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Alternative Education Program Best Practices: A Comparative Analysis of Three Mid-Missouri High School Alternative Education Programs

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Declaration of Originality

I do hereby declare and attest to the fact that this is an original study based solely upon my own scholarly work here at Lindenwood University and that I have not submitted it for any other college or university course or degree here or elsewhere.

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Abstract

School districts in the state of Missouri are required to provide an education to all students, including those on suspension, and many other states have similar requirements. The number of alternative programs has grown over the last 50 years, and most districts provide some type of alternative program for at-risk students. With few state regulations for evaluation of these programs, researchers in alternative education recommended districts perform internal evaluations to ensure program quality. The research identified six research-based best practices domains critical to the success of an alternative program. The six domains were curriculum, assessment, engagement, instruction, leadership, and structures. This mixed methods study identified Type I, Type II, and Type III program characteristics, compared location performance in the six best practices domains, and analyzed data to explore a relationship between district data and performance in the best practices domains.

The study used two surveys and written responses from alternative program certified and non-certified staff to compare data at three alternative program locations in the mid-Missouri region. A program characteristics survey identified Type I, II, and III characteristics and two themes emerged from the data. All three locations supported a Type II program, which focused on separation and isolation of at-risk students with behavior issues. All three programs were in development of a Type III program that offered counseling and interventions that supported at-risk students. A Likert scale survey identified performance in the best practices domains and gave participants the opportunity to include written responses pertaining to the six domains. Five themes emerged from the data: (a) lack of district support concerning curriculum, (b)

inconsistency in assessment practices, (c) active engagement through teacher/student relationships, (d) supportive and responsive building leadership, and (e) lack of applicable professional development. Data from the Likert survey was used to perform analyses to determine if a relationship existed between district data and performance in the six domains. Analysis showed a significant relationship between district graduation rate, attendance rate, dropout rate, and the performance in the six domains of best practices. Further recommendations were then made for educational leaders in the area of alternative education.

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Chapter One: Introduction

The face of education has changed over the last several decades, previous to this writing. Studies, such as "The School to Prison Pipeline," identified gaps in the current education system and its use of valuable resources to serve at-risk students (Taylor, Banner, & Hartman, 2012). In a recent study conducted for the Georgetown University Law Center Fact-Finding Mission, Taylor, Banner, and Hartman (2012) estimated that the average annual cost to educate a child was $10,826 and the average annual cost of juvenile incarceration was $88,000, making it more fiscally responsible to serve at-risk students in an alternative environment before incarceration takes place (p. 12) The National Center of Education Statistics reported that in a survey given in 2010, over 64% of districts in the United States reported they supported at least one type of alternative education program (as cited in Carver & Lewis, 2010, p. 3). With the increasing numbers of alternative programs, there was a need to determine if those programs were effectively serving the targeted population of students.

I have spent most of my 10 years in education working in the alternative school environment. The work in that field allowed me to gain a deeper perspective on the different needs and services that an alternative education program provided its students. Working with local stakeholders, district and building leaders, and the communities, I have helped develop several programs to serve the needs of students in alternative high schools. Once each program was written and implemented, the question was 'how do we know if the program is working?' Upon reflection of this question, I decided to construct my dissertation research on conducting a comparative analysis of three alternative

programs in the Mid-Missouri alternative high schools, evaluating each program using research-based standards.

Finding or developing a system to conduct the analysis was critical in the success of the research. The field of alternative educational research was relatively new. Some of the prominent researchers of alternative education were Raywid (1981, 1983) and Barr and Parrett (1997, 2001, 2010) in the earlier stages of alternative education research. Reimer and Cash (2003), Schargel and Smink (2001, 2004), and Aron (2003, 2006) contributed to the research in the early 20th century. Mills-Walker (2011), Hinds (2013), and Ladd (2014) built on previous studies and continued alternative education research. Using the research and recommendations from these innovators, I constructed two qualitative surveys to gather data on the following domains of alternative programs: Curriculum, Assessment, Engagement, Instruction, Leadership, and Structures.

The use of the surveys, along with state quantitative data and administrative interviews, allowed for a more comprehensive analysis of each district's performance within the six domains of alternative education best practices. In a study conducted in 2013, Hinds recognized alternative schools as being able to "introduce new and innovative ways of working with learners and provide an opportunity for small-scale experimentation with public resources" (p. 3). Hinds (2013) continued with identifying the difficulty in using an evaluation tool designed for a traditional setting in an alternative school. "It is clear that these alternative schools are not traditional schools; however, they are often included in traditional forms of educational accountability" (Hinds, 2013, p. 2). Based on the evaluation development research conducted by Hinds (2013), I

identified a need for a best practices analysis of three alternative programs in the Mid-Missouri region.

