EVALUATION OF AT-RISK STUDENTS' NEEDS IN PUBLIC ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS

A Dissertation
Approved by the Faculty of Argosy University/Online
December 2009

by

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Abstract

The need for alternative education programs that work is paramount in light of the nation's public education crisis. The problem is that alternative education programs fail to adequately address the issues that At-Risk students bring to, and face in, the alternative and/or the traditional classroom. This study utilized a qualitative and a quantitative approach to evaluate and delineate the fundamental needs of At-Risk students in the public alternative education sector.

The purpose of the study was for alternative students, their immediate relatives, and other affected groups to personally express their needs as lived, experienced, and as viewed by them. Those expressions of needs would then create the basis from which public education, having been apprised of the needs, can begin to develop the means by which they can be met.

The research utilized open-ended questions developed by the researcher and answered by five different groups most pertinent to the study. The results derived were then coded into common themes that accurately reported the needs expressed. Data-driven conclusions justified the need for a new and different approach to alternative education and subsequent further study. The findings of this study also led to the development of a theory by which alternative education can be guided.

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Acknowledgments

To my wife, Beverley, thank you. Were it not for you, I perhaps would not have started on this journey.

Although it is impossible to name everyone who participated in this journey, I would like to extend my sincere gratitude and appreciation to all who participated despite the level of involvement, as without you this journey could not have been travelled. A special thanks to those on whose shoulders I leaned most often and who, with my every leaning, provided the assistance, the guidance, and the encouragement needed. To one of my best friends, Maureen Gonzales, a heartfelt thank you for your kind and stellar assistance and amazing editing support through every step of this journey.

A special thanks to my son, David, and daughter, Bethany, for their kind support and particularly to David, on whom I called at odd hours of the night and who with calmness and love, answered every call and willingly lent any assistance needed. To my friends Andre Jobson and Stephan Perez, thank you both for your help. Then, to Joseph Dixon, who patiently sacrificed many sleepless nights in lending me the support I needed, a very special “thank you” to you Joe, you are an amazing friend.

Finally, I was privileged to have had the most supportive Dissertation Chair, Dr. Andrew Niesiobedzki, and Committee Members Dr. Cynthia Mishlove and Dr. Nancy Hoover. Your guidance will always be remembered and appreciated, and I thank you. To my Principal, Dr. Alicia Borishade, thank you for your kind encouragement and assistance. Dr. Gary Klein and Garry Powell, thank you both for your incredible assistance and kind cooperation. Philomena Sefranek, my senior editor, thank you. Then last, but certainly not least, to my wonderful parents, Arnold and Merlin Shirley, thank

you for always being there with some sweet words of encouragement even when just the sound of your voices alone, was enough encouragement for me – I love you both. This journey has been most rewarding and worthwhile, and all because of every one of you who made it both possible and enjoyable. Thank you.

Dedication

To all alternative students whom I have had the honor and privilege to serve or will have served in any capacity whatsoever, I dedicate this work and the totality of my career as an educator in alternative education. You have taught me and will continue to teach me that it is more blessed to give than to receive. That lesson was reinforced as I reviewed the data collected from you in this study and began to interpret it. It was reinforced when my mind reflected on the genius resident in the architects of great monuments and in doing so, I realized that I have no envy for even the greatest of them. For in fact, it is in the designing of lives that one becomes the greatest architect.

THANK YOU.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Crossroads Second Chance North (CSCN), in Roswell, Georgia, was the venue for conducting this study on the Evaluation of At-Risk Students' Needs. CSCN is a leading public alternative school serving At-Risk students who are removed from traditional classrooms in the Fulton County School District. The total student population at CSCN is 42% Black, 28% Hispanic, 25% White, and 5% other. Students are removed from traditional classrooms in Fulton County and placed at CSCN because of behavioral infractions that violate the school district's student guidelines and result in the tribunal of the students. Behavioral infractions range from cumulative student rules violations to any one significant infraction, such as drugs or violence. CSCN receives students from both middle and high schools in the North Fulton County area, with high school enrollment accounting for 76% of the student population. Students in both the middle and high school segments of the school, although removed from traditional classrooms and placed in an alternative school, are subjected to the same respective core curriculum as the traditional classrooms.

In light of the student profile at CSCN, the demographics of Roswell show a population of over 87,000, a mean household income of $99,961, and an ethnicity of 73.9% White, 14.8% Hispanic, 12.4% Black, 4.4% Asian, and 7.2% other (The City of Roswell, 2008). CSCN, the organization of this writer, is comprised of students with varying behavioral challenges who, for a multiplicity of reasons, behaviorally and academically, were not being successful in traditional education settings. The challenges, as demonstrated by the student body, range from cases as severe as drug use, drug distribution, and assault, to chronic classroom disruptions.

Problem Background

Several studies, such as the ones conducted by Hardy (2007) and Aron (2006), have shown why public school systems need to address the issues that At-Risk students bring to, and face in, the alternative classroom, effectively. However, those and other studies have failed to delineate the fundamental needs of At-Risk students in the public alternative education sector as well as failed to create the basis by which those needs can be met. Students who are placed in alternative programs in the public school system are not able to benefit from the curriculum because of developmental and other needs that are blocking that ability. Yet schools continue to focus primarily on students' academic development and do not see the need to target the deficiencies in their social-behavioral development (Severson, Walker, Hope-Doolittle, Kratochwill, & Gresham, 2007). At-Risk students are being placed in schools labeled as *Alternative* and with some hope of matriculating back into traditional classrooms upon consistently demonstrating reasonably adequate classroom behaviors and academic performance.

The achievement of reasonably adequate classroom behavior and academic performance may not necessarily signify that the needs of At-Risk students are being met through what is called "Alternative Education." The problem is that the nationwide failure rate of At-Risk students continues or intensifies even after the removal from traditional classrooms and placement in public alternative schools. Therefore, it is necessary to evaluate whether or not public school systems need to be designed such that the needs of all students, regardless of the demographic or cultural composite of the school, can be adequately met. The declaration that "Alternative schools: Designed to provide nurturing environments for students at risk of school failure, these schools enroll

some 610,000 students" (U.S. Department of Education, 2004, p.1), implies that student success or failure is not defined by demographics or cultural composite of the community. Given the stated purpose for which alternative schools are designed, the concern arises as to how nurturing these environments are, and the alternatives offered to At-Risk students that will prepare them to be productive citizens of the community. Hutchison (2006) stated the concern as follows:

> The crisis in public education is well known. High dropout rates, low test scores, deficits in reading, math, and history, and inarticulate young people who do not read books are so frequently reported in the news that we have almost come to expect bad news about education. Why are these chronic problems so difficult to fix? Answer: the stubborn adherence by the public education establishment to ideas about education that do not work. (p. 1)

Reporting on the graduation dilemma of 2007, *Education Week* conducted an analysis of the nation's graduation rate and found that an estimated 30%, or 1.23 million students, would not graduate with their peers. The most vulnerable groups were Native American, Hispanic, and African-American students (*Education Week*, 2007). Accordingly, March 3, 2004, Stanford Report referenced New York City Schools' Chancellor Joel Klein declaring the issue of public education as America's greatest domestic problem, and that the education system is not preparing students for 21st century global competition. The report further referenced Klein advocating the need for public education to raise expectations and facilitate the means by which desired results in student performance can be attained (as cited in Trei, 2004).

Zweig (2003) indicated that mainstream education is not adequately meeting the needs of the At-Risk student population. That conclusion was derived from Zweig's analysis of the condition of At-Risk youth, their contribution to the domestic problem,

and their need for alternative placement. Zweig, in formulating the question, "Alternative Schools – Who is Being Reached?" wrote:

> Heeding the cautions raised about not creating dumping grounds for problem youth, it is clear that mainstream education and public systems are not adequately meeting the needs of all high-risk youth, and the difficulties vulnerable youth have in regular schools may exacerbate their disconnections. (p. 10)

Zweig believes that alternative enrollment provides the opportunity for school systems to meet the needs of At-Risk students and get these students reconnected with the educational process.

The opportunity exists for the needs of At-Risk students to be met through the concept of alternative school enrollment, but that opportunity is not exercised effectively (Zweig, 2003). The problem of the nationwide failure rate of At-Risk students continues or intensifies even when placed in alternative schools. Therefore, it is necessary for the nation's school systems to seek solutions to the failure rate dilemma among At-Risk students (Hutchison, 2006). However, solutions to the failure rate among At-Risk students cannot be sought effectively until their needs are first evaluated. Consequently, this study was designed to evaluate the needs of At-Risk students placed in public alternative schools. The study design utilized a methodology that will facilitate the development of solutions to the failure rate dilemma–a dilemma that studies show to be prevalent among At-Risk students even after their enrollment in public alternative schools.

The study to evaluate the needs of At-Risk students placed in public alternative schools was conducted at Crossroads Second Chance North (CSCN), in Roswell, Georgia. The selection of CSCN as the site for study was not indicative of any deficiencies at CSCN, nor was it reflective of inefficiencies in the Georgia educational

system. The CSCN site was selected because CSCN is a leading public alternative school and its student population was best suited to reveal the national education crisis that demands immediate address (Hutchison, 2006). Such a site was best suited because it permitted the researcher to have evaluated the needs of At-Risk students in the light of achieved success and current best practices. Accordingly, the CSCN venue provided the opportunity whereby the need for greater improvements can be evaluated. This venue was equally pertinent to the creation of a basis from which the measurement of new and innovative best practices, that will unleash potentials in At-Risk students nationwide, can be established.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the needs of At-Risk students in public alternative schools, by using the leading public alternative school in Roswell, Georgia, as the sample population. Evaluating and making known the needs of At-Risk students will facilitate educational institutions in being better prepared to address those needs and the associate nationwide education crisis. The problem addressed in this study is that the nationwide failure rate of At-Risk students continues or intensifies even after the removal from traditional classrooms and placement in alternative schools. Students, because of their social-behavioral deficiencies and lack of ability to connect with the curricula, are identified as At-Risk, removed from traditional classrooms, and placed in alternative schools through a tribunal process. Therefore, this study was designed to identify the academic and social developmental needs of students who are labeled as At-Risk and placed in public alternative schools. The study also shows that alternative school students do not benefit from the traditional curricula being used in alternative schools, and what

students have identified as their needs and would like to see the school system provide in support of those needs.

Through the process of this research, many scholastic components that are needed in order to gain behavioral and academic performance success in alternative education programs were made evident. That evidence was gained through the identification of students' individual needs as personally expressed by currently or previously enrolled students; by parents of current or of former students; by former students; by faculty, staff, and administration of current or of former students; and by partners in education and other stakeholders. Although the partners in education and other stakeholders were representative of the broader traditional and public alternative population in Georgia, all other participants were common affiliates of the leading alternative school in Roswell, Georgia.

Research Questions

The research questions established for this study were:

1. What are the needs of At-Risk students who are placed in public alternative schools?
2. Are the abilities of At-Risk students being developed in public alternative schools?
3. What is the relationship between the academic success of students placed in public alternative schools and the use of the traditional schools' core curricula in public alternative schools?

Definition of Terms

The following list of terms was selected for definition to ensure their systematic application throughout this study and because said application was pertinent to understanding the depth of the study:

Abilities. Abilities signify a student's aptitude, talents, and gifts as expressed by them, or otherwise observed and, signify students' potential to set and achieve individual productive goals and aspirations.

Alternative Schools. Alternative schools are schools established as transitional programs in which At-Risk students are placed until their behavior and academic performance signify readiness to return to traditional classrooms.

Alternative Students. Alternative students are students temporarily placed in alternative schools on the premise that they require alternative means of education (Quinn, Poirier, Faller, Gable, & Tonelson, 2006).

At-Risk. At-Risk is a term used to define students who are at risk of not graduating from high school because of behavioral and academic deficiencies that resulted in their removal from traditional classrooms and placement in alternative schools (Hardy, 2007).

Developed. Developed is used to illustrate the recognition, achievement, growth, and expansion of students' talents, gifts, and skills.

Failure. Failure signifies a student's lack of success academically, behaviorally, socially, and emotionally.

Habilitating Classrooms. Classrooms in which students are taught how to work through difficulties such as drug usage, negative peer pressure, lack of motivation, poor self-esteem, etc.

Nurturing Environment. Nurturing environments signify alternative schools in which the alternatives offered to At-Risk students equip them in developing their talents and abilities and acquiring the skills needed to become productive citizens of their community (Hutchison, 2006).

Tribunal. Tribunal is a school system's due process hearing through which a student's case is presented and tried. The student faces a tribunal hearing as a result of multiple altercations or an adverse one-time offense that warrants removal from the school.

Limitations

The proposed study was conducted at a leading alternative school located in Roswell, Georgia. The name of the school is Crossroads Second Chance North (CSCN) and is the organization of this researcher. Because the study was limited to only one location, the external validity is a concern and one that could lead to the study being perceived as lacking generalizability. Concurrently, the use of a leading alternative school, and one that is the organization of this researcher, could also be perceived as a limitation.

Delimitations

One of the two delimitations of this study was the alternative school's location and the associated population of students that were selected for study. Because of the geographic location of the school, that sample population may not appear to be representative of the magnitude of needs prevalent in lower-achieving alternative schools and in lower socioeconomic communities. The other delimitation is that student success, as measured by test scores, cannot be directly correlated to a particular curriculum, due to the many other variables that impact student performance outcomes.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study, to the field of education, is shown through a study by Hardy (2007), who, in addressing the issue of children At-Risk, stated:

> People who work in schools know that children – even kindergarten and preschool children – don't come to them as blank slates ready to be filled with knowledge. They come from families and neighborhoods … families that are troubled, neighborhoods with history of unspeakable violence. (p. 21)

In spite of findings such as Hardy's, school systems across America remain oblivious to the problems blocking learning among At-Risk students. Hardy (2007), in reflecting on the results of research, has concluded that both public schools and the nation as a whole must begin to address the needs of students, ranging from educational to safety, in order to promote academic and behavioral improvements among disadvantaged children.

At-Risk students are placed in alternative programs through each school system's tribunal process because of varying behavioral difficulties that bar success in traditional classrooms. Though placed in an alternative school, the students are subjected to the same curriculum as utilized in the traditional setting from which they were removed and in which they experienced consistent failure. Therefore, the focus of the alternative school is the same as that of the traditional – to prepare students to be successful on the Georgia High School Graduation Test (GHSGT). However, for the At-Risk student, success on the GHSGT has not been an achievable goal in the traditional setting and is even more dismal in a conglomerate of students who share similar behavioral challenges and academic deficiencies. Therefore, this study is pertinent to the field of education because it provides the framework from which educational leaders are able to assess existing alternative programs and schools. Leaders of public secondary education will

now be able to make pragmatic assessments, in light of the disclosed needs of the alternative student population.

Chapter Summary

The nation's public education crisis evidently is not rooted in the success of students; the crisis is rooted in the failure of students as determined by the nation's academic measurement tools (Hutchison, 2006). The significant group of failing students, now classified as At-Risk, has permeated every culture, every ethnic group, and every socio-economic status (*Education Week*, 2007). At-Risk students now comprise a population that is too large to ignore and with talents too numerous to be buried; in fact, no student should be ignored and no talent should be buried. The problem of failing students has escalated because alternative education programs fail to adequately address the issues that At-Risk students bring to, and face in, the alternative and/or the traditional classroom (Hardy, 2007). Consequently, Chapter 2 of this study reviews literature pertinent to the failure and causes of failure within the At-Risk student population. The literature review was conducted in an effort to create the framework from which a resolution can be sought to identify and address the needs of the At-Risk student population.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview of Public Education Management

In a study conducted by the U.S. Department of Education (2004), emphasis was placed on developing innovative means of meeting the educational needs of students. Equal emphasis was placed on communicating vital information to parents regarding parental access to the various education options designed to alleviate the plague of inequities in achievement among different student groups. The author of the study utilized a conceptual framework derived from a combination of analysis conducted on school choice research and the associated mandates of the No Child Left Behind legislation that school districts need to meet (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). The goal of the U.S. Secretary of Education, Rod Paige, was that innovative and devoted educators would devise the means by which inequities in achievement could be resolved and that the Office of Innovation and Improvement would become the depository from which ideas and resolutions would be communicated. The Secretary attributed the development of the Office of Innovation and Improvement to the need for parents to participate in the decision affecting where and how their children would obtain a free and public quality education (U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

The Secretary of Education envisioned a free and public quality education being channeled through the innovation and implementation of "public school choice, supplemental educational services, charter schools, magnet schools, alternative teacher certification, and school leadership" (U.S. Department of Education, 2004, p. v). With the strength of the No Child Left Behind legislation (NCLB) embedded in school choice, the Secretary sought to highlight the Office of Innovation and Improvement's 2004 finding

that school choice, through the efforts of school districts, was benefiting the neediest of students. The finding was propagated by the Secretary despite other data that continued to show escalating gaps in student achievement among different groups of students. The concept of school choice grants parents the right to transfer their children from failing schools to schools of their choice and was validated by NCLB. The right was designed to promote better parent involvement, improve student performance outcomes, support school integration, and provide the means by which the overall needs of students could be better matched (U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

School Choice and Alternative Schools

The effort to meet the needs of students through the school choice program incorporates the provision of alternative schools as one of the options granted to parents. The provision of the alternative school option was made on the premise that parents of approximately 610,000 students would chose the nurturing environments of alternative schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Parents would choose the alternative school option for their children upon determining that their children were at risk of not being successful in the other school options (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). However, the claim of alternative schools being nurturing environments for students, and that they parallel the other options granted to parents, does not reflect the feelings of students or parents of students who are placed in alternative schools. Studies such as Carroll (2008) and Kim and Taylor (2008) show alternative schools as ultimatums given to students who are removed from traditional classrooms through their school systems' tribunal process, and therefore these schools neither fit the school choice profile nor are they deemed as nurturing environments by parents or students. School choice eligibility

applies only to students of nonalternative Title 1 schools that fail to achieve needed student academic improvement, in accordance with the state's Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) evaluative tool. Title 1 schools are schools that, because of their low socioeconomic community or students' family status, are eligible for federal Title 1 funds and therefore subject to AYP requirements (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Where the deficiency in student achievement is not corrected within two consecutive years or more, students of the failing Title 1 School become eligible for transfer to a public school that is meeting AYP (U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

Although alternative schools typify failing Title 1 schools, students of alternative schools cannot participate in the school choice program. The students cannot participate whether the alternative school is failing academically or is otherwise a dangerous school; whereas students of Title 1 schools, who have been victims of violent crimes on school grounds or attend a school that is steadily dangerous, are eligible to participate in the school choice program (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). The need for alternative school students to be offered choices that are truly representative of a second chance, or an alternative opportunity to gain a quality education, is evidenced by research. Concurrently, some school districts across the United States have instituted a public school choice program in order to comply with NCLB guidelines. The school choice program is a result of the realization that school choice is an integral component in the achievement of student improvement outcomes. Although students in alternative schools are not eligible for school choice, one of the main benefits of the school choice program, as denoted by the U.S. Department of Education, is that school choice creates

environments that are better suited to the varying needs of students (U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

The exemption of alternative school students from the benefit of school choice increases alternative school students' and their parents' already disadvantaged position of being subjected to schools with low performance outcomes and enormous behavioral challenges. This dilemma is supported by the findings that all parents seek the best learning environments for their children and are concerned about their safety (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Expansions of school choice programs require innovative ideas for new programs, school structuring, and are the basis on which school districts are formulating the development of their infrastructure (U.S. Department of Education). However, while expansion of school choice programs remains in progress, the escalating needs of alternative school students are increasingly misplaced. "Deciding how to assign new responsibilities for NCLB and how to structure other duties should be predicated upon fully developed plans that identify the tasks that need to be accomplished" (U.S. Department of Education, p. 17).

School choice programs are designed to improve students' performance outcomes, and school districts are obligated to apprise parents of how they can capitalize on those opportunities.

> NCLB choice patterns are but one source of information about parent preferences that can drive the creation of new schools or programs. Ultimately, a district can create a diverse set of schools to address different needs and interests, making each school a 'school of choice.' District-authorized charter schools, magnet schools, specialized schools within a school, alternative schools, or new community schools all offer an opportunity to increase the supply of quality schools and the options available to parents. (U.S. Department of Education, 2004, pp. 21-22)

The demands of NCLB require school districts to improve the educational process, whereby all students can be afforded equal educational opportunities. Educational opportunities require the inclusion of schools in district planning processes and that school districts facilitate individual schools in meeting the demands of accountability as established by NCLB (U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

School Choice represents a solution to this nation's education dilemma and in the process of school choice implementation, it is necessary to project and examine outcome results. In examining results, the U.S. Department of Education's 2004 study on *Innovations in Education* highlighted the importance of school districts to analyze student achievement results rather than merely collecting data on enrollment and satisfaction. Because alternative schools are listed among school choices presented to parents, it is imperative to examine the validity of alternative schools being one of those choices. That validity will be examined by looking at performance results of alternative schools as shown by research. "New programs and individual school improvement plans aim to improve results. Do they? What lessons can districts learn and apply to new challenges?" (U.S. Department of Education, p. 32). An analysis of school choice in relation to the demands of NCLB legislation did not reveal whether alternative schools were designed to generate student achievement or were merely used to safeguard traditional classrooms from the challenges posed by At-Risk students. For example, an examination of the Cambridge Public School District in Massachusetts, by the U.S. Department of Education 2004 study, revealed that the 1980 goal to create racial diversity throughout Cambridge public schools was unsatisfactory. The racial diversity goal that was attempted through the implementation of a controlled choice plan in 1980, proved unsuccessful. The plan

was unsuccessful because it fell short of producing an equal educational experience for all students throughout the Cambridge Public School District as was intended (U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2003) reported that the larger the enrollment of school districts, the greater the provision of alternative schools and programs and that such schools and programs are more prevalent in urban school districts and in the Southeast. The NCES reported, "Concerns with maintaining order and discipline in regular schools, combined with a desire to provide such at-risk students with alternatives to dropping out, have increased interest in such schools and programs" (NCES, Indicator 27, p. 1). This same report shows that the largest percentage of school districts' enrollment in alternative schools or programs comes from low socioeconomic districts and that enrollment is at least 3% of the total district's population (NCES). Then, with low socioeconomic districts being the most vulnerable to NCLB legislations and the districts being least benefited from school choice, the implications for learning outcomes among this student body and the other affected groups are a concern (U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

Alternative Schools and the Traditional Curriculum

A plethora of problems face the educating of At-Risk students who are placed in alternative schools and programs. In light of the fact that there are problems, the main area of concern is that the curriculum of the public school system may have lost relevance not only to the alternative student body, but also pragmatically to the global economy of the 21st Century. Ediger (2002), in discussing societal trends and the curriculum, emphasized that the need to prepare students to meet the demands of

academic oriented professions, as well as the different levels of vocational job opportunities, is paramount. Ediger listed this need as the number one trend among his list of eight pertinent trends. The fourth trend was identified as a quality education for every student and that quality education was identified with equal importance in both academic and nonacademic training. In listing the seventh trend as the need for change, Ediger noted that the concept of change saturates society and with that concept, the school curriculum is in need of change, and its inherent value needs to be reassessed.

> The area of motivation is both broad and complex. What seems to be motivating to one person is not to another. However, one often useful technique is to show learners what they will be able to do when they finish the instruction. This is more than a statement of the objective of the instruction, which is the next component of the instructional strategy. It is the instructor's demonstration, written description, or illustration of what the learner will be able to do. (Ediger, 2002, p. 10)

Studies such as Hargreaves (2003), Ediger (2002), and Aron and Zweig (2003) all support the disconnection between curriculum instruction and the real world as one of the primary causes of failure not only among At-Risk students, but also among the general student population.

Flannery, Kopkowski, and Rosales (2008) reported on dropout prevention and alluded to the importance of teaching students real world skills where they are able to visualize themselves occupying positions in the future that will be of interest to them. Flannery et al. contended that it is in the students' ability to see and to feel a connection between the world of school and the world of survival, that students are able to formulate the relativity of school to having a career. Flannery et al. further stated that students need to be able to perceive careers in what they are good at and enjoy, or simply in seeing school's relativity in their current and future need to just being able to make a living. In

this same realm of practical relevance, Jehlen, Flannery, and Walker (2008) pointed to the inadequacies of the NCLB legislation as it pertained to the educating of students with challenging behaviors and other things that hinder learning. Jehlen et al. believe that students who experience significant obstructs to the process of learning (and to the point of barring attainment of a high school diploma or the achievement of employable skills) are found in most public schools. In light of already challenging situations that public schools face in educating students who resist the educational process, Jehlen et al. stated that the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) stipulations of NCLB legislation do not benefit students as much as those stipulations compound the problems for the students the stipulations seek to protect, and the schools endeavoring to meet AYP requirements.

All research in the area of alternative education seems to agree in whole or in part with the report of Aron and Zweig (2003):

> America's alarming school dropout rate – an estimated 10 percent nationwide and 50 percent in some inner cities – is as vital a problem as any plaguing the public schools… The United States has no real national system of alternative education that offers out-of-school kids a second chance: What we have is a wide array of mostly underfunded programs that serve only a tiny percentage of this population. (p. 1)

The traditional students will naturally do well in traditional classrooms, and it is on the academically-oriented students that K-12 schools have placed their focus of student achievement and accountability. Correspondingly, the nontraditional students continue to fall victim to the more stringent discipline consequences that are related to the rejection of traditional education approach (Aron & Zweig).

With traditional K-12 education losing at least one quarter of its student enrollment to dropouts, the country cannot afford to leave such a massive representation of students uneducated (Aron & Zweig, 2003). The need to educate is evidenced by

continued escalating placement of students in alternative education programs who eventually add to the already large dropout rate. Public education, however, having fallen short of the ability to educate At-Risk students effectively, must now find a way of equipping them with the same quality skills and knowledge training as it does for students in traditional classrooms (Aron & Zweig). Change in the approach to alternative education is necessary if alternative students are expected to succeed in a global economy. Accordingly, it is necessary to make alternative programs more enticing to and productive for At-Risk students as, despite unreliable estimates, only a minute percentage of out-of-school students benefit from alternative education programs (Aron & Zweig).

While the traditional students' transition from adolescence to adulthood is to some degree within the normal range as compared to the transition of traditional students, the transitional period for At-Risk students is systematically tumultuous, as it is driven by a sense of disconnection from school and society (Aron & Zweig, 2003). This difference in self-esteem and intrinsic motivation between both groups of students dictates the need for an educational approach that is capable of bridging the divide between the student and the elements of needed success. The most notable point of emphasis is that At-Risk students operate outside of the traditional realm of childhood, due to a multiplicity of reasons (Aron & Zweig) and that difference could result in their being viewed as maladjusted. Yet, in spite of At-Risk students' premature entrance into and unprepared readiness for adulthood, they remain bound by a traditional curriculum and associated expectations that are commensurate with the abilities of traditional students. At-Risk students, as adult learners, may lack the necessary coping skills to be successful in a traditional academic environment due to the need for an atmosphere in which learning

can be enhanced (Richardson & King, 1998). Consequently, the magnitude of disconnection between the At-Risk student and the educational system cannot continue to be discounted or merely recognized. The disconnection requires a concrete and urgent resolution, and Aron and Zweig documented the findings of researchers in Aron and Zweig's effort to reveal where the addressed element of disconnection is affecting approximately 5 million youth.

A significant number of Americans, representing a population of approximately 5 million youth who are not adequately educated or are uneducated, are becoming increasingly prone to academic extinction, unemployment, and lifelong poverty (Aron & Zweig, 2003). Aron and Zweig contended that it is necessary to examine the rate of school completion and dropout, in order to comprehend the comparison between students' disconnection with school and the relationship to alternative education. Researchers such as Aron and Zweig postulated that while completion rates estimate students' school performance, student outcomes are projected through dropout rates. Aron and Zweig also believe that if an understanding is to be gained of the number of students finishing school, then both sets of data must be analyzed in the context in which the numbers are defined and the need for alternative education exists.

Aron and Zweig (2003) believe the levels at which reports on high school graduation rates are shown are contingent on the methodology employed in a study. That belief was validated by referencing a study conducted by Greene and Winters (2002) in which a lower graduation rate was shown and the lower rate was reflective of the methodology employed in the study. The study as reported by Greene and Winters stated:

> The national graduation rate for the public school class of 2000 was 69%. The rate for white students was 76%; for Asian students it was 79%; for African-

> American students it was 55%; for Hispanic students it was 53%; and for Native Americans it was 57%. (p. 1)

Aron and Zweig believe Greene and Winters' methodology resulted in showing lower graduation rates because it accounted only for official high school graduation and did not account for the General Education Diploma (GED) or other alternative credentials, as opposed to different methodologies which incorporate other forms of high school completion. Aron and Zweig further alluded to low high school graduation rates being a factor of expelled students who, given the opportunity to attend alternative schools in an effort to continue their high school education, seek not to exercise that option by the mere virtue of a lack of regard for, or value of, education.

Many high school dropouts, whether voluntarily or by way of expulsion from traditional classrooms, become potential candidates for failure as they are unable to shed the stigma of failure or rejection and carry the stigma with them into adulthood. The concept of the prolonged stigma is supported by findings such as conducted by Stanard (2003), whose study showed high school dropouts being the biggest beneficiaries of welfare and the majority of the prison population. However, some dropouts or otherwise expelled students are able to reconnect with the education process and become productive citizens of society, but that likelihood is heavily contingent on the opportunities provided to them through the alternative education process (Aron & Zweig, 2003). Consequently, it is pertinent that alternative education is not and does not become a dumping ground for At-Risk students, as evidence shows that most alternative schools or programs are not meeting the needs of the students they are designed to serve (Aron & Zweig). Rather than helping At-Risk students to reconnect to the mainstream, some alternative schools are mere channels of their disconnection. The focus of alternative education has the

appearance that it is placed more on removing vulnerable students from the mainstream than on meeting their needs, as the vast majority of students who require alternative means of education are not being reached through the traditional curricula (Aron & Zweig, 2003).

