & Young, 2008).

History of Alternative Education at Science Hill High School

The researcher was an active participant in the creation, modification, and continuing evaluation of alternative education at Science Hill High School. Therefore the information provided in the last two sections of this paper is the result of personal knowledge, written reports, evaluations, and the points of view of other participants who were knowledgeable and had a vested interest in the Alternative Center. Citations from those vested in the Alternative Center have been used for written reports and evaluations as well as personal communication with others. Personal knowledge of the development and history of the Alternative Center programs have been identified as the researcher's point of view.

Science Hill High School (SHHS) is located in Johnson City, Tennessee and is Johnson City's only high school. Johnson City's population as of July 2009 was 63,141, which showed a gain of 13.8% since the year 2000. Due to the continued population growth, Johnson City Schools reconfigured their schools at the start of School Year (SY) 2012/13 (Johnson City Schools, 2010). Presently, Johnson City Schools consist of eight elementary schools serving pre-kindergarten through 4th grade, an intermediate school to accommodate 5th through 6th grades, a middle school to accommodate 7th and 8th grades, and the high school to accommodate 9th through 12th grades. The high school is comprised of three campuses: main campus, CTE campus, and the Alternative Center.

In October 1985 the researcher was hired to design and implement an alternative program at Science Hill High School (SHHS) in Johnson City, Tennessee to meet the needs of its growing dropout rate. Wertheimer, Kahne, and Gerstein (1992) cited nonattendance as the most prominent behavioral outcome related to the academic deficiency of at-risk students. According to Dave Chupa, Supervisor of Buildings and Facilities for Johnson City Schools

(March, 2011), the senior class of 1985 had seen a loss of approximately 300 students since starting their freshman year at Science Hill High School. Through the efforts of several key administrators serving Johnson City Schools in 1985, Mike Simmons (Superintendent of Johnson City Schools), Barbara Lawson (Supervisor of Secondary Education), Charlie Joe Allen (Curriculum and Instruction), Dave Chupa (Supervisor of Attendance), and Dan Russell (Principal of Science Hill High School) SHHS would meet the needs of students at- risk of dropping out of school through a self-contained program.

The Alternative Learning Program (ALP) was implemented in October 1985 and began serving students in January 1986. The students served were Science Hill High School (SHHS) students who were in danger of dropping out of high school but were not working under an Individual Educational Plan (IEP); therefore, were not directly served by special education. The Alternative Learning Program (ALP) classroom was a part of the present day Consumer and Technical Education (CTE) building formally known as the vocational building. The program identified fifteen 9th and 10th graders identified by SHHS counselors and staff who were at-risk of dropping out of SHHS due to truancy and failing grades.

Most of the students involved in the Alternative Learning Program came from similar backgrounds in which there were several stressors. Most of the students came from homes that had witnessed a divorce, remarriage, or the presence of a cohabiting partner. Some of the students came from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Many of the students had parents who were at-risk at some level, while others had parents who did not have a successful school experience, and almost without exception the students were in home situations with very little parental control over them.

Students from Science Hill High School selected to be a part of the Alternative Learning Program (ALP) were identified as unsuccessful in the traditional classroom due to truant behavior and academic failure. This core of students were taught by one lead teacher, Julia Decker (researcher), and an instructional assistant, Ms. Benson, who presently teaches Social Studies at University School which is a public high school located on East Tennessee State University's campus.

Due to the success of the students served in the Alternative Learning Program at that time and Johnson City Schools' need to meet the emergent requirements of at-risk students at Science Hill High School (SHHS), two new programs were underway by 1990, The PREP Academy and the PAS Program. Also at this time the Alternative Learning Center had been moved to the Liberty Bell campus and served only 7th and 8th graders, while the 9th and 10th graders were served by the PREP Academy on the SHHS campus.

The PREP Academy at Science Hill High School began in the fall of 1990 and was designed to prepare students for the academic requirements of regular high school. PREP's curriculum consisted of basic writing, reading, mathematical skills, art therapy, and basic computer programming. Two teachers and two assistants were assigned to the program that served 30 students. Students were selected by the following criteria: (a) recommendations of administration at Liberty Bell Middle School (LBMS), which served sixth through eighth grade, (b) scores based on standardized test, TABE (Tennessee Academic and Behavioral Evaluation), and (c) assessment by a team at Science Hill High School. Only those students who scored at sixth grade level or above on the TABE were considered for admission to the program. Those scoring below sixth grade level were encouraged to remain at LBMS until they had reached grade level.

The PAS program (Perform, Achieve, Succeed) was a program designed primarily for students who had dropped out of school and who wished to return and complete their education. This was a competency based program that allowed students to develop, with the assistance of teachers, an individual education plan and proceed at their own pace. These students were being prepared for gainful employment while given the opportunity to achieve their high school diploma.

On January 17, 1991, Johnson City Schools hired James Street to do an assessment and evaluation of the three at-risk programs serving Science Hill High School and Liberty Bell Middle School's at-risk students. James Street (1991) in his evaluation and assessment for at risk programs serving middle schools and high school at-risk youth listed the following recommendations for the success of the existing programs (personal communication, 1991).

Alternative Learning Program (ALP located on Liberty Bell Middle School's campus)

1. Continual evaluation and improvement of fixed processes (recruitment, admissions, behavioral monitoring, and existing)
2. Publish fixed processes
3. Follow criteria for admissions strictly
4. Document causes of student success or failure to examine predict success
5. Track students who re-enter the mainstream, successful re-entry should be defined
6. Re-entry phase by committee
7. Self-contained classrooms
8. Participation in art/music/family life education
9. Exposure to vocational school programs while in middle school
10. Teacher office space
11. Time out structure
12. Covered walk area between buildings
13. Full time social worker

PREP

1. Construction of barrier between portables and walkway
2. Contractual involvement of parents
3. Group/Individual Counseling (Contracting or graduate students)
4. Further study of Algebra requirement
5. Attention to offering continuing support when entering the regular program (beginning of year program, mentors, meeting together)
6. Track students in order to determine long-term success

7. Adult mentor/sponsor
- PAS Program
1. Clarity of who the program serves (dropouts or at-risks)
 - Type of student
 - Age level
 - Number of credits
 - Achievement level
 2. Greater communication (program to mainstream)
 3. Transmission of the program to the community
 4. Recording reasons why students leave the program
 5. Discussion of dealing with disruptive students

Based on Street's assessment and recommendations Johnson City Schools

Central Office personnel, Dave Chupa (personal communication, June 11, 1991) sent a memorandum to Barbara Lawson concerning an alternative education policy for Johnson City Schools. Street's evaluation brought about the following criteria for present (1991) and future alternative programs serving at-risk youth:

1. Linkage between programs
 - Formal means of tracking
 - Evaluation of data regularly
 - Mentoring for ALP students
2. Handbook
 - Goals of school system
 - Goals of Johnson Academy (include linkage)
 - Outcome objective of each program
 - How to evaluate objectives
 - Entrance Requirements
 - Guidelines and processes
 - Expectations
 - Distributions
3. Hiring
 - Avoid shifting of personnel
 - Training or experience with at risk
 - Desire to work with this population
 - Set of competencies or criteria to evaluate applicants
 - Consult with and include current teachers in hiring process
 - Representative of both sex in hiring
4. Provide training
 - Behavior management

- Performance management
 - Cooperative learning
 - Counseling skills
5. Make at risk education more comprehensive
- Planning for a free-standing alternative school

The researcher's intention for sharing this list from Street's evaluation and the school system's concerns was to provide insight to the foundations of serving at-risk youth in Johnson City Schools and how one program which started in October 1985, the Alternative Learning Program, would be the base for 26 years of alternative programs to facilitate those students who are at-risk of not graduating from high school. Through the 26 years an immeasurable amount of time has been spent by educators, students, families, and Johnson City Schools, which has allowed for the many successes shared at Science Hill High School Alternative Center.

Science Hill High School Alternative Center

Serving at-risk students had always been a priority for Johnson City Schools and under the leadership of Toni McGriff, Director of Schools, it was no different. The change came in January, 2005, when Toni McGriff altered programs at the Alternative Center to meet the needs of the population it served. With new Tennessee State Standards and graduation requirements, adjustments had to be made at the center. The system at that time failed in its attempt to meet the needs of those at-risk seniors attending the Alternative Center who were trying to meet graduation requirements.

The researcher was asked in January 2005 to lead Science Hill High School Alternative Center in a new direction; one that facilitated students who were not performing academically and meeting high school graduation requirements. This philosophy of change

from one of a *dumping ground* to a place where students felt safe and wanted to learn would be a change for the present (2005) alternative school.

The Science Hill High School (SHHS) administration was under the leadership of Dave Chupa in 2005, and he was the catalyst for the researcher returning to alternative education from her job as a sixth grade teacher. The administration team at SHHS was the first barrier the researcher encountered coming back into alternative education. Redefining alternative education and its use as a positive tool for at-risk students became one of the goals of the SHHS staff and administration. Although a program was in place at the alternative center, the program served those students who were in state custody or on probation; it was perceived as a place to *house* students. Teachers were assigned there for various reasons; very few were there by choice.

On January 5, 2005, the researcher took the position of Assistant Principal at Science Hill High School Alternative Center. Changing the culture of the school and sharing a vision that provided a safe, positive, and nurturing environment conducive to learning (TN Alternative Standard 2.0) at the alternative center were immediate changes that had to take place. Understanding and implementing the new culture and vision for the center would be a challenge in itself for some of the members of the alternative community.

Using the history of alternative education in Johnson City Schools and written yearly goals (Appendix E) to support and meet the standards set by the Tennessee Alternative Council to meet exemplary programs in alternative education, SHHS Alternative Center began to change the negative image the surrounding community had towards alternative education. Involving the school, community, and all stakeholders the Alternative Center was

finally seen in a positive light; students were succeeding in the classroom and changing behaviors, which allowed them to return to the main campus.

As of June 2011 Science Hill High School Alternative Center employed 23 full-time staff members. Of the 23 staff members, 13 are certified teachers, five are instructional assistants, a secretary, one SRO, a custodian, two certified special education teachers, and three specialized counselors. These groups of professionals are what made SHHS AC a safe, positive, nurturing environment that is conducive to learning. Building trusting relationships was essential in the ability to communicate with and teach at-risk students (Seland & Sylvestre, 2005). “The ability for people to trust one another is critical to maintaining any respectful relationship” and that trust is vital in the classroom (Brown, 2005, p.12). Research from numerous studies has attested to the vitality of trusting relationships and how the relationship between teacher and student is indispensable for the students’ success (Camak, 2007; Clarke, 2008; McArdle, 2003).

The Alternative Center housed several programs most of which operate under the administration of Science Hill High School: the Alternative Learning Program, two special needs self-contained classrooms, an in-school suspension classroom for students from the main campus in grades 10th through 12th, Optional High School, General Education Development (GED+2), Graduating on Time (GOT), a self-contained classroom for 7th and 8th graders, Credit Recovery classes, AfterSchool 1-5 Program, LEAPs, and Counselors (Appendix F). Aiding in the success of these programs are the daily running of the Alternative Center and the *internal human energy* that drives the climate of the school.

Students were assigned to one of the Alternative Center programs based on individual needs; the majority of students were there due to unmet graduation requirements based on

credits, age, and/or year in school (Appendix G, Placement Letter). Identified as at-risk during their freshman year for graduation purposes these students' needs were met through behavioral intervention, academic intervention, truancy court, small class size, or all of the above. Once a student was assigned to the Alternative Center he or she was placed in a specific program based on his or her individual needs. All students were interviewed by the social worker before entry into their specific program. At this time the social worker, student, and the student's guardian discussed the reasons for placement, rules and regulations, procedures, exit criteria, expectations of parents, and behavior management tools. Through this process the social worker collected data that assisted in making appropriate interventions. Using a student's social history, medical information, court involvement, family's need for social service, mental health screening or treatment, substance abuse screening or treatment, Intensive Case Management, or employability skills training, the social worker was able to put together an individual behavioral plan for the success of each student (Appendix H, Science Hill High School Alternative Handbook).

All programs at the Alternative Center used a behavior plan with the exceptions of Graduate On Time (GOT), Optional High School, and GED+2. The behavior system was a three-tiered system that provides: (a) students to take responsibility for their behavior and academic success, (b) reinforcement of positive behavior, (c) students to communicate their progress on a daily basis to their parents, (d) parents to reinforce school expectations via a home-school contract, (e) objectivity of student progress so it can be measured, (f) a basis upon which to establish exit criteria, (g) feedback to students, parents, and counselors to facilitate discussions around the issues of developing behaviors that will lead to school

success, and (h) programmatic consequences to troubling behaviors that allowed students to remain in the classroom rather than be assigned in-school or out-of-school suspension.

The alternative center's behavior system was based on three levels of success: (a) apprentice, (b) journeyman, (c) and mastery. These levels were duplicated on the Ladder of Success sheet (Appendix I) that the students carried with them throughout the day. It was a visual cue to their daily academic and behavioral success. The entry level for all students was the Apprentice level. After 30 days the students could qualify to move up to the Journeyman level, which was the second tier. Students had to meet half of their behavioral goals and maintain a D or above in all classes to move forward. All students had the opportunity to move forward weekly after 30 school days. Mastery level was the last tier of the behavior system. These students had met all their behavior goals and had at least a C in all classes. These were the students who were working on transitioning back to the main campus. Each level required a certain number of daily points to be successful.

To return to the main campus students demonstrated consistent compliance in attendance, academics, and behavior. An administrator met with each qualified student, parent, and school support teacher to make a determination about the student's return. Returning students received school support services for at least one semester (Appendix J, Letters to Students).

Provided an environment of support, trust, accountability, self-governance, and meaningful instruction (Smith, 1990; Wehlage, 1989), Science Hill High School Alternative Center students showed growth in academics and behavior. Through continued self-reflection of the programs it serves and believing that at-risk students can learn and achieve provided

that they have the right supportive environment (Wehlage, 1989), SHHS Alternative Center will meet exemplary status under Tennessee's Alternative Guidelines.

Summary

This literature review presented reviews of scholarly research and related literature concerning the history of public alternative education, definition of alternative schools, Tennessee guidelines for alternative schools, at-risk students, history of alternative education at Science Hill High School, and Science Hill High School Alternative Center. When alternative education and the population it serves are seen as worthwhile, those students identified as at-risk will be able to see a brighter future in education.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to provide the administration of Science Hill High School (SHHS), Johnson City Schools' Central Office, and the Johnson City community with a broader understanding of the educational programs offered to those students attending Science Hill High School Alternative Center and how each program provides for the educational success of those identified at-risk SHHS students being served. The research design was qualitative and nonexperimental. Qualitative research is founded on four basic characteristics: understanding the meaning people have constructed, the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis, field work, and inductive research (Merriam, 1998).

Allowing students to voice their feelings and concerns about their education at the alternative center provided the researcher the opportunity to focus on the human element and not be limited to numerical data strings to singly identify to what extent these SHHS students perceived their education, while attending the alternative center (Gerring, 2007; Merriam, 2008). McArdle (2003) noted by using the qualitative approach researchers working with alternative schools would be allowed to determine what was important to the participant interviewee, the student. Leedy and Ormond (2005) state that "qualitative research is typically used to answer questions about the complex nature of phenomena, often with the purpose of describing and understanding the phenomena from the participants' point of view (p.95). Allowing participants to relate their experiences at the Alternative Center gave credence to qualitative research and its focus on the quality of relationships based on the

participants construction of reality within groups and settings, and the information gathered reveals how all the individual parts work together (Merriam, 1998). According to Merriam (1998) qualitative research and education are intertwined because of the base interest of all educators to continue to build on past knowledge and experience in order to meet the needs of students in an ever changing and growing society.

Purpose of the Researcher

This researcher examined how the students attending Science Hill High School Alternative Center in Johnson City, Tennessee perceived their academic experiences as compared to their main campus experience. After 6 years of facilitating Science Hill High School's at-risk student population at the Alternative Center, the center was to be evaluated by the State of Tennessee to see if it met exemplary program criteria in Alternative Education.

Research Procedure

Science Hill High School consists of four campuses in Johnson City, Tennessee: the main campus, which houses grades 10th through 12th; Career and Technical Education building; eighth and ninth grade campus; and the Alternative Center (AC). Science Hill High School Alternative Center (SHHS AC) is housed in one of Johnson City's restored elementary buildings. Although a part of Science Hill High School, the AC sits approximately one mile from the main campus.