Background of the Study

There were students who needed an alternative school setting noted in research dating back as far as 1909 (Dewey). Possible reasons were the variety of human needs and preferred styles of learning. Perhaps it was just not reasonable to think that everyone could fit into and flourish in any one type of setting. There was extensive research done in the area of education over the last decade, but the research in the area of alternative education was still under represented. The most prominent areas of educational research focused on the topics of curriculum and instruction, assessment, graduation rates, and other areas that addressed student achievement (Institute of Educational Sciences: National Center for Educational Resarch [IES: NCER], 2016). One newly developed area of research dealt with alternative education. In 2003, the estimated number of youths in the United States who were not in school, did not earn a high school diploma, and not currently employed was approximately 3.8 million (Aron & Zweig, 2003, p. 5). This and similar statistics increased the awareness and need for alternative education programs to reach struggling students. "These youth need access to high quality alternative education and training opportunities to equip them to compete in today's labor market" (Aron, 2006, p. 1). With the development of alternative education schools, there was a need to conduct program analyses to ensure that the programs were aligned with best educational practices.

Effective alternative high schools have a strong student-centered vision, flexible and relevant curriculum, educational diversity, dedicated teachers, creative instructional

approaches, small class sizes, comprehensive program options, and autonomy (Barr & Parrett, 1997). The staff surveys used in this study allowed for feedback on these elements. The administrative interview questions allowed for a deeper understanding of these areas from a leadership point of view.

Statement of the Problem

There was a gap in the current research and program guidelines in the state of Missouri on what characteristics were defined as effective for alternative education programs. This research contributes to the body of research in alternative education in the state of Missouri by conducting a program analysis using research-based best practices taken from the current research. The teacher survey was influenced by the research conducted by Hinds (2013) and the published exemplar practices in alternative education by the National Alternative Education Association (NAEA, 2014). In his research, Hinds (2013) developed an evaluation tool with recommendations for future studies to be conducted in which alternative education programs were evaluated for their program effectiveness. The specific elements of effectiveness were described in the current research as curriculum, assessment, instruction, engagement, structures, and leadership (Barr & Parrett, 1997). The Standards of Quality and Program Evaluation were developed by the NAEA and became a standard many states used to internally evaluate their alternative programs (Deeds & DePaoli, 2017). These elements were combined for the focus of the study on establishing program best practices in alternative education.

Aron (2006) explained the need for alternative program evaluation in the study conducted for the U.S. Department of Labor. Aron (2006) identified both the

inconsistency in alternative education programs and the lack of state guidelines for alternative education programs. Aron and Zweig (2003) performed extensive research into the literature surrounding alternative education and recognized researcher Raywid (1994) for developing the four common dimensions in defining and identifying schools and programs in alternative education. These four dimensions were outlined as whom the program serves, where the program operates, what the program offers, and how the program is structured. By analyzing a program with these four dimensions, Raywid established an identification method for three types of alternative programs, named Type I, Type II, and Type III (Raywid, 1994; Aron & Zweig, 2003). This study focused on contributing to the research of alternative programs in the state of Missouri, as aligned with the above criteria.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine the practices of three Missouri alternative programs and compare each to what the literature said were the best practices in the domains of curriculum, assessment, instruction, engagement, structures, and leadership. The study used a Likert scale survey and examined how well each of those programs performed with the metrics of state-reported attendance, dropout, and graduation rates. The level of match between program features and best-practices was assessed on the following dimensions: district graduation rate, district dropout rate, and district attendance rate. After reviewing current research in alternative education, I identified the need for the analysis of a sample size of three alternative high school programs in the Mid-Missouri area. I focused my analysis on the six domains of industry 'best practices' for alternative education identified by Hinds (2013), as outlined in his

dissertation. I used Raywid's (1994) classification parameters to categorize each program as Type I, Type II, and/or Type III.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Research Question 1. What are the program characteristics of three alternative education programs in reference to the three classifications of alternative education programs, Type I, Type II, and Type III?

Research Question 2. How do three alternative education programs compare when using research-based best practices in the domains of curriculum, assessment, engagement, instruction, leadership, and structures?

Hypothesis 1. There is a relationship between the level of performance in the domains of program best practices and the: district graduation rate, district dropout rate, and district proportional attendance rate.

Hypothesis 2. There is a relationship between the level of performance in the domains of program best practices and the: three classifications of programs the location offers, Type I, Type II, and/or Type III.

