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ABSTRACT

This study examined the extent to which students with disabilities are accessing alternative schools and Area Learning Centers (ALC) in Minnesota. Also of interest was the option used by students to enroll in the school, the extent to which students crossed district boundaries to attend the school, and differential participation by category of disability. Surveys were returned by a total of 63 directors of public or private alternative schools or ALCs. Results indicated that students with disabilities are accessing alternative school/ALC programs in ways similar to nondisabled students with approximately equal percentages using the High School Graduation Incentive, the Pregnant Minor/Minor Parent, and the open enrollment options. Students with emotional/behavioral disorders were heavily represented in these schools. It was also discovered that when students enter these programs, special education labels are often dropped and services discontinued. Concerns are raised about whether students with disabilities are receiving needed services in these programs, or whether, instead, the lack of labelling increases their success. (10 references) (DB)

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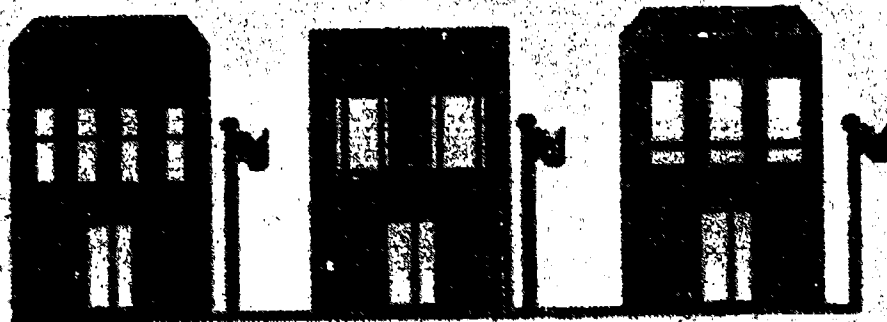
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Research Report No. 3



Enrollment Options for Students with Disabilities

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UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

January, 1992

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**Students with Disabilities Use of Various Options to
Access Alternative Schools and Area Learning Centers**

Deborah J. Gorney and James E. Ysseldyke

Enrollment Options for Students with Disabilities

University of Minnesota

January, 1992

Abstract

Alternative schools which were developed to encourage students having trouble in conventional schools to graduate from high school have been around since the 1970s. These schools represent a form of school choice available to parents and students. This study focused on the extent to which students with disabilities are accessing Alternative Schools and Area Learning Centers (ALC) in Minnesota. Also of interest was the option used (by both students with and without disabilities) to enroll in the school, the extent to which students crossed district boundaries to attend the school, and differential participation by category of disability. Results indicate that students with disabilities are accessing Alternative School/ALC programs in ways similar to non-disabled students. Students with emotional/behavioral disorders are heavily represented in these schools. It was also discovered that when students enter these programs, special education labels are often dropped and services discontinued. Implications for special education are discussed.

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Students with Disabilities Use of Various Options to Access Alternative Schools and Area Learning Centers

Parent and student choice in education is a much discussed topic in this time of major educational reform. President Bush has repeatedly called for increased parental choice in education in addition to the development of innovative programs to increase options in our current system. Several states have adopted school choice legislation as the school reform of the 1990's (Ysseldyke, Thurlow, Algozzine, & Nathan, 1991). Forms of choice legislation include interdistrict open enrollment in which parents can choose the district their child attends, intradistrict open enrollment which allows parents to choose within a district the specific school their child attends, post secondary programs through which high school students access college courses, and "second chance" alternative schools to encourage high school graduation. Options such as magnet schools, voucher systems, and charter schools are variations available to parents and students in many states.