Function and Purpose of Alternative Education

When considering the needs of At-Risk students, Aron and Zweig (2003) advocated the importance of looking at the degree to which alternative schools may be helping or hindering student progress, whether alternative education is reconnecting students to the educational process, and if reconnection should be a focus. Simultaneously, in considering the effect of the traditional curricula on student success or failure, Aron and Zweig believe that high stakes testing could be a major impediment to student success and needs to be examined in light of addressing the needs of alternative education students. Aron and Zweig revealed the desire for a common typology of alternative education, a typology that is effective in encapsulating the common denominator of At-Risk student needs and supports a comprehensive approach to solving those needs with adequate specificity. Aron and Zweig contended that such a typology could lead educators and other stakeholders in understanding and visualizing the product of a high quality alternative education endeavor; and that alternative students deserve high quality alternative education programs that are compatible with high quality traditional education programs. “By including in a typology factors associated with quality and effectiveness, policy makers, practitioners, and funders may be better able to help promote the expansion of high-quality approaches and improve or eliminate low-quality approaches” (Aron & Zweig, p. 21).

The need exists for alternative education programs to offer different and innovative strategies to the same educational end and public good that traditional education offers, based on the premise that there is more than one way to become educated. Different and innovative strategies conceptualize the fact that because all students are capable of being educated, society must assume the obligation of ensuring that outcome by invoking alternative curricular programs that align with the concept (Aron & Zweig, 2003). The educational goal of society cannot be to issue a high school diploma but rather, it must be to educate students to the level of adequately preparing them to fulfill productive roles in the community. Accordingly, the mission of education must be redefined to incorporate a statement that satisfies the goals of both a quality traditional and a quality alternative education program (Aron & Zweig). To date, separate facilities and location are the primary ingredients that qualify alternative programs as "alternative," as the curriculum approach for both groups incorporates the same high stakes tests and requirements. Most students entering alternative schools or programs lack basic academic skills. Because of the lack in basic academic skills, teachers of alternative students are forced to focus energy and concentration on teaching basic skills necessary to students' achievement of a regular high school diploma; although for many students in alternative schools or programs, the regular high school diploma is unattainable (Aron & Zweig).

Student Achievement and Academic Relevance

In addressing the issues of academic relevance, Hargreaves (2003) made some of the most thought-provoking statements that strongly suggest against any standardization of curriculum across the United States. In doing so, Hargreaves indicated the need for

schools to focus on the fostering of creativity and ingenuity rather than being obsessed with imposing and micromanaging curriculum uniformity. Hargreaves further addressed the issue of academic relevance by indicating that schools fall short of preparing young people to be effective in a knowledge economy and/or to assimilate adequately in a strong civil society; instead of promoting innovative approaches, school systems are buried in a method of useless standardization. Hargreaves contended that if schools abandon the use of a standardized curriculum, ingenuity and creativity in teaching and learning will evolve in the classroom and not only will needed test results be achieved, but teaching will regain its purpose of shaping lives and society. The negative effect of curriculum uniformity is reflected in such data as:

> Five out of every 100 young adults enrolled in high school in October 1999 left school before October 2000 without successfully completing a high school program … Over the last decade, between 347,000 and 544,000 10^{th} through 12^{th} grade students left school each year without completing a high school program … Among other findings, the report shows that young people (16-24 year olds) of Hispanic origin are more likely to be out of high school without a high school credential than young white and black non-Hispanics over the past 30 years. (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2002, p. 1)

Similarly, Aron (2006), in addressing the issue of Alternative Education programs, has indicated that "Urban school districts, districts with high minority student populations, and districts with high poverty rates were more likely than other districts to have such programs" (p. 10).

Factors Driving Poor Behavioral Performance in Students

The education process needs to be able to equip every student with the skills required to be productive in society. At the same time, the high school diploma remains unattainable for many students (Kim & Taylor, 2008). Consequently, it is necessary to underscore some of the factors driving poor behaviors that are preventing students from

gaining the high school diploma. Some of those factors indicated by Kahler, as cited by Pauley, Bradley, and Pauley (2005), alluded to the differences in each student's level of distress and motivation as dictated by each student's personality type. Each student's level of distress in the classroom, when confronted with the learning process, is reflective of the different personality types and contingent on what motivates learning (Pauley et al.). The Kahler study, as cited by Pauley et al., postulated that the factors affecting learning are influenced by the nature and level of the student's needs and if and how those needs are met. That study indicated that peoples' weakness and distress are demonstrated when the needs that motivate them are not being met; and because those emotions cloud the ability to think clearly or logically, students are more prone to demonstrate predictable negative behaviors in the classroom.

Variables That Interplay in the High School Diploma Being Unattainable

The six personality types developed by Kahler, as cited by Pauley et al. (2005), are Reactors, Workaholics, Persisters, Dreamers, Rebels, and Promoters; each personality dictating how a student will respond to different teaching styles in the classroom. Students with Reactors personality are feelings-oriented and, with quality interpersonal skills, are more academically oriented. Workaholics are logical and sequential thinkers, with the ability to view and analyze available options presented to them. Persisters are opinionated, decisive, and with a high values system, are systematically goal-oriented. Dreamers are rational and independent; they are not impulsive and are direction-guided achievers. Rebels love spontaneity and energy and are easily bored if not actively engaged in fun-oriented activities. Promoters are experimental-oriented, enjoy risk taking, and exhibit a dire need for immediate results. A conglomerate of these various

personalities in the average classroom of 30 students presents a massive challenge to any teacher and lends itself to the heightening or reduction of distress in students, depending on their individual level of motivation (Pauley et al., 2005).

Although each student in any given classroom possesses elements of all the various personalities, different specific personality characteristics are dominant in each student. Consequently, the students whose personality characteristics are more compatible with the teaching environments are the ones more prone to demonstrate academic and behavioral success in the classroom. Students whose needs are not being met in the classroom will inevitably demonstrate negative behaviors and academic performance that could potentially result in ultimate expulsion and alternative placements (Pauley et al., 2005).

Whereas Reactor personality students require individual recognition and sensory stimulation, Workaholic students desire recognition whenever their ability to think clearly and work hard is exercised and demonstrated in the classroom. Concurrently, Persister students want to be recognized for doing a good job or for having a good idea, and these students need the recognition to be verbalized to them. Conversely, Dreamer students require solitude to gain needed motivation; Rebel students need to be involved in playful contact with others and Promoter students need an exciting environment in order to feel motivated (Pauley et al.). The six personality factors represent variables that can interplay in making the high school diploma potentially out of reach for many students (Pauley et al.). Accordingly, Richardson and King (1998) postulated that the opportunities provided for learners must match their needs so that learning can be enhanced.

The necessity for aligning learning opportunities with the needs of the learner is promoted through prominent concepts such as Gardner's (1993) Multiple Intelligence Theory. The theory indicates increased understanding of individuals possessing multiple intelligences, which brings into question whether curricula should adjust to students or students should adjust to curricula. Gardner believes that the process of expanding or examining intelligence is too broad to be limited to a standard application or unit of measurement, as is the practice in the educational process. The failures being reaped in education are systemic and the reality is that in order not to leave any child behind (Mayers, 2006), alternatives must be created to meet the needs of the alternative group. Webster Dictionary (Thatcher, 1980) defines education as "… To cultivate and train the mental powers of; to qualify for the business and duties of life …" (p. 276) and Dewey's philosophy is embedded in one's ability to intimately connect the learner with what is to be learned by linking it with the learner's needs and interests (Noll, 2007). Accordingly, Ramirez (1999) spoke unfavorably about state academic standards by indicating that, except for the State of Iowa, all other states in the union propagate the development of rigorous state academic standards; state academic standards that fail to improve the quality of public education curricula, assessment driven instruction, and student performance outcomes.

Rather than investing in innovative approaches to help students resolve the insurmountable issues blocking learning, the focus remains on teaching the curriculum. Hardy (2007) contended that if society intends to invest in harnessing the talents and abilities of children in poor socio-economic neighborhoods, it will require the concerted efforts of the school system, as well as local and federal agencies. The combined effort is

necessary in order to meet the educational, housing, social, and emotional needs of disadvantaged students, as it is no longer feasible to focus only on their academic development. The educational view has been to minimize the importance of students' social-behavioral development and not to recognize the necessity for schools to place equal, if not greater importance on students' emotional and other personal needs as it does on matters of academics (Severson et al., 2007). According to Van Amelsvoort, Hendriks, and Scheerens (2000), dealing with today's youth is much more challenging than before and the politics of education must now confront the pragmatic needs of the educational system.

The means by which desired results can be attained were evaluated by Zweig (2003) who, in examining the condition of At-Risk youth, their contribution to the domestic problem, and their need for alternative placement, indicated that the needs of At-Risk students were not adequately met through the traditional method of education. Zweig advocated that although public school systems are cautioned not to create dumping grounds for At-Risk students, it is evident that public education systems continue to fall short of meeting the needs of this student population. Zweig believes that not meeting the needs of At-Risk students, in light of the difficulties At-Risk students face in traditional classrooms, further heightens the disconnect this student population experiences with the education system. Zweig believes that alternative enrollment provides the opportunity for school systems to meet the needs of At-Risk students and get them reconnected with the educational process.

Problems of and Solutions to Inequities in Public Education

According to Carroll (2008), although the academic predicament of At-Risk students is severe, not all states are concerned about the educational rights and needs of students expelled from traditional classrooms. Carroll further contended that the lack of concern among many states is heightened by the NCLB federal legislation that inherently denies expelled students from alternative measures of education. Carroll believes that the expulsion criterions, as adopted by many states, create the basis for easy and numerous removal of students from the mainstream, and at an exorbitant intrinsic cost to the students and a financial burden to taxpayers that is much greater than the cost of the educational route. With over 100,000 students expelled from the nation's public school systems during the 2004–05 school year, approximately 50,000 of them were left without access to public education, and some even permanently as a result of NCLB legislation that encourages exclusionary practices within the educational system (Carroll).

Although the public education system developed alternative education to prevent the academic neglect of At-Risk students, inequities remain embedded in public education. Alternative education was founded on the premise of school choice and the need to provide free and public education to an increasingly diverse student population. Consequently, alternative education provisions became more accessible to students through the school choice voucher system enacted in the 1990s by the federal government (Kim & Taylor, 2008). With 39% of the nation's school districts offering some form of alternative education provision to At-Risk students during the 2000-01 school year and beyond, Kim and Taylor reported a disproportionate location of alternative schools and programs within poor and minority school populations. The

disproportionate location of alternative schools, in poor and minority neighborhoods, carries with it the associated heightening of economic disadvantages and inequalities commensurate with poor and minority populations (Kim & Taylor).

Efforts are being made, however, to alleviate the disadvantages and inequalities that accompany the operation of public alternative schools. In spite of those efforts, public alternative schools continue to be perceived by the public as dumping grounds for poor achieving or otherwise problem students and that stigma must be remedied (Kim & Taylor, 2008). The underlying assumption of the public is that student failure is caused by their own individual inadequacies and the impact of societal and poor school conditions are discounted or ignored in the process (Kim & Taylor). However, the inadequacies of such assumptions are evidenced in findings that reveal where the educational system does not provide a level playing field for alternative schools or the At-Risk student population it serves. The educational system tends to favor the more elite mainstream population of students (Kim & Taylor). The absence of the necessary ingredients in alternative schools that produce success in students is evidence of the disparities that permeate the educational system (Kim & Taylor).

In order to alleviate systemic inequities that plague alternative schools, studies such as Kim and Taylor (2008), Aron and Zweig (2003) and Aron (2006) among others, reveal necessary components that must become evident in the administration of alternative schools. Those components are encapsulated as follows: (a) a curriculum that is engaging to and worthwhile for the alternative student; (b) a learning atmosphere that is nonthreatening to the behaviorally challenged student; (c) instruction that is career oriented for all affected students; (d) a management approach that allows for participatory

engagement of students in the functions and goals of the school; (e) a standard of education that is transparent to the public and compatible to the means afforded to the traditional population of students; and (f) an environment that is nurturing to the students and in which the students are able to achieve and maintain a needed sense of trust.

Accordingly, Schoel, Prouty, and Radcliffe (1988) explained that trust exists only when embedded in each member of a given team having the assurance of being belayed – safely connected to and by each other. Schoel et al. believes it is in the concept of belaying, that strategies of team building based on trust must be formulated.

> To belay means to "tie down." It is a nautical term taken from the days of sail and incorporated into the sport of rock climbing, and now ropes course work. If a person is "on belay" in an Adventure situation, it means he is tied safely to someone else, that person being a qualified "belayer." The belaying relationship is a safe relationship. That sense of interpersonal safety is another Adventure counseling cornerstone, and every group must seek to develop it. (Schoel et al., p. 32)

Infusing Principles of Trust and Team Work in At-Risk Students

Carroll (2008) indicated that the educational needs of At-Risk students are intense and Schoel et al. (1988) contended that the recognition and building of trust is paramount in the establishment of any team. Accordingly, the first building block of interpersonal safety in the process of establishing trust and team building in At-Risk students or in any other group is termed *Full Value Contract*. This building block (Block 1) becomes the cornerstone of the building of the team. Whereas the team determines the components and guidelines of Block 1, the team leader must consistently direct the team to the adherence of the guidelines. As the team progresses, other blocks are built upon Block 1 and the team leader incessantly reminds team members of their dependency on, and the interdependency of, each member of the team in order for the team to sustain continued

strength and stability. Leadership then aids the team in adhering to the principle that no member is at risk of failure because of the intimate connection to each other. Therefore, when one member becomes afraid of aiming for heights never attempted before, other members of the team challenge and encourage that member to continue the reach for great heights. Such encouragement from the team, and guidance of the leader, mobilizes each team member to risk curiosity, risk spontaneity, risk failure, and by which the entire team reaps the benefit of achieving desired goals (Schoel et al.).

The task of leading people plagued by a stigma of challenges is most difficult, and leaders of people with difficult challenges are worthy of all available assistance in an effort to achieve desired goals (Schoel et al., 1988). In the words of E. E. Cummings, as cited by Schoel et al.:

> We do not believe in ourselves until someone reveals that deep inside us something is valuable, worth listening to, worthy of our touch, sacred to our touch. Once we believe in ourselves we can risk curiosity, wonder, spontaneous delight, or any experience that reveals the human spirit. (p. ix)

Requirements in the Leading of At-Risk Students

Leading At-Risk students requires the ability to formulate effective teams, and Lencioni (2002) identified five dysfunctions of a team, those being absence of trust, fear of conflict, lack of commitment, avoidance of accountability, and inattention to results. Lencioni's approach to team building is to identify what does not work – the elements that destroy a team. Lencioni envisions the demonstration of dysfunctions when a team, by virtue of its departmentalization psychologically and physically, views each member as competitors rather than equal partners working towards the same goal. This frame of thinking, Lencioni stresses, creates skepticism among team members that makes them resentful and reluctant to give or accept solution-driven criticism among the team. A

misunderstanding of the nature and value of conflicts in a team results in avoidance that leads to a compromise in quality of outcome rather than to the solution of concerns that leads to success.

Lencioni (2002) implied that building a team spirit is the *soul* of an environment and the need to build a team spirit is the approach used by Blanchard and Bowles (1998) in the recommendation of strategies for building effective teams. The strategies Blanchard and Bowles proposed were derived from the behavioral observation of three types of animals: "The Spirit of the Squirrel, the Way of the Beaver, the Gift of the Goose" (p. xi). The observations made from the animals and applied to team building were: (a) they work hard because they are motivated, (b) they have a goal based on survival of the team, and (c) they understand that their work is important and worthwhile. Blanchard and Bowles stated, "Worthwhile goes beyond important but it starts with important" (p. 28) and that "Worthwhile just covers more territory than important" (p. 29).

Blanchard and Bowles (1998) stated that in the building of a team, the strategies must begin and end with the teaching of three lessons to the team in regard to the work in which they are engaged: "First, the work has to be understood as important. Second, it has to lead to a well-understood and shared goal. Third, values have to guide all plans, decisions, and actions" (p. 29). Blanchard and Bowles contended that a team would sense that the work of the team is worthwhile when all members of the team are all working toward a well-understood and shared goal guided by values. Blanchard and Bowles further stressed that there are two types of goals, "Result" and "Value," and that Result goals are different from Value goals. Blanchard and Bowles believed that goals initiate

actions but it is values that sustain the effort. They indicated that it is the responsibility of management to establish the values that must be enacted to guide the goals, and as mutual trust rises, support for goals will increase.

> That's the thing about a value. It has to hold up in tough times. Otherwise it's not a value. It's a feel-good slogan of the day. It's ethics of convenience. . . . Values aren't set the way goals are. The minute, the second, you proclaim a goal it's real. It's set. Values don't work that way. You can proclaim a value all you want, and you need to do that, but values become real only when you demonstrate them in the way you act and the way you insist others behave. Goals are for the future. Values are now. Goals are set. Values are lived. Goals change. Values are rocks you can count on. "Grandfather said, 'Rocks don't move in a swirling river. Pebbles roll. Even if you call them rocks.' " (Blanchard & Bowles, 1998, p. 46)

The Spirit of the Squirrel depicts one's understanding of the importance of one's work that leads to shared goals that are value driven. The Way of the Beaver illustrates the corporate, yet independent and innovative operation of each team member in the controlling and achievement of team goals. The Gift of the Goose illustrates the necessity and importance of the team to cheer and encourage each other in the carrying out and accomplishments of functions. These conclusions were derived upon observing the rapidity and homogeneous movements of geese in a day, the distance flown each year, and the cheering method employed among the group as they fly the distance (Blanchard & Bowles, 1998). Accordingly, where alternative schools are failing to meet the needs of the students served, Kim and Taylor (2008) question the viability of the schools being *alternative* and indicate that a system of inequity would stifle the achievement of a successful education for all students. A successful educational system is one that enhances student achievement by providing equitable resources, encouragement, and motivation in the achievement of goals (Kim & Taylor).

Monitoring and Feedback in Developing Motivation in Students

In the realm of motivation, feedback is an integral component. That component can only be attained through monitoring, as identified by Campbell (2006) in his study of the science teacher who was concerned about the lack of relevance of curriculum to students' needs and interests. The teacher's innovative attempt was to transform the study of science into a more relative format that would heighten students' ability to grasp scientific concepts and application. In the process of implementing the change, the teacher was able to identify where he needed to modify strategies in order to gain the outcome desired. That achievement was attained through constant monitoring based on the science teacher's principled belief that the best determinant of motivation and achievement was outcome. Monitoring results of student work is an effective motivator in the classroom, and the science teacher of Campbell's study supported the concept that students' personal and motivational needs must be the center of any strategy to improve learning (Campbell, 2006).

Visible and Invisible Forces Driving Student Expulsion

A review of literature in the realm of the courts evidences the effect of teacher attitude and approach on student achievement and in the handling of classroom discipline. In Dunn v. Fairfield Community High School, District No. 225, United States Court of Appeals, Seventh Circuit, 1998. 158 F. 3d 962, two guitar band members at Fairfield Community High school brought suit in the District Court against Fairfield for receipt of an 'F' ascribed to them by the band teacher for their final grade in the band course. The ascribed grading resulted in one of the plaintiffs (McCullough) being unable to graduate with honors. Fairfield and the band teacher had explicitly prohibited band

players from engaging in musical pieces outside of the planned band program during band performances. However, because these two guitar players chose to defy the band rules and their teacher's explicit orders, by playing two unauthorized guitar pieces during a band program, they both received an 'F' for the band course. The two band members subsequently brought suit in the District Court against Fairfield for violating their constitutional rights by "imposing disciplinary measures unrelated to academic conduct and . . . outside the parameters and intent of the Illinois School code and Fairfield's disciplinary policy" (as cited in Alexander & Alexander, 2001, p. 350). When summary judgment was granted to Fairfield, the plaintiffs appealed to the United States Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals, but the appellate court, in upholding the judgment of the district court, made note that the ruling was based on the fact that the school did not violate the plaintiffs' constitutional rights as was the claim made by the plaintiffs. The notation of the appellate court's ruling implied the court's preferred use of a less aversive approach by the teacher, given the nature of the offense and the consequence of the 'F' grades assigned to the students (Alexander & Alexander).

Severson et al. (2007) suggested the need for focus on the social-behavioral development of students to be a primary goal in the education process. However, it appears that many educators fail to recognize the importance of that focus and place emphasis chiefly on academic achievement (Severson et al.). Identifying the needs of At-Risk students is important because the education system continues to subject At-Risk students to the same standard curriculum and high stakes testing as the traditional classroom without investigating or giving concern to the possible effect on students' failure or expulsion rate (Aron & Zweig, 2003). The subjection of At-Risk students to a

standard traditional curriculum, even though trend indicators suggest the need for change (Ediger, 2002), is carried out under the disguise of a*lternative programs.* The disguise is used despite alternative students' blatant or cloaked rejection of the traditional curriculum method of education, as indicated by the escalating national student expulsion rate, and justifies why public education is now identified as a national crisis (Hutchison, 2006).

The cause of student failure in traditional classrooms has been a long and enduring concern for educators, with some educators believing that the students themselves are the cause of the problem. However, though At-Risk students possess different characteristics from those of traditional students, the cause, prevention, and treatment of the differences are the overriding factors. The cause is linked to an ineffective traditional system of education (Quinn, Poirier, Faller, Gable, & Tonelson, 2006). The needs of today's youth are as diverse as they are rapidly changing, and in order for the traditional system of education to be able to meet their needs, it too must be equally diverse and rapidly changing (Fizzell & Raywid, as cited in Quinn et al.). The paradox of responsibility is simplified in this assessment:

> Followers of Hobbs's reeducation (RE-ED) philosophy advocate that adults have a responsibility not only to work with children, but also to change the system in order to facilitate their growth in areas of competence, independence, responsibility, and self-respect. Therefore, when a child fails to learn and grow, the fault lies not solely with the child but instead lies mainly with the system and with the adults responsible for it. (Quinn et al., 2006, p. 11)

Accordingly, the need for effective alternative education measures supersedes all blame and must be rooted in the fact that today's non-traditional youth will continue to rebel against the norm and thus be removed from traditional classrooms. With removal, effective provisions must be made for the educational needs of At-Risk students through

the implementation of innovative alternative schools and curricula, as well as alternative teaching strategies (Quinn et al., 2006).

Temporarily placing alternative students in alternative schools, on the premise that they require alternative means of education, then returning them to traditional classrooms is not working, and evidences the need for change in the education system (Quinn et al., 2006). The need for effective alternative education is now more obvious and requires the involvement of all stakeholders including researchers. The involvement of researchers in disclosing the characteristics of effective alternative education is pertinent. Their involvement is paramount because there is little evidence or substantive showing of quality alternative program components that work (Quinn et al., 2006).

The Need for Creativity and Ingenuity in Secondary Public Education

The theoretical framework, by which the study on the Evaluation of At-Risk Students' Needs will be guided, is crafted from the concept of *Their Highest Potential* as designed by Walker (1996). Walker wrote about a local school district that was transformed from nonfunctioning to a fully involved family, school, and community organization tailored around the needs of the changing demographics of the student body it was charged to serve. The change occurred because of a change in concept from the existing '*School as a Business*' to that of '*School as a Family*.' This concept of a family appears predicated on Walker's implied philosophy that the success of a family hinges on the needs of all its members being equally and adequately identified and met.

Accordingly, the significance of *Their Highest Potential* concept was reflected in the principle of Hargreaves (2003). Hargreaves strongly cautioned against any standardization of curriculum across the United States, and indicated the need for schools

to focus on the fostering of creativity and ingenuity rather than being obsessed with imposing and micromanaging curriculum uniformity. The implication of the Walker concept of *Their Highest Potential* is that educators need to develop creative and innovative means of motivating students to achieve their highest potential. The concept aligns with Hargreaves' stance against the standardization of curriculum on the principle that it diminishes the creativity and ingenuity of educators.

The Voice of Students in the Development of Solutions

The development of solutions to the nation's education crisis requires education leaders to solicit the input of students. "Findings suggest that students are capable of providing valuable information and feedback about program and policy effects" (De La Ossa, 2005, p. 24) and in the search for solutions to the crisis in public education and the dilemma of alternative education. Alternative students freely admit that traditional classrooms are not conducive to their learning because of classroom size, pace of work, teaching style, magnitude of distractions, and lack of individual attention (De La Ossa). Alternative schools require a humanistic approach, as that approach permits the searching for and development of the human abilities and potential that result in individual enrichment and a greater appreciation of self and society. Concurrently, the validity of incorporating student voices in the reformation of education is shaped by the fact that not only do school policies directly affect students, but also the success of those policies is affected by student perception (De La Ossa).

In the study conducted by De La Ossa (2005) students reported that smaller class size, as evident in alternative schools, has the potential to permit teachers to be more of an artist than a worker. Students also reported that the need to address personal unsolved

problems in their lives frequently supersedes their desire for education, and that it is in the addressing of those problems that the desire for education can surface (De La Ossa). Students felt that developing personal relationships with teachers gave them a sense of obligation to learn and to succeed, and to not learn and succeed would be comparable to disappointing a friend. Students confirmed that feeling supported and comfortable produces a sense of security that motivates needed growth, and that to have only one way by which all students should be expected to learn is impractical (De La Ossa).

In the face of the factors driving student expulsion and the failure rate among At-Risk students, the study of this researcher was designed to reveal the needs of At-Risk students in public alternative programs. The study has determined a possible relativity between the traditional curriculum and the annual escalating failure and dropout rate among the alternative student body. The review of literature examined the documented problems affecting public secondary education in general and alternative schools in particular. The review detailed factors of the alternative education dilemma and examined how those factors are contributing to the nation's education crisis and with the purpose of identifying causes and generating solutions. Although alternative schools are provided for At-Risk students, and at tremendous cost to the public, national data do not support students benefiting from the schools and the curricula. This inability of At-Risk students to gain adequate benefit from alternative schools is attributed to the reason why public education is at a crisis situation (Hutchison, 2006), and therefore this study is pertinent to the solution of the national education crisis in general and to the dilemma of alternative education in particular.

Summary Statement

The literature review has revealed that At-Risk students bring a conglomerate of needs to the alternative classroom. They bring needs which, if not met, prevent them from achieving the benefits of the classroom. However, those needs cannot be met unless they are identified and it is for the purpose of identifying those needs that this study was designed. Through the literature review component of this study, it is confirmed that the needs of At-Risk students are best ascertained from the students themselves (De La Ossa, 2005). Consequently, the means by which the needs of the At-Risk student population were evaluated in this study are outlined in Chapter 3, the Methodology Chapter.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

Procedures

A qualitative and quantitative evaluation methodology was utilized for this study. The mixed methodological approach was used to identify and disclose the needs of At-Risk students in public alternative schools. First, a review of literature was performed to identify the United States' approach to both traditional and alternative sectors of public education and the interrelated problems and concerns stemming from both sectors. The literature review utilized online and library resources to reveal the current condition of public education in the United States. The current problems and concerns of public alternative education were also revealed in light of the problems and concerns of public education in general. The literature review documented the inherent, implicit, and underlying concerns of researchers, alternative students, educators, and other stakeholders of public alternative education.

Second, key concepts derived from the literature review were used to develop 5 individual sets of open-ended questionnaires, numbered 1 to 5. The 5 individual sets of open-ended questionnaires were used for the qualitative component of this study, and were the only questionnaires used in this study. The quantitative component of this study did not utilize questionnaires. Accordingly, each of the 5 sets of questionnaires was developed for and corresponded with a particular sample population, one set of questionnaires for each sample population. Each sample population is hereby and subsequently referred to as a subgroup but does not bear the title of subgroup, because they are identified and referenced by their respective questionnaire number (as shown in Appendixs E through I). The questions in 1 set of questionnaires were the same questions

in all 5 sets of questionnaires, and each set comprised of 19 questions. However, the questions in each set of questionnaire were framed differently to accurately address the respective subgroup for which each set was designed. Consequently, the questions among the 5 sets of questionnaires may be better described as comparable rather than as same. The title assigned to each set of questionnaire was representative of the subgroup investigated. The questions among the 5 sets of questionnaires were designed to obtain responses from the most pertinent of groups and to facilitate comparison of similarities and differences in their responses. Those groups, being the 5 different subgroups of participants, together constituted the total purposeful sampling population (Patton, 2002) that formed the study. The questionnaires served as the primary source of data collection for the qualitative segment of the study and all 5 questionnaires required the written or recorded verbal responses of participants but only written responses were obtained.

The responses from each of the 5 sets of questionnaires were analyzed and tabulated according to common themes among the comparable questions of each respective subgroup (as shown in Appendix E through I). The responses were then examined and categorized according to similarities, differences, themes, experiences, expressed feelings, expressed desires, expectations, and otherwise expressed emotions of each individual and of each subgroup of participants. A comparative analysis of responses to the comparable questions among the subgroups was then tabulated, analyzed, and communicated through the reporting of the findings as shown in Chapter 4.