Limitations

As with any analysis, there were limitations in this study. The sample came from three alternative high schools and may not represent all alternative high schools and/or the at-risk students attending those schools. The sites were chosen based on the size of the district and a minimum number of three traditional high schools that fed into the alternative location. This was a limitation in that it excluded alternative programs from smaller districts. The districts were selected by the first three responses to the invitation to participate and did not consider demographics, socioeconomics, or other geographic

characteristics. This was a limitation in that it may not represent all districts in the Mid-Missouri area. The study is confined to the Mid-Missouri geographical area and may not represent schools in different areas of the country.

Definition of Terms

Alternative Education - The U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) defined an alternative education as "a public elementary/secondary school that addresses needs of students that typically cannot be met in a regular school, provides nontraditional education, serves as an adjunct to a regular school" (U.S. Department Of Education [USDOE], 2002, p. 14).

Alternative High School –

> A public or private school or separate class group designed to best serve students' educational needs and interests and assist students in achieving the academic standards of the school district and the state. The majority of alternative high school students are enrolled in secondary grades (9-12). The school offers individualized instruction, low teacher/student ratios, flexible scheduling, and varied instructional methods to meet the learning needs of students. (Hinds, 2013, p. 23)

For the purpose of this research, alternative high schools include magnet schools and innovative schools that draw students from outside the school or district boundary. Although some charter and private parochial schools may also be alternative under this definition; they are outside the scope of this research study.

Alternative Program –

> For the purposes of this research study, a program may have some features of an alternative school, but a program, especially an 'alternative school program,' is part of and in service to a larger and more comprehensive school. That is to say a program is not a comprehensive school. (Hinds, 2013, p. 23)

At-Risk Students – Students that are at risk of dropping out of high school. These students would usually have two or more risk factors that would help identify them as at-risk. These can include, but are not limited to, pregnant/parenting, behind their cohort in credits for graduation, multiple suspensions and/or incarceration, poor attendance, undiagnosed learning disability, family/social issues, trauma, and behavior/emotional issues.

Best Education Practices - ("best practices) – "the wide range of individual activities, policies, and programmatic approaches to achieve positive changes in student attitudes or academic behaviors" (Arendale, 2018, p. 4).

Certified Staff – For the purpose of this study, teachers who hold a Missouri teaching certificate and are employed at an alternative education program.

Criteria –

> A set description by which something can be judged. In an alternative high school program evaluation, criteria must be simple enough for evaluators to understand, yet complex enough to thoroughly explain the tools and indicators that describe what is being observed. (Hinds, 2013, p. 24)

Drop Out – For the purpose of this study, a drop out is any student who is not attending school and did not earn a high school diploma or GED.

Equity in education –

> Equity as inclusion means ensuring that all students reach at least a basic minimum level of skills. Equity as fairness implies that personal or socio-economic circumstances, such as gender, ethnic origin or family background are not obstacles to educational success. Equitable education systems are fair and inclusive and support their students to reach their learning potential without either formally or informally pre-setting barriers or lowering expectations. (Global Cities Education Network, 2012, p. 5)

Goals – Often referred in education as SMART goals, they are set by the district and schools. They are specific, measurable, attainable, results oriented, and timely (O'Neill, Conzemius, Commodore, & Pulsfus, 2006).

Indicators - Narrative descriptors that specifically describe to which degree a behavior, performance, or practice is determined to have been achieved.

Non-state certified support personnel – For the purpose of this study, personnel that hold 60+ college level hours and are employed at an alternative education program.

Rubric – "Tool that includes indicators that describe ordinal descriptors for predetermined categories of characteristics. Rubrics include descriptive indicators for each level of performance that may be described by an evaluator" (Hinds, 2013, p. 27).

Traditional High School – For the purpose of this study, a traditional high school is defined as a 9-12 grade public school that is generally attended by students who live within the geographic boundaries of that school.

Summary

Chapter One began with an overview on the current face of education and the changes it has undergone over the last several decades. The School to Prison Pipeline,

and similar research studies, have increased the need for alternative forms of education some of society's most at-risk students (Taylor et al., 2012). With the increase in alternative programs comes the need to conduct an analysis for their effectiveness. A background of the study was given, focusing on the research that supports the need for program analysis to be conducted. The statement of the problem identified the gap in the current research and program guidelines in the state of Missouri, focusing on what characteristics are defined as effective for alternative education programs. This was followed by the purpose of the study and research questions and hypotheses. The chapter concluded by explaining the limitations of the study and defining the study terms.

Chapter Two begins with a history of alternative education to assist in gaining some perspective on its development over the last several decades. Chapter Two specifically defines alternative education, including the types of programs and the characteristics that identify them. Program features and best practices are outlined and explained within the framework of alternative education, concluding with the specifics of Missouri's alternative education environment.