A central assumption in educational reform is that not all students are successful in conventional schools and many of these students are successful in some type of alternative environment. Charles Glenn, a major proponent of choice in Massachusetts, states that "It has become clear that choice can do much to promote equity. It does so by creating conditions...it does so by allowing schools to specialize and thus to meet the needs of some students very well rather than all students at a level of minimum adequacy" (Glenn, 1989, p. 53). Magnet schools provide an

opportunity for students to explore talent in specific areas such as the performing arts and science, high school graduation incentive programs often appeal to students who desire a more individualized environment in which they can have more freedom than the conventional schools allow, and some students have access to college courses. A common characteristic of all of these alternatives is that they are accessible by choice.

A topic which is often missing from discussions about choice is the extent to which students with disabilities are using choice options. Interesting questions surround this population's participation in schools of choice. These include questions about the nature of outcomes for students with disabilities who have accessed a school by choice, impact of choice on the current special education system, and the kinds of students who choose to transfer. These questions are particularly salient when high school students are considered. Students in special education at this level usually have a long history of school failure. When options are available, can students find an environment in which they are successful? If so, what implications does this have for the educational system in which they have failed for so long? The schools of choice often associated with at-risk students or students not succeeding in the conventional schools are commonly called second chance schools, or alternative schools. Minnesota offers these types of schools and many other options.

Minnesota has been a leader in school choice. Many schools of choice are available in the state, including magnet schools, programs for pregnant minors and minor parents, alternative

schools for students having difficulty in conventional schools, and innovative programs that attract all types of students. Open Enrollment (Choice) legislation in Minnesota allows students to access these programs through various enrollment options.

In Minnesota, Public or Private Alternative Schools and Area Learning Centers are accessible to elementary and secondary students having difficulty in conventional school settings. Students in Minnesota were offered the choice of alternative schools in 1987 when the Area Learning Centers (ALC) and High School Graduation Incentives (HSGI) laws were passed to provide students, age 12-21, having difficulty in one school an alternative form of education (MDE, 1990). The laws are basically very similar; both of them provide at-risk students with alternatives to conventional education. In order to qualify for transfer under these laws the student must meet one or more of the following criteria: 1) test scores at least two years below performance on a local achievement test; 2) at least one year behind in completing coursework satisfactorily; 3) pregnant or a parent; 4) assessed as chemically dependent; or 5) expelled by a school district (age 12-16) (MDE, 1990). These schools can also be accessed through the Open Enrollment Option if the student is transferring districts and meets the entrance requirements of the program.

Like most alternative schools across the nation, the alternative schools in Minnesota were founded in the 1970's as a result of student, parent and community dissatisfaction with the traditional school system (Johnson & Faunce, 1972). There are

many definitions of alternative schools, reflecting the diversity of types of schools of choice: free or open schools, magnet schools, schools-within-schools, street academies, and schools referring to themselves as alternative schools. In the alternative school literature, definitions are often replaced with common characteristics to all alternative schools. Combining the lists of several authors, these characteristics include attendance by choice (student and teacher), a response to unmet needs of conventional schools, representative attendance by different groups of students, a student-oriented school climate, and individualized instruction (Garrison, 1987; Nathan, 1976; Raywid, 1984).

The Minnesota programs we investigated have the characteristics listed above with the exception of the types of students attending. The student population in these schools is not representative of the conventional school population because the entrance criteria attract students having difficulty in school and those labeled as "deviant" (pregnant minors, drop-outs, and expelled students). These particular alternative programs would be classified in Raywid's (1984) terms as "programs targeted for disruptive youngsters, underachievers, dropouts, and other varieties of 'at risk' youngsters" (p. 76).

Students accessing these educational options have a choice of programs to attend. Public or Private Alternative Schools are available which specialize in individualized instruction and alternative teaching methods. The Alternative Schools follow the same calendar as conventional schools. Area Learning Centers

(ALCs) are similar programmatically to the Alternative Schools, but they are open year round and offer both day and night classes to accommodate student schedules. In both types of schools, classes are offered which fulfill graduation requirements. The coursework may include work experience opportunities, trade and vocational skill training options, access to regular school programs, academic and learning skill classes, etc. After requirements have been met, diplomas are awarded from the student's home district or the district in which the program is located.