The secondary source of qualitative data collection was from a nonparticipant phenomenological observation study of the students and faculty at CSCN. Over a span of 2 school weeks and at random times, 3 observations were conducted and for an average

of 33 minutes per observation. Because the observations were limited to one population of students, hereinafter referred to as subgroup 1, some students were observed more than once in different settings but in a different mix of students. The observations were conducted at random times to facilitate the maximum mix of students, different group sizes, and in different settings that ranged from a morning cafeteria period to scheduled classes. Key concepts derived from the literature review (as shown in Appendix A) permeated the object of each observation. In the process of the observations, the 12 different patterns of behavior, conduct, and other variables (as shown in appendix A) were looked for and documented accordingly. The outcome of the observation was coded for the analytical, interpretative, and communicative findings of the qualitative data and in conjunction with the common themes utilized in the analysis of the 5 subgroups.

Third, permission to conduct the study at the selected research site of Crossroads Second Chance North (CSCN) was secured by the researcher. That permission was in the form of a signed Institutional Permission Letter (as shown in Appendix B) from the Principal of CSCN. Parent permission and student assent was sought through a Participant Consent Form (as shown in Appendix C). The Participant Consent Form and the signed Institutional Permission Letter were obtained through meetings with the Principal, and together served as the only informed consent or permission that the governing school agency required in order for this researcher to have conducted the study at CSCN. Every participant and parent or legal guardian of a minor participant (children under 18 years of age) were required to sign the Participant Consent Form (as shown in Appendix C) before the participant was permitted to participate in the study.

Accordingly, minor participants were required to sign the child assent section of the Participant Consent Form.

Fourth, with the approval to conduct the study at CSCN, an Application for IRB Review and Certificate of Compliance (as shown in Appendix D) was filed with Argosy University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The purpose of the application was to seek permission from the IRB to collect the data needed for this study on Evaluation of At-Risk Students' Needs in Public Alternative Schools.

Fifth, upon obtaining approval from the IRB to begin the collection of data and congruent with the successful proposal defense, this researcher began preparation for the data collection process. The researcher began the process by first informing the school administration of the date the data collection process would begin and of the methods, as outlined herein, that would be utilized in the study. The researcher systematically visited all classes, grades 8 through 12, (subgroup 1) to individually hand each student a Participant Consent Form (as shown in Appendix C) to take home to a parent or legal guardian to be filled out and signed. Students were, at the time of being handed the Participant Consent Form (consent form), advised as to the purpose of the consent form. Students were also informed of their optional participation, as indicated in the child assent section of the consent form, even after obtaining signed parental permission. The researcher also informed the students that they would not be permitted to participate in the study without a signed consent form by a parent or legal guardian and the signing of the child assent section of the consent form by the student. Students and/or their parents or legal guardians had the option of obtaining a consent form and the child assent section of the consent form translated in their primary language, if their primary language were

not English. However, all participants elected to use the English version of the consent form and questionnaires. Students were asked to and handed their returned signed consent form directly to the researcher who remained accessible to the students to ensure the absolute compliance with that requirement as was obtained. Students were asked to and returned the signed consent form within 2 weeks after receiving the consent form from the researcher; a minimum of 80 consent forms were handed out to students.

The researcher followed up the issuance of the consent form to students, with a telephone message to the student's home or other contact number as was listed with the school. The researcher was vigilant in making personal contacts with students and parents in an effort to obtain a minimum desired number of 35 returned signed consent forms. Although "There are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry" (Patton, 2002, p. 244), each subgroup was ascribed a desired sample size in accordance with the purpose of the study.

The first subgroup of participants (subgroup 1) was comprised of students, grades 8 through 12, who were currently enrolled at CSCN at any time and for any period during the data collection process. The population of students in Grades 8 through 12 was in the range of 77 to 90, due to the normal transient enrollment of students. In all events, there was no need to nor was any current student excluded from the study on any basis of enrollment and for the duration of the data collection process. Though the number of participants that comprised subgroup 1 was not limited to a particular number, a desired sample size of 30 participants was considered adequate to support the purpose of the study and 37 participants were obtained. In all events, all participants were gained during

the established period for each subgroup and all participants were used in this study. The number gained for each subgroup is revealed in the report of this study.

Sixth, the data collection process began with subgroup 1 upon implementation of the procedures detailed herein and which guided the confidentiality of every participant in all 5 subgroups that comprised the study. The students who returned the signed consent form (as shown in Appendix C) granting them permission to participate in the study, and who signed the child assent section of the consent form that indicated their willingness to participate in the study, were targeted for completion of the subgroup 1 questionnaire.

Seventh, a nonparticipant phenomenological data collection observation (as shown in Appendix A) was conducted concurrently with the data collection process of subgroup 1. The observation approach examined the behaviors, actions, and interpersonal relationships with and among the entire current student population at CSCN. Findings from the literature review permeated the object of the observations and all aspects of both vertical and horizontal communication among students and teachers were evaluated. Three observations were conducted randomly over a period of 2 school weeks at unscheduled times. The observations lasted for an average of 33 minutes each, covering the beginning and ending of classes, transitional periods between classes, break periods, and main instructional periods.

The 3 observations were conducted to permit the identification of patterns and themes; and regularities of behavior, conduct, and other variables such as learning atmosphere and observational settings. The observations were unannounced and purely observatory with virtually no interaction with students, faculty, or other school personnel. The focus of the observations was on the grades 8 through 12 student population to

parallel that of subgroup 1. In the process of observation, data were recorded according to patterns, themes, similarities, and differences that appeared common to more than one verbal, implied, or otherwise expressed statement of any form within and among the available and observable groups.

Eighth, participants who were targeted for completion of subgroup 1 Questionnaire, titled CSCN Currently or Previously Enrolled Students, Grades 8 through 12 (as shown in Appendix E), were asked to complete the questionnaire independently at school or at home either in writing or by the recording of the student's verbal response. Questionnaire #1 (as shown in Appendix E) positioned subgroup 1 to have stated their needs as experienced and felt in the alternative classroom as well as in the traditional classroom. Subgroup 1 participants consisted of all students, grades 8 through 12, who obtained and returned a signed consent form granting them permission to participate in the study, were willing to participate in the study, and had signed the child assent section of the consent form. The number of 8 through 12 grade students enrolled at CSCN ranged from 77 to 90. The data collection period for subgroup 1 was terminated in less than 7 calendar weeks after the researcher had notified CSCN administration, in writing, of the data collection start date. The calculation of 7 calendar weeks did not include the last or first 2 weeks of the semester in which CSCN students were in class, but data collection was inclusive of the last 2-week period of the semester.

Ninth, the completed questionnaires were secured by the researcher at all times and accessible only by the researcher and for data analysis as necessary throughout the process of the study. In the data analysis process, responses of subgroup 1 participants were compared and contrasted with the responses obtained from participants in each of

the four remaining subgroups. Students in grades 6 and 7 were not participants in the study. The reason for the exclusion was to permit the objective of achieving meaningful and useable determination of similarities and differences in responses from all 5 subgroups, and the focus of the study was not on the middle school student population. Accordingly, no consideration was given to gaining any particular number of students from any one grade level or by any other level of measurement other than students in grades 8 through 12.

Tenth, Questionnaire #2 (subgroup 2) titled, Parents of Current or of Former CSCN Students (as shown in Appendix F) was developed and delivered to parents along with a copy of the consent form (as shown in Appendix C) to subgroup 2 for participation in the study. Participants' responses with the signed consent form were the only responses included in the study. For the purpose of equitable comparison between completed questionnaires of subgroup 1 and subgroup 2, and in alignment with the purpose of the study, a returned response of at least 30 participants for subgroup 2 (same number as subgroup 1) was the number established to be considered adequate. The researcher was diligent in attempts to follow up mailed questionnaires with telephone or email contacts as could be determined and for gaining the desired 30 participants that were obtained. The turnaround time for the responses to Questionnaire 2 extended to the end of the data collection period for subgroup 2, which did not exceed the 8 calendar weeks after the date given to CSCN administration as the start date for data collection.

Eleventh, the study targeted former CSCN students as the sample population for subgroup 3. Questionnaire #3 (subgroup 3) titled, Former CSCN Students (as shown in Appendix G) was designed to gather the data from that population. The targeted former

CSCN student population was at least 9th graders and with no limitation to academic standing or any other factor other than a maximum age of 35 that was intended to limit the age disparity among current and former students. The questionnaires were mailed home to former students along with a consent form (as shown in Appendix C). The consent form required the signature of a parent or legal guardian if the participant was under the age of 18 and the child assent section of the form was required to be signed by said child participant, and all participation requirements were met. A returned response of at least 15 participants was established as the number to be considered adequate for subgroup 3, and 14 participants were obtained. The response of 15 was established for subgroup 3 participants because of the difficulty of obtaining current available addresses. A response of 15 was established as the adequate number to satisfy the purpose of the study and to support adequate comparison of findings among the 5 subgroups. Subgroup 3 was included in the study and would have been included as intended, regardless of the number of participants received. The turnaround time for the responses to Questionnaire #3 was extended to the end of that data collection period and which did not exceed 8 calendar weeks.

Twelfth, Questionnaire #4 (subgroup 4) titled, Faculty, Staff, and Administration of Current or of Former CSCN Students (as shown in Appendix H) was developed and utilized for the collection of data from subgroup 4. A consent form (as shown in Appendix C) accompanied the questionnaire handed to each participant and responses were not used unless the researcher received the signed consent form. A returned response of at least 15 participants for subgroup 4 was established as an adequate response for the study but 32 responses were obtained. Although a response of 15 would

have been adequate to satisfy the purpose of the study, the response of 32 permitted a broader and more comprehensive comparison of findings among the 5 subgroups.

Thirteenth, Questionnaire #5 (subgroup 5) titled, CSCN Partners in Education and Other Stakeholders (as shown in Appendix I), was developed and delivered to subgroup 5. Partners in education were community and business members who had established partnership with CSCN by supporting the purpose and objectives of CSCN tangibly and/or intangibly. Other stakeholders were community and business members who may not have established partnership with CSCN but were supportive of the purpose and objectives of CSCN either tangibly or intangibly. Each participant was required to sign and return the consent form (as shown in Appendix C) along with the completed questionnaire. Completed questionnaires were not included in the study without the returned signed consent form from the participant. A returned response of at least 15 participants for subgroup 5 was established as adequate to support comparison of findings among all 5 subgroups, and in accordance with the purpose of the study, but 25 responses were obtained.

The number of returned responses that were established as adequate for each respective subgroup was based on what this researcher deemed pragmatic for the population being studied. Accordingly, there are no rules guiding the number of participants for qualitative inquiries (Patton, 2002). However, this researcher based the most feasible number of returns, needed for each subgroup, on the researcher's knowledge of the population studied and on the numbers that could have been reasonably expected from each subgroup. Although the established number of participants was permitted to be at the discretion of the researcher, the researcher ensured that the sum

responses of all 5 subgroups fell within what would have been the guidelines of a quantitative inquiry, to further strengthen the generalizability of the study.

For the purpose of maintaining accuracy and confidentiality in record keeping, the researcher assigned a participant number, beginning with the number 1, to the questionnaire of each participant in all 5 subgroups. No person's name, initials, or otherwise personal identifying information, was written in or included on any questionnaire. The number assigned to each questionnaire in all 5 subgroups correlated with each participant's confidential identification information as shown only on the consent form (as shown in Appendix C). The correlation of each participant's number, as shown on each participant's questionnaire, was made on a confidential log sheet titled, Confidential log Sheet of Participants (as shown in Appendix J). The log sheet was the only source by which any completed questionnaire could be referenced to the respective participant. The log sheet was secured at all times by the researcher and no one, at any time, was given or allowed access to a log sheet.

Fourteenth, the study included a quantitative component. The quantitative data collection methods (as shown in Appendix K) were gathered from secondary local and statewide numerical student performance rates on the high school student population of CSCN and on available statewide alternative high school students in Georgia. The application of this data is pertinent to the study because all Georgia schools are subject to the same standard curricula. The mixed methodology adopted in the study was designed to determine the relationship between the application of the traditional standard core curricula in public alternative schools and the relative student performance outcomes. Extraneous variables such as different qualification levels among teachers, years of

teaching experience, teaching styles, or teacher ability to teach content (curricula) are understood to be variables that impact student performance outcomes. However, those variables were not factored in the study because the study was not designed to measure the impact of teaching and the related variables on student performance outcomes but rather the correlation of content (standardized curricula) to student performance outcomes.

The focus in answering the research question, *what is the relationship between the academic success of students placed in public alternative schools and the use of the traditional schools' core curricula in public alternative schools*, was on the high school population of CSCN and on the random sampling of statewide alternative high school populations from different socioeconomic communities. Publicly available high school data were secured from 5 alternative schools across Georgia with individual high school populations of at least 20 students, and all of whom were subjected to the same Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) curricula.

The Research Design

The Mixed Methodology

The qualitative component of the research design utilized 5 open-ended questionnaires numbered 1 through 5 and which correlated with 5 subgroups, subgroup 1 through subgroup 5. The qualitative component also utilized a nonparticipant phenomenological observation study that evaluated the needs of At-Risk students placed in public alternative schools. Students that were currently enrolled at the time of the data gathering process formulated subgroup 1. Participants in all 5 subgroups were asked to answer their assigned questionnaire independently and without seeking the advice of or

corroborating with anyone other than the researcher. Responses of all 5 subgroups were paired one with another for the purpose of comparing and contrasting responses among the 5 subgroups.

Invariably, student success, as measured by test scores, cannot be directly correlated to a particular curriculum due to the many variables that impact student performance outcomes. Because other impacting variables were consciously excluded from this study, that exclusion is shown as a delimitation of this study. However, in the quantitative component of the design, secondary numerical data was gathered to determine the relationship between the academic success of students placed in public alternative schools and the use of the traditional schools' core curricula in public alternative schools. The quantitative data collection methods (as shown in Appendix K) were gathered from secondary local and publicly available numerical student performance rates on the high school student population of CSCN and on other alternative high school students in Georgia.

The focus of the quantitative analysis was 100% on the high school population of CSCN and of random sampling of other alternative high schools from different socioeconomic communities in the state of Georgia. Attempts were made to secure publicly available high school data, from at most 6 public alternative schools in Georgia with individual high school populations of at least 20 students, and data for 5 high schools were obtained.

Method of Securing Participants

The Participant Consent Form (as shown in Appendix C) was used in the study for all participants. The participation of all students in grades 8 through 12, who were currently enrolled and were under 18, was sought by giving them the consent form to take home to a parent or legal guardian. The students were informed that a parent or legal guardian needed to sign the consent form and that the student themselves needed to sign the child assent section of the form. Accordingly, the signed consent forms were returned directly to the researcher. Students with available addresses who were not currently enrolled, were under 18, at least in grade 8, and were former CSCN students, had a copy of the consent form (as shown in Appendix C) mailed home to their parents. Only those students whose consent form was returned signed by a parent or legal guardian and with the student's signature on the child assent section of the form, were allowed to participate in the study.

The consent form detailed the purpose, scope, content, and confidentiality governing the student's participation in the study. It was stipulated in the consent form that the student would not be permitted to participate in the study unless the form was returned signed by either a parent or legal guardian, and the minor participant signed the child assent section of the form. Students were instructed that the signed consent form would indicate their parent's or legal guardian's approval for them to participate in the study and although that would be the only means by which they would be allowed to participate in the study, both their and their parent's participation remained optional at all times. Adult participants in the study were secured through personal telephone contacts, physical mail, email, or personal visits from the researcher. All adult participants were

required to sign a consent form (as shown in Appendix C), before they were allowed to participate in the study. Participation involved the filling out of 1 of 5 questionnaires according to the subgroup in which participants fell and each questionnaire consisted of 19 open-ended questions suited to each respective group.

Method of Gaining Permission to Conduct the Study at CSCN

Permission to conduct the study at CSCN was gained by obtaining a signed Institutional Permission Letter (as shown in Appendix B) from the school's principal. The signed Institutional Permission Letter was the only informed consent or permission needed from the school district to permit the researcher to conduct the study at CSCN, because the researcher is an employee of CSCN, where the research was conducted.

The Platform for the Data Collection Process

The platform of the data collection process was informal and was designed to ascertain the meaningful and unrehearsed true and experienced feelings of participants. All data collection occurred within 8 calendar weeks from the beginning to the end of the designated data collection period. The results of all data, both qualitative and quantitative, were analyzed and amalgamated into the answering of the three research questions of the study. The results of the study then served to frame the recommendations made and formed the nucleus for further studies.

The Data Analysis and Report of Findings

The Data Analysis

The data analysis procedure was conducted in accordance with the suggestion of Patton (2002), that qualitative data be sorted and identified into two categories, (a) Internal Homogeneity and (b) External Heterogeneity. The analysis procedure further

aligned with Patton's recommendation that the classification of data be prioritized "According to the utility, salience, credibility, uniqueness, heuristic value, and feasibility of the classification schemes" (p. 466) and that it be analyzed for consistency and "integratability." The enhancement of Patton's suggestions was ensured by identifying and coding common themes and patterns according to the frequency of their recurrence in light of the nature of the questions asked and associated responses. The themes and patterns were derived directly from the written responses of the participants as there were no other forms of responses obtained in the collection of the qualitative data.

The quantitative component of the study utilized analytical methods that were feasible to evaluate the CSCN and statewide publicly available student performance data, as collected, to answer the research question: *What is the relationship between the academic success of students placed in public alternative schools and the use of the traditional schools' core curricula in public alternative schools?* The publicly available student performance data was derived from the sources as shown in Appendix K. All quantitative data used in the study were representative of the single Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) core curricula to which all Georgia schools, whether traditional or alternative, are subjected. Analysis of the quantitative data served the purpose of determining if the utilization of the GPS core curricula in alternative schools could be a factor of student academic performance in public alternative schools and in conjunction with the type of data collected.

The Report of Findings

The qualitative findings of the study are reported using graphs, chart, and narrative descriptions that permitted the element of generalizability needed to authenticate the study's relevance on a national level. Accordingly, the quantitative findings of the study are reported using tables, figures, and narrative descriptions. The reporting of the evaluative findings of data were designed to illustrate, through graphs, chart, figures, and words, the needs of students placed in public alternative schools as specifically expressed and enumerated by them, their parents, and all other participants of the study. Recommendations were made based on the available data gathered and were designed to disclose the needs of public alternative school students in an objective fashion as described by them explicitly and implicitly. Recommendations were constructed to communicate the needs of students placed in public alternative schools to governing bodies of public education in the United States and to other stakeholders. The construction of recommendations was equally intended to create a framework for further studies.

Assumptions or Limitations

The study was conducted at Crossroads Second Chance North (CSCN) in Roswell, Georgia, and which, because of its best practices and associated student performance outcomes, is known to be a leading alternative school. Because this study was conducted at only one location, this design is implicit of a limitation of the study and with inherent delimitations because the chosen venue was not representative of the typical low socioeconomic neighborhood in which public alternative schools or programs are more prevalent. Accordingly, results could be interpreted as lacking generalizability

because CSCN is not located in a low socioeconomic neighborhood. Hardy (2007) identified alternative school students to be more representative of low socioeconomic neighborhoods, single parents, and neighborhoods that are plagued with violence and poverty. Thus, the assumption could be that the needs of the CSCN student body are atypical when compared to student populations in troubled neighborhoods, though by virtue of the quantitative element of the study, using data from diverse socioeconomic schools and neighborhoods, that assumption could be refuted.

Another limitation of this study resulted from the unavailability of needed individual student performance data by which a hypothesis could have been tested. With only aggregate performance data to conduct the quantitative element of this study, it became necessary, during the process of the quantitative data analysis, to derive individual numerical data from the qualitative findings of the study. The derivation of numerical data was done by converting qualitative data into quantitative measurements. Though this process would not permit the testing of a hypothesis, it adequately provided needed data to conduct the quantitative analysis component of this study. The quantitative analyses substantiated the utility of the mixed methodology prescribed for this study. However, in the context of a quantitative statistical perspective, the translation of qualitative findings into numerical data could be labeled as having “subjective perceptions,” and contrary to the objectivity gained from a purely quantitative instrument. The absence of that objectivity is deemed as another limitation of this study.

Summary Statement

The development of innovative means by which the educational needs of students can be met (U.S. Department of Education, 2004), remained the emphasis throughout this study. The need for that continued emphasis framed the basis of the methodology defined in this chapter. This study focused on the needs of At-Risk students and the findings revealed in Chapter 4 of this study have disclosed those needs.

CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS

Restatement of the Purpose

This study evaluated the needs of At-Risk students in public alternative schools and was conducted in light of the research findings, disclosed in Chapter 2, which framed the mixed methodology outlined in Chapter 3. The study used Crossroads Second Chance North (CSCN) in Roswell, Georgia, as the sample population. The purpose of this study was to evaluate and make known the needs of At-Risk students as personally expressed by them and by other affiliated groups. The evaluation was done in an effort to bring awareness to educational institutions of the needs of At-Risk students. That awareness is necessary to facilitate educational institutions in addressing those needs, in light of the associated nationwide education crisis.

The problem addressed in this study is that the nationwide failure rate of At-Risk students continues or intensifies even after their removal from traditional classrooms and placement in alternative schools. Students, because of their social-behavioral deficiencies and lack of ability to connect with the curriculum, are identified as At-Risk, removed from traditional classrooms, and placed in alternative schools through a tribunal process. Therefore, this study has identified the academic and social developmental needs of students who have been labeled as At-Risk and placed in public alternative schools. The study also shows that alternative school students are not benefiting from the traditional curriculum being used in alternative schools, and reveals what students have identified as their needs and invariably would like to see the school system provide in support of those needs.

The Collection of Data

The collection of data was conducted using both a qualitative and quantitative approach. The qualitative data was gathered using 2 instruments. One of the 2 instruments was the utilization of 5 open-ended questionnaires numbered 1 through 5 and which correlated with the 5 subgroups used in the qualitative component of the study. Each questionnaire consisted of 19 open-ended questions and all questions were answered in a written format. The subgroups were strategically developed to include the most pertinent of participants. They were developed through the researcher's own knowledge of the groups that would be most capable of offering the essence of experiences as lived, felt, or otherwise experienced and understood to be the fundamental difficulties faced by At-Risk students.

The primary or focus group in the study was group 1. Group 1 was comprised of students that were currently enrolled at CSCN, the alternative school where the study was conducted. From group 1, 37 questionnaires were completed. Group 2 completed 30 questionnaires and this group consisted of parents of current and/or of former CSCN students. Group 3 was comprised of former students who, at the time of the data collection period, may have completed high school, attained adult status, had gone on to college or otherwise may have been gainfully employed. These factors of inclusion, in the development of group 3, were made because the researcher considered them pertinent to determine how former students would express their alternative schooling preparation for success in industry. Group 3 completed 14 questionnaires. Group 4, completed 32 questionnaires and this group was made up of faculty, staff, and administrators of current and of former students of the sample population. Group 5 was comprised of partners in

education and other stakeholders who themselves were either educators or closely associated and/or familiar with secondary education in general and the needs of At-Risk students in particular. Group 5 completed 25 questionnaires, which resulted in a combined total of 138 participants from all 5 subgroups of the study that completed open-ended questionnaires.

The other qualitative instrument was the utilization of a nonparticipant phenomenological observation study that was conducted at CSCN at the end of the 2008-09 school year. Each of the 3 conducted observations lasted an average of 33 minutes and permitted the observation of students and teachers in different settings within the school atmosphere. The observations focused on the following key elements:

1. Students' sense of concern for and respect of peers and adults
2. Students' emotional stability and instability
3. Standard courtesies and sense of values implied or expressed
4. Individual and group activities, movements, and interactions
5. Sounds, feelings, and facial expressions
6. Attitudes both subtle and blatant
7. Settings, surroundings, and atmosphere
8. Teaching and learning styles
9. Teacher and student frustrations
10. Students' attentiveness and focus
11. Students' work ethics and concern for performance results
12. Students' and teachers' sense of purpose and mission

The protocol, established for the observational study by this researcher, entailed the examining of students' performances, behaviors, actions, and attitudes in light of the settings in which they were observed and the activities in which they were engaged. The established protocol was embedded in the 12 key elements as illustrated above and which guided the focus of the observations.

The Nonparticipant Phenomenological Observation Study

A nonparticipant phenomenological observation study, by its own virtue, entails the unquestioned assumptions of the researcher (Patton, 2002). The researcher's assumptions are unquestioned because that paradigm permits the researcher to form independent opinions of the phenomenon observed (Patton). Those opinions, however, are strengthened by the researcher's own knowledge of the phenomenon being studied (Patton), as in the case of this researcher who, for 16 years, has been closely connected to the population of students that was studied. However, because the unquestioned assumptions is a weakness of the paradigm (Patton), this researcher conducted the nonparticipant observation study in a fashion that permitted the analysis of collected data to be directly tied to the analysis of the data collected through surveys from 138 participants.

In the nonparticipant phenomenological observation study, the researcher noted the various approaches students used to engage or disengage themselves in assigned tasks, in discussions or conflicts with peers or teachers, and the evident feelings, attitudes, and emotions that accompanied those and other engagements or disengagements. Some most notable observations were documented as students moved among different groups according to the conversations or engagements of others that

sparked their attention and interests, both academically and socially. This researcher looked for and documented the various factors that drove the varied behaviors, social engagements, and academic performance of the students observed. Accordingly, notations were made as to the conditions under which students' anxieties and/or attitudes were heightened or diminished on both a positive and negative slope. The cases, in which students wanted to be recognized, whether positively or negatively, or just to secure an opportunity to discuss matters of interest to them, were frequent and obvious and were documented accordingly. Every identified and observed actions or inactions of students were recorded in light of the purpose established for the research: The evaluation of At-Risk students' needs in public alternative schools.

The Coding Process Used in the Analysis of all Qualitative Data

The coding process used for all qualitative data, both for the surveys and the observational study, were adopted from guidelines established by Patton (2002). First, this researcher employed the services of an independent analyst to assist in the process of the coding and analysis of all qualitative data. The employment of an independent analyst facilitated the establishment of a coding protocol that allowed for the discussion of similarities and differences among all the sets of qualitative data. This type of analysis is identified by Patton as a "form of analytical triangulation" (p. 464). Second, with the aid of an independent analyst, responses were evaluated in search of themes, patterns, and recurring commonalities as they emerged from participants' responses to questionnaires and from the notations made in the observational study. Third, alphanumerical coding systems (coding keys) A-1- K-2 were developed and applied to the segmenting of all data into categories, patterns, and themes. The coding keys were objectively derived from the

direct words of participants' responses to the survey questions. This strategy, as formulated by the researcher, was used to alleviate subjectivity in the process of all data analysis and to permit a direct and objective connection of the observational notes to the survey responses. A direct and objective connection was able to be made because of the context in which the observational notes were taken and their interrelationship with the questions of the surveys. For example, in Questionnaire #1 (Group 1) as shown in Appendix E, question I seeks participants' responses to their feelings with respect to both the traditional and alternative classrooms. Accordingly, participants' responses to that question correlated to the observational notes of students' attentiveness and focus (as shown in key 10 of Appendix A). Accordingly, key 8 notes correlated to participants' responses to not only question 2 but many other questions of the survey.

The number of times a coding key (A-1 – K-2) emerged in all data, in accordance with their respective group (Group 1- 5), was summated and shown in the reporting of outcomes as 'frequency.' The frequencies permitted the objective condensing of significant and coherent patterns and themes into two categories, needs and reasons – the reasons being subsets of the respective needs that emerged from the analysis.

Virtually all of the needs and reason that emerged from the coding process were the direct words of the participants and were purposely formulated to sustain the voices of participants in the reporting of the findings. Accordingly, the adopted coding process produced the objectivity that the analysis approach was designed to generate. The convergence of themes and patterns into categories as reflected in codes A-1 through K-2, from which all the reports of the findings from the quantitative component of the study were developed, was equally applied to both the survey data analysis and the

observational data analysis to ensure a direct and objective connection between both sets of data. The reports accurately reflect the objective findings from each of the 5 subgroups that comprised the study and of the nonparticipant observational segment of the study. The outcomes of the study, as reported for all groups and referenced as Needs and Reasons, are shown in the report of the qualitative findings; those reports follow the listing of the research questions.

The Research Questions

The research questions established for this study were:

1. What are the needs of At-Risk students who are placed in public alternative schools?
2. Are the abilities of At-Risk students being developed in public alternative schools?
3. What is the relationship between the academic success of students placed in public alternative schools and the use of the traditional schools' core curricula in public alternative schools?

The Report of the Qualitative findings

The qualitative findings of this researcher's study begins with the definition of needs as expressed (A-K) and reasons (A-1 – K-2). Following those definitions are brief narratives and associated detailed graphical reports for each respective group, inclusive of the phenomenological observation group. The qualitative data reporting concludes with a consolidated report of all the groups.

Definition of Needs as Expressed (A-K) and Reasons (A-1 – K-2):

The needs expressed were identified through the explained qualitative coding process that this researcher developed with the aid of guidelines established by Patton (2002). Although responses varied from participant to participant and from group to group, the differences were primarily marginal in scope and with no response that could skew any findings of the general data. The commonality and recurring regularities or frequencies among findings permitted a smooth convergence of data and its alignment with the criteria for identifying internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity among the different categories of data (Patton, 2002). Each element of data analysis was examined for, and conformed to the integratability of the patterns, themes, categories, and coding (Patton) that generated the 11 derived needs (A – K) and the associated reasons (A-1 – K-2).