Chapter Two: The Literature Review

The topic of alternative education in the area of educational research was relatively new and often undefined. Before exploring what has been accomplished in the realm of alternative educational research, the history and a means of defining alternative education was necessary. Program features and best practices were outlined, as well as Missouri's alternative education environment.

History of Alternative Education

A discussion centered on the history of alternative education required an understanding of the concept of educational equity. In a report published by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD),

> Equity as inclusion means ensuring that all students reach at least a basic minimum level of skills. Equity as fairness implies that personal or socio-economic circumstances, such as gender, ethnic origin or family background are not obstacles to educational success. Equitable education systems are fair and inclusive and support their students to reach their learning potential without either formally or informally pre-setting barriers or lowering expectations. (Global Cities Education Network, 2012, p. 5)

Defining equity as fairness was crucial to understanding alternative education. Equity as fairness was the driving concept that inspired alternative education and was prevalent in its history.

Early 1900s

Dr. Timothy Young (1990) explained that the concept of alternative education dated back as far as the birth of public education itself. He described the multiple

alternatives available in public education that were often influenced by your social status, gender, and race. The curriculum varied depending on the type of school and who the school served. Public schools that catered to wealthy young men included studies in literature, philosophy, and languages such as Latin and Greek. These schools were attended year-round and prepared their students for higher education. In the middle were the common community schools, typically in session for eight to sixteen weeks and were attended by middle- and lower-class boys and girls in their communities. The community schools offered an English-based curriculum and focused on the three R's of reading, writing, and arithmetic (Young, 1990). Minority and poor children were educated in charity schools, typically funded by religious organizations. The educational sessions for only spanned several weeks, influenced by the planting season, and often left the demographic of students undereducated compared to the other children (Young, 1990). It was this educational inequality that eventually brought criticism to the structure of public education, claiming that this type of alternative education only served to create a system of inequity (Lange & Sletten, 2002).

The 1950s

The concern and focus on equity in education can be traced back to the civil rights movement, which started receiving national attention in the 1950s. The 1954 Supreme Court decision in Brown vs Board of Education broke down the existing structure of public education and recognized the need for the equitable access of a quality education for all students (Young, 1990). "The mainstream public educational system of the late 1950s and 1960s was highly criticized for being racist and exclusively designed for the success of the few" (Lange & Sletten, 2002, p. 9). Raywid (1981) supported these ideas

stating the schools were “cold, dehumanizing, irrelevant institutions, largely indifferent to the humanity and the ‘personhood’ of those within them” (p. 551). The current system had many critics who claimed that schools defined excellence “solely in narrow cognitive terms at the expense of equity” (Young, 1990, p. 9).

The 1960s

The criticism of the earlier decade became more pronounced in the 1960s, where “the traditional classroom was often conceptualized as an oppressive, rule bound, authoritarian teacher-centered and teacher-directed structure that demanded obedience, stifled creativity, and crushed the student’s voice” (Baker, 2017, p. 135). In an attempt to make sweeping changes to this educational framework, the movement for alternative schools outside the traditional public-school system took flight in the 1960s, having “lasting implications for public school schools with respect to curriculum, delivery, and structure” (Lange & Sletten, 2002, p. 4).

Alternative education became a widespread social movement and inspired the creation of thousands of alternative programs in urban settings (Miller, 1995; Stewart, 1993). These early attempts at alternative educational settings were short-lived (Raywid, 1981). Deal (1975) suggested that these early schools could not successfully achieve the balance between the individualized educational approach for each student with the need for a formalized structure that would ensure the school’s overall longevity and success. Raywid (1981) suggested that the early schools lacked that data to identify the elements that would consistently contribute to and sustain educational success. Even with the early failures of the alternative education schools, the experimentation of the time period helped lay the foundation for the continuing alternative education movement.

The emergence of alternatives in education exposed the idea that a one size fits all education system was not successful and called for another chapter in educational reform. With that idea in mind, Raywid (1994) said

> despite the ambiguities and the emergence of multiple alternatives, two enduring consistencies have characterized alternative schools from the start: they have been designed to respond to a group that appears not to be optimally served by the regular program, and, consequently have represented varying degrees of departure from standard school organization, programs, and environments. (p. 26)

The encompassing contribution of the early movement was that not all students learned the same way and the traditional school format was limiting to many of these students (Lange & Sletten, 2002).