The Science Hill High School Alternative Center incorporated several programs that operated under the administration of Science Hill High School: the Alternative Learning Program, AfterSchool 1-5, 2 special needs self-contained classrooms, a 10th through 12th In-School Suspension program, Optional High School, General Education Development (GED+2), Graduate On Time (GOT), LEAP's, and a 7th and 8th grade self-contained

classroom. These programs at the AC serve the 7th through 12th grade population of Science Hill High School and Indian Trail Middle School.

Student selection and recruitment initially started by word of mouth. Students then began asking if they could be a part of the study. I sent information to the Alternative Center, put an announcement in the Science Hill daily announcements, and met students in the halls and cafeteria asking for student participation in the study. I explained the purpose of the interview as an opportunity for them to tell their side of the story of what it was like to be at the Alternative Center and how they could impact change within in the programs they served. I left index cards at the Alternative Center and asked students who were interested to write down their name, the program they were in, and why they would like to be a part of the study. I also informed the students that although their interviews were confidential and no identifying information will be shared, if they were under the age of 18, I would have to have parent consent.

Of the 142 students presently enrolled at the Alternative Center and 64 students on the main campus who are alumni of the center, my goal for this study was to select 18 students, two students from each of the nine identified Alternative School programs who would represent diversity in terms of gender, race, and ethnicity and who could articulate feelings and ideas with the researcher about their academic programs. Using students presently enrolled in the programs and alumni of the Alternative Center, either enrolled on the main campus or graduates, gave the researcher an advantage to having the students available for interviewing. Hatch (2002) stated, "Guiding questions for studies using interviewing as the primary data source require researchers to develop questions based on their research purpose, knowledge of their informants, and hunches about the phenomena they are studying" (p.102).

Having served these students as their direct administrator gave me the opportunity to know the circumstances that brought them to the Alternative Center. Knowing this information gave me the advantage to not only work with the questionnaire but to work around some of the questions being asked if they were in doubt of what was being asked. The truthfulness of the participants' dialogue attests to their cooperation in revealing the truth as they perceived it.

I used open-ended semistructured interviews with the students. The initial interviews lasted approximately 1 to 2 hours. I explained the purpose of the interviews, how they will be used, and advised those under the age of 18 that they were to have a waiver signed by their parents before I could talk to them. Those of age could sign their own consent form. For those needing parent signatures before the interviews, I called parents or guardians and explained informed consent, confidentiality, and what benefit their student could have in making possible future changes at the center. These parents either came to the school or I went to their homes to obtain signatures on informed consent forms. (Appendix K)

Interviewee's statements are "not collected, they are coauthored by the interviewer" (Kvale, 1996, p.183). This statement served as a reminder to avoid taking the results of this social interaction as arrogance of truth on the students' part and keeping in mind the social cocreation of the final outcome. Kvale (1996) says by using semistructured interviews, you allow the participants to have freedom to express their views on their own terms. This type of interview involved the use of an interview guide. The guide is a list of questions to be covered during the interview (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). During the interview I followed the guide but was able to follow relevant avenues in the conversation that strayed from the guide when appropriate. A semistructured interview is flexible, allowing new questions to be brought up during the interview as a result of what the participant says (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Interviews were tape recorded and transcribed at a later time. No identifying information was transcribed. Interview questions were aimed at finding how students perceived their education while attending the Alternative Center.

Limitations

The usefulness of research is limited or enhanced by its validity and reliability (Richie & Lewis). Trustworthiness in qualitative research is comprised of four main elements: credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability. This research project was limited in its scope of inquiry and did not produce universal findings. However the researcher did assume that Science Hill School's at-risk students attending the Alternative Center had valuable observations about their education and had strong opinions about the way the school was managed. The literature revealed that few studies used students as evaluators and none had targeted alternative school experiences. Many studies however used student voices in traditional settings to examine student perspectives: (Certo, 2003; Gallagher, 2002; Oerlemans & Vidovich, 2005; Pierce, 2005). These used interviews or case studies as the chosen methodology.

One consideration was to minimize any bias on behalf of the participants or myself. As the on-site administrator I had personal investment in all my students and even though they were given guidelines for the study, I cannot rule out bias on their part. Although my own experiences with Science Hill High School Alternative Center provided me an insight to which the participants' stories were interpreted, I made an honest attempt to do so fairly. I tried diligently not to reveal to any participant any of my preconceptions or bias regarding academic equality or inequality at the alternative center. The testing instrument asked for the

interviewee's age, gender, grade, and in what program the participant was served; interview questions were then asked.

Interview Questions

With regard to the research question, Gall, Gall, and Borg (2003) stated that research questions and the standing body of knowledge in the area of inquiry should drive the research design. The following interview questions guided this study for my research question, How do students' perceptions of their academic experiences at Science Hill High School Alternative Center compare with perceptions of their main campus experience?:

1. Presently, are you working and/or going to school? (Please tell me where.)
2. What year did you graduate from SHHS and with what type of diploma?
Regular/GOT/GED
3. Were there certain staff (people) who helped you be successful while at the AC?
(Be specific.)
4. Where was your previous school before coming to the AC?
5. What behavior(s) placed you at the Alternative Center? Grades? Discipline?
Choice?
6. How long have you been at the center? Were you given a time frame for change?
7. If you are here by choice, why did you choose to stay?
8. How have your educational and social experiences been while at the alternative center? Were you successful academically? Did you make strides in appropriate social interactions?
9. At this time in your life, how do you perceive your education at the AC?
Teachers? Peers? Classified Staff?

10. What are you learning in respect to your interests and needs? (What did you learn about yourself?)
11. Do you think the alternative center meets and supports your needs? Why or why not?
12. What do you think of the academic curriculum at the AC? Did it prepare you to return to the main campus or the next level of your academic or work life?
13. What are your present goals? Goals after high school? If you have already graduated, what are your future goals?
14. Did the AC help you to pursue your goals? Please explain your answer.

These students represented a good mix of the types of students served at the alternative center in age, programs, academics, behavior, and length of stay. Due to my duties as the administrator of the alternative center this constituted a convenience sample for research purposes.

Data Collections

The purpose of the interview was to gather students' perceptions of their educational experience while attending Science Hill High School Alternative Center. The 18 students selected from the center, two from each of the nine programs, were asked open-ended structured questions. In an effort to ensure consistency the interviewees were given the same pre-established questions before the interview. Ample time was given for responses because the questions were open-ended.

Individual student interviews were the primary source of data collection. The interviews were transcribed from written notes and audio recordings to identify emerging themes and were the source of data collection. The researcher followed the interview guide

with the use of probes to gain further understanding of the interviewees' responses. Informed Consent was obtained from each participant following the rules established by East Tennessee State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The researcher maintained objectivity throughout the student interview and an auditor was used to ensure the authenticity of the interviews and transcripts.

Data Analysis

Each interview was preserved by extensive note taking, audio recording, and the use of the participant's direct quote for authentic responses and meanings. Audio recording allowed for repeated reviews and analysis including focusing on a single aspect of a discussion with each interviewee. Each audio-recording was listened to and notations made. The data were then sorted by the questions and grouped into themes.

Second, I examined the individual summaries and identified consistent patterns among the participants' responses. I used a chart to secure responses as well as to provide a structure for summary, recommendations, and continuing analysis.

Summary

In this qualitative study, "the questions go beyond the task of gathering information, they call for social change as well" (Shank, 2002, p. 102). In allowing participants to identify problems at the Alternative Center and give voice to the solution(s), it made them accountable to the part of learning they can control, and help those students who continue to be helped by the center.

In verifying the information in this qualitative research through interviews using a semistructured interview process and following the 14 questions as a guide, the alternative center students' responses to these questions allowed me to analyze the question, "How do

students at Science Hill High School Alternative Center perceive their academic growth, while in attendance at the center compared to their success or failure at their main campus.” According to Miles and Huberman (1994) using observed and first hand data to weigh evidence gives reliability and validity to the process. Each question was analyzed individually after the completion of each interview to identify emerging themes and relationships. Themes were established, interviewer’s observations noted, and case records established for access (Patton, 1990).

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS

The purpose of this study was to examine the educational experience of high school at-risk students who attended an alternative high school within their school district. The study involved collecting data by one-on-one interviews from 18 Science Hill High School Alternative Center alumni. Purposeful sampling was used to select the students who were alumni of the Alternative Center and who represented the different programs offered at the center. These alumni were asked questions that pertained to their academic growth while in attendance at the center, compared to their academic success or failure at their main campus.

I obtained initial student contact through a mass email to the teachers of the Alternative Center asking for student volunteers who had been served by the Alternative Center from January 2005 through June 2011. I also had face-to-face contact with students on Science Hill's main campus. Although some alumni were involved with more than one program, all of the 18 alumni students when sent to the Alternative Center were placed in one program area. A script was used; follow-up questions were then asked to probe further meaning. The interview questions examined the perceptions and reflections of these eighteen alumni students who attended the Alternative Center between January 2005 and May 2011.

The interview questions included:

1. Presently, are you working and/or going to school? (Please tell me where.)
2. What year did you graduate from SHHS and with what type of diploma?
Regular/GOT/GED
3. Were there certain staff (people) who helped you be successful, while at the AC?
(Be specific.)

4. Where was your previous school before coming to the AC?
5. What behavior(s) placed you at the Alternative Center? Grades? Discipline? Choice?
6. How long have you been at the center? Were you given a time frame for change?
7. If you are here by choice, why did you choose to stay?
8. How have your educational and/or social experiences been while at the alternative center? Were you successful academically? Did you make strides in appropriate social interactions?
9. At this time in your life, how do you perceive your education at the AC? Teachers? Peers? Classified Staff?
10. What are you learning in respect to your interests and/or needs? (What did you learn about yourself?)
11. Do you think the alternative center meets and/or supports your needs? Why or why not?
12. What do you think of the academic curriculum at the AC? Did it prepare you to return to the main campus or the next level of your academic and/or work life?
13. What are your present goals? Goals after high school? If you have already graduated, what are your future goals?
14. Did the AC help you to pursue your goals? Please explain your answer.

The personal interviews allowed the students to reflect on their days spent at the Alternative Center and recount their reason(s) for attending and the success they had while in attendance. The interviewees were encouraged to react to any ideas or share any concerns openly. Each interview session concluded with a debriefing and a show of gratitude by the

researcher. This process assisted with the identification of early patterns and themes and helped to prompt for additional questioning during further interviews.

The focus of the data analysis was to see if themes emerged as to the effectiveness of the center and suggestions for improvement to academic core classes, electives, and personal accomplishments. Through careful examination and hand-coding of the data, themes emerged as to the effectiveness of the Alternative Center and careful thought-out improvements that would enhance the quality of the classroom experience for future students attending the Alternative Center.

The study was comprised of 18 alumni students who attended the Alternative Center during January 2005 to June 2011. Each of these students, 8 males and 10 females, held a unique view that collectively provided data-supported themes to guide this qualitative research. Table 1 identifies the students, the initial program in which they were served, gender, age, graduation year, and diploma earned.

Table 1.

Science Hill High School Alternative Center Alumni

Alumni	Program	Gender/Age	Grad Year	Type of Diploma
Amy	Alternative Learning Program (ALC)	F/18	2012	Regular/28 Credits
Brad	Alternative Learning Program (ALC)	M/17	2013	Regular/28 Credits
Carl	AfterSchool 1-5	M/17	2012	TN State/22 Credits
Dale	AfterSchool 1-5	M/17	2013	TN State/22 Credits
Evan	Special Education	M/17	2013	Regular
Frank	Special Education	M/21	2009	Regular
Gabby	GED+2	F/21	2009	GED
Hattie	GED+2	F/22	2009	GED
Izzie	Optional High School	F/20	2011	Regular/28 Credits
Julie	Optional High School	F/23	2008	Regular/28 Credits
Kevin	Graduating On Time (GOT)	M/19	2012	TN State/22 Credits
Linda	Graduating On Time (GOT)	F/20	2011	TN State/22 Credits
Mike	Self-Contained 7/8	M/14	2016	9 th grader
Nancy	Self-Contained 7/8	F/14	2016	9 th grader
Olivia	LEAPs	F/20	2010	Regular/28 Credits
Patty	LEAPs	F/16	2014	11 th grader
Quinton	In-School Suspension	M/18	2012	Regular/28 Credits
Rita	In-School Suspension	F/17	2013	Regular/28 Credits

Emerging Themes

After personally interviewing 18 alumni of the Alternative Center, ranging in ages from 14 to 22, the following three themes emerged: (1) relationships; (2) diversity of programs; and (3) personal growth.

Relationships

One theme that emerged from the interviews was the relationships the alumni made with the staff at the alternative center. Most stated that without the help from these individuals

they would not have been successful academically or behaviorally. The words most echoed by the alumni were *support* given to them from the staff at the AC and *trust* they found in believing what adults said they could achieve if they followed their plan for success. Kevin, who graduated from the GOT program:

I returned to the AC on two different occasions. First time I earned my way back but then chose to come back to the AC for GOT because it was a better environment.

People cared if I showed up and were successful.

Amy, who attended the ALC program and returned to the main campus for the rest of her senior year, reflects on her success:

I learned I was a better student than I thought and everybody's not a bad guy. The AC met my needs because it took the time to know me as a person and it gave me another chance to succeed.

Support

During the interviews all participants had perceptions of their teachers both from the traditional high school and the Alternative Center (AC). Some alumni's perceptions of the staff at the AC were more of a mentor than as a teacher. They reflected a sense of mutual respect when discussing staff and the roles they played at the Alternative Center. Some alumni had a greater sense of respect for their teachers at the AC because they felt respected as young adults. Some teachers allowed students to have greater flexibility in their learning or how they were to learn: Frank, a special education student, talks about a staff member who allowed him to sit sideways in his chair because he could not fit under the desk comfortably. He also remembered not liking math, so he could pick out whatever five problems he wanted to do, and as long as he was getting them right, (staff member) would let him pick the

problems. Alumni described the bond among staff as a family that never gave up, even though they, the alumni, wanted too many times: Hattie, 22 years old and a GED graduate, relates how she hated school, the Alternative Center, and anything having to do with her education. “I wanted out but you and my PO just wouldn’t let me go no matter what I said to you or did. I’m sorry for all my cussing but why didn’t you just suspend me? You never gave up on me and I respect you for that.”

The sense of mutual respect shared between staff and students at the center created different experiences and perceptions for many of the alumni. This was repeatedly emphasized throughout the interviews from the alumni.

Carl, an alumnus and 2012 GOT graduate, talks about his first day of attending the AfterSchool 1-5 program.

“I learned that I really do wanna graduate. I found that ability in myself while at the AC. I used to think different but now I am actually going to do it. Thanks to the ALC for giving me a second chance.”

Patty who will graduate in 2014 has attended the LEAPs program since she was in eighth grade. “My education was what I made of it. The teachers cared about the students. (Staff members) went beyond their duties to help me be successful. I consider them my family.”

Several of the alumni spoke of the staff at the Alternative Center as people they would remember for helping them graduate and transition to college or the work force. Quinton, a 2012 graduate and student who served many days in In-School suspension for various offences, speaks of the AC as a place where he was respected as a student. “When someone respects you, you are more likely to respect them and act in ways that you would not

otherwise.” Brad, who attended the Alternative Learning Program, also speaks of the staff as caring and nurturing:

I’d been sent to the AC three times in my high school career. Each time I came back (3 staff named) asked me why I was back and it was usually for grades but the first time it was for silly immature stuff, do you remember? Wow, I don’t know what I was thinking. I’m a senior now and I’ve matured mostly because I understand what you and my parents were trying to say to me about being grown and taking on more mature responsibilities. Do you remember the time (staff member) sent us to the elementary school to read to the kindergarteners? I really enjoyed that but I would never want to be a teacher because of the way I used to act. I have learned it is time to grow up and life has its struggles. It’s how you handle them. You know I never thought I would say this but (4 staff named) really helped me grow up. I don’t know if I would have graduated if it weren’t for the AC. Did you know I’m going to Northeast State and then to ETSU? Thanks.

Brad has returned to the main campus for his senior year and will graduate May 2013 with 28 credits, which will give him a Science Hill High School diploma.