Students can also enroll in education programs for pregnant minors and minor parents. Some of these students attend the Alternative Schools or Area Learning Centers and others attend programs specifically designated as programs for pregnant minors.

Because terminology in this area can be confusing, some terms used in this paper need to be clarified. In this study, we defined HSGI as an option the student could use to access the Public or Private Alternative Schools and Area Learning Centers. HSGI, in our definition, includes access to Alternative Schools and ALCs through either the HSGI law or the ALC law. We use the term ALC to identify one type of school a student may attend. In our study, we surveyed three types of schools: Private Alternative Schools, Public Alternative Schools, and Area Learning Centers (ALC).

The purpose of this study was to document the participation of students with disabilities and special needs in two enrollment options, Alternative Schools and Area Learning Centers. We were

also interested in the extent to which students use these options to attend a school in a non-resident district. Comments from directors of these programs about students with disabilities accessing their programs were also of interest. The following research questions were addressed:

- To what extent do students with disabilities access Public Alternative Schools, Private Alternative Schools, and Area Learning Centers?
- To what extent is there differential participation as a function of category of disability or type of school?
- To what extent are students with handicaps using the HSGI option to enroll in a school outside of their resident school district?
- What are the issues and concerns expressed by program directors about the enrollment of students with disabilities or special needs in the Alternative Schools or Area Learning Centers?

Method

Surveys were designed to gather the following information from directors of Private and Public Alternative Schools, and Area Learning Centers (ALC): the number of resident and non-resident students accessing their program, type of enrollment option used to access the program, and number of students with disabilities attending the program. Respondents were also encouraged to comment on concerns or issues of importance for students with disabilities who access these programs.

The survey required the respondent to classify each student enrolled in their program as of December 1, 1990 (used for child count purposes) by three factors: 1) type of enrollment option used (High School Graduation Incentives, High School Graduation Incentives also Pregnant Minor/Minor Parent, Open Enrollment, or Other); 2) classification (disabled or non-disabled); and 3) residency (resident or non-resident). The enrollment options were chosen because these are the primary ways in which students access Public and Private Alternative Schools and Area Learning Centers. Residency was defined as "students who live in the school district in which your program is located." Conversely, non-residency was defined as "students who live outside of the school district in which your program is located." Respondents were also asked to report the type of disability for non-resident students. In addition to special education classifications, students receiving gifted services, ESL services, and Chapter I services were included in the "disabled/special needs" category.

All secondary Alternative Schools and Area Learning Centers in Minnesota accessible by HSGI were included in the sample. Surveys were sent to the directors of 40 Area Learning Centers, 38 Public Secondary Alternative Schools, and 13 Private Alternative Schools. Follow-up calls were made to those not returning the survey after a two-week period. The purpose of the call was to gather the survey information over the phone or to remind people to return the survey by mail.

Results

Response rates. Sixty-three surveys (69%) were returned. Response rates were similar for the different types of programs: 62% of the surveys sent to Private Alternative Schools were returned, 75% of the ALC surveys were returned, and 66% of the Public Alternative School surveys were returned.

Results across all options. Nineteen percent of the students accessing High School Graduation Incentive (HSGI) programs were reported as students with disabilities. Of the students with disabilities, 26% (257 students) were non-residents of the serving district. Similarly, 27% of the non-disabled students were non-residents of the serving district. Including all students, 74% of the students these schools are serving are residents of the district in which the school is located and 26% are non-residents.

The ALCs serve 47% of the students enrolled in an HSGI program, the Public Alternative Schools 40%, and the Private Alternative Schools 13%. Of the disabled students attending these programs, 1% were served by Private Alternative Schools, 46% were served by Public Alternative Schools, and 52% were served by ALCs.