The 1970s

The number of alternative schools grew in the late 1960s and early 1970s, largely influenced by the Civil Rights Movement and educational practices and priorities made a shift to a more progressive approach (Kim & Taylor, 2008). The number of alternative schools grew from approximately 460 in 1973 to over 5,000 in 1975, influenced in part by a report published by the President's Commission on School Finance in 1972, which requested for more options for students in the form of alternative educational programs (Stewart, 1993). The 1970s witnessed the development of a variety of alternative education settings. Working from the individualized concept of the 1960s, the schools sought to bring a sustainable structure to alternative education while implementing them in a public-school setting (Young, 1990). Some of these alternatives are represented in the Table 1 (Lange & Sletten, 2002).

Table 1

Structures of Alternative Programs in the 1970s

Schools without Walls	Focused on a community-based learning approach, these schools brought individuals within the community to teach students
Multicultural Schools	These schools were designed to integrate ethnicity and culture into the school's curriculum.
Schools within a School	Popular in large secondary schools, these attempted to create smaller subsets of the school that supported individual groups and were designed to meet their educational needs and personal interests.
Magnet Schools	Developed to promote racial integration, they offered a curriculum that emphasized different themes, in an attempt to draw diverse groups of students from a range of cultural and racial backgrounds.
Continuation Schools	Most closely related to today's alternative schools, these schools served students who were failing in the traditional school setting because of individual issues. These could include issues such as pregnancy, dropout, failing grades, and homelessness. These schools were typically more individualized in their program creation.
Learning Centers	Offered vocational education in a traditional school setting.
Fundamental Schools	A 'back to basics' approach to education that focused on the fundamentals of reading, writing, and math.

Note. Information for table sourced from Lange & Sletten, 2002.

These programs sought to bring personal options to students and individualize the educational experience for students at risk of academic failure. The alternative education focus reached the national stage in the late 1970s when key leaders in the movement met for the International Consortium on Options in Public Education (Lange & Sletten, 2002). Barr, Burke, and Smith were key leaders in the consortium and quickly "became a major voice for alternatives and options systems" (as cited in Raywid, 1981, p. 552). Raywid (1981) also stated that the number of alternative options in public education grew from less than 100 to more than 10,000 in less than a decade. Barr, and Parrett (1997), and Fantini (1985), were the primary contributors to the alternative education literature of the decade and sought to bring the narrative of alternative education to the public's notice. The growing pressure from the public for school accountability and financial mismanagement were prominent causes why many of the alternative schools closed before the end of the decade, slowing the growing movement of alternative education (March & Willis, 2003).

The 1980s

As the alternative education experience moved into the 1980s, the structure and focus underwent its first significant change. Alternative programs saw a shift "from the more progressive and open orientation in the 1970s to a more conservative and remedial one in the 1980s" (Young, 1990, p.20). Young (1990) further attributed this change to the growing conservative climate of the decade, which caused alternatives in education to focus on students who were performing below grade level and struggled to succeed in the traditional school setting. Lange and Sletten (2002) echoed Young's belief, stating that "A growing number of alternatives were geared towards student who were disruptive or failing in their home school and the character and variety of options was greatly shaped by this change" (p. 5). Raywid (1981) supported these ideas and believed that the collective decision-making between teachers and students was decreasing and the focus shifted to teaching the basics to growing population of disenfranchised students.

More than fifteen states passed some type of legislation to increase alternative education options by 1987, and 35% of districts across the United States added alternative programs to serve a variety of at-risk students with disruptive or violent behaviours (Garrison, 1987). Other groups of at-risk students served included students of diverse economic, ethnic, and social backgrounds, along with students who were juvenille offenders (Gloria & Karr-Kidwell, 1993; Pauly, 1992; Wang & Reynolds, 1995).

The 1990s

As alternative education moved into the 1990s it began to take on certain characteristics that became recognizable to researchers. Experts in the field of alternative

education began to identify common elements that loosely defined alternative programs across the country. In their attempt to compile the characteristics of alternative education, Lange & Sletten (2002) identified the five common elements of alternative education encountered in their studies. Common elements included small student to teacher ratio, one to one instruction opportunities for individual learning needs, a supportive environment that is maintained and student/teacher relationships are developed and nurtured, opportunities for student success that is connected to the student's future goals, and evidence of student decision making with flexible structures provided to make learning visible (Lange & Sletten, 2002).

These characteristics supported the unique needs of the alternative student. "Alternative schools include unique education subculture and include staff and students who are actively involved in educational innovation, often out of necessity" (Hinds, 2013, p. 55). Alternative settings used learning practices that were personalized, used proficiency based progress monitoring, authenic forms of assessment, teacher and student choice, and an active learner engagement approach (Barr & Parrett, 1997, 2010; Raywid, 1994). As alternative education moved towards the 21st Century, it developed a recognizable identy that was student and teacher focused and reconnected students who struggled to find success in the traditional education setting.