A NEED SMALL NON-TRADITIONAL CLASSES IN ORDER TO LEARN

Reasons:

A -1: School is more interesting and focus is easier in non-traditional size classrooms

A -2: Feel recognized, important, and sense of individuality in smaller classes

A -3: Do not feel ignored and are more monitored and motivated in smaller classes

A -4: Not as many distractions and less tempted to get in trouble in smaller classes

A -5: Needed personal attention is gained in smaller classes

A -6: Are able to reflect on important values and enjoy work more in smaller

classes

A -7: Develop more positive social skills in smaller classes

A -8: Need the feeling of “family” that is produced through smaller classes

A -9: Less friends, intimidations, and distractions in smaller classes

A -10: Are able to work faster and more efficiently in smaller classes

A -11 More willing to accept and tackle challenges in smaller classes

B NEED CARING TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS

Reasons:

B -1: Need teachers and administrators to help wherever necessary

B -2: Need teachers to facilitate the achievement of class and school requirements

B -3: Need teachers to show how to stay focused on what is important

B -4: Need teachers and administrators to show interest in the student as a person

B -5: Need motivated teachers and administrators with positive attitudes

C NEED HABILITATING CLASSROOMS AND SCHOOLS

Reasons:

C -1: Need alternative classrooms and schools to be family oriented

C -2: Need classrooms that allow for more time to complete tasks

C -3: Need classrooms that strengthen positive role modeling in students

C -4: Need classrooms that are not conducive to or accepting of bullying

C -5: Need alternative classrooms that permit needed learning focus and opportunities for students to connect learning with real life

C -6: Need classrooms that provide opportunities for students to view success and failure in light of current performance

C -7: Need classrooms and schools that provide opportunities for positive socialization

C -8: Need classrooms and schools that equip students to manage the daily and ongoing challenges they face

C -9: Need classrooms and schools with firm discipline that permits needed focus

C-10: Need classrooms and schools that focus on the individual needs, abilities, and interests of students

C-11: Need alternative schools because success was not being achieved in traditional

C-12: Need the choice of alternative or traditional school based on where focus can be achieved and maintained

D NEED TO EXPERIENCE FUN AND JOY IN SCHOOL WORK

Reasons:

D -1: Need to experience fun and joy with classes to find interest in them

D -2: Need to have interest in required work in order to get involved

D -3: Need to be enjoying work in order to improve behavior and performance

D -4: Need to have changes in routine to limit boredom and experience motivation

D -5: Need work to match abilities in order to show interest in it

E NEED SCHOOL TO BE A FAMILY ENVIRONMENT

Reasons:

E -1: Need a family atmosphere in order to gain adequate involvement in work

E -2: Want to participate and succeed when a family environment is being experienced

F NEED ACADEMIC LIFE SKILLS – SOCIAL SKILLS (ALS) CLASS

Reasons:

F -1: Need to develop positive relationships as taught in Academic Life Skills (ALS)

F -2: Need to know how to connect life lessons and academics with reality

F -3: ALS produces more meaningful learning because it correlates with real life

F -4: Need the social leadership skills taught through ALS

F -5: ALS shows the importance of school and education to real life and success

F -6: Focusing is more easily achieved in ALS because of its connection to real life

F -7: ALS is needed because it shows students how to accept and work with change

G NEED MARKETABLE AND PRACTICAL SKILL BUILDING COURSES

Reasons:

G -1: Need courses in law because all At-Risk students are involved with the law

G -2: Enjoy speaking and interacting and need courses in public relations

G -3: Need hands-on courses that deal with cars because of love of cars

G -4: Need hands-on courses that relate to the practical things desired to do in life

G -5: Need art classes because of love of and desire for art

G -6: Need classes that teach leadership

G -7: Need culinary arts classes because of love of cooking

G -8: Need photography classes because of love of pictures and related technology

G -9: Need courses that will produce skills to fill the job positions of the community

G-10: Need music classes because of love of music

G-11: Need acting classes because of natural acting abilities and love of the stage

G-12: Need a substance abuse class because of association with drugs and alcohol

H NEED THE PRAISE AND RECOGNITION OF PARENTS

Reasons:

H -1: Success is more desired when praised and recognized by parents for achievements

H -2: A needed sense of accomplishment is obtained when applauded by teachers for achievements

I NEED TO GRADUATE HIGH SCHOOL

Reasons:

I -1: Want to graduate high school because that is important

I -2: Intend to graduate high school and nothing will stop that

J NEED TO FEEL INVOLVED

Reasons:

J -1: Classes that relate to the real life work we like make us want to get involved

J -2: Hands on opportunities give us the feeling of involvement we need

J -3: Traditional classes and schools do not produce the feeling of involvement needed

K NEED MORE MANAGEABLE WORK LOAD

Reasons:

K -1: Work load is unmanageable in traditional classroom

K -2: When work load is manageable it is easier to get it done

The needs and reasons as shown, communicate the strength of the outcome from phenomenon studied and all in a fashion that captures the experiences as felt, believed, and expressed by the participants. The strength of the outcome is further substantiated through the findings of the observational study. All the needs and reasons, as shown, were virtually derived from the direct words of participants as expressed through the survey responses and as captured through the described coding analysis process that was adopted in the study. The outcome of the study (needs and reasons) utilized participants' own words to permit the sustenance of their voices in the report of the findings.

The Qualitative Analysis Reports, Using Graphs and Charts (Figures)

The findings of this study are further reported in graphs and charts, identified as Figures 1 – 14. The experiences expressed by the participants are indicated by the measurement of frequencies as shown for each group of participants and further substantiated by the frequencies indicated in the observational study. Following are the reports that were generated from the needs as they emerged from the qualitative study. The reasons, as were derived from the alphanumerical coding (A-1 – K-2) were then ascribed a substantive significance for each alphabetical set. Each substantive significance was identified as a need (Need A – K), in accordance with the theme that emerged from the patterns and categories developed in each alphabetical set.

The alphanumerical coding (A-1 through K-2) was used for each of the 5 groups and for the nonparticipant observational study. Each group shows the needs, A – K as they were identifiably expressed in the study. Figures 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, and 11 were constructed by summating all the reasons (A-1 – K-2) that corresponded with each need (A-K). These specific figures were compiled to show how each need ranked among the different groups. Accordingly, Figures 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, and 12 were constructed to show the 5 most significant reasons (A-1 – K-2) among the different groups.

The graphs (Figures 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, and 11) were compiled by summating the number of times (indicated in the graphs as ‘frequency of needs as expressed’) each need emerged in the coding analysis of each respective group (Groups 1 – 5 and in the observational study). The sum totals of each need (need A – K), within each group (Groups 1-5) and in the observational study, were then used to develop the graphs (Figures 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, and 11). Concurrently, the 5 most significant reasons (as shown in

Figures 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, and 12) were compiled by summating all the reasons (A-1 – K-2) for each respective group (Groups 1 – 5) and for the observational study. From those summations, the 5 highest totals, signifying the 5 most prominent reasons within each respective group (Groups 1 – 5) and in the observational study, were used to develop Figures 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, and 12. The identity of each need (A –K) surfaced from the summation of the number of times each set of alphanumerical reasons (A-1 – K-2) emerged in the coding analysis, thus permitting the culminating of reasons into needs. Accordingly, each alphanumerical reason (A-1 – K-2) within their respective alphabetical set (A-K) was counted and totaled to arrive at a sum total for each need. The need with the highest sum total of reasons gained the highest significance for that respective group. The findings, as graphically reported for each of the 5 groups studied, begin with Group 1 and end with consolidated reports of the findings from all 5 groups and of the observational study.

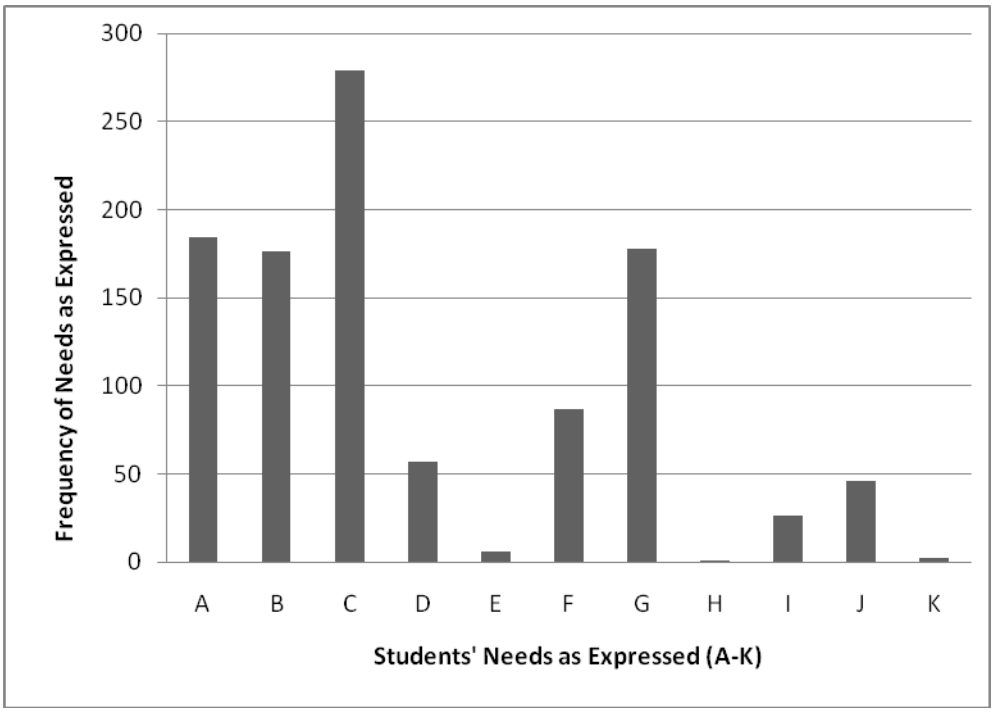

Figure1. Group 1. Students' needs (A-K) as expressed by current students.

Research question 1 states: *What are the needs of At-Risk students who are placed in public alternative schools?* In answering this research question, this graph (*Figure 1*) shows the findings of Group 1, CSCN currently or previously enrolled students. *Figure 1* reports the distribution of the students' needs (A-K) as expressed by Group 1. Group 1 participants felt they needed habilitating classrooms and schools (need C) more than any other need. The term 'habilitating,' though defined among the definition of terms in Chapter 1, is best explained through a quote from a participant in the study: "Many times at-risk students cannot leave their personal troubles to do traditional subject learning. This changes when the key is turned that unlocks their lives" (Participant #103, personal communication, June 11, 2009). The graph also shows that Group 1 participants felt small non-traditional classes (need A), caring teachers and administrators (need B), and marketable and practical skill building courses (need G), were virtually all equally and significantly important among their priority lists of needs in public alternative schools.

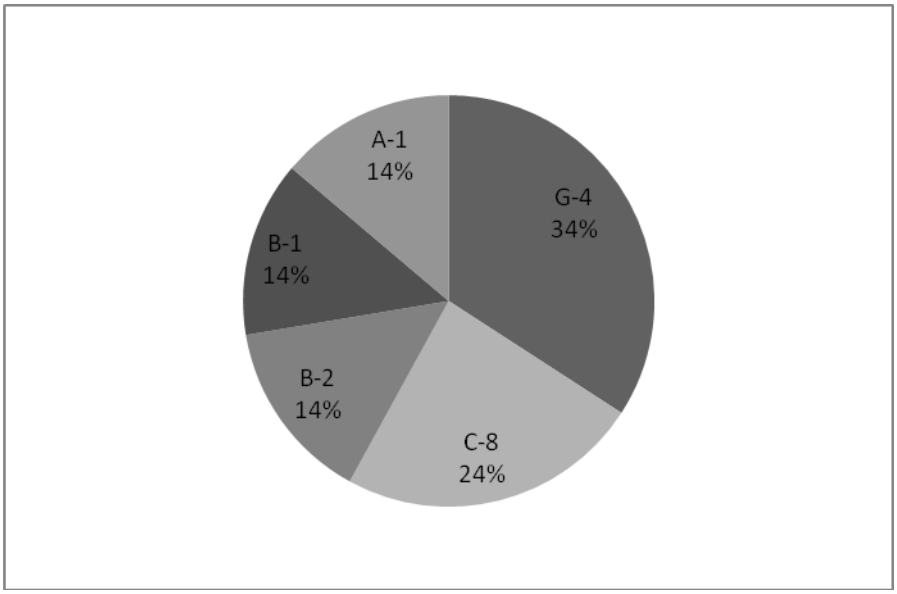

Figure 2. Group 1. 5 most frequently expressed reasons (A-1 – K-2).

Figure 2 reports that Group 1 participants expressed their need for hands-on courses that relate to the practical things they desire to do in life (reason G-4), as their most important reason, thus signifying 34% of the times that reason emerged within the category of reasons for Group 1. Though this does not support need C as the most important need for Group 1 participants, it does provide an explanation as to why need G was their second most important need, due to the high degree of interrelationship between both categories and with reason C-8 representing 24% of all the reasons indicated for Group 1.

Accordingly, in answering research question 2: *Are the abilities of At-Risk students being developed in public alternative schools?* The findings of Group I responses to survey questions, indicate At-Risk students' significant need for marketable and practical skill building courses (reasons G-1 – G-12). However, courses which would align with the indicated academic interests of At-Risk students are virtually not offered in public alternative schools. Likewise, since 'abilities,' as stated in the definition of terms, signify the academic interests of students as expressed by them or otherwise observed, the findings of Group 1 indicate that the abilities of At-Risk students are not being developed in public alternative schools. Simultaneously, because Group 1 findings indicate that the abilities of At-Risk students are not being developed, in response to research question 3, a direct negative relationship exists between students' academic success and the traditional schools' core curricula as applied to that student population.

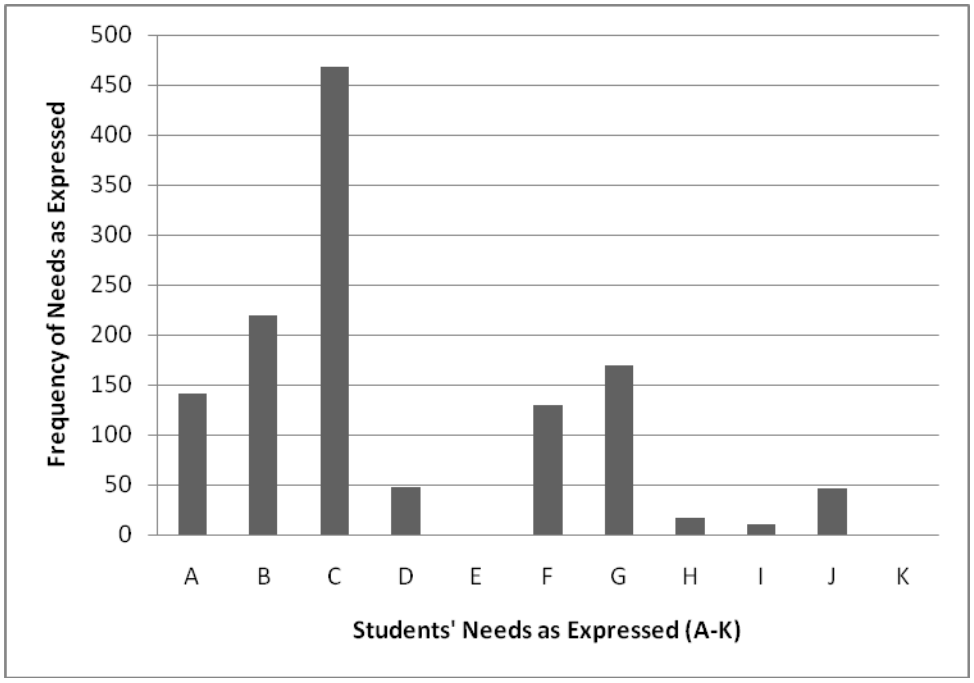

Figure 3. Group 2. Students' needs (A-K) as expressed by parents of current or of former CSCN students.

Figure 3 reports the needs as expressed by Group 2 and this group was comprised of parents of current or of former CSCN students. *Figure 3* shows, overwhelmingly, that parents felt their children needed habilitating classrooms and schools (as identified by need C), more than any other need expressed by that group. The report also demonstrates parents' belief that caring teachers and administrators (as shown by need B) are essential to the success of At-Risk students in public alternative schools. Parents also felt that need G (Need marketable and practical skill building courses) was a significant need among At-Risk students. Group's 2 responses to the survey questions directly address all 3 research questions of this study. First, the responses identified *the needs of At-Risk students in public alternative schools* (the concern of research question 1). Second, *if the abilities of At-Risk students are being developed in public alternative schools* (the concern of research question 2) is answered. That concern is answered on the premise

that the traditional curriculum, to which At-Risk students in public alternative schools are subjected, was not designed to satisfy the academic interests of students signified by need G. Concurrently, research question 3 seeks to determine *the relationship between the academic success of students placed in public alternative schools and the associated curriculum.* Accordingly, because the traditional schools' core curricula lack the provisions by which the overwhelmingly most significant need of Group 3 (need C) can be satisfied, a negative relationship is evident.

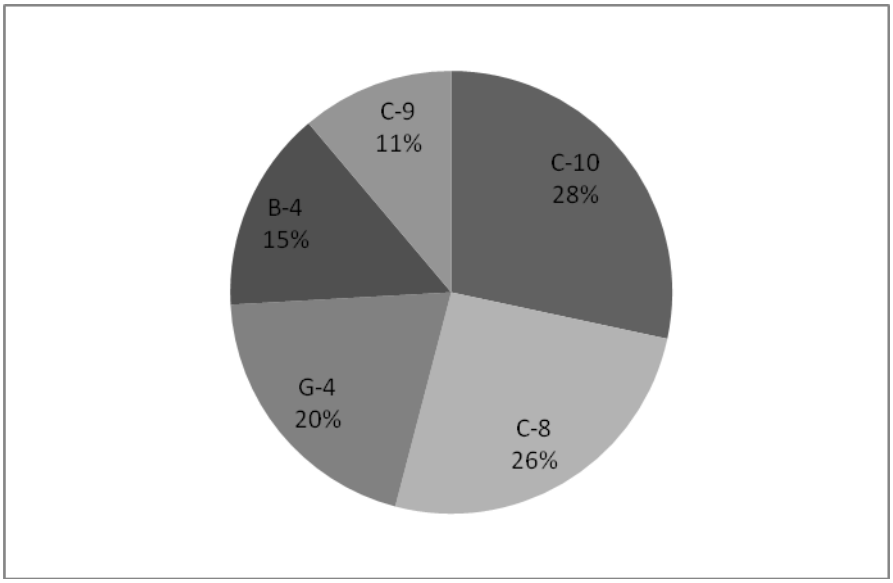

Figure 4. Group 2. 5 most frequently expressed reasons (A-1 – K-2).

Figure 4 displays that of all the reasons, A-1 – K-2, reasons C-10, C-8, and G-4, headed the list of the 5 most significant reasons. *Figure 4* indicates parents' belief that most importantly, At-Risk students need classrooms and schools that focus on students' individual needs, abilities, and interests (reason C-10). Therefore, in addressing all 3 research questions respectively, the needs of At-Risk students (research question 1) are

indicated through the findings of Group 2. The abilities of At-Risk students (research question 2) are not being developed because associated courses are not built into the curriculum. Accordingly, a negative relationship exists between the academic success of students and the applied traditional schools' core curricula. A negative relationship exists because the nature of the courses that would be necessary in meeting the needs expressed by Group 2, and thus impacting the academic success of students, is not built into the traditional core curricula to which the students are subjected (research question 3).

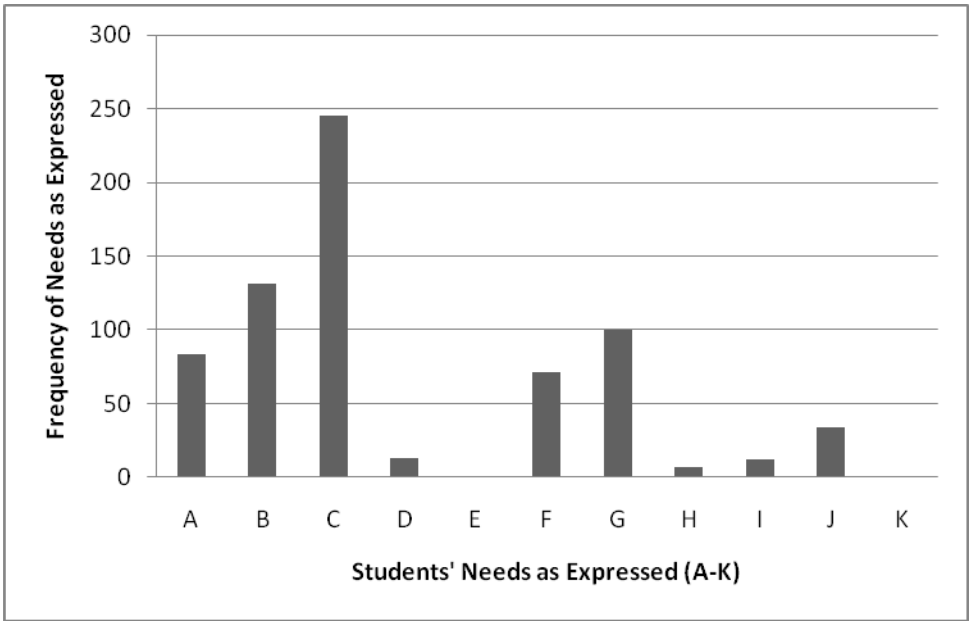

Figure 5. Group 3. Students' needs (A-K) as expressed by former CSCN students.

Figure 5 displays that among the former students, need C (need habilitating classrooms and schools) was expressed as the most important need of At-Risk students. The following 2 most significant needs were need B (need caring teachers and administrators) and need G (need marketable and practical skill building courses). Accordingly, the answer to research question 1, which seeks to determine *the needs of At-*

Risk students who are placed in public alternative schools, is expressed through Group 3 responses as indicated in *Figure 5*.

Research questions 2 and 3, which seek to determine *if At-Risk students' abilities are being developed, and the relationship between the academic success of students and the applied curricula in public alternative schools*, respectively, are directly addressed through the findings of Group 3 responses to the survey questions. First, the findings indicate that the abilities of At-Risk students are not being developed, primarily because the most significant need (Need C) is not evident in public alternative schools. All research of this study show public alternative schools to be more punitive than habilitating. Concurrently, the ability of alternative schools to meet the needs revealed by Group 3, such as the need for habilitating classrooms (need C) and the need for marketable and practical skill building courses (need G), has not been manifested.

Therefore, by virtue of the responses obtained from Group 3, the abilities of At-Risk students are not being developed in public alternative schools. Likewise, the traditional schools' core curricula used in public alternative schools are void of courses necessary to meet the 3rd most dominant need of Group 3. The void is indicative of a negative relationship between the traditional schools' curricula used in public alternative schools and the academic success of the students served (research question 3).

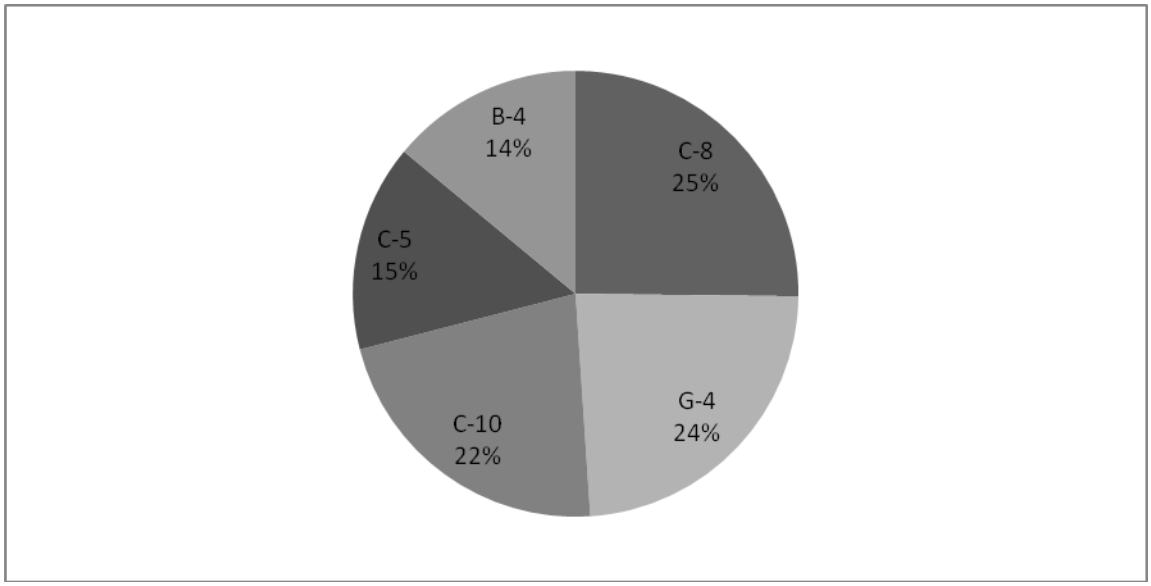

Figure 6. Group 3. 5 most frequently expressed reasons (A-1 – K-2).

Figure 6 shows that former alternative school students (Group 3) feel most strongly that alternative schools need to be equipped to provide At-Risk students with the tools needed to manage the daily and ongoing challenges they face (reason C-8). That reason signifies 25% of the 5 most significant reasons indicated for group 3, thus making C-8 the most prominent reason within that group. The next most prominent reason, signifying 24%, is G-4 and that reason states that At-Risk students need hands-on courses that relate to the practical things they desire to do in life. The 5 most significant reasons, with the exception of B-4, that former alternative school students have indicated to be paramount to the success of At-Risk students in public alternative schools, are all curriculum related.

Consequently, with the significant shortcomings of the traditional schools' core curricula, as it is applied to public alternative schools, the findings of Group 3 show that the abilities of At-Risk students are not being developed in public alternative schools (research question 2). Likewise, the findings of Group 3 also show a negative relationship

between the academic success of students placed in public alternative schools and the use of the traditional schools' core curricula in public alternative schools (research question 3).

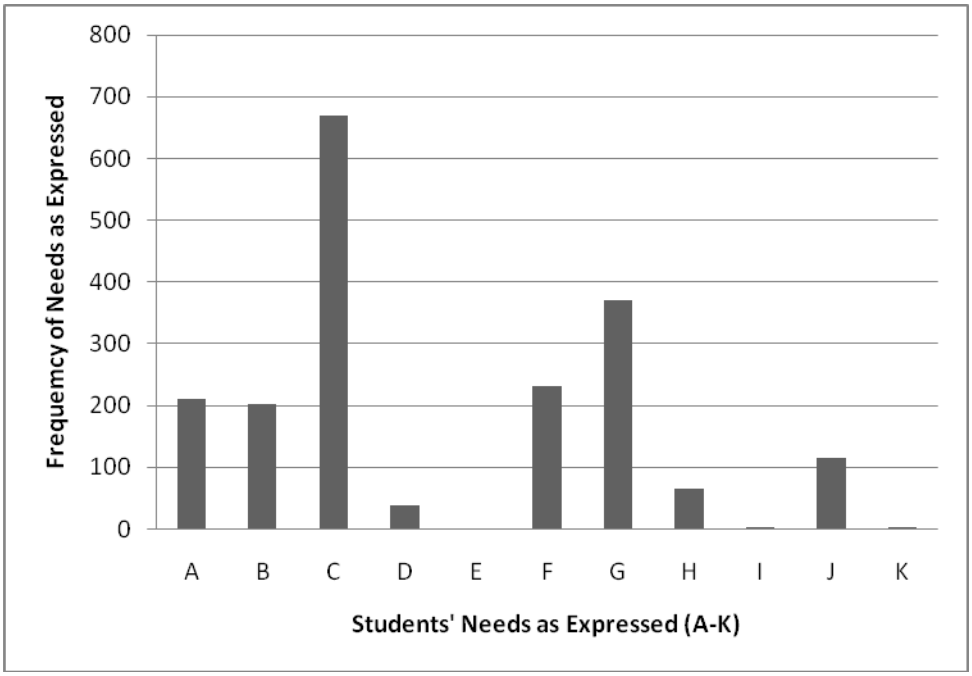

Figure 7. Group 4. Students' needs (A-K) as expressed by faculty, staff, and administrators of current or of former CSCN students.

Figure 7 exhibits the findings from Group 4 and Group 4 consists of the faculty, staff, and administration of current or of former CSCN students. The most important need, with significant values according to *Figure 7*, was need C (need habilitating classrooms and schools). The distribution of needs following need C is very comparable to that reported in *Figure 1* (current or of former CSCN students). It is important to note that group 4 symbolizes the group most intimately connected with the needs of the At-Risk student population. The next most significant need as disclosed by this group is need G (need marketable and practical skill building courses).

The 5 groups selected for participation in this study were selected because their intimate connection to the phenomenon studied, enabled them to have been the most qualified of any other single or collective groups to give the most valid and meaningful input – a paramount requirement to the validity and generalizability of this study. Group 4 (faculty, staff, and administration of current or of former CSCN students) typify the substance of that claim. They typify the substance of that claim due to their stellar understanding of, and familiarity with, the phenomenon studied – the most pertinent variables in this phenomenological qualitative study.

The needs of At-Risk students (research question 1) are demonstrated in *Figure 7*. Research question 2 seeks to determine if *the abilities of At-Risk students are being developed in public alternative schools*. The identification of needs indicated by Group 4 responses show that the abilities of At-Risk students are not being developed in public alternative schools. The findings of Group 4 significantly state that claim in 2 ways: First, the abilities are not being developed because the curricula do not provide courses that would be needed to assist students in working through the numerous and strong obstacles they face, such as drugs affiliation, significant varied hostility, and low self-esteem. Because these strong obstacles block students' learning and diminish their desire for education, habilitating classrooms and schools are needed (need C) and courses are the substance of any classroom. Second, marketable and practical skill building courses (need G) are not built into the curricula. Thus, such significant voids in curricula indicate lack of needed courses through which the abilities of At-Risk students can be developed – a most pertinent need in the At-Risk student population, as disclosed through this study. Likewise, the identified voids in curricula indicate a negative relationship between the

academic success of students placed in public alternative schools and the use of the traditional schools' core curricula in public alternative schools (research question 3).