Teachers can strongly influence students. Most alumni had at least two staff members who made a difference in their experience while attending the AC. These alumni stated that honesty and caring for them not only as students but young people who had a future made all the difference in the world when trying to change their behaviors. Their responses were directed at specific staff members and the staff members’ commitment to the alumni’s success. Olivia and Brad, both high school graduates, stated how thankful they were for certain staff who helped in their successful academic transition to post high school. While

retelling their stories of success, they stated how genuinely happy they were about these staff members and the times shared with them.

Yes, they helped me be a better student and person. I'm still in school but I remember (staff member) telling me to think before I speak and one day things will come together if I just give teachers a chance to help. It seems to be working so far. The AC helped me in the sense of always knowing that I have someone that will help me in where I need to go. Even after 2 years of graduating. (Olivia) Yes, (staff member) whenever I needed help there was always a teacher close by. It didn't matter if (staff member) was busy; it seemed they always had time for me. (Brad)

Izzie, an Optional High School graduate of 2011, summed up best what most alumni expressed about their level of support from the staff at the AC:

Yes, the AC supported my needs. The AC helped me more than just my grades, (3 staff named) helped me change the way I thought about myself. I always thought that I would drop out of school just like members of my family. They pushed me even on the days when I was at my worse. They believed in me.

Trust

The sense of trusting someone in an educational setting was a new experience for many of the alumni. School had been a place of failure and mistrust with most adults who were supposed to be accommodating to their needs. Many of the alumni stated the importance of times staff spent with them *off the clock*. Frank, a 21 year old special education student who graduated with a regular Science Hill diploma, affirms how his teacher cared about him and his education:

I knew (staff member) wouldn't let me fail Algebra, so she helped me during her planning time and afterschool. You know Ms. Decker she didn't have to do that but I'm glad she did. I passed my Algebra class and my EOC (End of Course) and I will graduate with a regular high school diploma.

As a 2009 special education student Frank could graduate with a regular diploma if he passed his End of Course Exams (EOC). This consisted of English 10, Biology, and Algebra 1. The number of credits earned to that point did not matter.

LEAP was offered as a year-round program to benefit those students who needed academic tutoring and supervision. During the school year it was used as an academic tutorial program and also served as a mentoring program that elicited life skills programs for these students: cooking classes, arts and crafts, sewing, etc. Patty had so much fun in her cooking classes though LEAPs when she registered for ninth grade she signed up for Culinary Arts. She has been in the culinary arts program since.

“No one in my family really cooks except my Granny and I thought it would be fun to learn. We started with making things like cookies and then made Thanksgiving Dinner one year for our parents. The only thing I didn't like is washing the dishes. I guess if the cooking class hadn't been offered I would have never signed up for Culinary Arts.”

During the summer months the program shifts to an outdoor leadership program where the students are more involved with the planning and structuring of their time. The AC incorporated many summer trips to ensure the continuity of school for the students. These programs not only provided stability for some but made sure students were fed and supervised over the summer months. Survivor Camp and caving in Bristol Caverns were popular times

spent with staff off campus according to interviewees. Several of the alumni talked about these experiences as if they were vacationing with family members. Carl, who attended LEAPs as a ninth grader for math tutoring, reminisces about his times at camp and caving as if it happened yesterday.

You know (staff member) was the coolest and I was one of the first to go to survivor camp. Boy, I slept like a log at night because we worked hard during the days. (Staff member) played it just like it is on TV even down to some nasty food. Some of the younger kids had a hard time so some of us older ones took care of them. Caving was fun, too. Did you know that (student named) got stuck between the rocks? (Staff member) came and talked to (student named) until he got through. You know I would have never done any of those things if it wasn't for (staff member). They spend a lot of hours with us, they didn't have too. I'll have stories to tell my kids one day.

One other alumni experience came in the form of volunteer work that was done after school and on the weekends. Olivia states, "I was able to get experience and reach out with volunteer work. I was part of the anti-drug coalition with (staff member) and found great joy with my work there."

Diversity of Programs

The Alternative Center offered several programs for Science Hill High School students. Some of these programs were behaviorally directed and all were academically directed. Some of the alumni were given an option to remain at the AC, but most students attending the AC were required to attend due to academics and behavior; students attending for academic reasons were a majority in the last 4 years.

The structure of the Alternative Center and the programs offered to the students at the center allowed for the success of many of these alumni. The alumni elaborated positively on how they believed academic and behavioral contracts, along with the curriculum, enhanced their ability to learn.

For Kevin and Linda, who attended the GOT program (Graduating On Time), the program offered early graduation, a quieter working environment, time for their jobs, and smaller classes size and was less stressful than the regular classes both on the main campus and the ALC.

Gabby, who graduated with a GED in 2009, expressed how the program at the AC met and supported her needs by pushing her to attend school every day even though her circumstances were hard. She was angry with herself for not getting a regular diploma but knew with a GED she would be able to get a job and possibly start school at the technical center in the spring.

For those served through special education classes, Frank, who graduated in 2009, and Evan, who will graduate this year, found being with the same teacher for all their academics helped them to be successful academically. Frank expressed (staff member) gave him the chance to be successful.

“Most of the time (staff member) was positive about what I could do after high school. I believe (staff member) is a part of the reason I have a good job, a wife and children. I’m a good daddy and husband because we used to talk about families and what your responsibility was a man. (Staff member) encouraged me to be a better person.”
Evan voiced, “(Staff member) always helped me with my work and if she was busy, I always had (staff member) to help me. My peers were also helpful when (staff

member) allowed them to help. I didn't always like (staff member) because she can be bossy sometimes and I would get smart right back. Sometimes I would cuss or argue, but I would usually sit down and do my work. Course I guess you remember me coming to the office after getting kicked out of class for cussing?"

The After School 1-5 program was behavioral based; Dale and Carl both stated the program served their needs while attending and were thankful for it. They both expressed how the AC was not a place for them because they weren't like the other kids who had to come to the ALC.

Nancy and Mike attended the seventh and eighth grade self-contained classroom. While Mike was happy that (staff member) didn't procrastinate with his work and liked to get things done, Nancy wished she could have stayed with (staff member) longer. "(Staff member) understood me and wanted what was best for me. I started my days by telling (staff member) about my night and it seemed to make the day better."

Most students attended the ALC for failing grades, and this was the case for Amy and Brad. Amy, who graduated in 2012, stated attending the ALC was the best decision for her because she needed help in Algebra and Geometry. Having smaller classes and more personal attention helped her graduate with her classmates. She also affirmed the staff was helpful and wanted her to succeed. She stated, "You're not a number, you're an actual person." Brad stated although he wasn't there by choice it was the best move for him. He got his grades up, made personal goals, and was allowed back on the main campus. He has been successful since his return and will graduate with his classmates May 2013.

Julie and Izzie graduated through the Optional High School program. Julie acknowledged her appreciation for the Optional High School program because without the

program, she would have never graduated. She had to work to support her siblings and this program provided her the ability to do both. Izzie states, “I had a great experience at the AC and chose to stay there to complete my education. I improved my grades but at times sabotaged myself so I could stay. I felt like I belonged and people cared about me.”

LEAPs provided Patty and Olivia with afterschool tutoring. They stated it was a good program and the opportunities it provided was time well spent.

Unfortunately going to an alternative program sometimes carried a *stigma* or *a sense of personal failure* to some students and parents. Alternative schools continued to fight the stigma given to them because people’s perception of alternative schools continued to come from society’s lack of understanding of alternative schools and their programs (Raywid, 2009). Julie, who attended the Optional High School program, remembers her friend’s remarks as hurtful because she could not finish her credits on the main campus. “They said only retarded people and druggies attended the AC.” Some parents and students see their failure as *the schools fault*. Gabby, who received her GED, remembers blaming everyone except herself. “I wasn’t going to accept responsibility for all those things I did; I really didn’t understand why I did some of those things (skip school, cuss people, fight, smoke pot) back then until I was sent away.” The alumni maintained that without these programs at the AC they would not be successful academically in their transition back to the main campus, work, trade school or college. Many of these students suffered repeated failures in their traditional school because they never identified what changes needed to be made for their transition to the next level. For these alumni to make change academically they had to identify that changes were needed for their success and then relate how they could then implement those changes. According to Webster’s Dictionary (1971), change is to ‘become different, or make

something or somebody different' (p.139). Not always knowing change sometimes brings about positive outcomes, some of these alumni reluctantly went to the AC; of the 18 participants, seven were there by choice and all were involved with a program(s) in some capacity for a minimum of 2 years. These 2 years were uninterrupted or intermittent.

While some made the decision to attend the AC, others were not given an option.

Some of the alumni explained their actions:

The curriculum did help me to prepare to return to the main campus. Once I arrived at the main campus I felt alone and out of place. I felt like a number and did not fit in. I started failing my classes on purpose so that I could go back to the AC. (Izzie) I am a strong person and should never have gotten in trouble with truancy. With the help offered at the AC I learned how to better deal with life events and negative circumstances so I could succeed. (Amy) Yes, because I graduated! If the AC was like the main campus, I would have felt like no one cared and been less likely to finish at my full potential. (Brad)

Quinton stated that although he had been in and out of the AC for a period of 2 years and had never wanted to be there, as he looks back, he reminisces about the behaviors and what he was doing that put him there.

“Obviously, I needed to be there. My grades and behavior showed that but I always felt I was better than the other students who were there. They seemed to not care about anything or didn't have family who cared about them. I guess I didn't care about anything back then either but I knew I had a loving family who would be there for me.”

Alumni discussed their perceptions of how the AC created an atmosphere where failure was not an option. Their comments ranged from teachers who wouldn't give up, expectations of graded work, and allowing as much time as needed on an assignment to be successful. Linda states,

“I learned I was a better student than I thought. The AC was more one on one and cared if you succeeded. All the people helped me when I needed help. I wouldn't be where I am today without the AC.”

The learning environment at the AC provided a much smaller teacher-pupil ratio than the main campus and with a smaller setting it allowed for the students to learn within their best learning modality. Some of the alumni agreed this was very important to their success while in attendance.

I liked getting my assignments and being left alone to work at my pace. If I needed help I could ask (staff member). I liked the quietness of the classroom. (Quinton) I wasn't there by choice but I did see my grades were getting better. I learned that I work best in a quieter environment. (Brad) The staff takes time to help me and I get to do my work on the floor and spread out. You know I didn't miss an assignment when (staff member) let me sit on the floor for my studies, as long as I didn't interrupt other students. (Mike)

With smaller classes teachers were able to give more individualized attention to each of the students they served. This idea was best said by Nancy,

“My educational experience was good because if I didn't care (staff member) did and she wasn't going to let up until I had done my best. Sometimes I told her I would just take the F, but no, we started over so I would make a better grade. Sometimes we

would get done with our work and learn about fun stuff. (Staff member) made the class fun and I wanted to do my best for her. Sometimes my best was not good enough for her, so we would work it out together. I have two teachers now who are like (staff member) and I work hard for them.”

Most of the older alumni took part in GOT, OHS, AfterSchool 1-5, and ISS. These programs lend themselves to student autonomy within their structures of operation. Alumni from these programs talked about a sense of success in their life today because they were allowed to be a part of the process that allowed them success. Giving young adults the freedom to choose their schedules of learning for the day or the time of day in which they learn better allowed them to regulate themselves. If issues arose in these areas such as truancy or failing grades, it became a learning experience of choices and a contract for change was made. Amy states,

“Same work, except computers let us move at our own pace. I am just as ready academically as main campus students and more ready emotionally for the next steps in life. I used to do my math first in the morning because I always struggled with math; language arts was the easiest so I left it for last. I worked with (staff member) after school to do my resumes and interviews. I would never have been able to do an interview without (staff member) help. She taught me how to dress, what to say, and all that stuff. We practiced and practiced and it paid off. I have a good job and am enrolled in ETSU.”

Personal Growth

Another theme to surface from the interviews was one of personal perseverance by the alumni. They were of the same opinion that self-direction and accountability for their actions

led them to success. The majority of the alumni were ready for life after high school because they had learned the skills of self-reliance and communication at all levels. Most of the alumni emphasized the interpersonal skills they learned at the AC were invaluable, and they were more important than the academic skills they learned. The skills alumni learned were affective communication and working as a team.

(Staff member) made sure we could write a resume and hold our own in a job interview. She had no problem telling us we were not going to an interview in those clothes or dirty finger nails or hair. I know she cared because she told us all the time how we were a team and a team is only as strong as its weakest link. (Julie) Course Ms. Decker, you were always correcting our grammar, but did you know we started doing it to one another? (Staff member) told us the best way to learn was to learn with one another. Correct each other in a nice way and learn by our mistakes. I was in an interview one time and (store manager) didn't use the correct tense on his word, course I didn't correct him then but I have worked at (store) for four years now and I remembered this when I got your questions for the interview so I told him and he just laughed. (Frank)

The ability for these at-risk students to build relationships with their peers and the staff required them to feel safe and protected in their learning environment. There was a comfort with the alumni and the staff at the AC. It was a comfort of safety and acknowledgement of who they were as human beings. For the most part it had become a family to so many of these students. Nancy remembers coming to the AC as an eighth grader and telling the counselor she was going to do what she had to do to get out. She wasn't going to make friends or anything; she didn't want any part of this school.

“I walked in to the class and it was all boys. (Staff member) greeted me at the door and I bet she thought I was crazy; I didn’t even speak to her. It didn’t take me to long to realize how much I trusted and wanted to be a part of (staff member) class. There are days now, I wish I was back there.”

These alumni were not part of the traditional high school social life; they were outcasts in a high school where they were failing. Not fitting in to any social group and trying to seek attention through negative behavior was the reason some of the alumni attended the Alternative Center. Some of the alumni were very descriptive in explaining the differences between *us*, those attending the AC, and *them*, those attending on the main campus.

I didn’t socialize with anyone on the main campus. I don’t have the name brand clothes or the perfect hair. I don’t speak proper. I didn’t need name brand clothes at the AC or perfect hair; I could just be me, Hattie. I knew I had changes to make if I was going to be successful outside of the AC, as I was inside. I know that I fit in with most of the other kids and some of us became friends and helped each other to graduate. On the leadership team I learned to be assertive with the goals I wanted for myself and believed I was as good as any student on the hill. (Hattie) I felt comfortable enough to believe what (staff member) was telling me, it was hard sometimes though because adults had not always told me the truth. Some were liars. I was told over and over to believe in myself, the process and the rest would follow. It took about 3 months for me to trust (staff member), but I did and today I am in college, have a job and living on my own. (Linda)

The class size and the size of the programs continued to be a topic of discussion

during the interview process. Within the smaller groups they learned not to judge others as they had been judged. They talked about their differences but talked a lot about how they were similar and the perception they had was of a family; belonging to something.

I was angry and didn't care what I said to anyone. I realized now by putting up a wall around myself I could keep the ugliness out. I had enough at home to deal with; I didn't want drama at school. I was sitting in group with (counselor) and she asked me what makes me so angry. Fake people I remember saying. While I was explaining what I meant I saw many heads nod in my group so I kept on. I soon realized I was not alone with my home life or feelings I had about school. I was so put down by my family; I became that person they were talking about. It took me to move out of my mom's house and go through a successful first semester in college to realize all that the AC staff was telling me about how good of a person I was and how smart I was became real. I know now as a young woman I am a survivor and hope that I can be just like (staff member) and be a positive role model for teenagers. (Hattie)

Most of the alumni attended the AC due to failing grades and did not care if they passed or failed. Being sent to the AC was one more failure they added to their list. They just wanted to do *their time* and get out. Some had parents who pushed for passing grades and some had probation officers who told them they would not be off probation until they were caught up with their credits and were passing all classes. Passing grades were something to celebrate at the AC because they were major accomplishments for the alumni. Setting academic goals was a part of the initial interview process. Students, with a counselor, wrote attainable academic goals based on their academic failure from their previous coursework

taken on the main campus. Once these goals were written, students were held accountable for reaching their goals through their daily point sheet and staff daily interactions.

I learned that if I really set my mind to something I can complete anything. My goals after high school were to obtain a degree in the criminal justice field. Although I have not completed that goal yet I have earned my cosmetology license so I can support myself. I will be starting ETSU next Fall. (Gabby) My goals are to go to college and do something with computers. (Frank) Yes, I graduated so I can take the next step to college. (Staff member) helped me get all of the fiancés, paperwork, ACT and other college stuff get set-up so I can begin my four year undergrad at ETSU in the fall.