Most students are using the HSGI option to enroll in these programs. Eighty-three percent of the students were reported as using HSGI, 11% as using HSGI along with the Pregnant Minor/Minor Parent (PMMP) option, 2% as using Open Enrollment, and 4% as using other options such as tuition agreements, placement by district, and adult education. Extracting the data for students with disabilities, the trend is practically identical to the overall

trend: 83% of them enrolled under the HSGI option, 11% under the HSGI/PMMP option, 1% under the Open Enrollment option, and 5% under other options.

Category of disability information was collected for students with disabilities who were non-residents of the district. Students with learning disabilities and students with emotional/behavior problems comprised a majority of the students with disabilities group. Thirty-five percent of the students with disabilities participating were learning disabled, and 54% were emotionally/behaviorally disturbed. Percentages of students representing each disability group are listed in Table 1. Table 1 also contains the percentages of students in each category for the disabled population of Minnesota for easy comparison of representativeness of the students choosing to enroll in HSGI programs.

Across handicapping conditions it is difficult to assess the extent to which students with different handicapping conditions are accessing the programs through similar options because of the limited number of students in most categories. The Learning Disabled and Emotionally/Behaviorally Disturbed (EBD) categories can be compared since most of the participants fall into one of these categories. LD students are slightly more likely than EBD students to enroll under the PMMP option (16% of the LD students compared to 7% of the EBD students). The other options are equally likely to be used by learning disabled and emotionally/behaviorally disturbed students.

Table 1

Participation by Category of Disability in Comparison to Category Representation in the Minnesota Special Education Population

Disability Type	% of total disabled accessing HSGI programs	% category represents in MN sped pop.*
Autistic	0	<1
Chapter I	0	NA
Emotionally/Behaviorally Disturbed	54	25
English as a Second Language	01	NA
Gifted	<1	NA
Hearing Impaired	02	02
Learning Disabled	35	32
Mentally Retarded	03	05
Multiply Handicapped	01	<1
Physically Handicapped	02	01
Speech	<1	04
Visually Handicapped	<1	01

*Students aged 12-17 as reported by Minnesota State Department of Education (1990).

Comparing the percentages of students within each disability type participating in HSGI programs with percentages of each disability type in the special education population of Minnesota, there is a large percentage of students in the Emotionally/Behaviorally Disturbed category (54% of the students with disabilities in HSGI programs compared to 25% in the disabled population of Minnesota) accessing Alternative Schools and Area Learning Centers. Students with learning disabilities (35% in the HSGI programs compared to 53% in the special education population) and students with mental retardation (3% at the Alternative Schools/Area Learning Centers and 14% in the special education population) are underrepresented in the HSGI programs. Students served under other categories are represented in similar percentages when compared to the Minnesota population of special education students.

Resident vs. non-resident students. Resident and non-resident students are accessing Alternative Schools and Area Learning Centers in similar ways. Table 2 contains data on residents and non-residents use of each option. HSGI is the most common option used for both groups of students. As would be expected, the non-resident students are more likely to enroll under Open Enrollment.

In Table 3 we have divided the populations of each type of program (Private Alternative, Public Alternative, and Area Learning Center) into resident and non-resident. For each type of program, a majority of the students are residents of the program's district. A larger percentage of students in the Alternative

Table 2

Resident Versus Non-Resident Use of the Various Options

Option	% Resident	% Non-Resident
HSGI	85	79
PMMP	10	13
Open Enrollment	<1	06
Other	05	03

Schools are residents than in Area Learning Centers. Most of the students in Private Alternative Schools are residents of the district.

Disabled vs Non-disabled students. As can be seen in Table 4, disabled and non-disabled students are using the variety of options in a virtually identical manner to access Alternative Schools and Area Learning Centers.

As far as the type of school being accessed, the Public Alternative Schools and the Area Learning Centers appear to attract similar percentages of disabled and non-disabled students. The Private Alternative Schools report very few disabled students. Table 5 contains information on how the disabled and non-disabled groups are distributed among the different types of programs.