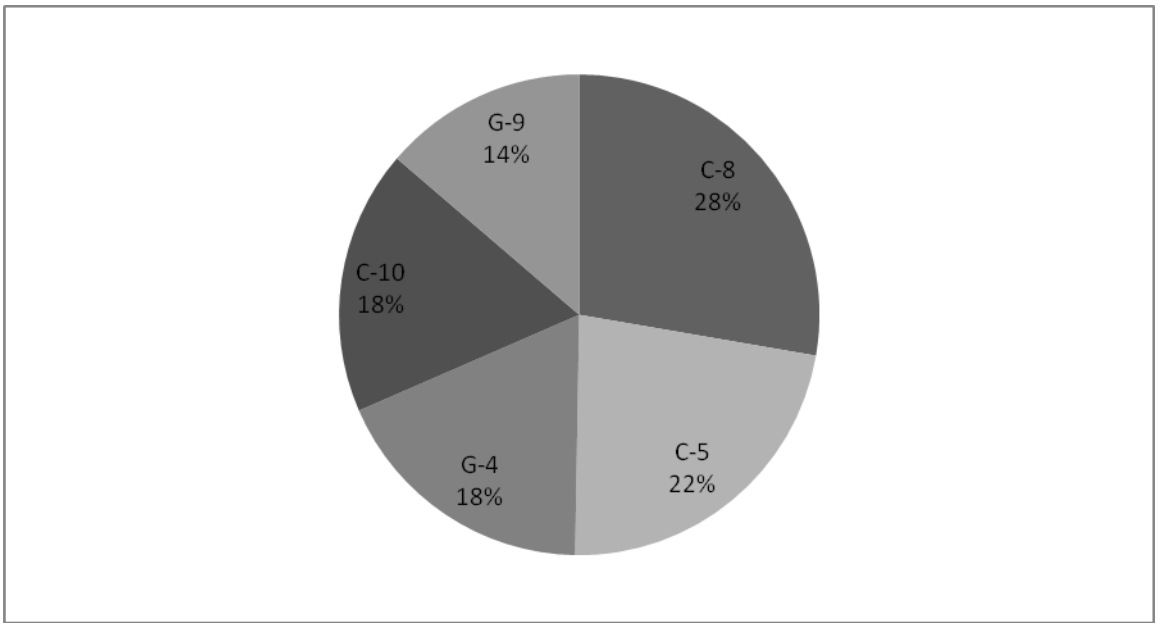

Figure 8. Group 4. 5 most frequently expressed reasons (A-1 - K-2).

Figure 8 shows that faculty, staff, and administration of current or former CSCN students strongly believe students need classrooms and schools that will equip them to manage the daily and ongoing challenges they face (C-8). This was the same reason group 3 felt was most important and this graph demonstrates the trend set by groups 2 and 3 – that 3 of the top 5 reasons originate from category C. Another finding most pertinent of notation and derived from group 4, is that reason C-5, representing 22% of the top 5 reasons, states, *need alternative classrooms that permit needed learning focus and opportunities for students to connect learning with real life*. This need, being a significant shortcoming of the curricula, confirms that students abilities are not being developed (research question 2) and shows a negative relationship between the academic

success of students placed in public alternative schools and the use of the traditional schools' curricula (research question 3).

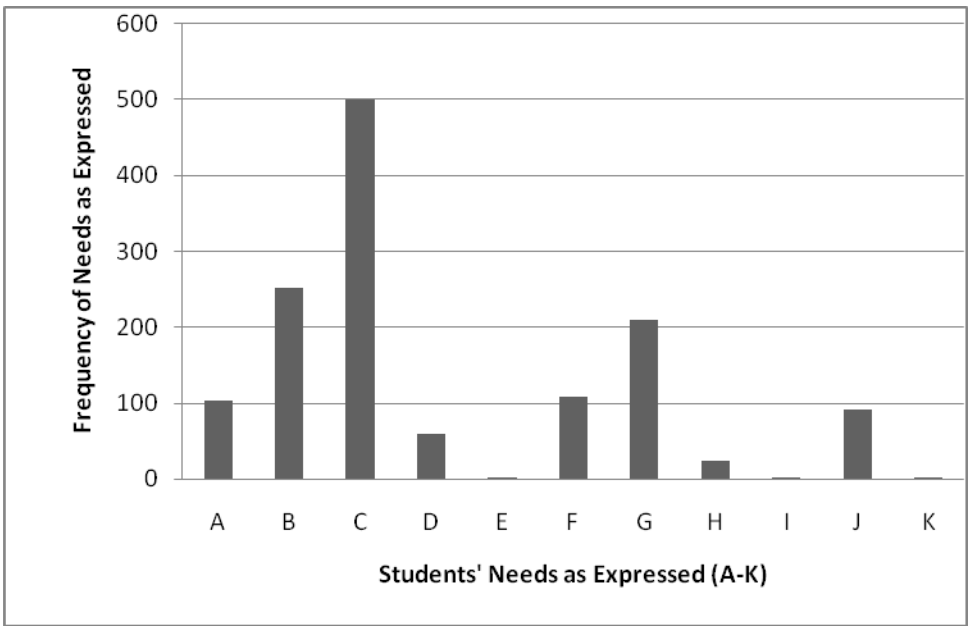

Figure 9. Group 5. Students' needs (A-K) as expressed by partners in education.

Figure 9 shows the results of the findings from Group 5, CSCN partners in education and other stakeholders. This group, along with all other groups, shows need C as the most important need. For Group 5, need C is followed by need B then need G, thus making need C (habilitating classrooms and schools), need B (caring teachers and administrators), and need G (marketable and practical skill building courses), the 3 most significant needs shown by this group. *Figure 9,* in showing the needs stated by Group 5, answers research question 1.

Concurrently, research question 2 sought to determine *if the abilities of At-Risk students are being developed in public alternative schools* and to which the results of the findings show that the abilities are not being developed. That finding is substantiated by

the strength of needs C and G which are both curriculum related needs and direct attributes to the development of student abilities. Likewise, research question 3 sought to determine *the relationship between the academic success of students placed in public alternative schools and the use of the traditional schools' core curricula in public alternative schools*, and a negative relationship is indicated on the premise of the interconnectivity between the appropriateness of curricula and student academic success.

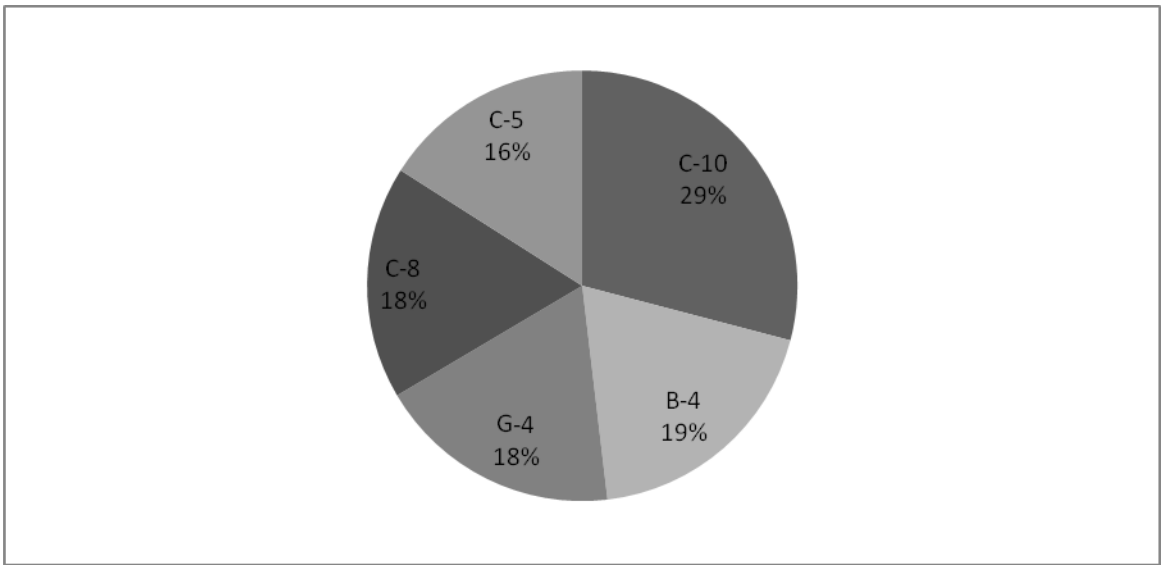

Figure 10. Group 5. 5 most frequently expressed reasons (A-1 - K-2).

Figure 10 shows Group 5's selection of C-10 as the most important reason, and with marginal differences among the remaining 4 most frequently expressed reasons. This graph most closely resembles *Figure 6.* Figure 10 shows that CSCN partners in education and other stakeholders (Group 5) feel most strongly that At-Risk students need classrooms and schools that focus on their individual needs, abilities and interests (C 10, representing 29% of the top 5 reasons stated by Group 5). Accordingly, Group 5 felt that reason C-8 (need classrooms and schools that equip students to manage the daily and

ongoing challenges they face) and reason G-4 (need hands-on courses that relate to the practical things desired to do in life) shared equal importance (each representative of 18% of the top 5 reasons). The 5 most significant reasons, with the exception of B-4, that CSCN's partners in education and other stakeholders have indicated to be paramount to the success of At-Risk students in public alternative schools, are all curriculum related.

Therefore, because the curricula lack courses capable of meeting the needs Group 5 has identified to be those of At-Risk students, the findings of Group 5 show that the abilities of At-Risk students are not being developed in public alternative schools (research question 2). The findings of Group 5 also show a negative relationship between the academic success of students placed in public alternative schools and the use of the traditional schools' core curricula in public alternative schools (research question 3.)

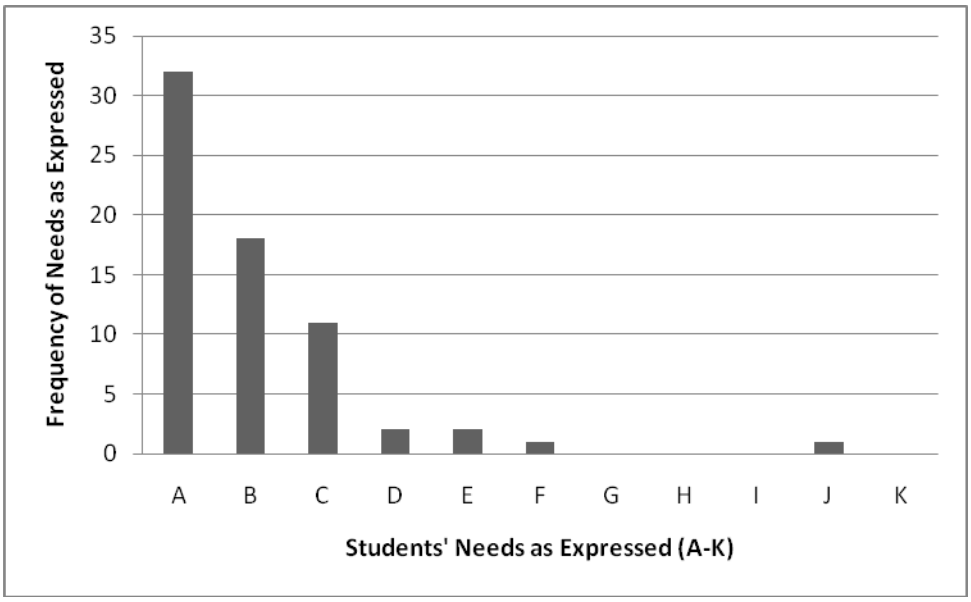

Figure 11. Observation Study. Students' needs (A-K) as expressed during non-participant data collection observation.

Figure 11 reports the findings from the non-participant phenomenological observation study. The findings of the observation study were different from the findings of the 5 groups that comprised this research. *Figure 11*, in revealing the needs of At-Risk students (research question 1), shows that At-Risk students need, most importantly, small non-traditional classes in order to succeed.

The answering of all 3 research questions, on the basis of the observational study, is made on the strength of the findings as conducted by this researcher. Accordingly, Patton (2002) contends that a nonparticipant phenomenological observation study, by its own virtue, entails the unquestioned assumptions of the researcher, because it permits the researcher to form independent opinions of the phenomenon observed. Patton advocates that the researcher's opinions are strengthened when the researcher is knowledgeable of the phenomenon being studied, as in the case of this researcher who, as a pioneer teacher of the At-Risk student population for the past 16 years, has gained tremendous knowledge of, and insight into, the difficulties encountered by At-Risk students. However, because the unquestioned assumptions are a weakness of the observational paradigm (Patton), this researcher conducted the nonparticipant observational study in a fashion that permitted the analysis of collected data to be directly tied to the analysis of the data collected through surveys from 138 participants (reference key elements of *The Nonparticipant Phenomenological Observation Study as shown on* p. 63).

The findings of the observational study show need A (need small non-traditional classes in order to learn) as the most prominent need. Following were need B (need caring teachers and administrators) and need C (need habilitating classrooms and schools). Inherent in needs A and C are the integral factors of any curriculum

development, as curriculum, to be adequate, must be suited to the population it is designed to serve. Therefore, in answering research question 2 that sought to determine *if At-Risk students' abilities are being developed in public alternative schools*, the findings of the observational study show that At-Risk students' abilities are not being developed in public alternative schools. That analysis is justified by the findings of needs A and C and further confirmed by the 2nd most important finding (need B – caring teachers and administrators), a factor for which no provision is in place to secure or to train such personnel in light of the sensitivity and unique expertise that must accompany the application of the curriculum in the alternative classroom.

Consequently, in answering research question 3 which sought to determine *the relationship between the academic success of students placed in public alternative schools and the application of the traditional core curricula*, the findings of the observational study show a negative relationship. The showing of a negative relationship is premised on the direct interconnectivity of the deficiencies in the curriculum applied, to the academic success of students. That negative relationship is further confirmed by the existing lack of provision through which specialty trained teachers and administrators can be secured and/or trained.

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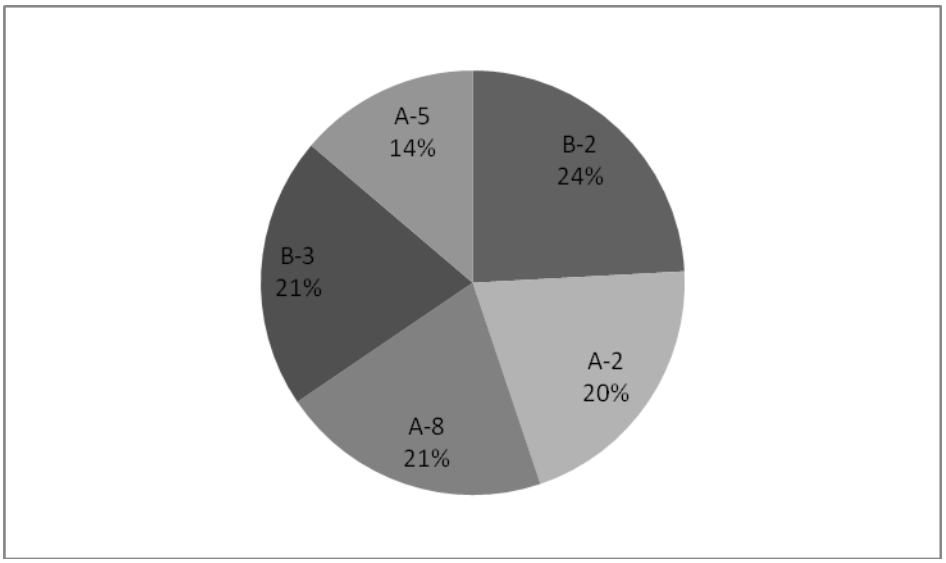

Figure 12. Observation data. 5 most frequently expressed reasons (A-1 – K-2).

Figure 12 shows that among the top 5 reasons, reason B-2 (need teachers to facilitate the achievement of class and school requirements) is the most significant (24%). Most closely and equally following B-2 are B-3 (need teachers to show how to stay focused on what is important) and A-8 (need the feeling of "family" that is produced through smaller classes). Notably, all 5 significant reasons shown through the observational study entail pertinent teacher/student relationship factors – factors that are integral to the academic success of At-Risk students.

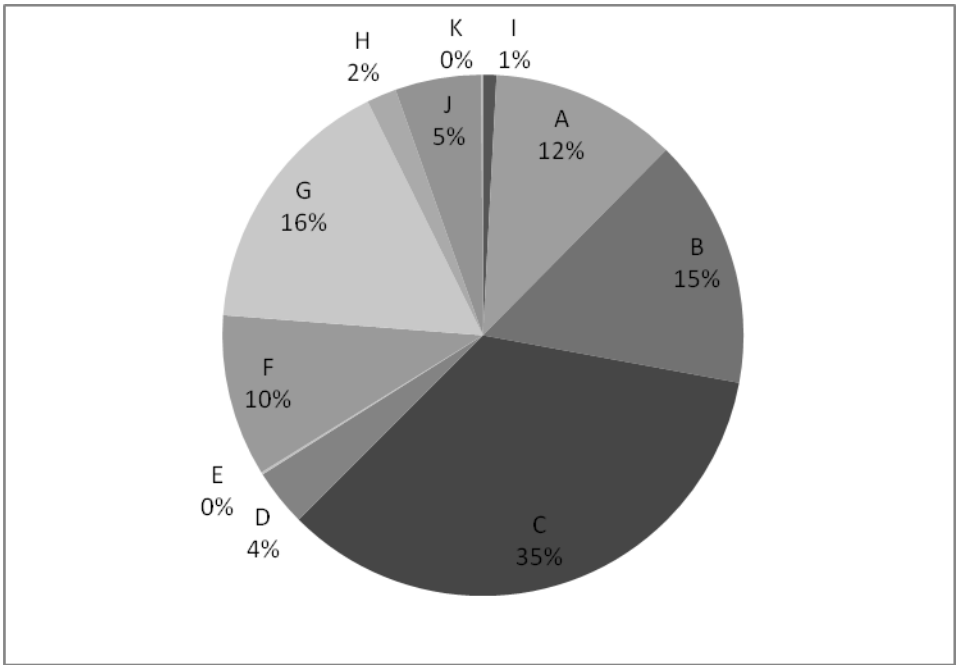

Figure13. Consolidated needs (A-K) as reported by all 5 groups

Figure 13 is a graph reporting the Needs (A-K) for groups 1-5. This graph summated the number of times that each need (A – K) was expressed by each group (Group 1- 5). The sum total for each group was then consolidated such that the percentage representation of each need, for all the 5 groups combined, could be calculated. The derived percentage representation of each need, in comparison to the body of needs, is reflected in figure 13. Thus, this graph shows a comparative analysis of all the needs derived from all 5 study groups combined. That comparative analysis shows need C (need habilitating classrooms and schools) to be the most prominent need (35% representation) that emerged from the qualitative study – a study that engaged 138 participants. The enormous significance of need C is embedded in the fact that it is greater than twice the value of even the second most prominent need (need G).

The significance of this finding (need C's 35% representation) is commensurate with the body of knowledge that shows why At-Risk students' abilities are not being developed in public alternative schools. Their abilities are not being developed due to the

lack of a curriculum alignment to the needs of the At-risk student population and which clearly and directly confirms the answer to research question 2.

Concurrently, Need G (need marketable and practical skill building courses) was the second most prominent need expressed (16% representation) by all 5 groups. Combined, these 2 needs alone signify a 51% representation of all the needs, and both of which are directly curriculum related. This finding further confirms the individual findings from each of the 5 groups. Those findings indicate a negative relationship between the academic success of students placed in public alternative schools and the use of the traditional schools' core curricula in public alternative schools – the answer to research question 3, which is the final research question of this study.

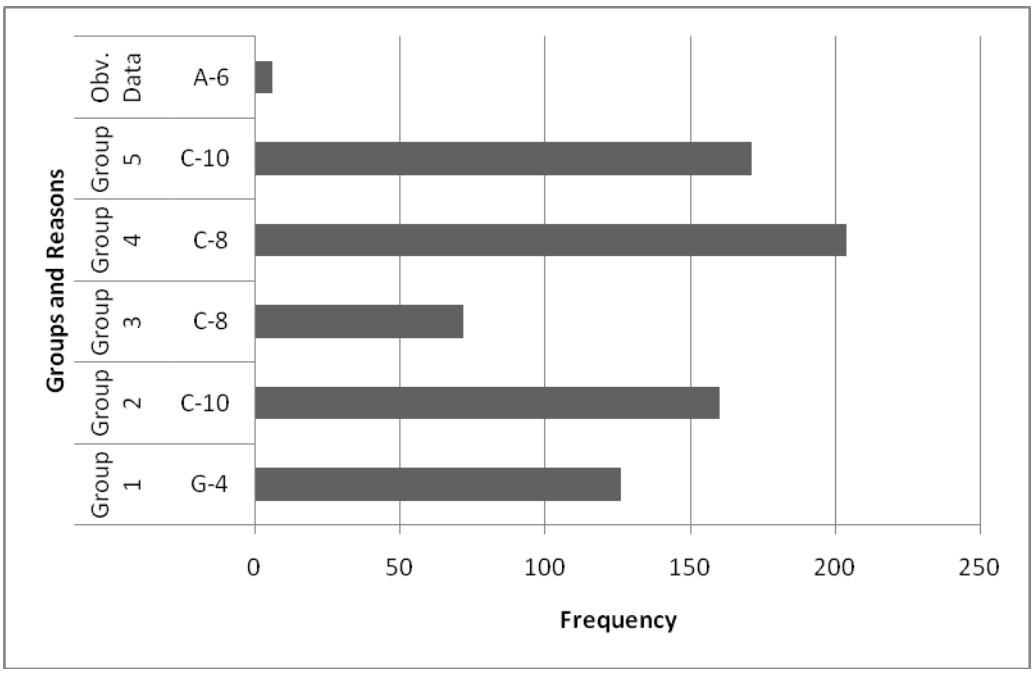

Figure 14. Most Significant Reasons (A-1 – K-2) as reported by groups 1 – 5 and the non-participant observation study.

Figure 14 is a comparative analysis of the most significant reason expressed by each of the 5 groups comprising the study, and the most significant reason derived from the observation study. This comparative analysis shows that both groups 3 and 4 had C-8 (need classrooms and schools that equip students to manage the daily and ongoing challenges they face) as their most significant reason. Accordingly, groups 2 and 5 indicated C-10 (need classrooms and schools that focus on the individual needs, abilities, and interests of students) as their most significant reason. Notably, Group 1, which was the focus group of the study, revealed reason G-4 (need hands-on courses that relate to the practical things desired to do in life) as their most prominent reason. This reason, as indicated by Group 1, confirms the body of knowledge as revealed through the literature review of this study that At-Risk students are and feel disconnected from the curriculum. The reality of At-Risk students' disconnection from the curriculum remains one of the greatest factors of the continued and escalating failure rate among this student population.

Participants' own Words That Embellished the Study

This researcher desired to report, in a narrative format, a few of the true and sincere feelings, experiences, and emotions as they relate to the needs expressed by participants of the study. The report is made from the outcome of the study, which utilized 19 open-ended questions as answered by the 5 groups that comprised the study. The 5 groups that comprised the study totaled 138 participants. The study focused on the evaluation of At-Risk students' needs in public alternative schools, and this segment of the report is intended to reveal those needs as expressed in the own words of participants. Consequently, in an effort to produce a brief report of the captured feelings and emotions of participants, the reporting of the quotations is void of editing.

Accordingly, the following selected quotations are shown in accompaniment of the associated survey question and are classified according to the respective groups from which the quotations were selected. The questions, as they appear, are all taken from the Group 1 questionnaire because Group 1 (CSCN currently or previously enrolled students) was the most targeted group. The questions, although taken from Group 1, are representative of the questions for all 5 groups but worded slightly differently for each group in accordance with the group they addressed.

Question #6: *Were you to compare the alternative classroom with the traditional, what are the pros and cons that you would identify as significant in each place and why?*

Group 2:

"Today's traditional classrooms are fine for students who can be successful there. Alternative, separate, different classrooms help at-risk students achieve success. Both types of students exist, so both types of classrooms must too." (Participant #109)

Question #8: *Please explain the level of your involvement in your classes when you were enrolled in the traditional classroom and explain what you think were the reasons for it.*

Group 5:

"Many times at-risk students cannot leave their personal troubles to do traditional subject learning. This changes when the key is turned that unlocks their lives." (Participant #103)

Question #9: *Please explain as to whether or not you think CSCN or school as a whole is providing you with the skills and knowledge you need to help you in achieving and being successful according to your abilities and interests in life, and why?*

Group 1:

"It is for info but not for handy skills." (Participant #32)

"They are and they aren't because I learn some things but not what I need to know." (Participant #8)

Question #10: *When you are in the classroom what are the things you find yourself mostly thinking about, whether class related or not, and how would you prioritize those things in their order of importance to you and why?*

Group 1:

"I think about drugs, money, girls, friends, the weekend, etc. I treat all of these things like they're the most important thing for me to do, but I know they aren't. I consider them important because I enjoy them and they're fun." (Participant #48)

"I don't really think about anything, I am space out a lot." (Participant #17)

Question #11: *What kind of social skills do you believe you came to CSCN with and please explain if and how CSCN is helping you to improve on those skills and why you believe or do not believe so?*

Group 5:

"Bring to Class: Negative social skills (argumentative, defensive, disruptive, etc.) I do not see any help for students in alternative schools…yet." (Participant #94)

Question #12: *What classes, that if offered in the alternative school, would gain your interest in learning and why, and what existing classes would you like to see eliminated or changed in any way and why?*

Group 1:

"The class I would love to take is photography because I love to take pictures. I would change Health not completely but I'll put some of Life Skills in Health." (Participant #9)

Group 2:

"Math but I would love to see life skills class in her home school because I think it really is helping them." (Participant #50)

Group 3:

"I think classes that would focus on careers, such as auto tech, cooking classes of that sort." (Participant #138)

Group 4:

"I would like to see an available curriculum that is much more focused on vocational/technical subjects. Many of our students will not attend college and focusing

on academics that prepare them for this course is doing them a disservice and may play a large role in creating a drop out situation." (Participant #93)

Question #15: *What do you believe are the things, whether in school or out of school, that possibly could be causing any lack of interest or boredom with school and why?*

Group 1:

"Because sometimes our minds are based on what we want to learn, rather than what we need to learn." (Participant #59)

"Not being able to do stuff I want to do every day." (Participant #4)

"Smoking weed because I keep my mind over things that stress me out." (Participant #47)

Group 3:

"Teachers is number one, I am absolutely honest and saying beyond my alternative teachers only five or so more in my whole educational career stick out as helpful and dozens whom I felt have robbed me of my learning." (Participant #133)

Question #18: *When you are sitting in a classroom, what do you find yourself mostly thinking about and what classes, if offered, could possibly prevent you from focusing on those things and why do you think those classes would prevent you from focusing on those things?*

Group 1:

"I really don't know, maybe a substance abuse class" (Participant #124).

Group 3:

"I think this goes back to teaching material that will interest kids, and the only way to do this is to offer courses that they know will help them succeed in whatever career they decide to choose." (Participant #91)

Question #19: *What courses, if any, would you like to see deleted from schools and would those deletions influence you in completing high school and why?*

Group 1:

"Not so many math classes because we're really not going to need them later in life unless their trying to become a math professor or something and if some of those were deleted such as trigonometry and algebra III and calculus a lot more people would pass because math to most is one of the hardest and least favorite subjects and some people figure that they will just never get it and without it you can't pass so they just drop out." (Participant #59)

Group 2:

"People, not just students, usually don't know whether they like or have a talent for something till they give it a try, so I don't want to eliminate whole subjects from traditional schools. For alternative schools, I know from my daughter's experience that when a student is at-risk, for whatever reason(s), he or she couldn't care less about 'The Three R's.' The only key to that student's success in a school setting has to be to re-capture that student's interest by providing structure plus discipline first, and real-world relevance in their curricula. And that structure plus discipline must be of a positive, not negative, nature." (Participant #109)

Summary Analysis of Quotations

This segment of the study was developed to give the reader a fresh and pure report of participants' responses and to further sustain the voice of participants in the outcome. However, it is important for the reader to see the connectivity of the words used by participants to the needs as they emerged from the study. A most notable quotation that has permeated many areas of the findings is:

"Many times at-risk students cannot leave their personal troubles to do traditional subject learning. This changes when the key is turned that unlocks their lives" (Participant #103). This particular quotation is directly connected to the most prominent need derived from the study, Need C (need habilitating classrooms and schools). The essence of the entire study is embedded in the need to give At-Risk students their own specialized key to success. At-Risk students have been given the "master key" (the traditional curriculum) with the expectation for them to use it as have all generations before them. However, though the "master key" (the traditional curriculum) still has its place in 21st century education, it has lost its ability to open a new generation of doors that require a different and more specialized key (an alternative curriculum). At-Risk students must be handed an alternative curriculum that is uniquely carved to permit functionality and be guided by specialty trained teachers capable of showing them how to turn the key.

Participants from every group of the study have placed enormous emphasis on the importance of the teacher in the educational process. Participant #133, in stating the claim, "… have robbed me of my learning" has most adequately explained the negative impact many teachers have on At-Risk students in the classroom. Concurrently, At-Risk

students feel ‘robbed’ when faced with a curriculum in which they have no interest and to which they are absolutely disconnected, and the findings of this study have confirmed that reality.