(Amy) I learned I really do want to graduate and go into the military. I haven't reached my goals yet, but I am sure in the long run I will. (Carl) I remember one of my goals was, change my behavior to something positive. I did just that with the help of (3 staff named) and have been off probation for 2 years and will be starting Northeast State in the Fall with Hope Scholarship money. (Linda) I knew I was headed to juvee, if I continued fighting and selling drugs. For a long time I wanted to go to college, but the group I was hanging with were mostly dropouts. My probation gave me one last chance to get it right. I wrote one of my goals as wanting to attend business school. Though counseling with (2 staff named) I learned I could be successful with school. The AC taught me that I could be responsible and earn an education myself. (Kevin) I learned that I am really smart and that I can actually graduate and not dropout. We went on field trips to the local colleges to see what we might be interested in after high school. We went to a school call ITT Tech and that's where I am going after high school. At first I didn't like the recognition on the announcements in the morning or

the special treat at lunch, but then I got used to it and wanted to hear my name. My friends also like hearing their names or seeing their picture on the achievement board.

(Rita)

Lizzie is a self-assured 20 year old who articulated what it meant to belong to the AC family; she had just finished her sophomore year of college and will return in August to ETSU to start her junior year.

“Yes, the AC helped me to pursue my goals. At first I didn’t have any goals. I really was not sure what a goal was. I basically came to school to get out of the house. I just thought I would pass the time by until I dropped out. The AC helped me achieve far more than I ever thought possible. There were many times that I did not have transportation to school and I remember two staff members would go out of their way to help me get to school. They believed in me and helped me believe in myself. I started doing different things. I joined Leadership Resiliency Program (LRP) and became involved. LRP helped me experience so many things I would not have been able to do. My attitudes about my grades and my life started changing. I went from saying I can’t too I can. (Staff member pushed me to become a role model for others; she trusted me and helped me so much. The staff at the AC helped me to graduate high school and go to college. The AC was the best thing that ever happened to me.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine how 18 alumni of Science Hill High Alternative Center perceived their academic growth while in attendance at the center compared with their main campus experience. The interviews were held at the Career and Technical Center, which is part of the Science Hill High School campus.

One of the themes that emerged from the interviews was that of building relationships with the Alternative Center staff. The alumni stated building these relationships allowed them to learn to trust others. They had to become a part of something other than themselves, and to do this the staff had to be supportive of their decisions and help in their transitions. Acknowledging students needed to have input into their transition from the AC allowed them to feel a part of the decision-making process. This process allowed for personal growth and a smoother transition to postsecondary school and work.

According to the alumni in this study, staff at the Alternative Center possessed certain qualities that helped alumni be successful. For example, learning to communicate their needs to an adult helped to build trust, which in the past did not happen. Finally, the alumni in this study identified what was important to their success and what needed to be in place for future, at-risk, student success.

CHAPTER 5

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

From the late 1960s to the mid 1970s alternative education became a highly marketable movement by educators who were dissatisfied with the traditional curriculum. Alternative schools began to fulfill the missing elements of traditional education (Glass, 1995), and some educators believed that when students are in a nurturing and supportive environment they are able to thrive academically (Frediana, 2002). The alternative schools offered students opportunities for success according to the belief that one unified curriculum is not sufficient for all students. These schools emphasized the development of self-concept, problem-solving, and humanistic approaches (Conley, 2002).

Federal laws were passed that impacted how public schools facilitated alternative programs and how they met the needs of students identified as at-risk. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) in 2004, National Alternative Education Association (NAEA) in 2002, and No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2001 greatly supported alternative education.

The creation of the alternative school was to ensure that at-risk students graduate with a high school diploma. Popularity of these academic alternative high schools was directly related to the increased pressures placed on high school students due to increased testing, higher expectations, and greater academic standards. Johnson City Schools became a part of the alternative movement in 1985 by implementing an alternative program that would meet the needs of their failing high school students. Through the years Johnson City continued to meet the needs of its at-risk population, and in 2010 Johnson City had a free standing Alternative Center with nine diverse programs. These programs not only helped students

graduate from high school, they prepared students to transition after high school. Students obtained employment, applied for college and/or technical school, and some entered the armed forces.

In the last 25 years support from the community, central office staff, administrators, and other stake holders allowed Johnson City Schools to be proactive in the educational investment of all at-risk students. Understanding that not all students learn best in a traditional academic setting, Johnson City continued to examine various methods and models that teach effective strategies for increasing academic success for at-risk students.

Statement of Problem

The purpose of this study was to examine how students at Science Hill High Alternative Center perceived their academic growth, in attendance at the center compared to their academic success or failure at their main campus. At-risk students for the purpose of this study were defined as secondary students who typically displayed the following characteristics: (a) failing grades, (b) truancy, (c) poor home communication, (d) behavior and discipline challenges, (e) encounter with the juvenile justice system, and (f) poor social skills. This qualitative case study was conducted by interviewing 18 Alternative Center alumni who attended the Alternative Center from January 2005 to May 2010.

Discussion and Conclusions from Findings

The research question used to frame this study examined the perceptions of the alumni's academic and personal growth while attending the Alternative Center. Through the interview process their personal thoughts and candid answers were used to describe the Alternative Center and its effectiveness to provide programs that met the needs of Science Hill High School's at-risk population. Alumni representing each of the nine programs at the

Alternative Center gave a personal account of why they were successful and in some instances where they were not as successful.

Through analysis of one-on-one interviews with the alumni, three themes emerged that enabled me to construct the theoretical framework for this study: (a) relationships, (b) diversity of programs, and (c) personal growth.

In the first theme the alumni discussed the need to be able to trust adults. Once trust was made the alumni concurred on how they were supported by staff and realized they could accomplish the goals they had set for themselves. They expressed the alternative center had a family atmosphere and employed staff who were there to help them.

In this second theme the alumni discussed that having smaller class sizes, setting academic and behavioral goals, and for some having program choice allowed them to be in control of their learning. For those alumni who had choice in deciding which program best served them, they communicated a sense of accomplishment when they completed individualized goals and classes. Gabby chose to get her GED instead of a high school diploma because she financially supported herself. By taking the GED she would be an early graduate and start cosmetology school in the January.

I had to do what was best for me and my family. I passed my GED in November and signed up for cosmetology school in January. I had to work so I could stay on track and go to ETSU in the fall. I made it to ETSU with the help of (staff) and am a junior at state.

In the third theme all of the alumni agreed having personal goals for transition gave them a sense of self-reliance and personal perseverance. The alumni who have graduated

stated that goal setting was a big reason for their success although they did not see its importance while they were in school.

The factors that promoted the success of these alumni included: (a) staff as mentors, they stated the staff listened, (b) goal setting; they were a part of their own graduation and postsecondary transition plan, (c) the Alternative Center supported a safe environment, (d) their opinions mattered, and (e) some were given the choice to attend the center to bring up grades or stay after their goals were met.

The barriers that limited some alumni included: (a) parental support, and (b) students only enrolled in GOT or Adult High School could graduate from the center.

My parents only sent me to school so they could get my SSI check (Hattie). Frank wished he could graduate from the AC because “I had a better education due to (staff member) sitting down working with me one-on-one. They couldn’t do that on the main campus because the classes are so big. I know I can’t graduate down here but I wish I could.”

Relationships

All 18 alumni voiced they were successful because a staff member took the time to listen, mentor, counsel, or as Julie put it, ‘staff member just told you the truth about yourself whether you liked it or not; I like hearing the truth, I hear enough lies...’ The Alternative Center was a school that welcomed them. It was not the environment they heard was ‘a terrible place only for bad kids,’ and they were excited to let others know it was a safe place to be yourself and change negative behaviors.

Diversity of Programs

Alumni indicated that various on-going programs along with their main program, allowed them to be successful. Using LEAPs for after-school tutoring and Credit Recovery classes during the school day helped them meet their academic goals and keep them on track for graduation. It was also helpful that teachers associated with these programs were patient and understanding to their plight. Those who attended the GOT program were given a web-based curriculum that allowed them to work at their own pace and seek help when needed. GOT, GED, and AHS students shared the same classroom; one GED student noted she felt comfortable enough to ask some of the GOT students for help if she got stuck on a math problem.

...sometimes I would get stuck in my math workbook and (GOT student) would sit with me until I was done with the problem. You know he didn't have to do that. Math has always been hard for me and that GED math went all the way to Geometry. If it wasn't for the teachers and (GOT student), I don't know if I would have passed my GED.

The two alumni participating in the AHS agreed that without this program they would not have graduated with their high school cohort. Staying on the main campus was not an option because they knew they could not complete their credits to graduate within the given school year; they had to enter the Alternative Center to get their credits completed. Without the program at the AC, their only options would have been a state diploma or a GED. Of the two alumni, one is a manager of a gas station and the other is working and going to college. They explained their lives were complicated during high school and that the center gave them what they needed and positively contributed to who they are today. As an older group and

most now in college or the workforce most alumni mentioned they wish they would have done better in high school but they would not trade their experience at the AC. Two of the alumni talked about the people who had tried to help them as early as elementary school, but it did not mean anything then.

Several of the alumni wished they could have continued with their classes at the Career and Technical building (CTE) due to the success they were having in those classes. Julie recalled how she loved going to cosmetology class and that was the only class she did not skip. When she was enrolled in the alternative center she could no longer attend class at the CTE building but (staff member) helped her after school with her cosmetology hours and after graduating she went on to Cosmetology school.

Personal Growth

Goal setting both with initial interviews and exiting interviews were important to the success of these alumni. By making immediate goals for their success while attending the AC they were empowered to be successful in their academic classes. They followed their personal plans and through meeting their goals they graduated on time or returned to the main campus. Transition goals were written at the time of departure from the AC for postsecondary school, work-force, or returning to the main campus. Those students leaving the AC were connected with a graduation coach who helped them in the transition process. Of the 18 student alumni, 11 have graduated from high school to date and 4 will graduate with this year's senior cohort. One alumnus, Kevin, stated, "He didn't understand at first why he had to set goals for academics when he first came and thought it was dumb but as he got ready to graduate and a (staff member) worked on his transition goals, goal setting began to make sense." Several of the alumni stated they still set goals whether for school or work. Although many of the alumni

reported they never considered themselves labeled as at-risk, they also never thought they would graduate from high school; education was important but their family did not know how to help them be successful in school. It was noted that when alumni were successful in any academic area, 100% of the time they listed a staff member as helping them succeed.

Alumni with learning disabilities saw success through their IEPs. Of the two participants who followed an IEP plan, one will graduate with 28 credits in May 2013, and the other earned 23 credits plus passed his End of Course exams (EOC), which allowed him to graduate with a regular high school diploma.

Those alumni who were served in the AfterSchool 1-5 and ISS were not at the center by choice but of the four students interviewed: one returned to the ALC; two were served through GOT; and one remained on the main campus. Those alumni attending the AfterSchool program for violating school policy were thankful to be able to continue their education and not be suspended from school for the remainder of the year. Each stated the process was fair but wished they were not caught.

Most of the alumni stated incidences of personal (i.e., life style, values, home life) and physical (i.e., piercings, visible tattoos, stature) differences between themselves and their peers at the main campus, although not directly discussed, affected their behavior before they came to the AC. This attitude of difference is best read in a written document from the Workforce Education Council.

Workforce Education Council

Through the HEROE's grant several students from Science Hill High School were invited to speak at The Workforce Education Council. This council promoted linkage between the Chamber of Commerce, education (P-12, higher education, technical education), social

service, faith-based organizations committed to education, and the business community for the purpose of developing a work force ready population. The council was seeking input from students regarding their immediate needs relative to their college, career, and workforce readiness. There were three groups that served as focus group participants: a high achieving group (group 1), a middle group (group 2), and a group from the AC (group 3).

None of the students who served in Group 3 (AC) were part of the alumni interviews but their answers to some of the questions asked were echoed in the interviews by the alumni participants. (Appendix L).

Question 1: What are some of your after-school activities?

- After school I walk around town and hang out with my friends. I study if needed, finish up homework, and try to prep for the next day.
- Go to LEAPs, hang out at the Mall, and finish credit recovery
- Use to be on the swim team, work most days, run, hanging out with friends.
- I go to Carver Rec center every day to play basketball, be a role model for the little kids down there, and work out to stay in shape.
- Playing basketball, hanging out with friends, and playing Call of Duty with my dad

Question 2: What are your plans for the summer?

- Focus on being stress free, prepare for ninth grade, begin a work opportunity in August, and volunteer at the animal shelter.
- I have a summer job.
- Combination of work and a Medical Mission Trip in Mexico
- Work in a job to gain money and a credit for high school.
- Get a job

- Summer job to have money to go toward college, play basketball, and hang out with my friends.

Question 3: What is your area of focus or major in high school?

- Art, to get better grades to raise up my GPA so that I can do well on the ACT and get scholarships for college.
- Concentrate on high grade on the ACT to get HOPE scholarship and go to college
- I came to the AC because I had a very bad boyfriend experience which ended in a restraining order. This kept me from attending my IB classes on a regular basis. I am fixing my credits, bettering my GPA for IB and AP classes, since there were none offered at the AC, so that I can focus on my medical career.
- GPA is so important. I am going to focus on getting good grades, get better in math, and end this year better than it started.

Question 4: How did you decide on the classes you chose?

- I chose my classes on my own, since my mom died in 08, my dad is really busy and he trusts me to choose what is right, and since I know what I want to do, now- I will focus on GPA and Art class. Ms. Cooper and Ms. Parlett have been helping me decide what future classes to take to better prepare me for college.
- I have been on my own since I was 11 so I trusted my teachers to help me choose. When I came to the AC I was given more opportunity to see the choices that I had for my future. People have cared about what I did and therefore I was very successful.
- My parents did not have time to bother with me, so I work with Ms. Parlett and Mr. Bailey for dual enrollment and AP courses to make sure my credits are matched to my original plan.

- I messed up my original ninth grade plan, but Mr. Bailey and Ms. Cooper helped put me back on the technical path so that I can be in classes to work more with my hands and not sit in a desk all day. I think it's sad that the AC does not have access to the classes at the Vo-Tech building because I believe I would be successful with those.
- Mr. Bailey helped me to transition my academics from average then transition to more difficult classes.

Question 5: How do you believe we can get more parents and guardians engaged in students' academic success?

- My dad lives in Montana and I live with my mom and step-dad. No one is involved and they never check PowerSchool.
- My dad gives me help when I need it and checks up on me often. My mom lives across town and does not have time.
- Neither of my parents are involved because neither of them have faith that I can achieve my goals. My dad thinks I can't do anything and my mom has no time.
- I have no parents. My mom left when I was 11 and has been in and out of jail ever since. I pretty much raised myself; living house to house with whoever would let me crash. When I came to the AC Ms. Cooper and Ms. Decker took personal interest in making sure I knew that I could be successful.
- My mom is in jail, so it is just me and my dad. My dad trusts me, but since it is the two of us, he does not have a lot of time to be overly involved. He does support me and wants me to do well. Ms. Jackson notices I'm good in math, so she and Ms. Cooper have been working to send me in the right direction.

- My mom is dead and I live with my dad. He does his best. It is awesome to be in a school where counselors and teachers care enough about you to kind of take up the slack.

Question 6: What are your plans after high school?

- Five of the students want to go to a 4-year college, one wanted to do to attend a technical school or serve in the military

Question 7: What factors are influencing your plans?

- My parents do not believe that I can, but I want to prove them wrong. I believe that I can.
- My college education is priceless. Medical school is the only way that I can make it to be a cardio surgeon.
- None of my family ever went to college, my mom dropped out, so I would like to go to school so my family can be proud...And I would like a good paying job.
- I want to have a sense of education. I don't want to walk around here on these streets feeling dumb and I want knowledge...and for my dad.
- Parents did not go to college, so I want to prove to my family that I can do it. I know that if I put forth the effort, I can make it as a photographer. I have faith in myself.
- I would like to join the military and be a mechanic who works on planes. I can go to tech school until I'm 19, join the military and retire at 39. I can then have money for college so that I can start another career or my own business if I want to.

Question 8: What would you like for representatives from the Workforce Education

Council to know about your high school experience?

- That not all kids at the AC are bad kids.

- We should not be left out.
- We all need a second or third chance.

Question 9: What information or events would you like for the Workforce Education Council to provide for you?

- We want them to know we matter and to know when they ask us our opinions someone will hear it and do something about it.

These students are successful today because someone took the time to care about them and their educational needs.