Movement in the 21st Century

Barr (1981), Barr and Parrett (1997, 2001, 2010), Conley (2002), and Fowler (2004) were among those who studied the history of alternative education and its development, beginning with its origination in the first part of the 20th Century from the progressive education theories of Dewey (1909, 1916, 1938). As referenced in figure 1,

alternative education continued to change, reflecting the ideology of the decade. "Alternative schools in a broad sense are an integral part of the way the educational system has evolved in the United States: Early in our history we recognized that the needs of the few often mirror the needs of the many" (Hinds, 2013, p. 53).

From the establishment of Harvard College in 1636 to the charter and magnet schools of the 21st Century, the U.S. education systems were a collective result of a magnatude of alternative school programs (Katsiyannis & Williams, 1998). This ideology continued into the 21st Century. As the educational issues and focus changed in the 21st Century, the format and function of alternative education reflected those changes.

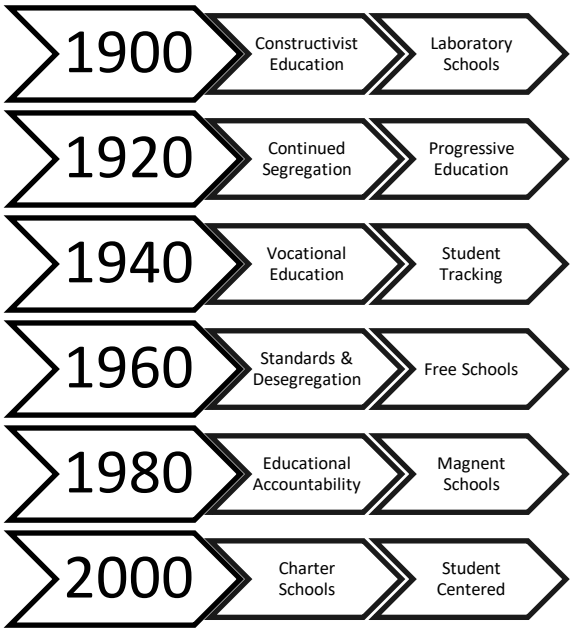

Figure 1: *Historical Framework of Alternative Schools from 1900 - 2000*

The history of alternative education, and education in general, in the United States remained reletively internal throughout the 20th Century. In 2000, the OECD administered the first Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), which tested 15 year olds' aptitute in science, mathmatics, and reading (National Center for Education

Statistics [NCES], 2015). The study published international data on a variety of educational areas, including graduation rates. For the first time there was a measuring tool to compare the U.S. educational performance to other participating countries. What evolved exposed serious gaps in the educational performance of American schools. "Among OECD countries, only Turkey, Mexico, Chile, Luxemburg, and Spain now have lower high school completion rates than the U.S." (Schleicher, 2011, p. 59). The influence of the PISA results continued to gain attention. In 2010, one of the most popular national news stories was the first place ranking of China on the PISA (Morgan, 2016). As previous patterns showed, the format and function of alternative education changed to reflect the educational issues and focus of the time.

In the light of these statistics, educational researchers recognized that America had a school drop out epidemic (McGee & Lin, 2017). The Alliance for Excellence in Education (2010) reported in "Reinventing The Federal Role in Education: Supporting the Goal of College and Career Readiness for All Students," that each year over one million high school freshman failed to graduate with their cohort in four years. This failure to complete high school created social and financial costs to both the indivdual and their communities (Raywid, 1994; Tavakolian & Howell, 2012). These drop out students shared many common factors that identified them as at-risk students. Many had a history of disruptive, defiant, or challanging behaviour that resulted in suspensions, expultions, and retention (Wagner, Wonacott, & Jackson, 2005). "The students who have negative school experiences tend to react poorly when placed in a traditional school structure that is not equipped to adequately respond to student needs" (McGee & Lin, 2017, p, 181). Even with a variety of factors preventing at-risk students from completing

school, it was the responsibility of schools to make structural changes to support students and increase the chances of graduation (Knesting, 2008). Alternative education developed in the 21st Century as a viable solution for school districts in supporting those at-risk students that did not find success in the traditional environment.