The Purpose and Function of the Quantitative Component of the Study

The quantitative analysis of the study was designed to further strengthen the objectivity of the study and the transferability of the findings. Whereas the qualitative analysis of the study answered all 3 research questions, the quantitative analysis focused on the 2nd and 3rd research questions (2 central questions). All 3 research questions are as follows:

1. What are the needs of At-Risk students who are placed in public alternative schools?
2. Are the abilities of At-Risk students being developed in public alternative schools?
3. What is the relationship between the academic success of students placed in public alternative schools and the use of the traditional schools’ core curricula in public alternative schools?

The quantitative analysis of the study was conducted using 2 sets of quantitative data. The 2 sets were (a) secondary data (as shown in Appendix K) from 5 alternative schools in Georgia and (b) primary data that was developed from the qualitative component of this study.

The primary data was developed by condensing the 11 needs (A-K) into 3 variables. Those 3 variables are: (a) Need alternative schooling and classes different from traditional; (b) Need classes suited to individual talents and abilities; and (c) Need

alternative curriculum in order to be successful. The 3 variables were then assigned numerical values using a four-point ordinal scale that ranged from one – *not important,* to four – *extremely important*. The conversion of qualitative findings into numerical data facilitated the input of each participant in the quantitative component of the study without infringing on the quality of either data set.

The scope and nature of this study on the At-Risk population of students, comes with pragmatic constraints and particularly as it involves the meaningful input of participants. All participants were asked to complete a survey consisting of 19 open ended questions that required valid and detailed response in the answering of every question. The enormity of the survey and the format in which it was developed were essential to the scope and nature of this study, and to the quality of outcome desired. Hence, any accompanying request for quantitative data, such as the inclusion of a Likert scale, would have lent itself to the diminishing of participants' interest and input in this most pertinent data set – the survey. By virtue of the phenomenon studied, a strong phenomenological approach was paramount and that approach was validated by the significant quality of the findings.

The qualitative findings were translated into 3 variables that would permit the construction of a 4-point ordinal scale in the rating of the needs as developed from the qualitative study. Each need (A-K) was analyzed individually looking for similarities of categories. From the similarity of categories, 3 variables emerged that most adequately encompass all the attributes of the 11 needs. Then, from the summative value (frequency) of all the reasons (A-1 – K-2) a level of importance was assigned to each variable. The level of importance was based on the 4-point scale relative to each of the 3 variables.

The values were assigned points with 4 being the highest point on the scale to 1 being the lowest. Though a sole phenomenological approach was adequate in answering the 3 research questions of this study, the incorporation of a quantitative approach, in spite of its limitation, further enhanced the objectivity of the study and the generalizability of the findings.

The Analysis of the Quantitative Data

The quantitative analysis of the study necessitated the drawing of inferences from secondary data collected from alternative schools in Georgia on student outcome measures for school years 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), and the End of Course Test (EOCT) established by the Georgia Department of Education. These data are summarized in the tables below, which show surprisingly low levels of overall achievement attained by students in each of the alternative schools for which performance data was collected for both the 2006-2007 and the 2007-2008 school years. The first item of note is that the SAT scores of students who took these tests (see Tables 1 and 2) are below system, state and national scores. Perhaps even more revealing are the small numbers of students in the reported alternative schools who actually took them.

While there were more complete data on pass/fail rates in the EOCT and GHSGT data, and the pass percentages tend to be a little higher at Crossroads Second Chance North than for the other 4 alternative schools on which data was collected, it is a reflective exception, rather than the rule, that over 50% of alternative students pass a given subject area, as is reflective in the alternative schools' data (see Tables 3 through 6). Such findings could be indicative that students are not thriving in public alternative schools under the traditional school curricula and which could further signify that the

failing of subject areas could be a factor of systemic deficiency occurring from the application of the traditional core curricula in public alternative schools. However, the inference of systemic deficiency is not intended to negate the numerous other factors, such as socio-economic and teacher efficacy, that could have impacted the showing of the low performance scores in the data analyzed. Data for all schools except for Crossroads North and South were obtained from the State of Georgia Governor's Office of Student Achievement (2008). Data for Crossroads North and South were gathered from the Fulton County Schools' Student Achievement Management System (SAMS).

Alternative Schools Test Data Results

The alternative schools and systems in the state of Georgia for which secondary test data were collected are DeKalb, Gwinnett, and Fulton County as shown below for the 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 academic years.

Table 1

Average SAT Score per School Compared With System/State/Nation 2006-2007Academic Year

SAT	DeKalb Alternative (DeKalb)		GIVE West (Gwinnett)		GIVE Center (Gwinnett)		Crossroads South (Fulton)		Crossroads North (Fulton)	
Data Sources	Avg. Score	# Tested	Avg. Score	# Tested	Avg. Score	#Tested	Avg. Score	# Tested	Avg. Score	# Tested
School	NA **	8	NDA *	NDA*	NDA *	NDA*	1445	1	NDA *	0
System	1346	3,621	1524	6,155	1524	6,155	1595	3,744	1595	3,744
State	1458	50,139	1458	50,139	1458	50,139	1458	50,139	1458	50,139
Nation	1495	1,178,753	1495	1,178,753	1495	1,178,753	1495	1,178,753	1495	1,178,753

* No Data Available (NDA) appears when a school or system has no data to report.
**State of Georgia does not report on fewer than 10 students.

Table 1 show that of all 5 alternative schools shown, not a single school had reportable SAT scores for the 2006-2007 Academic Year. This is indicative of the low academic performance inherent in alternative schools. While private access was available to the researcher in attaining CSCN's data, the organization of this researcher, as well as to the data of Crossroads South, those students, as shown, who took the test performed lower than the system, state, and nation.

Table 2

Average SAT Score for Each School Compared With System/State/Nation 2007-2008 Academic Year

SAT	DeKalb Alternative (DeKalb)		GIVE West (Gwinnett)		GIVE Center (Gwinnett)		Crossroads South (Fulton)		Crossroads North (Fulton)	
Data Sources	Avg. Score	#Tested	Avg. Score	# Tested	Avg. Score	# Tested	Avg. Score	# Tested	Avg. Score	# Tested
School	1048	10	NDA*	NDA*	NDA*	NDA*	975	1	1417	5
System	1338	3,699	1521	6,254	1521	6,254	1593	3,973	1593	3,973
State	1453	51,591	1453	51,591	1453	51,591	1453	51,591	1453	51,591
Nation	1495	1,167,849	1495	1,167,849	1495	1,167,849	1495	1,167,849	1495	1,167,849

* No Data Available (NDA) appears when a school or system has no data to report.
**State of Georgia does not report on fewer than 10 students.

Table 2 shows that, for the 2007-08 Academic Year, DeKalb was the only school with publicly available SAT scores. The average test scores for DeKalb, however, were significantly below system, state, and nation. Crossroads North, with 5 students who took the test, and Crossroads South, with 1 student, both also had inferior outcomes.

Table 3

EOCT Pass (P) / Fail (F) Rates per School for the 2006-2007 Academic Year

EOCT	DeKalb Alternative (DeKalb)		GIVE West (Gwinnett)		GIVE Center (Gwinnett)		Crossroads South (Fulton)		Crossroads North (Fulton)	
	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#
9th Literature and Composition	# Tested	129	# Tested	88	#Tested	99	# Tested	52	# Tested	32
	P-19%	25	P-27%	24	P-34%	34	P-19%	10	P-37%	12
	F-81%	104	F-73%	64	F-66%	65	F-81%	42	F-63%	20
American Literature and Composition	# Tested	63	# Tested	28	#Tested	35	# Tested	23	# Tested	11
	P-46%	29	P-36%	10	P-66%	23	P-48%	11	P-55%	6
	F-54%	34	F-64%	18	F-34%	12	F-52%	12	F-45%	5
Algebra 1	# Tested	189	# Tested	162	#Tested	115	# Tested	46	# Tested	17
	P-16%	30	P-16%	26	P-23%	26	P-13%	6	P-29%	5
	F-84%	159	F-84%	136	F-77%	89	F-87%	40	F-71%	12
Geometry`	# Tested	67	# Tested	44	#Tested	40	# Tested	24	# Tested	7
	P- 10%	7	P-11%	5	P-47%	19	P-12%	3	P-57%	4
	F-90%	60	F-89%	39	F-53%	21	F-88%	21	F-43%	3
Biology	# Tested	105	# Tested	110	#Tested	100	# Tested	45	# Tested	28
	P-5%	5	P-17%	19	P-25%	25	P-11%	5	P-10%	3
	F-95%	100	F-83%	91	F-75%	75	F-89%	40	F-89%	25
Physical Science	# Tested	86	# Tested	1	#Tested	0	#Tested	37	# Tested	16
	P-21%	18	NA**		NDA*		P-8%	3	P-12%	2
	F-79%	68					F-92%	34	F-88%	14
US History	# Tested	44	# Tested	27	#Tested	45	#Tested	22	# Tested	13
	P-36%	16	P-37%	10	P-33%	15	P-18%	4	P-38%	5
	F-64%	28	F-63%	17	F-67%	30	F-82%	18	F-62%	8
Economics	# Tested	32	# Tested	13	#Tested	27	#Tested	14	# Tested	1
	P-12%	4	P-15%	2	P-34%	9	P-7%	1	P-0%	0
	F-88%	28	F-85%	11	F-69%	19	F-93%	13	F-100%	1

* No Data Available (NDA) appears when a school or system has no data to report.
** The Governor's Office of Student Achievement does not report on fewer than 10 students.

Table 4

EOCT Pass (P) / Fail (F) Rates per School for the 2007-2008 Academic Year

EOCT	DeKalb Alternative (DeKalb)		GIVE West (Gwinnett)		GIVE Center (Gwinnett)		Crossroads South (Fulton)		Crossroads North (Fulton)	
	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#
9th Literature and Composition	# Tested	114	#Tested	66	#Tested	99	# Tested	38	# Tested	44
	P- 25%	29	P-41%	27	P-49%	49	P-18%	7	P-59%	26
	F- 75%	85	F-59%	39	F-51%	50	F-82%	31	F-41%	18
American Literature and Composition	# Tested	50	#Tested	30	#Tested	27	# Tested	24	# Tested	21
	P-52%	26	P-43%	13	P-59%	16	P-42%	10	P-52%	11
	F-48%	24	F-57%	17	F-41%	11	F-58%	14	F-48%	10
Algebra 1	# Tested	99	#Tested	66	#Tested	93	# Tested	30	# Tested	33
	P-19%	19	P-35%	23	P-44%	41	P-0%	0	P-36%	12
	F-81%	80	F-65%	43	F-56%	52	F-100%	30	F-64%	21
Geometry`	# Tested	68	#Tested	43	#Tested	25	# Tested	14	# Tested	22
	P-18%	12	P-37%	16	P-36%	9	P-7%	1	P-50%	11
	F-82%	56	F-63%	27	F-64%	16	F-93%	13	F-50%	11
Biology	# Tested	117	#Tested	73	#Tested	117	# Tested	15	# Tested	43
	P-23%	27	P-21%	15	P-36%	42	P-27%	4	P-40%	17
	F-77%	90	F-79%	58	F-64%	75	F-73%	11	F-60%	26
Physical Science	# Tested	74	#Tested	0	#Tested	0	#Tested	9	# Tested	32
	P-22%	16	NA*		NA*		P-22%	2	P-47%	15
	F-78%	58					F-78%	7	F-53%	17
US History	# Tested	37	#Tested	33	#Tested	24	#Tested	24	# Tested	17
	P-41%	15	P-36%	12	P-29%	7	P-13%	3	P-24%	4
	F-59%	22	F-64%	21	F-71%	17	F-87%	21	F-76%	13

* The Governor's Office of Student Achievement does not report on fewer than 10 students.

Table 5

GHSGT Pass (P) / Fail (F) Rates per School for the 2006-2007 Academic Year

GHSGT	Dekalb Alternative (DeKalb)		GIVE West (Gwinnett))		GIVE Center (Gwinnett)		Crossroads South (Fulton)		Crossroads North (Fulton)	
	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#
English Language Arts	#Tested	22	#Tested	10	#Tested	14	#Tested	12	#Tested	10
	P-77%	17	P-60%	6	P-50%	7	P-100%	12	P-100%	10
	F-23%	5	F-40%	4	F-50%	7	F-0%	0	F-0%	0
Mathematics	#Tested	20	#Tested	10	#Tested	14	#Tested	12	#Tested	12
	P-55%	11	P-70%	7	P-86%	12	P-100%	12	P-100%	12
	F-45%	9	F-30%	3	F-14%	2	F-0%	0	F-0%	0
Social Studies	#Tested	22	#Tested	10	#Tested	15	#Tested	12	#Tested	7
	P-55%	12	P-50%	5	P-86%	13	DNR*		P-100%	7
	F-45%	10	F-50%	5	F-14%	2			F-0%	0
Science	#Tested	21	#Tested	10	#Tested	14	#Tested	12	#Tested	6
	P-33%	7	P-20%	2	P-64%	9	DNR*		P-67%	4
	F-67%	14	F-80%	8	F-36%	5			F-33%	2
GHSWT (Georgia High School Writing Test)	#Tested	23	NA	No Students tested	#Tested	15	#Tested	18	#Tested	14
	P-65%	15			P-67%	10	P-72%	13	P-79%	11
	F-35%	8			F-33%	5	F-28%	5	F-21%	3

* Data Not Reported (DNR) due to transitioning of test versions QCC and GPS. Information can only be accessed by viewing individual student reports. Individual student reports may only be viewed by persons within the particular school of that student.

Table 3 on page 106 reports the EOCT results for the 2006-07 Academic Year for the 5 schools shown, all of which reported alarmingly low performance rates in every subject area and with one school reporting as high as 95% failure rate in Biology. The

scores are frightening and regardless of the factors impacting the failure rates, it is indicative that alternative schools are representative of a system that is not working.

Table 4 on page 107 reports the EOCT results for the 2007-08 Academic Year for the 5 schools shown, and with the same pattern of failure among all the schools. There was not a single school with satisfactory performance outcomes. The highest percentage for any school in any single subject area was 59%. It is worthwhile to note that several participants in the qualitative study attributed student dropout rate to their 'giving up' because of academic requirements that they are totally unable to meet. They are unable to meet the requirements due to lack of aptitude for that subject area and the accompanying level of expectation that has to be met. One specific subject area that was noted as a propellant for dropping out was math and ironically I of the schools in Table 4 posted 100% failure rate in math for the 30 students who took the test. These reports are most confirming of curriculum frustrations mentioned by participants of the study and which are clearly and distinctly tied to the massive student failure rate even as reported in these academic performance reports.

Table 5 on page 108 reports the GHSGT test rates for the 2006-07 Academic Year. Students who have made it to the point of eligibility for these tests are most likely to post passing scores. Though the reports of Table 4 are not as startling, as the SAT and EOCT test results, a high pattern of failure rate persists and with as high as 80% in science for one school and 45% in math for another.

Table 6

GHSGT Pass (P) / Fail (F) Rates per School for the 2007-2008 Academic Year

GHSGT	Dekalb Alternative (DeKalb)		GIVE West (Gwinnett))		GIVE Center (Gwinnett)		Crossroads South (Fulton)		Crossroads North (Fulton)	
	%	#	%	#	% #		%	#	%	#
English Language Arts	#Tested	21	#Tested	12	#Tested	11	#Tested	23	#Tested	11
	P-67%	14	P-8%	1	P-45%	5	P-61%	14	P-73%	8
	F-33%	7	F-92%	11	F-55%	6	F-39%	9	F-27%	3
Mathematics	# Tested	19	# Tested	11	#Tested	11	# Tested	19	# Tested	11
	P-79%	15	P-45%	5	P-55%	6	P-100%	19	P-100%	11
	F-21%	4	F-55%	6	F-45%	5	F-0%	0	F-0%	0
Social Studies	# Tested	20	# Tested	11	#Tested	12	# Tested		# Tested	7
	P-55%	11	P-27%	3	P-8%	1	DNR*		P-14%	1
	F-45%	9	F-73%	8	F-92%	11			F-86%	6
Science	# Tested	22	# Tested	11	#Tested	11	# Tested		# Tested	7
	P-55%	12	P-27%	3	P-36%	4	DNR*		P-57%	4
	F-45%	10	F-73%	8	F-64%	7			F-43%	3
GHSWT (Georgia High School Writing Test)	# Tested	13	# Tested	15	#Tested	17	# Tested	14	# Tested	16
	P-69%	9	P-80%	12	P-76%	13	P-86%	12	P-69%	11
	F-31%	4	F-20%	3	F-24%	4	F-14%	2	F-31%	5

* Data Not Reported (DNR) due to transitioning of test versions QCC and GPS. Information can only be accessed by viewing individual student reports. Individual student reports may only be viewed by persons within the particular school of that student.

Table 6 above reports the GHSGT test rates for the 2007-08 Academic Year. The report for this school year posted much worse results than the previous year. In one school, 92% of the students failed Language Arts and that same percentage failed social

studies in another school. Accordingly, 73% failed science in one school and 55% failed math in another. Notable, these are all curriculum related concerns.

Table 7

Study Participants Broken Down into the 5 Groups

Groups	Sample Size	Percent
Current Student, Grade 8-12	37	26.8
Parent or Guardian	30	21.7
Former Student, Grade 9 and Up	14	10.2
Faculty, Staff, Admin	32	23.2
Partners & Stakeholders	25	18.1
Total Participants	138	100.0

Table 7 shows the total 138 participants that engaged in the qualitative component of this study. That number is broken down in order of the groups (1-5) that comprised the qualitative component of this study, and their respective sample size: 37 interviews (26.8%) were with current students and 14 (10.2%) with former students, as well as 30 (21.7%) with parents or guardians, 32 (23.2%) with faculty/staff/administration and 25 (18.1%) with partners and stakeholders.

The conducting of the quantitative element of the study incorporated the development of numerical data from the qualitative study. That numerical data development was necessary because the secondary quantitative data obtained for the study were purely aggregate, as data on individual students were not available. The coding themes used in the analysis of the qualitative data were developed independently by 2 independent coders during the analysis of the qualitative data and to which

similarities and differences were compared and contrasted to arrive at common themes. Common themes were identified by examining the recurring regularities of the themes (Patton, 2002). Accordingly, all survey responses were independently coded by the 2 coders of the analysis process and entered into a qualitative analysis database (Patton).

However, in the context of a quantitative statistical perspective, that consolidation of coding and translation into numerical data could be labeled as having ‘subjective perceptions’ of At-Risk students’ needs as specified by all participants of the study, and is therefore reflected in the methodology as a limitation of the study.

Table 8

Mean and Standard Deviation of the 4-Point Scale of Importance for Selected Needs, Broken Down by Subgroup

Group		Need alternative schooling and classes different from traditional	Need classes suited to individual talents and abilities	Need an alternative curriculum in order to be successful
Student, Grade 8-12	N	37	37	37
	Mean	3.19	3.49	2.70
	Std. Deviation	.938	.804	.845
Parent or Guardian	N	30	30	30
	Mean	2.70	3.73	2.50
	Std. Deviation	1.055	.740	1.075
Former Student, Grade 9 and Up	N	14	14	14
	Mean	2.93	3.86	2.57
	Std. Deviation	1.141	.363	1.016
Faculty, Staff, Admin	N	32	32	32
	Mean	2.19	3.88	2.88
	Std. Deviation	.998	.421	1.040
Partners & Stakeholders	N	25	25	25
	Mean	2.52	3.84	2.28
	Std. Deviation	1.122	.473	.891
Total	N	138	138	138
	Mean	2.70	3.73	2.61
	Std. Deviation	1.083	.634	.977

Table 8 shows the means and standard deviations of 3 findings of highest significance in relation to the answering of the 2nd and 3rd research questions and with the utilization of the numerical data developed from the qualitative outcome of the study. The

means (*M*) of all five groups combined (as shown in table 8) are revealing, in that mean scores are closer to the ‘extremely important’ end of the continuum than to ‘not important.’ This suggests that students, parents, teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders combined lean strongly toward the assessment that curriculum and associated changes in alternative schools are needed. Participants of the study were especially in agreement that classes are needed that are suited to individual talents and abilities (*M* = 3.73, *SD* = .634).

While there is some variation within groups in their responses, gleaned by the size of the standard deviation in each cell in Table 8, there is also variation between different groups as shown by the different mean scores. This appears to be particularly true on the need for alternative schooling and classes different from the traditional model, where student mean scores are higher than the other groups, particularly faculty and administrators.

Table 9

Comparison of Group Means Using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Need alternative schooling and classes different from traditional	Between Groups	18.800	4	4.700	4.401	.002
	Within Groups	142.019	133	1.068		
	Total	160.819	137			
Need classes suited to individual talents and abilities	Between Groups	3.396	4	.849	2.184	.074
	Within Groups	51.684	133	.389		
	Total	55.080	137			
Need an alternative curriculum in order to be successful	Between Groups	5.671	4	1.418	1.506	.204
	Within Groups	125.198	133	.941		
	Total	130.870	137			

Table 9 shows a comparison of all 5 groups on the 3 listed student needs. A significant *F* indicates that there is enough variation between the mean scores that it is unlikely to be due to chance. The only *F* that is significant at the .05 level is the item measuring the need for alternative schooling and classes different from the traditional model ($p = .002$). Since there is not statistical significance at the .05 level for the other two indicators, it can be assumed that students, faculty and others are in basic agreement on the importance of these needs. However, it could be deemed that further probing may be necessary to further address the need for alternative schooling and classes that differ from the traditional model, in order to determine which groups in particular could likely show differences.

Table 10

Tukey Post Hoc Test on Need for Alternative Schooling (Multiple Comparisons)

Need alternative schooling and classes different from traditional

Tukey HSD (Honestly Significant Differences)

Group (I)	Group (J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Current Student, Grade 8-12	Parent or Guardian	.489	.254	.308	-.21	1.19
	Former Student, Grade 9 and Up	.261	.324	.929	-.64	1.16
	Faculty, Staff, Admin	1.002*	.249	.001	.31	1.69
	Partners & Stakeholders	.669	.268	.096	-.07	1.41
Parent or Guardian	Student, Grade 8-12	-.489	.254	.308	-1.19	.21
	Former Student, Grade 9 and Up	-.229	.334	.960	-1.15	.70
	Faculty, Staff, Admin	.513	.263	.296	-.21	1.24
	Partners & Stakeholders	.180	.280	.968	-.59	.95
Former Student, Grade 9 and Up	Student, Grade 8-12	-.261	.324	.929	-1.16	.64
	Parent or Guardian	.229	.334	.960	-.70	1.15
	Faculty, Staff, Admin	.741	.331	.172	-.17	1.66
	Partners & Stakeholders	.409	.345	.760	-.55	1.36
Faculty/ Staff/ Admin	Student, Grade 8-12	-1.002*	.249	.001	-1.69	-.31
	Parent or Guardian	-.513	.263	.296	-1.24	.21
	Former Student, Grade 9 and Up	-.741	.331	.172	-1.66	.17
	Partners & Stakeholders	-.333	.276	.748	-1.10	.43
Partners & Stakeholders	Student, Grade 8-12	-.669	.268	.096	-1.41	.07
	Parent or Guardian	-.180	.280	.968	-.95	.59
	Former Student, Grade 9 and Up	-.409	.345	.760	-1.36	.55

	Faculty, Staff, Admin	.333	.276	.748	-.43	1.10

* The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 10 shows that the most pronounced difference in the perception that alternative schooling is necessary lies between current students and faculty/staff/administrators (p = .001). No other group difference is significant at the .05 level. This indicates that the mean score for students (3.19) compared to the faculty/staff/admin (2.19) is very unlikely to be an outcome of chance. Thus, it can be stated with statistical confidence that the students feel that alternative schooling, differing from the traditional model, is more important than the faculty/staff/administrators believe; where the former average between an 'important to extremely important' perception to the latter of only a 'somewhat important' perception of the need for alternative schooling that differs from the traditional model.

Summary of Results

Both quantitative 'outcome' data from the alternative schools and qualitative 'subjective' data from the students, parents, faculty and others involved with alternative education in Georgia depict the need for change in alternative schooling. Low success scores indicate that although some At-Risk students are showing some success with the traditional curriculum structure in alternative schools by passing core subject areas, the majority are not, which makes it difficult to label the public alternative school system as successful. In completing the 19 open-ended questions of the surveys used in this study, many students stressed their strong desires for more alternative courses that better match their own academic desires. Students also stressed that they did not feel the current system is successful in preparing them academically. Whether student abilities can be

better developed in a more ambitious ‘alternative’ setting remains to be seen, as such a program has yet to be implemented.

There were 5 groups (independent, categorical variables) surveyed relative to the 3 research questions of the study. From the responses of participants, a report was developed using a 4-point scale, with 1 = *not important* to 4 = *extremely important*, to convert the qualitative outcome into a quantitative report. Means were then calculated for each set of responses and were further reduced and analyzed using One-way ANOVA. Stemming from the 3 questions that were surveyed, “Need alternative schooling and classes different from the traditional” appeared to have revealed statistical significance between responses for all five groups. *P* (Sig.) is .002 and $F = 4.401$; therefore according to One–way ANOVA, it is statistically significant that the responses given by respondents are statistically different and not due to randomness or chance.

Consequently, it can be interpreted that at the $p < .01$ level ($p = .002$) that this variation is not due to randomness of the data. There is otherwise a 99% likelihood that the difference in responses is significant. Contrasting with the other two responses stemming from the survey questions, none is below the customary statistical *p*-values of .01 or .05. For example “Need classes suited to individual talents and abilities,” $p = .074$ (which is greater than $p = .05$); is almost marginally significant. “Need alternative curriculum in order to be successful,” $p = .204$.

Because of findings with One-way ANOVA test, the only responses to research questions that were statistically significant were then further analyzed using TUKEY Post Hoc Tests. According to the ANOVA test it only revealed that there was a difference between the groups for that one question that was statistically significant. It did not reveal

between which particular group(s) of the five groups the responses were significant. However, the TUKEY test revealed that this variation was due mainly to responses given by the students, grades 8-12 and faculty/staff/administration groups; *p*(Sig.) = .001. Therefore, the most significant variation in responses to this question (need alternative schooling) came between the students and faculty/staff. Consequently, in assessing the responses given by students regarding whether they need alternative schooling and classes different from traditional, statistically the majority of students support this approach in comparison to the faculty, staff, and administration.

Concurrently, findings from both the qualitative and quantitative components of the study put into question any postulate that would suggest the needs of At-Risk students as being met in public alternative schools. The question of any such postulate is validated by the extraordinarily low performance scores reported by alternative schools and further best confirmed through the words of a participant in the study, "… I do not see any help for students in alternative schools…yet" (Participant # 94). Though many participants have praised the efforts of CSCN, because of their knowledge of its best practices and subsequent leading edge over other alternative schools, those recognitions did not deter them from stressing their concerns regarding the inadequacies of alternative education. Those formative inferences of participants were the basis of the 11 needs that emerged from the study.

In addressing central question #2 that targeted the abilities of At-Risk students being developed in public alternative schools, theoretically the answer to this question could not be considered conclusive using quantitative measurements because individual data from traditional schools were unattainable. However, despite the absence of a

statistical measurement, it can be inferred from the aggregate standardized test results that traditional core curricula do not work for alternative education, as test results are clearly subpar. That inference is substantiated in the literature review of this study that postulates the disconnection of At-Risk students from the traditional curriculum.

The low student achievement scores reported in the secondary data and widespread agreement in the quantified qualitative data indicate that alternative schooling outside of the traditional core curricula is important. Given that assessed importance, the findings of this study indicate that the abilities and needs of At-Risk students are not being met in current alternative schools. Further, central question #3 sought to determine the relationship between the academic success of students placed in public alternative schools and the use of the traditional schools' core curricula in public alternative schools. Though quantitative data needed to conclusively test the relationship between students' academic success and the traditional curricula's use in alternative schools were unattainable, the consensus of the qualitative study alone clearly indicated greater potential for success if the core curricula for alternative schools and classes were different from the traditional.

Chapter Summary

This study sought to evaluate the needs of At-Risk students in public alternative schools. The study was successful in revealing those needs as identified by At-Risk students themselves. Accordingly, the 4 other groups most capable of identifying those needs, due to their close affiliation or personal and meaningful association with the At-Risk student population, were also the desired participants of the study. Those groups were: Parents of At-Risk students; former students (who they themselves had been part of

the At-Risk student population); faculty, staff, and administrators of At-Risk students; and partners in education and other stakeholders of the sample population studied.

The study revealed an alignment of greater potential for success, in the At-Risk student population, with alternative core curricula. That alignment is visible throughout this study's findings of At-Risk students' needs in public alternative schools. Those needs, as identified, revealed that the abilities of At-Risk students are not being developed in public alternative schools. That analysis is derived in accordance with the components, as determined from the study. The study revealed components that are needed for the development of abilities but are not yet identifiable in public alternative schools. Simultaneously, both the qualitative and the quantitative elements of this study show that needed academic success is not being gained in public alternative schools under the use of the traditional core curricula. The following chapter, Chapter 5, discloses the discussion, conclusion, and recommendations drawn from the study.