Implications for Practice

Through this research, personal experiences, and the examination of thoughtful, reflective, and honest responses shared by alumni who agreed to participate in this study, the researcher was able to draw specific conclusions. These conclusions may aid Johnson City Schools in decision making about future alternative programs. It was gratifying to hear about the positive efforts the AC and Johnson City Schools had provided for these alumni. Based on the dialogue provided through these interviews, the following need to be considered in future planning:

- Alumni stated that goal setting was meaningful to them. They thought it was useful to be a part of the decision-making process in their education.
- Alumni indicated it was important that staff members working in an alternative setting need to continue being mentors, teachers, parents, and care-givers to ensure these students feel they are important, while attending the Alternative Center.

- Alumni want adults to know they matter. Alumni stated that being a part of the workforce, being a good parent, and going to college or trade school were areas in which they could be good citizens.
- Alumni talked of sharing their experiences at the AC with those on the main campus who might be recommended for AC placement.
- Staff at the AC may want to continue participating in professional development to meet the needs of their diverse population. Alumni stated the importance for SHHS administration to understand each student is different and one program does not fit everyone.
- CTE administration and AC administration may want to consider allowing those students attending CTE classes to remain in those CTE classes after placement at the AC. This would only be available to the students if they were passing their CTE class at the time of placement to the AC. This would allow students to remain on the main campus for their CTE classes
- Administration may want to continue allowing some students the choice of attending the AC. All alumni who were given this choice stated it was a positive move for them.
- The staff at the AC may want to consider continuing to be a part of the community it serves and continue with programs that include families.

Implications for Further Research

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher would suggest that the following questions need closer examination:

1. Can at-risk students attending an alternative center be successful remaining in their Career Technical class without the supervision of the alternative staff?

2. How can alternative centers be seen as a positive choice?
3. Replication of this study with another alternative center that has similar components to see if there will be similar findings in the success of students academically.
4. Comparative study of at-risk students that remain on their main campus as opposed to those attending an alternative center: Are at-risk students any more at-risk of academic failure if they attend an alternative center than if they stay on their main campus?

Summary

The best teacher is not necessarily the one who possesses the most knowledge, but the one who most effectively enables his students to believe in their ability to learn (Norman Cousins, 2001).

This is best exemplified by an alumnus who was served through the Adult High School program,

“...LRP helped me experience so many things I would not have been able to do. My attitude about my grades and my life started changing. I went from saying I can’t too I can. (Staff member) pushed me to become a role model for others; she trusted me and helped me so much. The staff at the AC helped me graduate high school and go to college. The AC was the best thing that ever happened to me.”

Chapter 5 included an introduction, the statement of the problem, discussion and conclusions drawn from findings, implications for practice, implications for further research, and the chapter summary. In addition, this chapter addressed the communication from the Workforce Educational Council that showed many more students who are in attendance at the alternative center are successful, not just those who were interviewed for this study.

The discussion and conclusion that came from findings were developed from the interview questions. The alumni elaborated on all matters that were important to their success, not only while at the AC, but after as well. Staff members were repeatedly mentioned in a positive manner as to the level of care and time they invested in the alumni.

The alumni indicated that the Alternative Center helped them transition to work and school depending on their needs or interest after high school. Alumni reported that success was found in their Career and Technical classes (CTE) and stated that future students be allowed to remain in those classes while attending the AC.

Recommendations included that administrators may want to: (a) encourage collaboration with peers on the main campus with those at the AC, (b) may want to continue to be a part of the community they serve, and (c) provide professional development that enhances the relationships with students and allow choice of placement to the AC. Additionally, the administration of the AC and the CTE may be encouraged to work together to see how these at-risk students can be shared. Most importantly administration may want to continue using all resources in the counseling field to meet the needs of these students.

Further research on academic success for at-risk students attending an alternative center should be accomplished. Findings from this study may encourage high schools to dispel the notion that only certain high school programs are appropriate for a young person to succeed in life and that young people can make sound decisions about their schooling. When at-risk youth are given the right tools for success, they can become productive citizens of society.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Interview Guide

1. Presently, are you working and/or going to school? (Please tell me where.)
2. What year did you graduate from SHHS and with what type of diploma?
Regular/GOT/GED
3. Were there certain staff (people) who helped you be successful, while at the AC?
4. Where was your previous school before coming to the Alternative Center?
5. What behavior(s) placed you at the AC? Grades/Discipline/Choice
6. How long were you at the AC and were you given a time frame for change?
7. If you were there by choice, why did you choose to stay?
8. How were your educational and social experiences while attending the AC? Were you successful academically? Did you make strides in appropriate social interactions?
9. At this time in your life, how do you perceive your education at the AC? Teachers? Peers? Classified Staff?
10. What did you learn in respect to your interest and/or needs? (What did you learn about yourself?)
11. Do you think the AC met and/or supported your needs? Why or why not?
12. What do you think of the academic curriculum at the AC? Did it prepare you to return to the main campus of the next level of your academic/work life?
13. What are your goals after high school? If you have graduated, what are your future goals?

14. Did the alternative center help you to pursue your goals? Depending on your answer of YES or NO, explain, please.

Appendix B

Adaption: National Tennessee Alternative Education Association

January 30, 2009

<http://the-naea.org>

EXEMPLARY PRACTICES IN ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

EXEMPLARY PRACTICES 1.0: MISSION AND PURPOSE

An exemplary alternative education program develops a guiding mission and purpose that drives the overall operation of the program. All stakeholders (i.e., administrators, community representatives, parents/guardians, staff and students) share in developing, implementing, directing and maintaining the program's mission and purpose. The mission and purpose of the program include the identification of the target student population and promote the success of all students. Additionally, the mission and purpose embody high expectations for academic achievement, along with nurturing of positive social interactions between staff and students.

Indicators of Quality Programming:

- 1.1 The program mission clearly articulates the purpose, goals, and expectations of the program to student, parents/guardians, program staff, and the community at large.
- 1.2 The mission and purpose are documented, published and visible to student, parents/guardians, program staff, and the community.
- 1.3 All stake holders are involved in developing the mission, purpose, goals, and expected outcomes for the program.
- 1.4 The program mission includes the identification of the student population for whom the alternative education program is designed to serve.
- 1.5 The mission and purpose of the program have a unifying theme that evokes high levels of student and other stakeholder support.
- 1.6 The driving mission and purpose of the alternative school is consistent with the

district's goals while aligning with specific state standard(s).

1.7 Student success is central to the mission and purpose of the program, which includes learning across academic areas, behavioral management, life skills, and the vocational domains.

1.8 The mission and purpose of the program promotes the personal safety, security, and emotional and physical well-being of all students in the program.

1.9 The mission and purpose is communicated through the use of symbols, ceremonies, stories, and similar activities.

1.10 Needed resources are sought and obtained to support the implementation of the mission and purpose.

1.11 Barriers to achieving the mission and purpose of the program are identified, clarified, and addressed.

1.12 The mission and purpose shape the educational plans and activities undertaken by the alternative program.

1.13 The mission and purpose are regularly monitored, evaluated, and revised as needed.

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE 2.0: LEADERSHIP

An exemplary alternative education program employs passionate, innovative, competent, and experienced leadership that has administrative and bureaucratic autonomy, as well as operational flexibility. The administrators, teachers, and staff must be committed to full implementation of the program's mission and core values. On-site leadership utilizes and engages in a collaborative approach that ensures shared decision-making, high expectations for the program, and continuous monitoring of program quality. The superintendent or designated district administrator sustains the independence of the program and allocates sufficient resources (i.e., financial or other necessary resources) to protect the integrity of the program while supporting overall program quality.

Indicators of Quality Programming:

2.1 The district provides sufficient oversight to ensure quality programming while protecting the autonomy of the alternative education program's operation.

2.2 The district provides adequate financial support and other needed resources for implementation of quality alternative education services (i.e., teaching and non-teaching staff, equipment, technology, supplies, curriculum, etc.).

2.3 Program administrators are experienced and competent, enabling them to be engaged in all aspects of the program's operation and management.

2.4 The shared vision of the alternative education program is communicated by the leadership through the program's mission and purpose.

2.5 Where appropriate, leadership engages stakeholders in a collaborative process when making program decisions (i.e., Advisory Board and other opportunities that promote stakeholder participation in the decision-making process).

2.6 Program leadership ensures that decisions regarding program operation align with state legislation and local policies and procedures.

2.7 Program leadership develops and operates under a current policies and procedures manual that is consistent with the mission and purpose of the program, approved by the local board of education, and articulated to all stakeholders in the form of standard operating procedures (SOPs). Elements of the manual should address the following:

- Clearly defined roles and responsibilities for all teaching and nonteaching staff are written and fully explained to program staff.

- Referral, screening, and intake procedures are outlined and promote timely, user-friendly access to program services for students.

- Procedures to collect, share, and store individual student records are developed for participants that ensure student confidentiality.

- Processes are established that coordinate effective placements, assess student needs to match appropriate program services and interventions, and formalize the transition of students from one learning environment to the next.

- Reliable assessments are identified and inform procedures for developing an individualized student learner plan (ISLP) that addresses the academic, behavioral, life skill, service coordination, transitional and vocational needs of the participant.

- Programs have established a thorough written code of conduct and a comprehensive student discipline action plan that outlines rules and behavioral expectations, appropriate interventions, consequences of misbehavior, and celebrates proper student behavior (i.e., level system or similar behavior support mechanisms).

- Program policies encourage the active engagement of parents/guardians as equal partners in the planning, implementation, and development of the alternative education program.

- Policies for developing collaborative partnerships with public and private agencies are established and formalized by program leadership (i.e., memoranda of understanding or MOUs) and outline the roles and responsibilities of partnered social service organizations (i.e., mental health organizations, the juvenile justice system, public health departments, local and state advocacy agencies, child welfare agencies, family support groups, judicial/legal agencies, youth service agencies, and research/evaluation institutions).
- A formal crisis plan is developed and managed by program leadership to include strategies that sustain a safe, well-maintained, caring, and orderly program environment that is in compliance with state and local policies, standards, procedures, and legislation.
- Process and outcome evaluation monitors are in place that determine student and program progress. This includes the identification of areas of weakness while ensuring that a plan of action exists when and where remedy is necessary.
- Procedures to collect, store, and share program data ensure that students, parents/guardians, and staff are protected and identities are preserved.

2.8 Program leadership recruits, hires and trains qualified teachers and non-teaching staff.

2.9 Program administrators ensure low student to teacher ratios exist, that ratios reflect the needs of the student population, and that the student to teacher ratio never exceeds 12 to 1.

2.10 Leadership promotes collaboration among the school of origin, community, and home, thereby fostering an effective learning environment for the student.

2.11 Administration ensures that reliable data and student performance measures guide the instructional practices of the program.

2.12 Program leaders work to offer transportation, food services and appropriate health services to students.

2.13 Consistent and constructive performance evaluations of administrative, teaching, and non-teaching staff are conducted by leadership in a timely manner.

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE 3.0: CLIMATE AND CULTURE

An exemplary alternative education program maintains a safe, caring, and orderly climate and culture that promotes collegial relationships among students, parents/guardians, and program staff. The program culture and climate are characterized by a positive rather than punitive atmosphere for behavioral management and student discipline. Program staff

establishes clear expectations for learning and student conduct. The staff actively models and rewards appropriate student behavior. The program uses proven practices such as positive behavior support to organize student support systems. The alternative program actively promotes connections among students and between program staff that is positive and encourages academic, behavioral, and social success.

Indicators of Quality Programming:

3.1 Alternative education services are efficiently organized into effective delivery systems whether the entity is an alternative school, program, or classroom.

3.2 The program is housed in a safe, well maintained, aesthetically pleasing, and physically accessible environment that supports optimal student learning.

3.3 Rules and behavioral expectations are clearly written (i.e., code of conduct and comprehensive student discipline action plan), understood and accepted by staff, students, and parents/guardians. Both mechanisms ensure that students are actively taught, rewarded, recognized and monitored which guide and manage student behavior, evaluate progress, and direct the learner's experience in the alternative education program.

3.4 The program has a designated team of representatives (i.e., administrative, teaching and non-teaching staff, parents/guardians, and, if possible, student representatives) that strategically plan, monitor, and implement prevention and intervention strategies that reflect the culture and climate of the alternative education program.

3.5 The program actively promotes student engagement and affords students with the opportunity to have a role in shaping the learning environment to facilitate feelings of connectedness.

3.6 The alternative education program communicates high expectations for teacher performance, which in turn results in improved student academics and behavior with opportunities to celebrate individual successes on a regular basis.

3.7 Student and staff evaluation data and feedback regarding the program are presented at staff meetings and used to make appropriate programming changes.

3.8 The program demonstrates an understanding and sensitivity to academic, behavioral, cultural, developmental, gender, and societal needs of students, parents/guardians and the community.

3.9 Short and long-term program goals address the needs of the students, staff, parents/guardians, and the program.

3.10 Program objectives are measurable and built upon student academic achievement, student behavior, and social improvement and are the basis of program accountability, evaluation, and improvement.

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE 4.0: STAFFING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

An exemplary alternative education program is staffed with effective, innovative, and qualified individuals trained in current research based teaching methods that facilitate active learning. Written professional development plans exist that identify staff training needs, match needs to relevant training, emphasize quality implementation of research based and best practices, and establish performance evaluations aimed at improving program and student outcomes and overall program quality.

Indicators of Quality Programming:

4.1 The program employs enthusiastic, energetic, and innovative teachers who demonstrate multiple teaching styles

4.2 The staff understands and practices the concept of facilitative learning.

4.3 The diversity of the staff mirrors the diversity of the student body and the experience of the alternative education faculty mirrors the faculty experience of the school district.

4.4 A sufficient number of teaching and non-teaching staff are working in or assigned to the alternative education program.

4.5 Staff members create written professional development plans that facilitate personal and professional growth, identify the professional development needs of the individual, establish short and long term goals, and align professional development training to address the individual's overall plan.

4.6 Professional development reflects a good use of internal and external resources by the program.

4.7 The focus of professional development relates to positive student outcomes across academic, behavioral, life skill, service coordination, transitional and vocational domains and increases the likelihood of student success in present and future settings.

4.8 The program uses a variety of professional development approaches, including technology, to accomplish the goals of improving instruction and increasing student achievement.

4.9 Professional development opportunities include information related to effectively collaborating with community support services and how to connect with students and families.

4.10 The program strategically increases staff capacity through training, modeling and ensuring the use of research based strategies that align with the needs of the program population.

4.11 Sufficient resources, such as time, substitutes, and incentives allow all staff to participate in workshops, conferences, and seminars.

4.12 Administration ensures that ongoing professional development is geared towards the adult learner, promotes lifelong learning, helps build the staff's capacity through the use of research based strategies and best practices, and ensures that learned techniques are implemented.

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE 5.0: CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

An exemplary alternative education program maintains high academic expectations for students across academic, behavioral, life skill, service coordination, transitional and vocational domains. Furthermore, the program integrates a creative and transitional and vocational domains. Furthermore, the program integrates a creative and engaging curricula and instructional methods that are relevant to the individual student's needs. Additionally, the program uses an integrated, well-organized framework of research based curricula and teaching practices designed to address the "whole" student while continuing to meet or exceed federal and state standards.

Indicators of Quality Programming:

5.1 The alternative education program ensures that all students have access to the academic core curriculum.

5.2 Teachers are highly qualified in the content area based on individual state standards.

5.3 Teachers are competent in research based teaching techniques and behavior management strategies appropriate for the target student population.

5.4 The program operates in full compliance with laws governing students with special needs.

5.5 Curricular options reflect, but are not limited to, those offered in the traditional educational setting.

5.6 Teaching across all curricula is employed by program staff.

5.7 The alternative education program individualizes the student's curriculum and instruction utilizing an individualized student learner plan (ISLP). The plan engages and challenges the student while also addressing the academic, behavioral, life skill, service coordination, transitional and vocational needs of the participant. The learner plan and processes include the following:

- A Student Support Team (SST) is established and involved in forming and monitoring the student's progress on the learner plan while further providing the reinforcement necessary for achievement.