Disabled/Resident vs. Disabled/Non-resident students. Students with disabilities who transfer districts appear to be more likely to attend an ALC than a Public Alternative School (see Table 6). Students with disabilities who choose an HSGI program within their home district are equally likely to choose an ALC as a Public Alternative School.

Comparing the disabled/non-resident and disabled/resident students on type of option used, the two groups are accessing the Alternative Schools and Area Learning Centers in very similar ways. A majority of both groups are using the HSGI option, see Table 7 for the percentages of disabled/nonresidents and disabled/residents using each option.

Table 3

Residents Versus Non-Residents in Type of Program

Program	% Resident	% Non-Resident
ALC	60	40
Public Alternative	81	19
Private Alternative	95	05

Table 4

Disabled Versus Non-Disabled Use of the Various Options to Access HSGI Programs

Option	% Disabled	% Non-Disabled
HSGI	83	83
PMMP	11	11
Open Enrollment	01	02
Other	05	05

Table 5

Distribution of Disabled and Non-Disabled Among the Different
Types of Programs

Program	% Disabled	% Non-Disabled
ALC	52	46
Public Alternative	46	38
Private Alternative	01	16

Table 6

Disabled/Non-Resident Versus Disabled/Resident Choice of Program

Program	Disabled/ Non-Resident	Disabled/ Resident
AJC	70	46
Public Alternative	30	52
Private Alternative	00	02

Table 7

Disabled/Non-Resident Versus Disabled/Resident Use of Option

Option	Disabled/ Non-Resident	Disabled/ Resident
HSGI	79	84
PMMP	10	12
Open Enrollment	03	00
Other	08	04

Concerns or Issues Raised by Directors. Looking at the comments made by directors, there is a range of reactions to participation of special education students. Some dismiss special education altogether, others realize that the students are there and need services, but the characteristics of the program make it impossible to offer any type of services. Still others claim that student handicaps miraculously disappear when they enter the HSGI program. A few directors indicated that special education reimbursement would be helpful to the program, however, as one director stated: "One characteristic of our student population in general, is sporadic attendance...this makes it virtually impossible to comply with Special Education paper work and timelines. As a result, these students do not have active I.E.P.s and are not listed as a Special Education student." Two of the directors of the Public Alternative Schools commented on the constantly changing student populations of these schools. And a few directors commented on the extra amount of time it takes to assist students with handicaps. Table 8 contains sample comments from directors of each type of program.

Discussion

The purpose of this investigation was to determine the extent to which students with disabilities are accessing High School Graduation Incentive programs. We were also interested in determining what type of students are choosing to enroll in these programs and the degree to which students with disabilities leave their resident school districts in order to attend one of the HSGI

Table 8

Comments Made by Directors of HSGI Programs

Program	Comments
Private Alternative	<p>Some students have been served under special education with IEPs at their home school.</p> <p>The program philosophy does not believe in special education or labeling, so there are no students given special education services at the school.</p> <p>The [program] does not identify disabilities/special needs students.</p>
Public Alternative	<p>[Students] don't stop switching...they didn't stay at any program long enough to earn any credits.</p> <p>One characteristic of our student population in general, is sporadic attendance...this makes it virtually impossible to comply with Special Education paper work and timelines. As a result, these students do not have active I.E.P.s and are not listed as a Special Education student. Because 3 of the 4 of our staff are Special Education trained and licensed, and because all classes are taught on an individual basis utilizing a diagnostic teaching approach, the individual needs of these students are able to be addressed. The impact, therefore, is on the program....More staff time is involved on behalf of these students, yet no Special Education reimbursement can be claimed because active I.E.P.s are not in place. This has a significant financial impact on the program.</p> <p>Adequate funding for appropriate materials for different learning styles. We also need more money for staffing at a lower student/teacher ratio.</p> <p>The students in our...program are concerned with survival issues--jobs, supporting families, self-esteem. They are often under pressure from Human Services Agencies to progress as fast as possible and often rapid progress is not realistic for our students, especially those with disabilities.</p> <p>Transportation is a barrier to students attending.</p>