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Discussion

The preceding chapter, Chapter 4, disclosed the findings of this study which focused on the accurate answering of all 3 research questions. Those findings served to develop the framework from which the discussion, conclusions, and recommendations of this chapter are drawn. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the needs of At-Risk students placed in public alternative schools and Crossroads Second Chance North (CSCN) in Roswell, Georgia, was used as the sample population. The evaluation utilized a qualitative and a quantitative methodology, and 138 subjects participated in the qualitative component. The need for this study was driven by the strength of the broad body of data as documented in Chapter 3 and all of which are capsulated by Aron and Zweig (2003):

> Ideally, it would be useful to have a single definitive definition of alternative education that is broad and flexible enough to support a variety of purposes (such as conducting needs assessment, educating policymakers, projecting staffing needs, tracking expenditures, etc.) and specific enough to be useful for any one of these purposes. Whether such a typology will ever be developed is unclear, but a typology could be extremely helpful in establishing common terminology and for understanding the different kinds of alternative education.
>
> Such a typology could also contribute to the body of knowledge about effective and high quality alternative education. Vulnerable youth who are disconnected (or disconnecting) from mainstream schools need and deserve to have high-quality alternative education as do all youth. By including in a typology factors associated with quality and effectiveness, policy makers, practitioners, and funders may be better able to help promote the expansion of high quality approaches and improve or eliminate low-quality approaches. (p. 21)

Although the development of a typology for alternative education was not the purpose of this study, the findings of the study will lead to that development. The findings will lead to that development because it has formulated the prerequisite needed to frame such a

typology. From the findings, all needed elements of change in the innovation and implementation of alternative education can now be set in motion.

Although different typologies exist for alternative schools and programs as identified by Raywid (1998) in Aaron and Zweig (2003), the findings of this study have the capability of formulating the construct needed for an alternative means of educating alternative students and to equip them to meet both the short and long term demands of society. Such a construct appears to be critically needed since the nationwide failure rate of At-Risk students continues or intensifies even after their removal from traditional classrooms and placement in alternative classrooms or schools. Hutchison (2006) alluded to the high failure rates in public education as a well known crisis and stated that the problem remains difficult to fix because the public education system refuses to try new and innovative approaches. Accordingly, Zweig (2003) questions the functionality of the alternative school system as it exists and questions who they are actually reaching when the needs of At-Risk students remain unmet.

Consequently, this study sought to identify and disclose the needs of the At-Risk student population who are placed in alternative schools and in an effort to bring those needs to the forefront of the alternative education system nationwide. Though alternative schools typify failing Title 1 schools, students of alternative schools cannot participate in the school choice program. The students cannot participate whether the alternative school is failing academically or is otherwise a dangerous school; whereas students of Title 1 schools, who have been victims of violent crimes on school grounds or attend a school that is steadily dangerous, are eligible to participate in the school choice program (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). The need for alternative school students to be offered

choices that are truly representative of a second chance, or an alternative opportunity to gain a quality education, is evidenced by research. Accordingly, the demands of NCLB require school districts to improve the educational process, whereby all students can be afforded equal educational opportunities.

School choice was intended to present a solution to this nation's education dilemma and in the process of school choice implementation, it is necessary to project and examine outcome results. In examining results, the U.S. Department of Education's 2004 study on *Innovations in Education* highlighted the importance of school districts to analyze student achievement results rather than merely collecting data on enrollment and satisfaction. Because alternative schools are listed among school choices presented to parents, it is imperative to examine the validity of alternative schools as one of those choices. That validity should be examined by looking at performance results of alternative schools as shown by research. "New programs and individual school improvement plans aim to improve results. Do they? What lessons can districts learn and apply to new challenges?" (U.S. Department of Education, p. 32)

In the review of literature conducted in this study, its analysis of school choice, in relation to the demands of NCLB legislation, did not reveal whether alternative schools were designed to generate student achievement or were merely used to safeguard traditional classrooms from the challenges posed by At-Risk students. Though the true purpose of alternative schools may still be blurred, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2003) reported that the larger the enrollment of school districts, the greater the provision of alternative schools and programs, and also that such schools and programs are more prevalent in urban school districts and in the Southeast.

A plethora of problems faces the educating of At-Risk students who are placed in alternative schools and programs. In light of the fact that there are problems, the main area of concern is that the curriculum of the public school system may have lost relevance not only to the alternative student body, but also pragmatically to the global economy of the 21st century. Ediger (2002), in discussing societal trends and the curriculum, emphasized that the need to prepare students to meet the demands of academically oriented professions, as well as the different levels of vocational job opportunities, is paramount and the findings of this study strongly validate that concept. That validation was made by participants of this study having indicated that the five most pressing needs of At-Risk students are:

1. Need habilitating classrooms and schools
2. Need marketable and practical skill building courses
3. Need caring teachers and administrators
4. Need small nontraditional classes in order to learn
5. Need academic life skills – social skills class

Accordingly, there is no known evidence of alternative education being designed to facilitate these needs and to adequately prepare At-Risk students to meet the global demands of the job market.

In relation to At-Risk students' inability to meet the global demands of the job market, Flannery, Kopkowski, and Rosales (2008) reported on dropout prevention and alluded to the importance of teaching students real world skills where they are able to visualize themselves occupying positions in the future that will be of interest to them. Flannery et al. contended that it is in the students' ability to see and to feel a connection

between the world of school and the world of survival, that students are able to formulate the relativity of school to having a career. Flannery et al. further stated that students need to be able to perceive careers in what they are good at and enjoy, or simply in seeing school's relevance in their current and future need to just being able to make a living. In this same realm of practical relevance, Jehlen and Flannery (2008) pointed to the inadequacies of the NCLB legislation as it pertained to the educating of students with challenging behaviors and other things that hinder learning. Jehlen and Flannery believe that students who experience significant obstruction to the process of learning, even to the point of barring attainment of a high school diploma or the achievement of employable skills, are found in most public schools.

With traditional K-12 education losing at least one quarter of its student enrollment to dropouts, the country cannot afford to leave such a massive proportion of the student body uneducated (Aron & Zweig, 2003). The need to educate is evidenced by continued escalating placement of students in alternative education programs who eventually add to the already large dropout rate. Public education, however, having fallen short of the ability to educate At-Risk students effectively, must now find a way of equipping them with the same quality skills and knowledge training as it does for students in traditional classrooms (Aron & Zweig). Change in the approach to alternative education is necessary if alternative students are expected to succeed in a global economy.

Conclusions

The findings of this study are fundamentally conclusive and not interpretive. The findings are conclusive because the study sought and obtained an analysis of needs as described by At-Risk students themselves and the parties most affiliated with that group. The conclusion is that At-Risk students placed in public alternative schools desire an alternative means of education. This student population stated their need for an alternative medium of education that is different from, but not inferior to, the traditional curriculum approach. Studies have shown that the current alternative education approach has not worked and continues to be ineffective in light of evaluated results. The infusion of traditionalism in alternative schools has produced consistently poor performance outcomes. The traditional curriculum approach is used in alternative schools in an effort to achieve what is considered to be the norm established for secondary education. Then in light of that, the word 'alternative,' simply put, means a different way to achieve a desired result. The norm established for secondary education has been the achievement of a traditional high school diploma. That norm, however, has proven to be predominantly unattainable by At-Risk students, where more than 50% are unable to pass even a given subject area.

The reality is that in order for no child to be left behind, a viable alternative curriculum approach, capable of meeting the needs of At-Risk students, must be created. The needs of the alternative population, as expressed in this study, are not traditional and therefore provisions to meet their needs cannot be traditional. Alternative students are alternative and traditional students are traditional. Consequently, the needs of alternative students must be met using an alternative curriculum approach just as the needs of

traditional students are met using the traditional curriculum approach. This concept is paramount because the talents and abilities of alternative students are just as pertinent as the talents and abilities of traditional students. The word alternative does not exemplify inferiority, it simply exemplifies difference and difference is the root cause of change.

This study was designed to be significantly qualitative. A significant qualitative approach was the only means by which the affect group was able to voice their feelings, their desires, their hurts, their emotions, their opinions, and their symptoms. Then, were those variables not to be investigated, listened to, analyzed, and responded to, any and all applied remedy to solve the issues faced by At-Risk students will continue to be illogical and ineffective. The 138 participants of this study were all asked the same questions and were all directly and meaningfully connected to alternative education at every conceivable level of involvement. Given each participant's connectivity to alternative education, the voice of each participant was objectively heard and evaluated. Hearing and evaluating the voice of each participant was important because in essence, no one is more capable of articulating pain being felt than the one by whom the pain is being borne or one who is capable of empathizing with that pain.

This study disclosed 11 needs that require significant attention and response from every avenue of educational leadership. The needs, as expressed, are indicative that associated provisions are particularly lacking in alternative education and in education as a whole. Consequently, meaningful and measurable improvements must be made to repair deficits in secondary education. The needs of the alternative group, as stated by them and as validated by the performance results identified in this study, must be rapidly and innovatively addressed. Hutchison (2006) has shared this conclusion by stating the

concern that alternative education is not preparing students to be productive citizens of their community and that the public education crisis is a well known dilemma. Given that known dilemma, Hutchison stated a further concern as to why the problem is not yet fixed, and in the words of Hillary Rodham Clinton in her presidential campaign exit speech on June 7, 2009, “Every moment wasted looking back, keeps us from moving forward.” This study has provided the education establishment with an objective evaluation of the needs of At-Risk students in public alternative schools and where needs are not met, outcomes will remain deficient.

Recommendations

Confirmatory and Discovery Significance

The findings of this study have confirmatory as well as discovery significance (Patton, 2002). The findings are confirmatory because they align with prior research of experts such as Aron and Zweig (2003), Kim and Taylor (2008), and Hargreaves (2003). For example, Aron and Zweig stated that continued placement of At-Risk students in the current public alternative school system is resulting in an addition to the already large dropout rate of traditional K-12 education. Likewise, Hargreaves attributes the failure rate of At-Risk students to the lack of connection between curriculum instruction and the real world. Concurrently, this study has discovery significance because it permits not only informed knowledge but also creates the basis from which innovative changes in public alternative education can be created and implemented.

The need for innovative changes not only aligns with the confirmatory significance of this study but equally so with its discovery significance. Both cases of significance show the immediacy and pertinence to the making of major innovative changes in alternative education. Innovative changes are needed to provide the solutions sought by the NCLB legislation of the Bush administration. That legislation mandates the requirement to equally engage all children in the education process and to gain the paramount resolution to the national education crisis.

Needed Innovative Changes

The recommendations being made are based on the findings of this study that indicate the need for innovative changes in the public alternative educational system as it currently exists. Those recommended changes are:

First, develop public alternative schools that are suited to the needs of At-Risk students, as enumerated in the findings of this study. The schools must be equipped to unleash the latent talents and abilities of students – talents and abilities of which penal institutions and the grave have long been and continue to be depositories. To accomplish that goal, public alternative schools must cease to be punitive and become strictly rehabilatory as shown by need C of the findings. The recommendation to develop schools that align with the needs of the students they serve is confirmed by all participants of this study. Participants expressed need C which states, “Need habilitating classrooms and schools” to be the single most dominant need and which comprises 35% of the responses.

Second, create an alternative curriculum that is designed to produce and develop global functional job skills in students rather than the mere issuance of a diploma. The traditional diploma not only lacks needed value and effectiveness for the alternative

student, but has been proven to be unattainable by the mass. Though different from the traditional, the alternative curriculum would incorporate relative and substantive elements of the traditional that are vital to 21st century educational preparation. Then with significant focus on vital components of the traditional curriculum, the alternative curriculum would equally focus on the changing needs of the global job market. Though the traditional diploma would be different from the alternative diploma, the attainment of either diploma would be respectively rigorous. The 2 essential focuses of curricula (traditional and alternative) will put the alternative curriculum and associated diploma at par with the traditional. The need for an alternative curriculum is expressed through need G which states "Need marketable and practical skill building courses," and the traditional curriculum lacks that provision. Need G represents 16% of the responses from all participants of the study. Accordingly, this study shows that students' interest will be drawn to practical traditional elements of learning when connected to their specific areas of interest, talents and abilities.

Third, recruit, train, and equip educators to meet the needs of the At-Risk population in a fashion that will promote the esteem of alternative education and will eradicate the stigma of failure and inferiority that is associated with the At-Risk student and alternative education. This recommendation is substantiated by Need B which states, "Need caring teachers and administrators." Participants of the study defined caring teachers and administrators to mean facilitators who are willing and capable of helping students wherever necessary. Participants desired educators who are capable of facilitating students' achievement of class and school requirements while simultaneously

tapping into and being sensitive to the intrinsic needs of At-Risk students. Need B accounts for 15% of the findings as identified through this study.

Fourth, infuse the building of self-esteem and value in At-Risk students by creating educational environments and institutions that are equal to the facilities and resources afforded to traditional students. This recommendation is substantiated by Need A which states, “Need small non-traditional classes in order to learn.” Need A accounts for 12% of participants’ responses. Given that educational environments and institutions are established to meet the needs of the traditional curriculum, then equally so, educational environments and institutions must be established to meet the needs of an alternative curriculum. With equal status assigned to both environments and institutions, alternative education will more likely be viewed and managed as ‘different’ from, and not as ‘inferior’ to, traditional education.

Fifth, make alternative education a realistic and viable school choice in the public education process. That school choice must not be punitive nor be a temporary facility designed to make a traditional student out of an alternative student as studies show that that has not worked and will never work. The traditional student is traditional and the alternative student is alternative and both are equally deserving of a quality and meaningful education in alignment with their talents and abilities. With this recommendation, alternative education will be able to produce meaningful learning as it will connect student learning with real life. This recommendation is substantiated by Need F which states, “Need academic life skills – social skills class.” Need F comprises 10% of participants’ responses and is so expressed because it connects student learning with real life activities and makes learning more realistic for the alternative student.

Theory of Alternative Education

What is the meaning of alternative education? Alternative education means, an education that is different from that which has been deemed as the norm. Though different, alternative education sustains equal educational status. However, the term 'Alternative Education' has been used to mean the gaining of what has been deemed the educational norm, through the mere placement of students in a different physical setting. Concurrently, alternative education applies only to At-Risk students. At-Risk students are students who are deemed by respective educational leaders to be at risk of not being able to gain the regular high school diploma. At-Risk students, because of their behavioral challenges that conflict with standard school rules and guidelines, are removed from traditional classrooms through their respective school district's tribunal process. Once removed from traditional classrooms, those students are placed into a setting with students who share similar or even greater challenges that block their ability to be successful in traditional classrooms.

Although At-Risk students are removed from traditional classrooms and placed in a setting labeled 'alternative,' they are still required to fulfill the demands of the standard curriculum used in traditional classrooms. The standard curriculum is forced upon At-Risk students because educational leaders hold the standard high school diploma as the proof by which all students are able to gain the qualified secondary education needed for them to successfully compete in a global economy.

Alternative education must be different from traditional in order for it to sustain the meaning of alternative. Then, to be different, the curriculum and the educational approach, plus the physical setting in which they are applied, must be equally different.

Alternative education must be recognized not only as different from the educational norm, but equal to the quality of education gained from what has been considered as the norm. Because both standards of education are different, yet equal in status, each will lead into the directions associated with its difference. At-Risk students must be provided with an alternative curriculum commensurate with their abilities, gifts, and talents. When At-Risk students are provided with an alternative curriculum commensurate with their abilities, gifts, and talents, they will then be positioned to gain the quality education needed to be competitive in a global economy and to pursue their desired careers. They will be positioned to gain a quality education and a realistic career, because with an alternative curriculum that focuses on their needs, educators will then be able to tap into the multitude of abilities, gifts, and talents inherent in the At-Risk student population.

Summary of Thoughts

The goal of this study was to evaluate the needs of At-Risk students in public alternative schools. This study will likewise permit the evaluated needs to be brought to the forefront of public education in an effort for them to be addressed in a timely and adequate manner. Accordingly, the concept of school choice and the NCLB legislation of the Bush administration embodied the literature review component of this work. The literature review unfolded the development of public alternative classrooms and schools. Alternative classrooms and schools were designed as the placement for At-Risk students removed from traditional classrooms, because of chronic or severe behavioral concerns. Unfortunately, those behavioral concerns have served to cloud the multiplicity of talents, gifts, and abilities inherent in that student body.

The literature review also revealed that the public educational system has not been successful in harnessing the unmatched potential resident in At-Risk students, and Howard Gardner (1995), in speaking about multiple intelligences (MI), wrote:

> Indeed, contrary to much that has been written, MI theory does not incorporate a "position" on tracking, gifted education, interdisciplinary curricula, the layout of the school day, the length of the school year, or many other "hot button" educational issues. I have tried to encourage certain "applied MI efforts," but in general my advice has echoed the traditional Chinese adage "Let a hundred flowers bloom." And I have often been surprised and delighted by the fragrance of some of these fledgling plants – for example, the use of a "multiple intelligence curriculum" in order to facilitate communication between youngsters drawn from different cultures or the conveying of pivotal principles in biology or social studies through a dramatic performance designed and staged by students. (p. 6)

Evidently, this study has shown that the 'blooming' of the talents and abilities of At-Risk students placed in public alternative classrooms and schools is contingent on their identified needs being met. The blooming is contingent on their needs being met, and in the absence of that provision through the traditional curriculum, all research of this study has shown a distinct disconnection between the needs of the At-Risk student and the traditional curriculum. Then, with those needs now clearly identified, the public educational system, charged with the responsibility of not leaving any child behind, must now create the means by which the evaluated needs of At-Risk students can be met. In fact, it is only when those needs are addressed in equal proportion to the needs of the traditional student that, realistically, the principles of school choice can be actualized and the concept of "No Child Left Behind" can be set in motion.

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APPENDIX A

Non-participant Data Collection Observation of CSCN Current Students

Three observation studies of current semester students were conducted randomly over a period of two school weeks at unscheduled times. Each observation lasted an average of 33 minutes covering the beginning and ending of classes, transitional periods between classes, break periods, and main instructional time periods. The three observations permitted the identification of patterns, themes, and regularities of behavior, conduct, and other variables such as learning atmosphere and observational settings.

The observations were unannounced and purely observatory with virtually no interaction with students, faculty, or other school personnel. The observations were focused in the following areas and on the total high school's segment of the student population. That population was in the estimated range of 70 to 80 students:

1. Sense of concern for and respect of peers and adults
2. Emotional stability and instability
3. Standard courtesies and sense of values implied or expressed
4. Individual and group activities, movements, and interactions
5. Sounds, feelings, and facial expressions
6. Attitudes both subtle and blatant
7. Settings, surroundings, and atmosphere
8. Teaching and learning styles
9. Teacher and student frustrations
10. Student attentiveness and focus
11. Student work ethics and concern for performance results
12. Students and teachers sense of purpose and mission

APPENDIX B

Institutional Permission Letter

CROSSROADS SECOND CHANCE NORTH
FULTON COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION

INSTITUTIONAL PERMISSION LETTER

Alicia Borishade
PRINCIPAL

Amy Ajukwara
ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL
Kathy Cannon
ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

FROM

CROSSROADS SECOND CHANCE NORTH (CSCN), RESEARCH SITE

FOR RESEARCH STUDY ON

EVALUATION OF AT-RISK STUDENTS' NEEDS IN PUBLIC ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS

BY

RESEARCHER, DOEFORD G. SHIRLEY

SUBMITTED TO ARGOSY UNIVERSITY'S INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB)

February 24, 2009

This letter serves to confirm the approval for a qualitative and quantitative research study to be conducted at Crossroads Second Chance (CSCN) by Mr. Doeford Shirley. Mr. Shirley is employed by Fulton County Schools as a teacher at CSCN and is hereby granted permission to use CSCN as the research site to conduct his study on *Evaluation of At-Risk Students Needs in Public Alternative Schools*. The study will engage CSCN students who, upon being granted written permission from their parents, will be eligible voluntary participants in the study.

Other voluntary participants in the study will be parents of current and former students of CSCN and CSCN'S current and former faculty, staff, administrators, and other relative stakeholders. Permission is also granted for Mr. Shirley to secure and engage secondary student performance data in answering the quantitative research question of his study. Mr. Shirley is intending to begin this research study upon the granted approval of Argosy University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the study is expected to be completed within one calendar year following Argosy University's IRB'S approval date.

Thank You,

Dr. Alicia Borishade
Principal, Crossroads Second Chance North (CSCN)

C:
Brandi Casey
Specialist 1, Assessment and Evaluation
554 Parkway Drive
Hapeville, GA 30354

APPENDIX C

Participant Consent Form

Evaluation of At-Risk Students' Needs in Public Alternative Schools

Doeford Shirley, teacher at Crossroads Second Chance North (CSCN), is requesting of me to participate in a research study that he will be conducting at CSCN on the needs of At-Risk students in public alternative schools. This research study is a part of Doeford Shirley's dissertation process, fulfilling the requirements of his Doctorate degree in Educational Leadership at Argosy University.

I am being asked to participate in the study because I fall into one of the following 5 subgroups of needed participants for the study:
Group 1, Parent or legal guardian of a current or of a former CSCN student
Group 2, Currently or previously enrolled CSCN student, grades 8 through 12
Group 3, Former CSCN students, at least 9th graders, and not exceeding the age of 35
Group 4, Faculty, staff, and administration of current or of former CSCN students
Group 5, CSCN partners in education and other stakeholders

There is no maximum to the number of participants needed for each subgroup, as the greater the number of participants received from each subgroup, the greater will be the outcome of the study and consequently all members of each subgroup are being asked to participate in this study. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the needs (academic and behavioral) of students placed in public alternative schools and extends beyond the requirements for the doctorate degree. Most importantly, the results of the study will be enormously informative to the education industry as it will reveal the needs of students as personally expressed by students, parents, teachers, staff, administration and other stakeholders.

I understand that if I agree to be in this study, I will be asked to complete a questionnaire at CSCN or wherever I desire, either in a written form or in a verbally recorded form, using any verbally recorded medium I desire. The questionnaire I will answer will depend on the subgroup in which I fall and the questionnaire will be comprised of 19 open-ended questions, with each question seeking as much of a thorough and detailed response as possible and without showing or mentioning any personal information that could possibly reveal my personal identity. It will be completely my choice as to the medium of response I desire to use in answering the 19 research questions, but the medium selected must be used in answering all 19 questions and submitted as one complete document.

My participation in this study will take only as much time as I am willing to give it in thoroughly answering all 19 open-ended questions of the survey for the subgroup in which I fall and my participation will not extend beyond the completion of the survey. I understand that there will be no associated or no possibly associated risk to me resulting from my participation in the study. Accordingly, the benefits to me, from my participation in the study, are limited to the benefits that are likely to result in the improvement of alternative education, from the conducting of this study. The study carries no monetary benefit to me or to any other participant in any subgroup of the study. The identity of participants in this study will be confidential. Confidentiality will be ensured by the researcher, Doeford Shirley, assigning a numerical number to each

participant's questionnaire through the use of a confidential log sheet and the corresponding names and contact information required on this Participant Consent Form will be privy only to the researcher, Doeford Shirley, and will not be made available to anyone for any reason other than as would be compelled by judiciary force of law.

The study has the School District's required approval of the Principal, Dr. Borishade. The records of this study will be kept private by Doeford Shirley and no identifiers that could personally link me to the study will be included in any sort of report that might be published. Research records will be stored in a secure file by the researcher, Doeford Shirley, and the researcher will be the only person having access to any research records that would bear or otherwise reveal the identity of a participant in the study.

I understand that my participation in this study is strictly voluntary and that my decision regarding my participation will not affect my current or future relations with CSCN or with Argosy University. If I decide to participate, I am free to refuse to answer any of the questions that may make me uncomfortable. I can withdraw at any time without my relations with CSCN, the university, or any other institution or person being affected. I can contact Doeford Shirley at 404 358-1166 with any questions about this study.

I understand that this research study has been reviewed and Certified by the Institutional Review Board, Argosy University in Chicago, Illinois. For research-related problems or questions regarding participants' rights, I can contact the Institutional Review Board at Argosy University through Hoover, Nancy R, at nhoover@argosy.edu

I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. Where I had questions, all my questions were answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this consent form. By signing this document, I consent to participate in the study.

Name of Participant (printed) _____

Physical and email address and telephone contact information of participant (please print clearly):

_____

_____

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's Physical and email address and contact number: 3278 Winter Wood Court, Marietta, GA. 30062. Doeford@yahoo.com 404 358-1166

Permission Needed for Children Under 18 Years of age to Participate in the Study

A parent or legal guardian's permission is needed to grant parental permission for your minor child (children under 18) to participate in the research study, and therefore, if granting permission, please print the child's name here: _____

Relationship to Child (*circle whichever applies*) Male Parent, Female Parent, Male Grandparent, Female Grandparent, Other Male Relative - specify relationship _____, Other Female Relative - specify relationship _____, Legal Guardian (specify *appointed by*) _____.

Please note that children under 18 years of age must have parental permission to participate in a research study and that a separate assent (agreement) form or statement is required for the child's participation. That statement, as included in this consent form is as follows:

Assent (Agreement) Statement for Children Under 18 Years of age

I understand that I have the right to refuse to participate in this study even if approval has been given by my parent or legal guardian for me to participate in the study. I also understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and therefore I can refuse to answer any questions in the survey that I do not want to answer. I can also stop my participation at any time during the completion of the questionnaire, if I chose to do so.

I also understand that my participation in the study or my refusal to participate will not in any way affect my relationship with CSCN, or otherwise affect my position as a student at CSCN in any form or fashion.

Child's Printed Name: _____

Child's Signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX D

Application for IRB Review and

Certification of Compliance

Application for IRB Review and Certification of Compliance

3.2.2 Expedited Review (Level 2) Application, Moderate Risk

(Review by the designated IRB member or the IRB Chair).

Application Form Checklist

To the Principal Investigator of a research project:

1. *Please review the documents listed below that pertain to your research project. In the event that your project does require the use of any of the listed documents, attach a copy of the original form to the application submitted for IRB review.*

2. Please be advised that research projects involving interaction with human participants must have an Informed Consent Form(s) attached. If a minor or incapacitated individual of any age is involved, parent/guardian permission must be included.

3. Parental permission does not negate the child's right to chose to not participate.

4. *If you are conducting a research project in another institution (e.g., a hospital or school), you must attach a signed permission letter from a supervisor/administrator who is in a position to grant you permission to conduct the research at that site. The letter must be on institutional letterhead and must have an original signature.*

5. *If that institution also has a Human Subjects Review Committee--often referred to as the Institutional Review Board (IRB)-- then written permission from the participating institution's IRB must be attached to your IRB application.*

6. *If you are conducting the research outside the geographical location of the United States, attach a letter of assurance that you will abide by the laws and regulations of the governing bodies that preside over the location (state or country) where the research is being conducted.*

Please check: The attached Application for Certification of Compliance contains

☐ Institutional Permission Letter (where research is taking place)

☐ Assurance of Adherence to Governmental Regulations concerning Human Subjects (if research project is conducted outside the US)

☐ Letter(s) of Informed Consent

☐ Parent/guardian Permission Letter (must have provision for written signature)

☐ Oral statement of Assurance (used with minors)

☐ Data-gathering instruments (s): Observation, Interview, Survey

☐ Conflict of Interest Disclosure Statement

Also required on your application:

☐ CRP/Dissertation Chairperson/Research Supervisor's signature

☐ Principal Investigator's signature (2 places)

☐ Packet reviewed by CRP/Dissertation Chairperson/Research Supervisor Initials _____

IRB# _____

Date Logged: _____

Application for IRB Review and Certification of Compliance

3.2.2 Expedited Review (Level 2) Application, Moderate Risk

(Review by one or more IRB Members—

May lead to Full IRB Review)

Principal Investigator/Researcher's Name: Doeford Shirley
Student ID Number: _____

Type of Research Project: Dissertation

Title of Research Project: Evaluation of At-risk Students' Needs in Public Alternative Schools

Principal Investigator/Researcher's Address: 3278 Winter Wood Court, Marietta, Georgia 30062

Telephone Number: 404 358-1166

Research Supervisor/CRP/Dissertation Committee Chair's Name:
Dr. Andrew Niesiobedzki

College: BUS ☐ PBS ☐ EDUC ☐
HS ☐ OTHER ☐

Program of Study: Educational Leadership Degree: EdD

Project Proposed Start Date: April 27, 2009

Project Proposed Completion Date: September 30, 2009

Signature of Principal Investigator/Researcher _____/_____
Date

Signature of Research Supervisor/CRP/Dissertation Committee Chair:

_____/_____
Date

IRB Certification Signatures:_____
_____/_____
Date

The above named research project is certified for compliance with Argosy University's requirements for the protection of human research participants with the following conditions:

1. Research must be conducted according to the research project that was certified by the IRB;
2. Any changes to the research project, such as procedures, consent or assent forms, addition of participants, or study design must be reported to and certified by the IRB;

3. Any adverse events or reactions must be reported to the IRB immediately;

4. The research project is certified for the specific time period noted in this application; any collection of data from human participants after this time period is in violation of IRB policy.

5. When the study is complete, the investigator must complete a Completion of Research form.

6. Any future correspondence should be through the principal investigator's research supervisor and include the assigned IRB research project number and the project title.

****

NOTES:

- Please complete this cover and the Petition in detail. Every question must be answered. **Please type your answers**.
- Attach the appropriate documents and submit the entire application materials under the cover of a completed Application Checklist to the CRP/Dissertation Chairperson.
- Do not proceed with any research work with participants until IRB approval is obtained.
- If any change occurs in the procedure, sample size, research focus, or other element of the project impacts participants, the IRB must be notified in writing with the appropriate form (see ancillary forms).
- Please allow 30 days for processing.

- **DO NOT COLLECT DATA PRIOR TO RECEIVING IRB APPROVAL**

Application for IRB Certification of Compliance

3.2.2 Expedited Review (Level 2) Application, Moderate Risk

(Review by one or more IRB Members—

May lead to Full Review)

Research with minors, prisoners, mentally/emotionally/physically challenged persons, pregnant women, fetuses, in vitro fertilization, and/or individual or group studies where the investigator manipulates the participants/ behavior or the subject is exposed to stressful or invasive experiences do(es) not qualify for Expedited status.