- Parents/guardians are on the SST and involved in drafting, developing, and implementing the student's ISLP to include processes for communicating the learner's progress to the parents/guardians.
- Plans are developed based on the student's differentiated (remedial or accelerated) needs.
- Processes for the learner plan include reviewing current credit attainment and ensuring that the student is making adequate progress toward graduation.
- Four areas are embedded into the learner plan that engages the student in planning for the following: community participation, employment, independent living and post-secondary education.
- Teachers utilize individual student data in making instructional decisions and developing the learner plan.
- Plans incorporate goals for changing negative behavior patterns which may have impeded the student's progress and success (e.g., absences, suspension and/or expulsion, tardiness, etc.).
- The learner plan addresses required services to meet the educational needs of students with disabilities.
- Formal and informal assessments document students' progress toward completion of the ISLP and are used to determine programming changes for the student.
- The plan allows the student to monitor his or her own learning and progress while promoting lifelong learning.

5.8 Teachers identify and provide appropriate instruction designed to close gaps in student learning.

5.9 A variety of instructional strategies are employed to accommodate for students with different backgrounds, individual learning styles (e.g. visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learners), and multiple intelligences.

5.10 Students have opportunities to learn and/or participate in non-core content areas to include, but not limited to, the following: adventure learning, art, character education, health, music, physical activities/education, recreation, and vocational education.

5.11 Programs promote community involvement using service learning as a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction, teaches civic responsibility, and aims to strengthen the learner's role in his or her

community. Furthermore, the community involvement component includes student reflection as a part of the learner's experience.

5.12 Instruction integrates life skills (e.g., career preparation, citizenship, conflict resolution, decision making skills, problem solving, public speaking, self-management, social skills, teamwork, time management, work-based learning, etc.) into the curricula and affords the student with opportunities to put the acquired skills into action.

5.13 Secondary programs provide opportunities for career exploration (e.g., job shadowing and training, mentorships, work-based learning, career fairs, etc.) related to the student's career interests and postsecondary goals.

5.14 Group delivery systems are used to build social relationships by supporting collaboration and teamwork.

5.15 The alternative education program uses researched based dropout prevention strategies for those learners at risk of dropping out of school.

5.16 Technology is embedded in the curricular delivery process and distance learning is utilized when appropriate.

5.17 The curriculum is supported by access to a balance of up-to-date, well-maintained collection of textbooks, library media, technology, software, and other instructional supplies and materials.

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE 6.0: STUDENT ASSESSMENT

An exemplary alternative education program includes screening, progress monitoring, diagnostic and outcome-based measurements and procedures to improve short and long term results at the student level. Student assessments are used to measure achievement and identify specific learner needs. The program exercises a research based framework that values use of reliable measures to monitor student progress and adjust program services accordingly.

Indicators of Quality Programming:

6.1 Program administrators enforce data-driven accountability to measure achievement and identify individual learner needs.

6.2 The purpose of assessments is clearly defined and communicated to students, staff and parents/guardians.

6.3 Data collection procedures are clearly outlined to ensure reliable and valid student assessment results.

6.4 Teachers use formative and summative assessment tools that are frequent, rigorous, and align with curriculum and instruction to track student performance and progress.

6.5 The program utilizes multiple assessments that continually monitor the academic, behavioral, life skill, service coordination, transitional and vocational needs of the student while using those assessments to make individual programming decisions for the learner.

6.6 Frequent, reliable and rigorous measures using both quantitative and qualitative procedures are used to identify student progress as prescribed by the district and state.

6.7 Assessments are directly linked to choosing curriculum and instructional methods while accommodating a variety of learning styles and multiple intelligences.

6.8 Results of assessments are used to inform students and parents/guardians of learner progress, guide curriculum and instruction, and monitor the individualized student learner plan (ISLP).

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE 7.0: TRANSITIONAL PLANNING AND SUPPORT

An exemplary alternative education program has clear criteria and procedures for transitioning students from the traditional education setting to the alternative education setting, from the alternative program to the student's next education or workforce setting while ensuring timely access to community agencies and support services. This process calls for trained transitional personnel experienced in this particular area. Furthermore, the transitional process ensures that the alternative placement is the most appropriate placement for student's specific academic, behavioral, life skill, service coordination, transitional and vocational needs.

Indicators of Quality Programming:

7.1 The alternative education program has a Screening Committee to ensure that the alternative placement is most appropriate for the student's specific academic, behavioral, life skill, service coordination, transitional and vocational needs (individual student, individual placement decision).

7.2 The program has a formal transition process for students from pre-entry through post exit which includes the following elements: an orientation which consists of rapport building, assessment of the student, IEP review, information and record sharing regarding the student, short and long-term goal setting, development of an individualized student learner plan (ISLP), and other mechanisms designed to orient the student to the alternative education setting.

7.3 Transition planning and the ISLP afford students the opportunity to maintain and accelerate their current progress toward graduation.

7.4 A Student Support Team (SST) is established that consists of educators from the school of origin, educators from the alternative education program, the student, the parents/guardians and other trained transitional personnel. The team is directly

involved in all aspects of the transitional process including assessment, planning, and implementation of the student's transitional plan and ISLP.

7.5 Transition planning includes referral and timely access to community agencies and support services such as mental health, public health, family support, housing, physical fitness activities, and other youth services.

7.6 When appropriate, students in the alternative education program are provided with opportunities to develop and maintain supportive links to the school of origin.

7.7 Student needs (i.e., academic, behavioral, life skill, service coordination, transitional and vocational needs) are addressed before, during, and after the student's transition.

7.8 Prior to a student's entrance and exit from the alternative education program, transition services are coordinated by the SST with all appropriate entities to ensure successful entry into the student's next educational setting or into the workforce.

7.9 Within the bounds of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), information sharing (availability of pertinent records) takes place between the school of origin, the alternative education program, and other social service organizations. Copies of the following items are forwarded to the alternative education program: attendance records, birth certificate, current health treatments and medications needed during the school day, discipline records, immunization records, report cards, school enrollment letter, social security card, special education file and IEP (if applicable), state assessment test scores, transcripts and other appropriate information on the student.

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE 8.0: PARENT/GUARDIAN INVOLVEMENT

An exemplary alternative education program actively involves parents/guardians beyond parent/guardian-teacher meetings. The alternative program emphasizes a non-judgmental, solution-focused approach that incorporates parents/guardians as respected partners throughout the student's length of stay in the program. Furthermore, the program works with parents/guardians to provide proper training and support to advance the learning and personal success of each student in the program.

Indicators of Quality Programming

8.1 Parental/guardian involvement is welcomed and actively recruited by the alternative education program.

8.2 Effective communication and interaction takes places between parents/guardians and school staff to include being continually notified of students progress (regular progress reports or as needed).

8.3 Parents/guardians are recognized as equal partners and involved in the decision-making process for the student and the program, including the following: to serve on the Student Support Team (SST), to help develop the individualized student learner

plan (ISLP), to help guide and direct the mission and purpose of the program via an Advisory Council, and to help evaluate the overall effectiveness of the alternative program.

8.4 Parents/guardians participate in solution-focused problem-solving for academic, behavioral, life skill, service coordination, transitional and vocational issues involving students.

8.5 Consultation regarding strategies to support the learning and personal success of students is made readily available to all parents/guardians.

8.6 Parents/guardians have access to parent education programs sponsored by the alternative education program or other community social service organizations.

8.7 Privacy is afforded to parents/guardians when engaging them as equal partners in the alternative program.

8.8 Procedures are in place to address all parent/guardian grievances in a timely fashion while respecting and considering the dispositions of parents/guardians.

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE 9.0: COLLABORATION

An exemplary alternative education program establishes authentic partnerships with community resources based on trust, open communication, clearly defined goals, and shared responsibility which links the program, home, and community. Collaborative partnerships promote opportunities for service learning, life skills, and career exploration for all students. Community representatives also have a role in the planning, resource development, and the decision-making process for the alternative program.

Indicators of Quality Programming

9.1 Authentic partnerships with community resources are secured and established to help the alternative education program solve problems and achieve goals as outlined in the program's mission and purpose.

9.2 Partnerships are designed to support and enrich the program by including the community as a resource for education, advocacy and volunteerism.

9.3 Collaborations with community partners are based on trust, open communication, clearly defined goals, and shared responsibility which links the program, home, and community.

9.4 A comprehensive program of community relations is established by the alternative education program.

9.5 Partnerships exist with community service organizations, cultural groups, faith-based representatives and agencies, and business and industry.

9.6 Relationships are established that support the physical and mental health of students enrolled in the program.

9.7 There is a strong collaboration with law enforcement, the juvenile justice system, and juvenile treatment centers. When appropriate, these partnerships facilitate an integrated case management strategy and wraparound services for students and parents/guardians.

9.8 Program planning incorporates collaboration with community agencies and other support services that help in providing a comprehensive student assistance program which allows for referrals to community agencies when appropriate.

9.9 As needed, collaborative partnerships with public and private agencies are established, formalized (i.e., memoranda of understanding or MOUs), and outline the roles and responsibilities of partner social service organizations (i.e., mental health, juvenile justice, public health, advocacy agencies, child welfare, family support, judicial/legal, youth service agencies, and research/evaluation institutions).

9.10 Community representatives are drawn upon as resources during the planning phase of the individualized student learner plan (ISLP) that involves student planning for the following: community participation, employment, independent living and postsecondary education.

9.11 Community partners are utilized when integrating service learning, life skills, and career exploration into the alternative education program.

9.12 Community representatives serve on the Advisory Board and assist in planning, resource development, and decision-making for the alternative program.

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9.10 Community representatives are drawn upon as resources during the planning phase of the individualized student learner plan (ISLP) that involves student planning for the following: community participation, employment, independent living and postsecondary education.

9.11 Community partners are utilized when integrating service learning, life skills, and career exploration into the alternative education program.

9.12 Community representatives serve on the Advisory Board and assist in planning, resource development, and decision-making for the alternative program.

EXEMPLARY PRACTICE 10.0: PROGRAM EVALUATION

An exemplary alternative education program systematically conducts program

evaluations for continuous program improvement. Data triangulation is employed with three different sources of data collected for analysis. Data collection includes the following items: program implementation ratings, student outcome data, and student, parent/guardian, and staff surveys. All sources of data are gathered and used to assess quality, provide a course for improvement, and direct future activities of the program. The guidelines presented herewith titled *Exemplary Practices in Alternative Education: Indicators of Quality Programming* as well as state specific standards would be an appropriate means in which to evaluate the program.

Indicators of Quality Programming

10.1 The alternative education program routinely conducts program evaluations to determine progress toward meeting the mission and purpose of the program, and plans for continuous program improvement.

10.2 Evaluation measures include a review of program implementation ratings (based on observable data). Ratings are given based on alignment with state specific standards and *Exemplary Practices in Alternative Education: Indicators of Quality Programming*.

10.3 Student outcome data for core content, non-core content areas, and non-academic areas are gathered as a means to evaluate the success of the alternative program. This includes collecting data on the following: absences, disciplinary data, credits earned, dropout statistics, grades, graduation rates, student achievement data, and recidivism rates (quasiexperimental design).

10.4 Student, parent/guardian, and community surveys are administered by the alternative education program to assess attitudes and opinions about discipline, program culture and climate, the learning environment, staff-student and staff-parent/guardian and program community relations, perceptions of program effectiveness, and success relative to students' academic, behavioral, and social progress.

10.5 Staff surveys are administered by the program to assess attitudes and opinions about discipline, program culture and climate, the learning environment, staff administrator/ staff-staff relations, perceptions of program effectiveness and success relative to students' academic, behavioral, and social progress.

10.6 Transition services are routinely evaluated to determine the program's effectiveness in transitioning the student to the next educational setting or into the workforce. Evaluation of transitional services includes follow-up visits with past students of the program.

10.7 Program evaluation results are used to develop or update a plan for continuous program improvement.

10.8 When available, an external evaluator is called upon to evaluate the program's effectiveness based on the principles set forth. The NAEA offers external evaluators as part of an effort to provide outreach. For more information visit our website at: <http://the-naea.org>.

Appendix C

Tennessee Alternative Program Standards

<http://tennessee.gov/sbe/alternativeschool.html>

Alternative Education Program Standards

The Background:

Tennessee Code Annotated Section 49-6-4017(f)(2) requires that “The State Board of Education shall provide a curriculum for alternative schools to ensure students receive specialized attention needed to effectively reform students to prevent them from being repeated offenders.”

The Alternative School Program Standards provide a framework for local school systems to use in developing curriculum to meet the needs of the students.

The standards define an alternative school environment with curricula, counseling, and resources to enable the student to master life skills that are critical to social, emotional, and academic growth and success.

The standards were developed by a broad-based committee that also develops the service learning curriculum standards.

Alternative Education Program Standards

The Alternative School Program Standards provide a framework for local school systems to use in developing curriculum to meet the needs of the students.

Mission

The mission of the Alternative School is to intervene positively with students who currently are not succeeding in a traditional school environment.

Students Served

For purposes of these guidelines, the student populations to be served in alternative school programs include:

- Students who have violated school policy in regards to zero tolerance;
- Students with multiple rule violations;
- Students who have been suspended for a period greater than 10 days;
- Other students whose assessments have demonstrated inability to make decisions, low capacity in resiliency, poor self-management skills, lack of self-respect and self esteem, poor interpersonal and social communication skills, inability to work with

others, poor negotiation skills, lack of responsibility for self and others, inability to work cooperatively , poor organizational skills and inability to follow directions.

Alternative Education Program Standards

The student who is in need of an alternative school environment will be provided with curricula, counseling, and resources to enable the student to master life skills that are critical to social, emotional, and academic growth and success.

Standard 1.0 The Alternative School program will establish collaborative partnerships in a system of shared responsibility for program support and for service delivery to enrolled students.

Program Expectations- The collaborative partnerships will:

- 1.01 Provide supportive administration including but not limited to the superintendent, the program director, and juvenile court judges.
- 1.02 Provide support services to address the student's environment outside the school, including community agencies such as family resource centers and mental health centers.
- 1.03 Provide community sponsored mentorship program.
- 1.04 Provide successful service learning in the community.
- 1.05 Develop a liaison with the school from which the student has been reassigned.
- 1.06 Involve and inform parents about techniques and strategies to work effectively with their children, using school resources and home visits.

Standard 2.0 The Alternative School program will integrate life skills development within the curriculum.

Program Expectations- the Students will:

- 2.01 Learn social skills and work readiness.
- 2.02 Have access to learning experiences outside the school building including real life experiences.
- 2.03 Engage in service learning.
- 2.04 Learn to set realistic short term and long term goals and learn what they must do to achieve their goals.

- 2.05 Understand how they learn using a learning styles inventory and develop an appreciation of their uniqueness.
- 2.06 Learn responsibility, conflict resolution, problem solving and decision-making.
- 2.07 Learn time management skills.
- 2.08 Learn citizenship.
- 2.09 Learn that people have to work to live.
- 2.10 Learn self-assessment and improvement.
- 2.11 Learn to accept constructive criticism and react positively.
- 2.12 Develop career awareness.

Standard 3.0 The Alternative School will have an effective system of positive student management.

Program Expectations- the Alternative School program will:

- 3.01 Provide positive reinforcement.
- 3.02 Define clear, explicit student expectations and discipline plan.
- 3.03 Provide consistent, firm, and fair behavior management.

Standard 4.0 The Alternative School will utilize innovative teaching strategies.

Program Expectations- the Instructional Format will:

- 4.01 Provide varied and innovative teaching strategies and provide for experiential learning.
- 4.02 Allow frequent student and teacher interaction.
- 4.03 Use structured multiple teaching styles matched with student learning styles.
- 4.04 Encourage teacher networking to enhance teaching strategies and available resources.
- 4.05 Include project based, experiential activities.
- 4.06 Consist primarily of non-lecture techniques.

4.07 Include instruction through innovative, useable technology and appropriate software.

4.08 Use interdisciplinary approaches.

4.09 Use appropriate equipment-video, audio, still camera.

4.10 Use varied multiple assessments.

Standard 5.0 The Alternative School will have curriculum developed in response to needs of the student population.

Program Expectations- the Curriculum will:

5.01 Include a balance between mandated curriculum and special needs of the student.

5.02 Focus on social skills development, such as skills defined in the course Success Skills Through Service Learning.

5.03 Incorporate student ideas in curriculum design.

5.04 Include the GED+2 program, as appropriate.

5.05 Include career awareness and exploration.

Standard 6.0 The Alternative School program will provide appropriate assessment and support services.

Program Expectations- the Alternative School Program will:

6.01 Conduct initial student assessment associated with social and emotional needs, such as the F.A.S.T. assessment.

6.02 Assess the student to determine if the student needs drug or alcohol abuse intervention.

6.03 Include mental health evaluation.

6.04 Include individual and group counseling.

6.05 Integrate conflict resolution into all aspects of the program.

6.06 Include tutoring and mentoring components.

Standard 7.0 The Alternative School program will provide an environment that is conducive to learning.