Defining Alternative Education

Before an analysis could be initiated on the alternative education programs, a working definition of alternative education was necessary in outlining the parameters for an alternative education program. In generalized educational terms, an alternative educational program was any that worked outside the traditional framework of a K-12 setting (Aron, 2006). The USDOE (2002) defined an alternative education program as

> a public elementary/secondary school that addresses needs of students that typically cannot be met in a regular school, provides nontraditional education, serves as an adjunct to a regular school, or falls outside the categories of regular, special education or vocational education. (p. 14)

A survey was conducted in 1998 of state coordinators in the area of alternative education. The survey reported that twenty states had adopted a definition for alternative education (Katsiyannis & Williams, 1998). With the growing focus on alternative education, this number increased to thirty-four by 2002 (Lehr, Tan, & Ysseldyke, 2008). Forty-three states and the District of Columbia had adopted a formal definition of alternative education by 2013 (Porowski, O'Conner, & Luo, 2014). The increasing number of states that had adopted a definition for alternative education reflected the growing number of programs offered within those states.

Just as the states were individual in their identities and characteristics, so were their definitions for alternative education. The diversity of context and settings, the differences in policy and legislation, and the variety of at-risk youth were contributing factors in the lack of a commonly accepted definition (Aron & Zweig, 2003). There were some generalities that appeared in the concepts of each state. "Alternative programs often have a characteristic approach to teaching and learning, environment, and support. While not all programs share all these common threads, most alternative education programs incorporate one or more" (Wagner, Wonacott, & Jackson, 2005). Aron and Zweig (2003) did extensive research into the literature surrounding alternative education and recognized Raywid's (1994) four common dimensions in defining and identifying schools and programs. These four dimensions are outlined as whom the programs serve, where the program operates, what the program offers, and how the program is structured.

The Institute of Educational Sciences (IES) used these four dimensions when analyzing and identifying state specific definitions for alternative education (Porowski et al., 2014). These four dimensions are also supported in research conducted for the Urban Institute (Aron, 2006). Identifying the elements of a program allowed for an alignment with these dimensions and provided consistency when conducting a program analysis.

Whom the program serves

Identifying whom the program serves is the first step in formulating a definition for alternative education. Programs that service gifted students and focus on vocational education are typically classified as alternative; however, these programs were not the primary focus of state definitions. Most alternative programs and schools serve students who are at-risk academically or behaviorally (Lange & Sletten, 2002). It was in the areas

of academics and behavior that drove the focus for states when formulating their individual definitions for alternative education. "In a survey of state level policies on alternative education half the states indicated that alternative schools were designed to prevent students from dropping out of school" (Porowski et al., 2014, p. 3).

When states addressed their definition for alternative education, twenty-eight states included grade level descriptions of the students served. Within those twenty-eight states, twenty-four states identified high school students in their definition, while twenty-two states included middle school students. There were only thirteen states that specifically addressed elementary students in their definition (Porowski et al., 2014).

A research study on defining elements of state alternative education programs was conducted in 2014 by the IES for the USDOE. The study identified specifically targeted populations identified in forty-two state definitions. The information was compiled from state policy, websites, and legislature concerning alternative education (IES: NCER, 2016).

The most commonly targeted students were those with behavior problems. Thirty-five states identified this classification, including students under suspension, students with classroom disruption issues, and students who have committed severe disciplinary infractions. Academic issues, such as low-test scores, credit deficiency, and chronically poor grades were identified by thirteen states. Truancy and attendance problems were identified by eleven states and thirteen states addressed the students who were not successful in a general education setting. Additional challenges sighted were students who were also parents, had drug and substance abuse issues, and legal issues

with juvenile or family court, any of which could hinder the educational success of the student (Porowski et al., 2014).

Where the program operates

There were a large variety of variations in the discussion of where a program operates and how that influences the definition of an alternative school. The specific program setting should be in relation to the types of services offered (Aron & Zweig, 2003). Resources rooms inside a traditional school building can be utilized for an alternative program. Schools within a school and self-contained classrooms were also cited as examples of alternative education.

Many alternative schools operated on a separate campus from the traditional environment (Porowski et al., 2014). Many were separate from traditional school, located in neutral territory and with access to public transportation (Aron, 2006). No matter where the alternative school was located, there were several specifics that were vital for a program to succeed. "Effective alternative learning programs are in clean and well-maintained buildings that are attractive and inviting and that foster emotional well-being, a sense of pride, and safety" (Aron, 2006, p. 12).

The IES identified specific criteria within state regulations on the location of an alternative school. Possible locations for an alternative school are given by thirty-five states in their study. Eighteen states allow for alternative programs to be located at separate sights or school facilities. Alternative education programs located within a traditional school are noted in twelve state definitions (IES: NCER, 2016). Other program and location identifiers cited in the study were home schools, juvenile justice facilities, online learning programs, and mental health/substance abuse facilities (IES:

NCER, 2016). "Although state statutes and administrative codes provide examples of settings and locations for alternative education programs, the identified settings are not intended as exhaustive lists" (Porowski et al., p. 8).