Please completely answer the requested information (NA is not acceptable for any question). Begin typing in the gray boxes.

1. Purpose of the Study: The purpose of the study is to evaluate the needs of At-Risk students in public alternative schools, in accordance with my dissertation topic.

2. Summary of the Study. Methodology (Be Specific-attach extra page if needed). The study will utilize a mixed methodology – Qualitative and Quantitative:

The Qualitative Approach

The qualitative study will be phenomenological, utilizing: (A) Open-ended questionnaires (as shown in Appendixes E, F, G, H, and I) to be answered in writing either in person or by physical or electronic mail and or, recorded verbatim from participants, either in person or as otherwise recorded by participants or researcher. (B) The conducting of a non-participant observation study (as shown in Appendix A) of students and faculty members at Crossroads Second Chance North (CSCN) in Roswell, Georgia. All the students in the non-participant observation study will have been actively enrolled at the time of the study.

The Quantitative Approach

The quantitative approach that will be utilized in this research study will engage the use of secondary data from CSCN and statewide student performance data that are available to the public and regarding public schools in Georgia. The quantitative approach will be used to test the third and final research question.

3. Subject/participant Demographics:

a. Anticipated Sample Size: 50 to 70 Students

b. Special Ethnic Groups (describe): The study will not involve any special ethnic group just the general student body.

c. Institutionalized Y N Protected Group (describe): The protected groups are school children grades 8 through 12

d. Age group: 8th Graders to Senior Citizens

e. General State of Health: Fair to Excellent. Fair to excellent means there are no means by which the researcher is able to confirm that all students or other participants are in excellent health except to say that all the students or participants that will be used in the study fall within the general health category of the population. There are no students or other participants with any ailments known to the researcher that would cause the researcher to believe, to suspect, or to know that the students or other participants' would fall into any other health category other than fair to excellent and fair is used only to create a general range (fair to excellent) that could be used to describe any population where, in the absence of a health certification, it would be prudent for any reasonable person to know or to suspect that the student or participant would fall into a health category other than normal good health.

f. Other details to describe sample group. CSCN school students – present and former; CSCN school teachers, staff, and administration – present and former; parents or legal guardians of CSCN students – present and former; CSCN partners in education and other stake holders – present and former. Sample groups are limited to (a) current or former students of Crossroads Second Chance North (CSCN) a public alternative school serving middle and high school students who are removed from traditional schools because of behavioral altercations resulting in their expulsion form the traditional schools. (b) Former CSCN students grades 8 to adults up to the age of 35. (c) Parents or legal guardians of current and or of former CSCN students who will be willing to participate in the study. (d) Professional or nonprofessional adults who have worked with or otherwise knowledgeable of the student population that is served or was served at CSCN. All participants are either school age students grades 8 through 12 or adults of or affiliated with the school or business community.

4. Will deception be used in the study? Y N No deceptions will be used in the study.

5. Will audio or videotapes be used in the study? Y N Yes, audio or video tapes will be used in the study in the recording of the survey answers for participants who chose verbal response to the survey.

6. Confidentiality protection issues (pertains to audio and video as well as written documents.) Confidentiality of all participants will be ensured and maintained as follows: (a) Whether participants' responses are obtained through the completion of a written questionnaire or audio or video recording of the response to the questionnaires, no participants' name or other personal identifiable information will be shown on or in the written surveys or included in or mentioned during the audio or verbal recording of participants' responses. The names and other personal identifiable information of participants will be known only to the researcher. If and where it would become necessary to involve an assistant or assistants in the study where, in the process of data collection, the assistant or assistants would be aware of who is responding to a survey, the assistant or assistants would first be made bound in all manner, form, and respects to the same confidential protection issues by which the researcher is bound. The confidentiality assurance issue would be made in a written binding agreement between the researcher and the researcher assistant or assistants and would be developed by the researcher. The only document bearing any participant's name or other personal identifiable information will be the Participant Consent Form (as shown in appendixes C) and a confidential log sheet of participants that will be secured and kept solely by the researcher. The Participant Consent Form as well as the Confidential log Sheet of Participants will be kept, maintained, and handled only by the researcher and will be the confidential records of the researcher and which will be secured by the researcher at all times throughout and after the study has been completed.

   a. What precautions will be taken to insure the privacy and anonymity of the participants? (i.e. closed doors, private rooms, handling of materials where subject's identify could be discovered, etc.). Participants will be asked to sign a Participant Consent Form listing their name and contact information (As shown in Appendix C) and the consent form will be privy only to the researcher and to be kept in a secured locked drop box. Accordingly, a confidential log sheet (as shown in Appendix J) will be used by the researcher to cross-reference participants' questionnaires and the questionnaires are identifiable only by a number and with no personal information of any participant on any questionnaire. Questionnaires will be completed in classroom settings or non-school settings as chosen by participants and in no situations will the confidentiality of participants be breached.

b. What specific precautions will be taken to safeguard and protect subject's confidentiality while handling the data (audio/video/paper) both in researcher's possession and in reporting the findings? (i.e.,coding, removal of identifying data). Data collection questionnaires will not bear the name or any revealing personal information of participants nor will any coding or reporting of data be identifiable by any reference to any personal information of any participant.

c. Describe procedures where confidentiality may be broken by law (e.g., child abuse, suicidal intent). Confidentiality may be broken by law only where the researcher has the legal obligation to report such acts such as child abuse, suicidal intent or other criminal acts for which the researcher is made knowledgeable and must, by the obligation of the law, report those acts and in all cases those reports would be made only to the appropriate legal authorities and not to the public by the researcher or any agent of the researcher.

7. Review by institutions outside of Argosy University/Sarasota Y N (Attach copies of permission letters, IRB approvals, and any other relevant documents). There are no reviews by any institutions outside of Argosy University.

8. Informed Consent and Assent (Attach copies of all relevant forms). If consent is not necessary (e.g.) anonymous interview), describe how you will inform all participants of the elements of consent (see instructions). A confidential Participant Consent Form will be signed by all participants (as shown in Appendix C).

9. If informed consent, written consent is required, describe the manner in which consent and/or assent was obtained for each category).

(a) Adult Participants (18 years and older – written consent required). Participant Consent Form (as shown in Appendix C) will be signed by all adult participants.

(b) Child Participants (under 18 – parent/guardian permission and participant agreement required). Participant Consent Form (as shown in Appendix C) will be signed by a parent or legal guardian for each participant under 18 years old. Included in the Participant Consent Form will be the Child Assent Statement to be signed by child participants.

(c) Institutionalized participants (parent/guardian/conservator permission with appropriate participant agreement). No institutionalized participants will be included in the study.

1. Describe any possible physical, psychological, social, legal, economic or other risks to participants (Attach another page if needed). There are no such risks as described or otherwise, to any participant. There are no potential risks to any participant for 3 reasons: (1) The extent of any participant's involvement is limited to the answering of a survey either in writing or in audio, or video recording. (2) All participants involvement are purely optional with absolutely no implied, express, or other measure that could possible impose a risk to any participant. (3) The confidentiality measures exercised by the researcher are adequate to prevent participants from any exposure to any form of risks.

    a. If there are any potential risks, describe the precautions taken to minimize risk to participants. There are no potential risks to participants.

    b. Describe procedures implemented for correcting harm caused by participating in the study (e.g., follow up calls, referral to appropriate agencies). There is no potential harm from participating in the study and parents who send in signed consent forms will be followed up with a telephone call from the researcher to ensure the validity of their consent. The telephone contacts to parents, who send in signed consent forms by their children, would be made by the researcher to ensure that the parent or legal guardian's permission signature is in fact that of the parent or legal guardian and that verification would be made as a footnote on the returned signed consent form.

2. Potential benefit of the study:

    a. Assess the potential benefit(s) of the study for the participants: There are no potential benefits to the participant that would be different from the general potential educational benefits to all alternative and traditional students and to the general public at large. All students will be benefited from the study because the study is designed to reveal the academic, social, and emotional needs of students that drive or hinder students' academic and behavioral performance in schools. The revelation of the students' needs will position the educational institution to better address the needs of students in alternative schools as well as in traditional schools.

    b. Assess the potential benefits(s) to the professional audience in the study: The potential benefits to the professional audience in the study are limited to the improvement of student achievement and educational standards in the public school system that will result from the study and which will serve to benefit not only the students served but ultimately the

professional and business community at large. Other professionals in education will be benefited from the study as the study is designed to improve the quality of education and the associated performance of professionals in the field of education. The data gathering and or analysis process may require the employment of personnel for which those personnel would be paid appropriately for those services as would be deemed reasonable and within the scope of compensatory wages only.

As the principal investigator, I attest that all of the information on this form is accurate, and that every effort has been made to provide the reviewers with complete information related to the nature and procedures to be followed in the research project. Additional forms will be immediately filed with the IRB to report any: change in participant(s), selection process, change of principal investigator, change in faculty dissertation chair, adverse incidents, and final completion date of project. I also attest to treat human participants ethically and in compliance with all applicable state and federal rules and regulations that apply to this study, particularly as they apply to research work conducted in countries other than the United States.

Signature Principal Investigator Date

Signature of Research Supervisor/Committee Chair Date

Attach any other forms, tests, institutional permission slips, etc., relative to this study. Failure to do so will result in delayed processing of the approval form.

APPENDIX E

Questionnaire #1

CSCN Currently or Previously Enrolled Students, Grades 8 Through 12

Note to Participants

This open-ended questionnaire requires either the written or recorded oral response of the participant. The participant responding to this questionnaire will be identifiable only by a number that will be assigned to the questionnaire upon receipt of the signed returned Participant Consent Form inclusive of the signed child's assent statement as applicable, and completed questionnaire. The participant's number will then be logged on a log sheet(s) titled, CONFIDENTIAL log Sheet of Participants. For purpose of referencing and validity, the log sheet will list the participant's number, the participant's name, and the date the questionnaire was completed by the participant.

The participant's identifying information will not be revealed to anyone for any reason. Therefore, **please do not include your name or other personal identifiable information on or in the answering of the questionnaire.**

PARTICIPANT # _____

The Questionnaire

1. Being enrolled in an alternative school, please express your feelings towards it in comparison to the traditional classroom.

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

2. Please list the experiences, positive or negative, that you are having with your classes at CSCN and tell how those experiences are affecting your learning.

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

3. What experiences, positive or negative, did you have with your classes in the traditional classroom and how did those experiences affect your learning?

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

4. Would you say that you are enjoying or not enjoying the learning process at CSCN and if so, what would you say are the reasons why you are enjoying or not enjoying this learning process? (Enjoy means being successful and satisfied)

_____
_____
_____
_____

5. Do you believe that the faculty and administration at CSCN are concerned or not concerned about your learning and please describe how important that concern or lack of concern is to you and how it affects you behaviorally and academically?

_____
_____
_____
_____

6. Were you to compare the alternative classroom with the traditional, what are the pros and cons that you would identify as significant in each place and why?

_____
_____
_____
_____

7. While enrolled at CSCN, please explain your level of involvement or lack of involvement in your classes and explain what you think are the reasons for it.

_____
_____
_____
_____

8. Please explain the level of your involvement in your classes when you were enrolled in the traditional classroom and explain what you think were the reasons for it.

_____
_____
_____
_____

9. Please explain as to whether or not you think CSCN or school as a whole is providing you with the skills and knowledge you need to help you in achieving and being successful according to your abilities and interests in life, and why?

_____
_____
_____
_____

10. When you are in the classroom what are the things you find yourself mostly thinking about, whether class related or not, and how would you prioritize those things in their order of importance to you and why?

_____
_____
_____
_____

11. What kind of social skills do you believe you came to CSCN with and please explain if and how CSCN is helping you to improve on those skills and why you believe or do not believe so?

_____
_____
_____
_____

12. What classes, that if offered in the alternative school, would gain your interest in learning and why, and what existing classes would you like to see eliminated or changed in any way and why?

_____
_____
_____
_____

13. What do you believe are your personal talents and or abilities – those things you are good at and perhaps would like to see yourself doing as a career or as a job when you grow up?

_____
_____
_____
_____

14. Looking at what you think you would like to become or to do for a living, what would be the classes you would enjoy taking at CSCN that would gain your interest in your education and how and why do you think they would?

_____
_____
_____
_____

15. What do you believe are the things, whether in school or out of school, that possibly could be causing any lack of interest or boredom with school and why?

_____
_____
_____
_____

16. Is there any chance that you may not complete your high school education and if so, what are the classes or problems you are facing in or out of school that could cause that?

_____
_____
_____
_____

17. What classes are you taking now that you truly believe will be most helpful to you in your life and from which you are gaining the most benefit and do you think those classes are preparing you for what you may want to do as a career or job?

_____
_____
_____
_____

18. When you are sitting in a classroom, what do you find yourself mostly thinking about and what classes, if offered, could possibly prevent you from focusing on those things and why do you think those classes would prevent you from focusing on those things?

_____
_____
_____
_____

19. What courses, if any, would you like to see deleted from schools and would those deletions influence you in completing high school and why?

_____
_____
_____
_____

APPENDIX F

Questionnaire #2

Parents of Current or of Former CSCN Students

Note to Participants

This open-ended questionnaire requires either the written or recorded oral response of the participant. The participant responding to this questionnaire will be identifiable only by a number that will be assigned to the questionnaire upon receipt of the signed returned Participant Consent Form and the completed questionnaire. The participant's number will then be logged on a log sheet(s) titled, CONFIDENTIAL log Sheet of Participants. For purpose of referencing and validity, the log sheet will list the participant's number, the participant's name, and the date the questionnaire was completed by the participant.

The participant's identifying information will not be revealed to anyone for any reason. Therefore, **please do not include your name or other personal identifiable information on or in the answering of the questionnaire.**

PARTICIPANT # _____

The Questionnaire

1. Being the parent of a current or former student of CSCN, please express your feelings towards it in comparison to the traditional classroom.

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

2. Please list the experiences, positive or negative, that your child is having or had with his/her classes at CSCN and tell how those experiences are affecting or had affected your child's learning.

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

3. What experiences, positive or negative, did your child have with his/her classes in the traditional classroom and how did those experiences affect your child's learning and or interest in school?

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

4. Would you say that your child is enjoying or had enjoyed the learning process at CSCN and if so, what would you say are the reasons why your child is enjoying or had enjoyed the learning process? (Enjoy means being successful and satisfied)

_____
_____
_____
_____

5. Do you believe that the faculty and administration at CSCN are or was concerned or not concerned about your child's learning and please describe how important that concern or lack of concern is or was to your child and how it is affecting or had affected your child behaviorally and academically?

_____
_____
_____
_____

6. Were you to compare the alternative classroom with the traditional, what are the pros and cons that you would identify as significant in each place and why?

_____
_____
_____
_____

7. While enrolled at CSCN, please explain your child's level of involvement or lack of involvement in his/her studies and explain what you think are or were the reasons for that involvement or lack of involvement.

_____
_____
_____
_____

8. Please explain the level of your child's involvement in his/her studies while enrolled in the traditional classroom and what you think were the reasons for it.

_____
_____
_____
_____

9. Please explain as to whether or not you think CSCN or school as a whole is providing your child with the skills and knowledge needed to help him/her in achieving and being successful in what his/her abilities/interests are, and why?

_____
_____
_____
_____

10. What would you say are the most pressing needs your child bring or had brought to CSCN or the classroom on a whole and how would you prioritize those needs in their order of what you think is or was importance to your child, and why?

_____
_____
_____
_____

11. What kind of social skills do you believe your child brought to CSCN and please explain if and how CSCN is helping or had helped your child to improve on those skills and why you believe or do not believe so?

_____
_____
_____
_____

12. What classes, that if offered in the alternative school, would gain your child's interest in learning and why, and what existing classes would you like to see eliminated or changed in any way and why?

_____
_____
_____
_____

13. What do you believe are your child's personal talents and or abilities – those things he/she is good at and perhaps would like to be able to do or is doing as a career or as a job?

_____
_____
_____
_____

14. Looking at what you think your child would like to become or to do for a living, what would be the classes you think our child may enjoy or would have enjoyed taking at CSCN that would gain his/her interest in their education and why?

_____
_____
_____
_____

15. What do you believe are the chief things, in and out of school, that is causing or may have caused your child's lack of interest or boredom with school and why?

_____
_____
_____
_____

16. Do you or did you believe there could be a chance that your child may not complete high school and if so, what are the classes or problems he/she is facing or had faced in or out of school that is causing or may have caused that thought?

_____
_____
_____
_____

17. What classes are your child taking or had taken that you truly believe will be or was most helpful to him/her in life and from which he/she is gaining or had gained the most benefit in their preparation for the real world of careers or jobs?

_____
_____
_____
_____

18. When your child sits or was sitting in a classroom, what do you think he/she thinks or was mostly thinking about and what classes, if offered, could possibly create or could have created or improved the needed focus on his/her classes?

_____
_____
_____
_____

19. What courses, if any, would you like to see deleted from schools, whether in the traditional classroom or the alternative, and do you believe those deletions would better influence your child in completing high school and if so, why?

_____
_____
_____
_____

APPENDIX G

Questionnaire # 3

Former CSCN Students

Note to Participants

This open-ended questionnaire requires either the written or recorded oral response of the participant. The participant responding to this questionnaire will be identifiable only by a number that will be assigned to the questionnaire upon receipt of the signed returned Participant Consent Form and signed child's assent statement as applicable, and the completed questionnaire. The participant's number will then be logged on a log sheet(s) titled, CONFIDENTIAL log Sheet of Participants. For purpose of referencing and validity, the log sheet will list the participant's number, the participant's name, and the date the questionnaire was completed by the participant.

The participant's identifying information will not be revealed to anyone for any reason. Therefore, **please do not include your name or other personal identifiable information on or in the answering of the questionnaire.**

PARTICIPANT # _____

The Questionnaire

1. Having been enrolled in an alternative school (CSCN), please express the feelings you had towards it in comparison to the traditional classroom.

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

2. Please list the experiences, positive or negative, that you had with your classes at CSCN and tell how those experiences had affected your learning in your classes.

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

3. What experiences, positive or negative, did you have with your classes in the traditional classroom and how did those experiences affect your learning in them?

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

4. Would you say that you were or weren't successful and or satisfied with the learning process at CSCN and if so, what would you say were the reasons for that and why?

_____
_____
_____
_____

5. Do you believe that the faculty and administration at CSCN were concerned or not concerned about your learning and please describe how that concern or lack of concern may have affected your behavioral and academic development there?

_____
_____
_____
_____

6. Were you to compare the alternative classroom with the traditional, what are the pros and cons that you would identify as significant in each place and why?

_____
_____
_____
_____

7. While enrolled at CSCN, please explain your level of involvement or lack of involvement in your classes and explain what you think were the reasons for it.

_____
_____
_____
_____

8. Please explain the level of your involvement in your classes when you were enrolled in the traditional classroom and explain what you think were the reasons for it.

_____
_____
_____
_____

9. Please explain as to whether or not you think CSCN or school as a whole is providing or had provided you with the skills and knowledge necessary for the development of your talents and abilities in life and why you think so.

_____
_____
_____
_____

10. When you were in the classroom what were the things you found yourself mostly thinking about, whether class related or not, and in looking back, how would you prioritize those things in their order of importance to you then and why?

_____
_____
_____
_____

11. What kind of social skills do you believe you brought to CSCN and please explain if and how CSCN helped you to improve on those skills and why you believe or do not believe so?

_____
_____
_____
_____

12. What classes, that if they were offered in the alternative school, would have gained or better gained your interest in learning and why, and what existing classes would you like to see eliminated or changed in any way and why?

_____
_____
_____
_____

13. What do you believe are your personal talents and or abilities – those things you are good at and perhaps would like to see yourself doing or are already doing as a career or as a job?

_____
_____
_____
_____

14. Looking at what you think you would like to become or to do for a living, what are the classes you would have enjoyed taking at CSCN that would have gained or better gained your interest in your education and how and why do you think so?

_____
_____
_____
_____

15. What do you believe are the things, whether in school or out of school, that possibly could have caused any lack of interest or boredom with school and why?

_____
_____
_____
_____

16. When you were in school, did you believe there was any chance that you may not have completed your high school education and if so, what were the classes or problems you faced in or out of school that could possibly have caused that?

_____
_____
_____
_____

17. What classes did you take that you truly believe is most helpful to you in your life and from which you are gaining the most benefit and do you think those classes prepared you for what you may want to do or is doing as a career or job?

_____
_____
_____
_____

18. When you were sitting in a classroom, what did you find yourself mostly thinking about and what classes, if offered, could possibly have prevented you from focusing on those things and to have focused on your class why do you think so?

_____
_____
_____
_____

19. What courses, if any, would you like to see deleted from schools and would those deletions have better influenced you in completing high school and why?

_____
_____
_____
_____

APPENDIX H

Questionnaire #4

Faculty, Staff, and Administration of Current or of Former CSCN Students

Note to Participants

This open-ended questionnaire requires either the written or recorded oral response of the participant. The participant responding to this questionnaire will be identifiable only by a number that will be assigned to the questionnaire upon receipt of the signed returned Participant Consent Form and the completed questionnaire. The participant's number will then be logged on a log sheet(s) titled, CONFIDENTIAL log Sheet of Participants. For purpose of referencing and validity, the log sheet will list the participant's number, the participant's name, and the date the questionnaire was completed by the participant.

The participant's identifying information will not be revealed to anyone for any reason. Therefore, **please do not include your name or other personal identifiable information on or in the answering of the questionnaire.**

PARTICIPANT # _____

The Questionnaire

1. As a current or former educator or staff member of CSCN, please express your feelings towards alternative schools in comparison to the traditional classroom.

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

2. Please list the experiences, positive or negative, that you are seeing or otherwise aware of that students are having with the learning process at CSCN or other alternative schools and tell how those experiences may or have affected their learning in those classes.

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

3. What experiences, positive or negative, are you aware of that At-Risk students are having in the traditional classroom and tell how you think those experiences may be affecting their learning and the general classroom environment and why?

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

4. Would you say that students are enjoying or had enjoyed the learning process at CSCN and if so, what would you say are the reasons why they are enjoying or had enjoyed the learning process? (Enjoy means being successful and satisfied)

_____
_____
_____
_____

5. Do you believe that the faculty and/or administration at CSCN are or were concerned or not concerned about student achievement and please describe how important that concern or lack of concern is or was to the students and how it is affecting or had affected them behaviorally and academically?

_____
_____
_____
_____

6. Were you to compare the alternative classroom with the traditional, what are the pros and cons that you would identify as significant in each place and why?

_____
_____
_____
_____

7. Observing or having observed students at CSCN, please explain their level of involvement or lack of involvement in their studies and explain what you think are or were the reasons for that involvement or lack of involvement.

_____
_____
_____
_____

8. Please explain your knowledge of At-Risk students' involvement in their studies while in the traditional classroom and what you think are the reasons for it.

_____
_____
_____
_____

9. Please explain as to whether or not you think the alternative school or school as a whole is providing At-Risk students with the skills and knowledge needed to help them in developing their talents and abilities in life and why you think so.

_____
_____
_____
_____

10. What would you say are the most pressing needs At-Risk students bring to the classroom and how would you prioritize those needs in their order of importance to At-Risk students and their development and success and why?

_____
_____
_____
_____

11. What kind of social skills do you believe At-Risk students bring to alternative schools and please explain if and how CSCN is helping or had helped students to improve on those skills and why you believe or do not believe so?

_____
_____
_____
_____

12. What classes, that if offered in alternative schools, do you believe would gain At-Risk students' interest in learning and why, and what existing classes would you like to see eliminated or changed in any way and why?

_____
_____
_____
_____

13. What do you believe are inherent talents and abilities of At-Risk students – those things at which they appear most efficient and perhaps would like to be able to do and which would be meaningful and practical careers or jobs for them?

_____
_____
_____
_____

14. Looking at what you think AT-Risk students talents and abilities are and the related career paths, what would be your recommendation of practical and skills-building classes to be offered to them in alternative schools and why?

_____
_____
_____
_____

15. What do you believe are the chief things, in and out of school, that possibly could be causing At-Risk students' lack of interest or boredom with school and why?

_____
_____
_____
_____

16. What do you believe are the practical chance of At-Risk students completing high school and what are the courses or problems they face in schools that are major barriers to their gaining a regular high school diploma?

_____
_____
_____
_____

17. What classes, to your knowledge, are being offered in alternative schools that you truly believe will be most helpful to At-Risk students and from which they can gain the most benefit in their preparation for the real world of careers or jobs?

_____
_____
_____
_____

18. What do you think At-Risk students sitting in the alternative classroom, find themselves mostly thinking about and what classes, if developed and made available to them, could possibly create better focus in the classroom?

_____
_____
_____
_____

19. What courses, if any, would you like to see deleted from schools, whether in the traditional classroom or the alternative, and do you believe those deletions would better influence At-Risk students in completing high school and if so, why?

_____
_____
_____
_____

APPENDIX I

Questionnaire #5

CSCN Partners in Education and Other Stakeholders

Note to Participants

This open-ended questionnaire requires either the written or recorded oral response of the participant. The participant responding to this questionnaire will be identifiable only by a number that will be assigned to the questionnaire upon receipt of the signed returned Participant Consent Form and the completed questionnaire. The participant's number will then be logged on a log sheet(s) titled, CONFIDENTIAL log Sheet of Participants. For purpose of referencing and validity, the log sheet will list the participant's number, the participant's name, and the date the questionnaire was completed by the participant.

The participant's identifying information will not be revealed to anyone for any reason. Therefore, **please do not include your name or other personal identifiable information on or in the answering of the questionnaire.**

PARTICIPANT # _____

The Questionnaire

1. As a partner in education with, or stakeholder of, CSCN, please express your feelings towards alternative schools in comparison to the traditional classroom.
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

2. Please list the experiences, positive or negative, that you are aware of or believe At-Risk students to be having at CSCN or in other alternative schools and tell how those experiences may be affecting their learning and in what way.
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

3. What experiences, positive or negative, are you aware of that At-Risk students are having in the traditional classroom and tell how you think those experiences may be affecting their learning and the general classroom environment and why?
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

4. Would you say that students are enjoying or had enjoyed the learning process at CSCN and if so, what would you say are the reasons why they are enjoying or had enjoyed the learning process? (Enjoy means being successful and satisfied)

_____
_____
_____
_____

5. Do you believe that the faculty and/or administration at CSCN are or were concerned or not concerned about student achievement and please describe how important you believe that concern or lack of concern is to At-Risk students' success and its effect on their behavioral and academic performance?

_____
_____
_____
_____

6. Were you to compare the alternative classroom with the traditional, what are the pros and cons that you would identify as significant in each place and why?

_____
_____
_____
_____

7. Observing or having observed students at CSCN, please explain the apparent level of involvement or lack of involvement in their studies and explain what you think are or were the reasons for that involvement or lack of involvement.

_____
_____
_____
_____

8. Please explain your knowledge of At-Risk students' involvement in their studies while in the traditional classroom and what you think are the reasons for it.

_____
_____
_____
_____

9. Please explain as to whether or not you think the alternative school or school as a whole is providing At-Risk students with the skills and knowledge needed to help them in developing their talents and abilities in life and why you think so.

_____
_____
_____
_____

10. What would you say are the most pressing needs At-Risk students bring to the classroom and how would you prioritize those needs in their order of importance to At-Risk students and their development and success and why?

_____
_____
_____
_____

11. What kind of social skills do you believe At-Risk students bring to alternative schools and please explain if and how you believe CSCN is helping or had helped students to improve on those skills and why you believe or do not believe so?

_____
_____
_____
_____

12. What classes, that if offered in alternative schools, do you believe would gain At-Risk students' interest in learning and why, and what existing classes would you like to see eliminated or changed in any way and why?

_____
_____
_____
_____

13. What do you believe are inherent talents and abilities of At-Risk students – those things at which they appear most efficient and perhaps would like to be able to do and which would be meaningful and practical careers or jobs for them?

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14. Looking at what you think AT-Risk students talents and abilities are and the related career paths, what would be your recommendation of practical and skills-building classes to be offered to them in alternative schools and why?

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15. What do you believe are the chief things, in and out of school, that possibly could be causing At-Risk students' lack of interest or boredom with school and why?

_____
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_____

16. What do you believe are the practical chance of At-Risk students completing high school and what are the courses or problems you believe they face in schools that are major barriers to their gaining a regular high school diploma?

_____
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_____

17. What classes, to your knowledge, are being offered in alternative schools that you truly believe will be most helpful to At-Risk students and from which they can gain the most benefit in their preparation for the real world of careers or jobs?

_____
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_____
_____

18. What do you think At-Risk students sitting in the alternative classroom, find themselves mostly thinking about and what classes, if developed and made available to them, could possibly create better focus in the classroom?

_____
_____
_____
_____

19. What courses, if any, would you like to see deleted from schools, whether in the traditional classroom or the alternative, and do you believe those deletions would better influence At-Risk students in completing high school and if so, why?

_____
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APPENDIX J

Confidential log Sheet of Participants

Participant's #	Participant's Name	Questionnaire Completion Date
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APPENDIX K

Quantitative Data Collection Methods

This details the areas from which secondary numerical data was collected on CSCN High School and on other alternative high school students in Georgia.

The types of numerical data that interplayed in the analysis of the relationship between the academic success of students placed in public alternative schools and the use of the traditional schools' core curricula in public alternative schools were:

1. Georgia High School's Graduation Test (GHSGT) results
2. Georgia High School Writing Test (GHSWT) results
3. End of Course Test (EOCT) results
4. Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) results

The focus of answering the quantitative research question was on the high school population of CSCN and of random sampling of alternative schools from different socioeconomic communities in Georgia. High school data was obtained from five alternative schools in Georgia.