Program Expectations- the Alternative School Program will:

- 7.01 Have a safe, clean and quiet facility.
- 7.02 Be designed to facilitate teamwork.
- 7.03 Have adequate space for teacher-student ratio, 1:12 with teaching assistant.
- 7.04 Have open architectural design that supports youth empowerment.

Standard 8.0 The Alternative School program will be implemented by effective, qualified staff.

Program Expectations- the Alternative Staff will:

- 8.01 Include exited, energetic, competent teachers with multiple teaching styles.
- 8.02 Understand and practice the concept of facilitating learning.
- 8.03 Include appropriately trained aides and counselors.

Standard 9.0 The Alternative School will have an effective transition process for students entering and exiting the program.

Program Expectations- the Alternative School Program will:

- 9.01 Provide student orientation that consists of rapport building, assessment, goal setting, and development of individual student profile, designed to orient students to alternative school settings.
- 9.02 Develop specific, individualized long range plan for each student as the first and the last step of the transition process.
- 9.03 Establish a team, composed of representatives from the origin school, the alternative school, and the parents, to review referrals on transition readiness.

Appendix D

Tennessee Alternative Education Principles

Principles

In order to remove barriers to success for students, alternative school programs are based upon the following principles:

1. Educators understand that all students have potential.
2. Public investment in resources to address needs is cost effective in that it forestalls greater expenditures later.
3. Alternative education must be one component of a comprehensive discipline policy and procedures action plan, which includes classroom management training, graduated disciplinary alternatives, and other strategies. Alternative education must be integrated with community resources, including federal, state, and/or local service delivery agencies.
4. Alternative programs address the basic psychological needs of at-risk youth. Five central dimensions are crucial to an individual's well-being and ability to be resilient under stress:
 - Competence: the student has evidence of abilities, skills and strength.
 - Belonging: people accept the student in some important group.
 - Usefulness: the student's work is needed by others and it has meaning.
 - Potency: the student has power to make changes.
 - Optimism: the student receives positive feedback from others and is confident about solving problems in the future and understands that the future holds promise.
5. Alternative programs must offer an alternative learning environment in which students can learn: possibly at different rates of time, with different but successful strategies and tools, and with caring and dedicated staff of visionary teachers and leaders.
6. Professional development enables staff to approach behavior problems in a way that builds character and offers opportunities for restitution; use active listening skills and problem solving strategies; and use social skills that demonstrate positive character traits

Appendix E

Personal Communications: Three Yearly Goals

SCIENCE HILL HIGH SCHOOL 1st YEAR PLAN

January 17, 2005-End of School Year

1. School Climate
2. Vision
3. Personnel/Team
4. Positive Student Management System

1. School Climate
 - Clean building
 - Painting
 - Drop Ceiling
2. Vision/Mission
 - The mission of the alternative program is to intervene positively with students who currently are not succeeding in a traditional school environment.
3. Personnel/Team
 - Weekly team meeting
 - Energize staff
4. Positive Student Management System
 - Change system to reflect real world expectations...Behaviors that will be affect the world of work.
 - System needs to be positive...too many rules!

End of Year Report

- Downstairs has been painted
- Building has been cleaned
- Weekly meetings have been a success due to positive interaction of staff
- Breakfast and lunch provided for staff to try and get them to socialize and interact with one another in a positive light.
- Took out rules that held no benefit for student success
- Ended the JEA program

SHHS ALTERNATIVE CENTER 2ND YEAR PLAN
August 05-May 06

1. School Climate

- The building is now full and present custodian cannot take care of the building
- The upstairs needs to be painted and ceiling dropped
- Outside walkway needs to be redone (roof)
- 10/12 ISS return to campus

Completed:

1. Upstairs painted

Work in progress:

1. Present custodian talking about retiring
2. Gas/Manpower/Discipline/Time/Assignments

2. Vision

- Statement is the same, must understand the principals behind the statement:
 - a) Understand that all students have value and potential.
 - b) Public investment in resources to address needs is cost effective in that it forestalls greater expenditures later.
 - c) Alt. education must be one component of a comprehensive discipline policy and procedures action plan, which includes classroom management training, graduated disciplinary alternatives, and other strategies. Alt. education must be integrated with community resources, including federal, state, and/or local service delivery agencies.
 - d) Alt. program must address the basic psychological needs of the at-risk youth. These are crucial to an individual's well-being and ability to be resilient under stress: competence, belonging, usefulness, potency, optimism. (*Abraham Maslow, William Glasser and Richard Sagor, At-Risk Students: Reaching and Teaching Them (1993)*)
 - e) Must provide a learning environment in which students can learn.
 - f) Needs caring and dedicated staff of visionary teachers and leaders.
 - g) Professional development enables staff to approach behavior problem in a way that builds character and offers opportunities for restitution

3. Personnel/Team/Needs

- Need to work with staff individually to find weaknesses and strengths
- Continue to try and pull together as a team in the same direction
- Computers/overheads/ computer lab
- Hiring own staff who wants to be here
- Ratio of teachers to students 15 to 1 (State would like to access 12 to 1)
- Secretary position needs to be administrative (losing staff due to pay)

Completed:

1. All staff now has computer stations/overheads...etc.
2. Computer lab was bought through grant given by Dr. Ralston

Work in progress:

1. Working together as a team because staff does not share the same vision/some want to continue in punitive mode...there is a place, but not school wide.
2. Hiring staff that want to be here...2 year rotation/stands alone and hires own?
3. Continue to meet 1 on 1 with staff...seems some feel move was negative for them and want to
give that negativity back to the students
4. Have seen pay scale for sec./the alt. sec. position has no shared responsibility. Also, files court petitions and represents in court.

4. Positive Student Management System

Work in progress:

1. Teachers have to understand the more rules the harder to maintain. Negative brings about negative. Discussed rules and why they were put into place...cut list to half. This is an area which needs redesigning each year. I think the staff believes they cannot do without it...it has become a crutch for some; seem some have lost faith in their own ability to teach and maintain a class.

5. Staff Training

- Professional development that adheres to the problems of the at-risk student
- Teachers going to conferences

Work in progress:

1. Hard for us to do individual professional development because of being part of 8-12
2. Sending staff members to summer conferences and technology conference in October.
3. Summer conf. are no longer affective for this staff/has become family vacation

6. Staff Hiring

- Important that the Alt. center be implemented with effective, qualified staff that want to be there.

Work in progress:

1. Need to work with 8-12 administration to find excited, energetic, competent teachers with multiple teaching styles.
2. Teachers who understand and practice the concept of facilitating learning.

7. Cafeteria Needs

- Hot lunches
- Quantity/Quality

Work in progress:

1. Met with Laurie and have had A/B schedule for breakfast and lunch; gives students variety.

SHHS ALTERNATIVE CENTER 3RD YEAR PLAN
August 06-May 07

1. School Climate

- Building has been painted except cafeteria which was not on the list-gym stage area, BR in café., office BR's
- Upstairs ceiling has been dropped
- Outside walkway has a new roof-November
- Original toilet seats have been replaced-November
- New custodian hired- during the summer
- Phones have been added to each classroom and radios were put up, except Mr. Brown's; wire has not been run

2. Vision

- This is an on- going process because the make-up of students and staff change
- Virtual Classrooms

3. Academic/Programs

- Daggett-Conference/School wide
- Reading in the Content Area-SIP meeting
- Mapping-Professional Dev./
- Arrive Alive-Officer Goff/through Health/Wellness
- LEAPS-after school-started 2nd year; includes 8/9 campus
- Connect Up-transition program

4. Personnel/Team/Needs

- Continue to work with admin. to support me in the use of "drifters"
- 2 teachers have asked to go to content area conference-Wilson, Lancaster
- Build inter/intra personal skills
- Counselors will be more active with small groups and individual counseling
- Ratio of students to teachers
- Professional Development that deals with at-risk population
- Secretarial position needs to reflect the job
- Custodial position needs to reflect the job
- GED/OPT. HS – where are we going with this program
- 7/8 self contained class

5. Ladder of Success

- Management system has been changed to reflect the world of work=3 levels
- Positive behaviors are rewarded
- Ownership to school
- Transition of students

6. Cafeteria

- Quantity/Quality
- Interaction with food service

7. Ideal

- Virtual Classes
- After hours classes for those OSS or LT
- Creative with school time to meet the needs of the learners
- Allow graduation from the alt. for those who meet the criteria (to be determined)
- Vocational Components need to be strengthened...need more availability
- Staff rotation

8. Safety

- Cameras
- PA system
- Phone into Mr. Brown's room

Appendix F

Alternative Center Program Descriptions

(Personal Communication, January 2005 through June 2011)

Alternative Learning Program (ALP)

Approximately 200+ students in grades 7 through 12 are served during a school year, the total number of students actively enrolled in the Alternative Learning Program at any one time will vary. The average number of students enrolled at one time was one hundred, during the 2010/2011 school year. Students are referred to the ALP as administrators determine the need for increased supervision, small class academic instruction and structure. Eight teachers provide instruction solely for the ALP; an additional four teachers are shared staff with the main campus to teach one or more courses. Five full-time teaching assistants are used to support to all ALP certified teachers.

Self-Contained Special Needs

SHHS Alternative Center houses two self-contained special education classes, with two full-time certified special education instructors and two teacher assistants. One special needs instructor and one full-time teaching assistant maintain a self-contained classroom with an average of 18 (eighteen) students. Those students are also instructed by another full-time special needs instructor in a team-teaching program; in addition, that instructor provides one-on-one assistance to an average of four students who attend a partial day and to an average of four homebound students.

Self-Contained Seven and Eighth Grade

As of SY 07/08, the AC has added a self-contained classroom for the seventh and eighth grade population. One teacher will instruct them in all academic areas except math.

Math is taught by a highly qualified math teacher; an elective class will be chosen for these self-contained students.

AfterSchool 1-5 Program

As of SY 09/10, the AC has offered students another opportunity to continue their education. This program is designed for short term intervention to meet the needs of eighth through twelfth grade students. Placement in this program is by SHHS administration, due to the contractual basic of time the student is in the program.

School Resource Officer (SRO)

The Johnson City Police Department provides one full-time SRO for the Alternative Center whose primary function is to be proactive in assisting with the safety and security of the school's students and staff. On-campus crimes are investigated by the SRO. In addition, the SRO coordinates with outside agencies to enhance the students' welfare. Law related classes are taught upon request. All SROs assigned to Johnson City Schools are full-time, certified police officers with full arrest power. All SROs have been additionally trained by the National Organization of School Resource Officers (NASRO)

Counseling

Johnson City Schools contracts with Frontier Health to provide the Alternative Center with one full-time therapist. This service is available to all students and their families. The therapist primarily conducts individual counseling, with group therapy provided when a common need is identified.

Lottery Funded Education After-school Program (LEAP)

LEAP is an after-school program funded by the Tennessee State Lottery and the Youth Empowerment Initiative. Housed at the AC, the program provides tutoring, mentoring, and

enrichment activities for students in grades eighth through twelfth. Time is allotted for homework/review and tutoring daily. Enrichment is also a part of the student's afterschool experience. The goal is to provide a safe learning environment where students can explore their interests while working to improve academic skills.

GED+2 (General Education Development)

The GED program is for students who have a limited number of credits to complete and are within one semester of their eighteenth birthday. Prospective students are given the GED pre-test, and consideration for enrollment is based solely on test scores. While enrolled in the program, the student must maintain employment of at least ten hours a week. Students who pass the GED exam may participate in Science Hill High School graduation ceremonies and are awarded a GED diploma.

Graduate On Time (GOT)

GOT is for students who, for various reasons, are unable to attain the required twenty-eight credits needed to receive a Science Hill High School Diploma. However, these students can still meet the requirements set by the State of Tennessee (twenty-two credits). GOT makes it possible for students to earn a high school diploma with their peers.

GOT also provides additional skills needed for students entering the work force, or beginning post-secondary education.

Optional High School

The Optional High School program is for students who are at least seventeen years of age and eligible to graduate by the end of the school year. Students must complete twenty-eight credits, pass the End of Course Exams (EOC) in English 10, Biology, and Algebra 1,

and show evidence of forty hours of community service. OHS students receive a Science Hill High School Diploma and may participate in graduation ceremonies.

Community Involvement

Several AC staff serves on community boards and advisory communities. All AC staffs serve as liaisons with SHHS main campus administrators, teachers, and counselors as well as with community agencies, crisis intervention programs, youth serving agencies, and mental health agencies.

Employability Skills Coach (HEROES Grant)

This program connects with students attending the AC and main campus, while tailoring services to each youth's specific needs. Skills compiled in this program consist of academic achievement, occupational training, proper social behaviors, team building, conflict resolution, positive personal power, work ethic, interests inventory, etiquette and official procedure paperwork preparation. The coach for this position collaborates with the local businesses in Johnson City and the academic community to provide campus tours, meaningful job shadowing, mentoring, career day opportunities, current job market information, and employment/scholastic applications. The final goal of the program is to promote a productive, motivated and educated workforce which the entire community can profit.

Social Worker (HEROES Grant)

The Alternative Center provides a social worker to serve as the link between students' families and the school. The social worker also works closely with parents, teachers and community agencies to ensure students reach their personal and academic potential. In addition, the social worker assists the students with their transition from the main campus to the AC and vice versa.

Appendix G

Placement Letter

Science Hill High School
Alternative Learning Center
820 West Market St.
Johnson City, TN 37604
(423) 928-0380 Fax (423) 928-0557

Dr. John Boyd
Principal

Julia Decker
Assistant Principal

This letter is to inform you that your child is being placed at the Alternative Center for the beginning of the 2010-2011 school year. This placement is based on your child's failure to receive enough credits and/or behaviors that have caused him/her to be unsuccessful in the regular program.

With this placement comes the opportunity for your child to make positive changes in his/her academics and behavior. The Alternative Center offers smaller classes, full-time counselors, and a staff that is highly qualified to meet the needs of your child.

This placement will allow your child the opportunity to take responsibility for his/her personal growth and academic credits. We have a responsibility to our students to give them the tools to be successful in the world at large and to do this we need to work as a team. We look forward to working with you and your child during the 2010-2011 school year.

If you would like to discuss your child's placement and graduation progress, Charlie Bailey and I will be available July 21-28. Please call the Alternative Center at 928-0380 to set up an appointment.

Sincerely,

Julia Decker, Assistant Principal
Science Hill High School

Alternative Center Placement Checklist

Referral Source: Please complete/collect/check-off the following information and forward to Alternative Center Office **PRIOR** to student arrival.

Student _____ Grade _____ Start Date _____

Reason for Placement: (Check any/all that apply)

Attendance Behavior Issues Academic Problems
 Substance Abuse Physical Aggression Mental Health Issues
 Chronic Tardiness Weapons Violation From State Custody
 Transfer from: _____ Zero- Tolerance

Other Reasons: _____

_____ Mr. Bailey contacted for **schedule**

_____ **Parent Contact** made: _____ phone _____ in person _____ letter
 By: _____ Date: _____

_____ **Special Education:** FBA required/completed? ____/____ yes ____/____ no
 M-Team required/completed? ____/____ yes ____/____ no

_____ Withdrawal grades	Class	Teacher	Obligations
	1 st .	_____	_____
	2 nd .	_____	_____
	3 rd .	_____	_____
	4 th .	_____	_____
	5 th .	_____	_____

Intake:

_____ Ms. Bright called, intake scheduled for: Date _____ Time _____
 Therapist _____

_____ Parent to call Ms. Bright at 928-0380 to schedule intake appointment.

Disbursement

Original: Alternative Center
 Copies: Mr. Bailey
 School Counselor File
 Administrator File

Appendix H

Science Hill High School Alternative Center Handbook

ALP Placement and Interview

Students may be assigned to the Alternative Learning Program (ALP) for behavior, academic, attendance or long term suspensions intervention. The assigning administrator will assist each parent/guardian in arranging a required interview with the Social Worker at the Alternative Center. During the interview, the Social Worker will:

- 1) discuss the reasons for placement, rules and regulations, procedures, exit criteria, expectations of parents, and behavior management tools; collect data, which will assist in making appropriate interventions, such as, social history, medical information, court involvement, family services, etc;
- 2) evaluate the family need for social services, mental health screening or treatment, substance abuse screening or treatment, Intensive Case Management, or employability skills training.