Table 8 (continued)

Comments Made by Directors of HSGI Programs

Program	Comments
ALC	<p>Once we diagnosis or have students' previous IEP, it is hard for us to have consistent contact with the student. We do not meet everyday with our students but the special needs students need more contact time.</p> <p>We don't serve students on IEPs, IEPs are taken care of by other schools</p> <p>If our ALC did not exist, over 50% of the student population would be high school drop-outs.</p> <p>Laws must be changed to enable students under the age of 16 to attend school for less than the required 30 hours per week, we need this for at-risk programs.</p> <p>We have found that we can teach the same curriculum to <u>all</u> our students when we allow them to control their pace and course load.</p> <p>Funding for special education services--sometimes a gray area; transportation sometimes an issue.</p> <p>Some of the non-disabled students were once in LD programs, but no longer qualified because of changes in the way LD was determined. However, they still need extra help and modified curriculum.</p> <p>Once students enter an Alternative School/Area Learning Center their handicap (students with disabilities) miraculously disappears. The primary reason I believe is due to the following: 1) new/different environment 2) more/different options for learning become available 3) different teaching strategies 4) more individual attention/concern. Many of the students had a handicap <u>only</u> in day school.</p>

programs.

Results of the study indicate that students with disabilities are enrolling in the HSGI programs. They are equally likely to attend either the Public Alternative Schools or Area Learning Centers and their primary means of gaining access to these programs is through the HSGI option. There were no differences between the students with disabilities and non-disabled students or between resident and non-resident students in type of option used.

Private Alternative Schools were much less likely than the Public Alternative Schools and Area Learning Centers to serve students with disabilities. Non-resident students (disabled or non-disabled) were more likely to attend an Area Learning Center than a Public Alternative School.

The most interesting finding is the overrepresentation of students with emotional/behavioral problems accessing these programs. These students are represented twice as often in the HSGI population than in the special education population of Minnesota.

The overrepresentation of students with emotional/behavioral problems is not too surprising considering the entrance criteria for these programs. Yet, the connection between students receiving EBD services in the schools and students in Alternative Schools/ALCs has not been explored. It is possible that these programs are operating as extensions of conventional special education programs, serving students who are unsuccessful in the special education system. If this is true, and special education

students are successful in the Alternative School/ALC setting, alternative programs may be able to inform special education about how to construct environments in which these students can be successful. More research needs to be conducted to ascertain ways in which this different environment affects students' problematic behaviors and academic achievement.

Looking at the disability categories of students accessing Public Alternative Schools and ALCs, the distribution of disability types is similar across the two. There is a slightly larger percentage of students with emotional/behavioral problems in ALCs than in Public Alternative Schools and a slightly higher percentage of students with learning disabilities in Public Alternative Schools than in the ALCs. Another interesting difference is in the hearing impaired category. Students with hearing impairments comprise 8% of the disabled population in Public Alternative Schools and only 2% of the disabled population in ALCs.

Looking at the non-resident to resident student ratio, ALCs are serving a higher percentage of non-residents than the Public Alternative Schools. ALC directors report serving higher percentages of non-resident students with disabilities than Alternative Schools. This may be due to the location of the ALCs, they may be drawing from larger areas and more districts than the Alternative Schools. The Alternative Schools may have been set up by districts who saw a need for an alternative within the district (thereby serving their own pupils), while ALCs may fulfill a more global educational need by offering classes both day and night and

also year round.

Students appear to be accessing Public Alternative Schools and ALCs in a similar manner, mainly through the HSGI option. The fact that resident and non-resident students are using the same options is a significant finding because it indicates that students will not need to be divided on this dimension in future investigations with this population.