Following the interview, all students and parents/guardians will be expected to understand and follow all program parameters.

Ladder of Success Level System

The level system monitors student compliance with ALC rules and academic achievement. Its goals are to:

- Have the student take responsibility for his/her behavior and academic success,
- Reinforce positive behavior,
- Communicate student progress on a daily basis to parents,
- Enable parents to reinforce school expectations via home-school contract,
- Objectify student progress so that it can be measured,
- Provide a basis upon which to establish exit criteria,
- Provide feedback to students, parents, and counselors to facilitate discussions around the issues of developing behaviors that will lead to school success,
- Provide programmatic consequences to troubling behaviors, which will allow students to remain in the classroom rather than be assigned in-school, or out-of- school suspensions.

Ladder of Success

Students will earn points for maintaining behavior, participating in class, and succeeding academically. The three levels of success are Apprentice, Journeyman, and Master. Entry level students will be required to earn 54 points per day to be successful. As students climb the ladder of success, more will be expected from them and more points must be earned to be successful for the day. Students who have received Master status will be considered for re-entry to the Main Campus

Ladder of Success		
<i>Apprentice</i>	<i>Journeyman</i>	<i>Master</i>
Entry Level Successful day=54 points	50% of behaviors met Passing all academic classes Successful day=56 points	100% of behaviors met “C” or better academically Successful day=58 points

Parent Involvement

Parents should expect their child to bring a progress report (Ladder of Success Sheet) home each day. Parents are to sign the report and the student is to return it to his/her homeroom teacher on the following day. This report will be an indicator of the student’s behavior and academic standing for the day. If the progress report (Ladder of Success Sheet) is not returned the following day, the student will receive loss of points and daily privileges. Following walkouts, multiple days of ISS, and/or OSS, parents are required to communicate with an administrator.

Parents are encouraged to become an advocate of their child’s education by attending “Family Night”, parent conferences and other school functions.

Returning to SHHS campus

Students will return to their respective campus based on their successful completion of the Alternative Learning Program’s requirements and the joint recommendation of staff and administrators.

To return to the main campus, students must demonstrate consistent compliance in attendance, academics and behavior.

An administrator will meet with each qualifying student, parent, and school support teacher to make a determination about the student’s return. Returning students will receive school support services for at least one session.

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory. If applicable, all absences will be reported to the Johnson City Juvenile Court. Absences will be excused for:

1. Death in immediate family
2. Illness certified by a note from a parent or doctor. Students in violation of the attendance policy must have illness verified by a physician.
3. Court summons

Parents are required to contact Mrs. Bright (928-0380) on the morning of any day that a student is absent. The student should submit written certification of the excuse on the following day.

For the safety of all students, no student is to leave the campus without permission. If a student chooses to leave the building without prior consent by parent and/or administrator, he or she will then take responsibility for any consequence deemed appropriate by an administrator.

Tardiness

Students are expected to arrive at school on time. All bus riders will be transported to the Alternative Center no later than 7:30 a.m. Non-bus riders are expected at the AC by 7:40 a.m. Excessive tardiness will result in In-School Suspension, The AC school day is 7:40 a.m.-2:30 p.m.

Policies

All students are expected to follow the SHHS Code of Conduct plus the following additions set forth by the Alternative Center.

- Students who willfully vandalize school property will be charged according to the law.
- All students, parents and visitors and their belongings and contents entering the Alternative Center are subject to search at any time by the principal or his/her designee at any time for weapons, drugs or drug paraphernalia. In addition, ANY vehicle and contents on Alternative Center property is subject to search at any time by the principal or his/her designee for weapons, drugs or drug paraphernalia. School property such as desks may be searched at any time. The student is responsible for the contents of any property assigned to him/her.
- If your child must carry a phone it is to be turned off during the day. The phone will be confiscated by staff if used during the school day and held for 30 days. (See handbook).
- If a student is sick, or a parent must be called, office staff will place the call.
- Students are not allowed to bring fast food or any drinks inside the building due to federal guidelines.
- Students attending the Alternative Center are not allowed on the main campuses of SHHS. Any Alternative Center student found on the main campuses will receive program consequences.
- Continued willful disobedience, defiance of authority, profanity, fighting, and disrespect are among offenses considered critical incidents and will result in program consequences up to out of school suspension.

It is suggested that students leave all electronic devices such as cell phones, MP3 players, I-pods, etc., at home. The school system is not responsible for loss of any such property due to loss or theft. (See SHHS handbook)

Parent/Student Agreement

I have received the rules and procedures for the SHHS Alternative Learning Center. My signature below indicates that I understand and agree to the rules and procedures.

I understand that the student is to bring home a Success Sheet each day. The parent is to review and sign the Progress Report and the student is to return the signed Point Sheet to school the following day.

The following adults are authorized to pick up my child from school:

<i>Name Information</i>	<i>Relationship</i>	<i>Contact</i>
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

My child may walk home from school: _____ Yes _____ No

My child may take JC Transit home: _____ Yes _____ No

Other Instructions: _____

Student Signature

Date

Parent/Guardian Signature

Date

Staff Signature

Date

Appendix I

Ladder of Success

POINT SHEET NOT
RETURNED
NO ACTIVITY TIME

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RESTROOM BREAKS	1	2
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**SCIENCE HILL HIGH SCHOOL
ALTERNATIVE LEARNING CENTER
LADDER FOR SUCCESS**

NAME _____

DATE _____

BEHAVIOR	H/R	1ST	2ND	LUNCH	3RD	4TH	H/R
POINT SHEET RET.							
PREV. DAYS ATTEND.							
ON TIME							
IN SEAT/ON TASK							
WORK COMPLETE							
VOICE							
RESPECT STAFF							
RESPECT OTHERS							
MATERIALS							
PROFANITY							
FOOD/DRESS							
TOTAL							

LEVEL 1 (WHITE) APPRENTICE *SUCCESSFUL DAY=54 POINTS *BEGINNING LEVEL	LEVEL 2 (GREEN) JOURNEYMAN *SUCCESSFUL DAY=56 POINTS *50% OF BEHAVIORS MET *PASSING ALL CLASSES	LEVEL 3 (GOLD) MASTER *SUCCESSFUL DAY=58 POINTS *100% OF BEHAVIORS MET *"C" OR BETTER ACADEMICALLY
--	---	--

TEACHER COMMENTS: _____

STUDENTS SERVING A FULL DAY IN ISS WILL AUTOMATICALLY LOSE 10 POINTS.

POINTS EARNED

(+)

OTHER INFRACTIONS

(-)

DAILY TOTAL

PARENT SIGNATURE: _____

PARENT COMMENTS: _____

Appendix J

Return Letter

Science Hill High School Alternative Learning Center
Main Campus Re-entry Checklist

Name: _____
Grade _____

Date enrolled at ALC: _____

Date of expected return to main campus:

Reason for placement at ALC:

Steps taken to succeed at main campus:

Goals met:

Attendance: Excused absences _____ Unexcused
absences _____

SUBJECT	GRADE	TEACHER	COMMENTS

Recommendations:

**SCIENCE HILL HIGH
ALTERNATIVE CENTER**

820 West Market Street
Johnson City, TN 37604
424-928-0380

Julia Decker
Assistant Principal

Dear ,



On the first day of school, January 2, 2008, you are to report to the main office on the **10/12** campus of SHHS. You have successfully completed the requirements for returning to your main campus.

I applaud your success at the Alternative Center and know you will have the same success through patience and time. Set goals for yourself and don't let others interfere with them.

Study hard and remember **you** control what you do, no one else.

Take care,
Ms. Decker

Appendix K

Parent/Student Permission Letter

Perceptions of Alternative Center Students on Their Successes: A Case Study of an Alternative Center in Northeast Tennessee

I invite your son/daughter to take part in a questionnaire which seeks to find ways to improve the programs offered at the Alternative Center. Participating in this study is totally voluntary.

The purpose of this study is to:

- enhance programs already in existence;
- find areas where improvement is needed;
- see how your student is succeeding on the main campus;
- clarify personnel that were helpful in your student's success;
- discuss your student's future goals.

Your son/daughter is being offered this opportunity because he/she made a successful transition to Science Hill High School's main campus.

If you agree for your son/daughter to participate in this study, their involvement will last only the day of the interview. Their name will not be mentioned outside of the interview and will not be listed in the study. Any writings and/or audio taken during the interview will be used solely by me, for data pertinent to the study.

This study is for research purposes only and the participant with either respond to the questionnaire in writing or verbally in an interview setting. The participant at any time may decide to end the interview or not answer the questions, and at that time their answers will not be used in the study. There is minimal risk to the participant as these are students' who have volunteered to be a part of the study. Any discomfort on the part of the participant will be noted and the student may stop at any time. Hopefully, the risk is seen as minimal by the participant as the student relates positive changes while attending the AC. The participants' grade will not be affected in anyway, due to the outcome of the questionnaire.

By signing below, you agree to allow your son/daughter to take part in the study. You will receive a copy of this signed document. If you have any questions, problems or research-related concerns at any time, you may call Ms. Julia Decker at 423-232-2200, or Dr. Catherine Glascock at 423-439-7615. You may call the Chairman of the Intuitional Review Board (IRB) at 423-439-6054 for any questions you may have about your rights as a research subject. If you have any questions or concerns about the research and want to talk to someone independent of the research team or you can't reach the study staff, you may call an IRB Coordinator at 423-439-6055 or 439-6002.

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____

Student Signature: _____

Date: _____

Sincerely,

Julia Decker

Appendix L

Workforce Council

Introduction (Group 3 ALC)

Workforce Education Charter: To promote linkages between the Chamber, education (P-12, higher education, technical education), social service and faith-based organizations committed to education and the business community for the purpose of developing a workforce ready population

The Workforce Education Council of the Chamber of Commerce serving Johnson City, Jonesborough, and Washington County is seeking input from students regarding their immediate needs relative to their college, career, and workforce readiness.

Possible Focus Questions for Secondary Students:

What are some of your after-school activities?

- After school I walk around town and hang out with my friends. I study if needed, finish up homework and try to pep, for the next day.
- Go to LEAPS, hang out at the Mall, and finish credit recovery
- Use to be on the swim team, works most days, run, hanging out with friends.
- I go to Carver Rec center every day to play basketball, be a role model for the little kids down there and work out to stay in shape.
- Playing basketball; hanging out with friends, and playing Call of Duty with my dad.

What are your plans for the summer?

- Focus on being stress free, prepare for the ninth grade, begin a work opportunity in august and volunteer at the animal shelter
- I have a Summer Job
- Combination of work and a Medical Mission Trip in Mexico
- Work a summer job to gain money and a credit for high school.
- Get a Job
- Summer Job to have money to go toward college, play basketball and hang out with my friends.

Will you be involved in community service activities? Explain

- Helping at the Rec
- My mission trip
- If I can
- I hope to but I am not sure yet

Do you plan to work outside of the home? Explain

- All said they hope to get a job or already have a job. Ms. Cooper (Employability Skills Coach) has helped us with Interviews.

What is your area of focus or major in high school?

- Art, To get better grades to raise up my GPA so that I can do well on the ACT and get scholarships' for college
- Concentrate on high grade on the ACT to get HOPE scholarship and go to college
- I came to the AC because I had a very bad boyfriend experience which ended in a restraining order. This kept me from attending my IB classes on a regular basis, I am fixing credits, bettering my GPA for IB and AP classes since there were none offered at the AC so that I can focus on my medical career.
- GPA is so important. I am going to focus on getting good grades, get better in math and end this year better than it started.

What interests you most about your area of focus?

- No Answers

How did you decide on the classes you chose?

- I chose my classes on my own, since my mom died in 08, my dad is really busy and he trust me to choose what is right for, and since I know what I want to do, now- I will focus on GPA and Art classes. Ms Cooper and Ms Parlett have been helping me decided what future classes to take to better prepare me for college.
- I have been on my own since I was 11 so I trusted my teachers to help me choose. When I came to the AC was given more opportunity to see the choices that I had for my future. People here cared about what I did, and therefore I was very successful.
- My parents do not have time to bother with me, so I work with Ms Parlett and Mr. Bailey for dual enrollment and AP courses to match me back up to my original plan.
- I messed up my original 9th grade plan, but Mr. Bailey and Ms. Cooper helped put me back on the technical path so that I can be in classes to work more with my hands and not sit at a desk all day. I think it's sad that the AC does not have access to the classes offered at the Vo-Tec building because I believe I would be successful with those.
- Mr. Bailey helped me to transition my academics from average then transition to more difficult classes.

How do you believe we can get more parents/guardians engaged in students' academic success?

- My dad lives in Montana and I live with my mom and step-dad. No one is involved and they never check Power School.

- My dad gives me help when I need it and checks up on me often. My mom lives across town and does not have time.
- Neither of my parents are involved because neither of them have faith that I can achieve my goals. My dad thinks I can't do anything and my mom has no time to care.
- I have no parents, my mom left when I was 11 and has been in and out of jail ever since. I pretty much raised myself – living house to house with whoever would let me crash. When I came to the AC Ms. Cooper and Ms. Decker took personal interest in making sure that I knew that I could be successful.
- My mom is in jail, so it is just me and my dad. My dad trusts me, but since it is the two of us, he does not have a lot of time to be overly involved. He does support me and wants me to do well. Ms. Jackson notices I'm good in math so she and Ms. Cooper have been working to send me in the right direction.
- My mom is dead and I live with my dad. He does his best. It is awesome to be in a school where counselors and teacher care enough about you to kind of take up the slack.

What are your plans after high school?

Do you plan to go to a technical college, community college, a four-year college, military, or go directly into the workforce?

- 5 want to go to a 4 year college. 1 wanted to go to a technical school or the military.

What factors are influencing your plans?

- My parents do not believe that I can, but I want to prove them wrong. I believe that I can.
- My college education is priceless. Medical school is the only way that I can make it to be a cardio surgeon.
- None of my family ever went to college, my mom dropped out, so I would like to go to school so my family can be proud.... And I would like a good paying job.
- I want to have a sense of education. I don't want to walk around here on these streets feeling dumb and I want knowledge... and for my dad.
- Parents did not go to college so I want to prove to my family that I can do it. I know that if I put forth the effort, I can make it as a photographer. I have faith in myself.
- I would like to join the military and be a mechanic who works on planes. I can go to tech school until I'm 19, join the military and retire at 39. I can then have money for college so that I can start another career or my own business if want to.

How did you find out how much positions you will be seeking pay?

- Family
- Ms. Cooper
- Friends

What kinds of workforce opportunities have you had? Visits, guest speakers, on-site experience, etc.

- Ms. Cooper helps a lot.
- Most of us have worked.

What value do you place on a College Degree?

- All answered very important.

Do you feel that you have the personal communication skills you need to make the next step in your life?

- 4 of 6 feel pretty good about their communication skills. 6 of 6 received help in one form or another from the AC.

If needed, would you know where to go for financial help for college or vocational schools?

- Ms. Cooper
- Ms Decker
- Ms Fudge

Can you name three resources that could be beneficial toward your academic and/or workforce readiness success?

- FAFSA
- Scholarships
- Grant opportunities (all had help with these from people at the AC)

What would you like for representatives from the Workforce Education Council to know about your high school experiences?

- That not all kids at the AC are bad kids
- We should not be left out
- We all need a second (or third) chance

What information or events would you like for the Workforce Education Council to provide for you?

- We want them to know we matter, and to know when they ask us our opinions someone will hear it and do something about it.

VITA

JULIA ELSIE DECKER

Personal Data: Place of Birth: Newfoundland, Canada

Education: Department of Defense Schools
A.S. Special Education, St. Petersburg Junior College,
St. Petersburg, Florida, 1975
B.S. Special Education, University of South Florida,
Tampa, Florida, 1978
Ed.S Specialist in Education, East Tennessee State
University, Johnson City, Tennessee, 2003
Ed.D Educational Leadership, East Tennessee State
University, Johnson City, Tennessee, 2013

Professional Experience: Teacher, Pinellas County Schools, St. Petersburg, Florida,
1979-1985
Teacher, Johnson City Schools, Johnson City, Tennessee,
1985- 2005
Administration, Science Hill High School Alternative
Center, Johnson City Schools, Johnson City,
Tennessee, 2005-2011
Career and Technical Center Director, Science Hill High
School, Johnson City, Tennessee, 2011-present