Comparing students with disabilities and non-disabled students on type of enrollment option used, there is one interesting finding. In the Public Alternative Schools, 15% of the students with disabilities accessed the program through HSGI/PMMP while only 9% of the non-disabled students used this option. This trend was reversed in the ALCs where 15% of the non-disabled students accessed the program through HSGI/PMMP and 8% of the students with disabilities used this option. The reason for this difference is not clear, (and may not be statistically significant); however it may warrant further investigation.

Based on directors' comments it can be assumed that directors of these programs are aware that students with special needs are accessing their programs, and they are aware that some students who might qualify for special education are not diagnosed. More research needs to be done to determine exactly how this affects the student with a handicap. Are the students receiving a more appropriate education for their needs through the alternative school than through special education programs? Are the students more satisfied in alternative schools because they are not labeled? Are these students more likely to finish school in an

alternative type of setting? Is it a disservice to the student with a disability to fail to offer special education services in the alternative school setting? Are alternative schools already organized to provide special-education-type services (individualized instruction, smaller classes, more personalized environment) to all students?

There are many limitations of the survey which need to be addressed when interpreting the results presented above. For example, the format of the survey caused much confusion among respondents. Numbers were often placed in the wrong boxes, and numbers in the bottom grid often failed to match the numbers in the non-resident/disabled column of the top grid. Follow-up phone calls were used to clarify discrepant responses.

Directors also had difficulty identifying students as residents or non-residents. Even though the definition provided with the survey was explicit (either the student lived in district boundaries or not), some directors considered all students residents. It seems that many students transferring districts enroll in the high school in the district where the HSGI program is located and then use the HSGI option to transfer into the program. As far as the Alternative School or ALC staff is concerned, these students are residents because they are coming from the district high school. Students transferring districts within a cooperative may have also been erroneously considered residents of the Alternative School/ALC if residency is thought of in a broader context of all of the cooperative districts. A consequence of this inability to determine residency may have

resulted in an underrepresentation of students using Open Enrollment if students used Open Enrollment to access the district high school as a means of attending the Alternative School/ALC.

Another limitation of the study was the inability of directors to identify students as disabled or in need of special services. Many student labels were dropped when the students entered the Alternative Schools or ALCs, and the directors had no record of previous services for their students. As a result, there are more than likely many more students with disabilities accessing these programs than reported here.

Numbers reported in our survey were compared with information gathered by the Minnesota State Department of Education. Although the data gathered from the State Department did not separate students into residents and nonresidents of the program's district, the programs did report total number of students, number of pregnant students, number of custodial parents, number of non-handicapped students accessing the program through HSGI, and the number of special education students accessing the program. The number of special education students reported to the state was similar to the number reported in our survey, however the total number of students was often very different. The number of students reported in the survey by any one program was usually lower than the total number reported by the program to the state. This discrepancy can probably be attributed to the following student groups being included in the report to the state: graduated, transferred, and dropped out.

Students with disabilities are, without a doubt, accessing

Alternative Schools and ALCs in Minnesota. Yet, the magnitude of participation shown in this study is conservative because students often drop their label when entering these schools. This is an important finding because it raises questions about how the HSGI programs relate to special education services. Perhaps students are accessing these programs because they can drop their labels and special education services. Although there is much literature on the history and effectiveness of alternative schools, there is practically no information on how students with special needs are affected by these programs. Future research needs to focus on the connection between these programs and special education programs. How are they the same/different? How do their populations differ? How are students with disabilities best served?

Currently, it is unclear how many students with disabilities are accessing HSGI programs. Based on the entrance requirements for these schools, nearly every student with a disability would qualify. Are these schools extensions of special education programs in conventional schools? If so, how can the successfulness of these alternative schools inform our special education practices? Students with disabilities are often left out of discussions about school choice, however it seems critical that we examine the choices they are making. Are alternative schools their schools of choice?

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