What the program offers

There were no specific data or accounting for the number and types of alternative education programs in the United States. Available estimates indicated that over 200,000 alternative schools and programs were in operation, most targeting students at risk of academic failure (Lehr, Lanners, & Lange, 2003). "The newness of the field means that researchers and policymakers are still examining the characteristics of promising programs, but lists of these characteristics are starting to converge and point to what should be measured and monitored as more rigorous evaluations are funded and implemented" (Aron, 2006, p. 11)

In operational definitions of alternative education, thirty-nine states included guidance on services that should be or might be provided, as indicated in official state definitions, legislative statutes, administrative codes, or department of education website content (Porowski et al., 2014). A specific level of academic instruction was implied in the language of the thirty-nine states, but only twenty-one states explicitly included this as a component in their alternative education definition. Other academic language included in state definitions were content area instruction, remedial education, small group learning, evidence-based curriculum, digital learning, active learning, academic support, and tutoring (Porowski et al., 2014). Additional programs cited as being offered were General Educational Development Tests (GED) preparation, career-technology

education, leadership education, therapeutic adventure experiences, and visual and performing arts education (Wagner, Wonacott, & Jackson, 2005).

Fourteen states included language to support guidance counseling for students at an alternative school or program. This aligned with the population that identified in the first criteria for the state definitions, whom the programs serve (Porowski et al., 2014). With many of the students attending alternative schools for behavioral and social issues, outlines for emotional health were specifically identified in the language of eleven states. These outlines were mandated in their definitions for alternative education. These services were cited, but not limited to, behavioral shaping, cognitive-behavioral education, anger management, conflict resolution, and positive behavioral supports (Porowski et al., 2014).

Social skills and support services were included in thirteen state definitions. These included skills necessary to increase employability and continued success in the community after graduation. Twelve states provide guidelines for career education, including vocational/technical training, on the job training, paid and nonpaid internships, career readiness, and career counseling (Porowski et al., 2014). Other services and supports were developmental supports for students, comprehensive guidance counseling for students and families, support for parents and other caregivers, and teachers who acted as counselors, advisors and mentors to struggling students (Wagner, Wonacott, & Jackson, 2005). The list of services cited in the state definitions were extensive and no definition included all the suggested program offerings. "No single school or program can be expected to handle such a wide array of educational and other needs" (Aron, 2006, p. 6).

How the program is structured

There are several theories that addressed a successful structure for an alternative school. In a three-type analysis of a program's goals, each type was identified by its unique structure. *Type I schools* offered full time, multi-year educational options for students. These included those students who needed an individualized educational program to be successful and students seeking challenging curriculum. A full instructional program provided all the credits necessary for a graduation program. It was also voluntary. Examples of these types of schools were magnet, charter, schools without walls, experiential, and gifted education schools (Raywid, 1994).

Type II schools were the most common alternative schools identified in state alternative education definitions. Their shared characteristic is discipline. This type of school served to separate, contain, and rehabilitate or reform behaviorally challenging students. This type of alternative education setting was not typically chosen by the student, but a placement issued by their "home school" for a specifically stated length of time. These placements offered only basic and required courses towards graduation and the time attended was short in nature. Examples for Type II schools are last-chance and in-school suspension programs (Raywid, 1994).

Type III schools focused on social and emotional health. They provided short-term therapeutic support for students with emotional and social problems that created barriers for their success in a traditional educational setting. These schools were primarily voluntary in nature (Raywid, 1994). Although Raywid (1994) published her concept of a three-type classification for alternative education, a reanalysis of the types almost a decade later still found the primary ideology behind them relevant. The Type III

program structure included many of the original alternative education programs. They are often referred to as the popular innovations or true educational alternatives (Krentz, Thurlow, Shyyan, & Scott, 2005).

Many state definitions of alternative education programs provided settings that were similar to traditional classrooms, hands-on learning, with an emphasis on new educational methods of learning (Porowski et al., 2014).

> Ironically, because they are often associated with students who were unsuccessful in the past, many alternative schools are thought to be of much poorer quality than the traditional K-12 school system, and yet because they are challenged to motivate and educate disengaged students many alternative education programs are highly valued for their innovation and creativity. (Aron, 2006, p. 3)

Alternative Education Best Practices

"For more than a decade, practitioners, researchers, and policymakers have been working to understand how to better serve vulnerable student populations and advance best practices and effective policies for alternative education settings" (Deeds & DePaoli, 2017). Tobin and Sprague (2000) focused their analysis of best practices on those that would have a positive impact on students with behavior disorders and/or antisocial behaviors. They identified nine effective practices: low student to teacher ratio, highly structured classrooms, positive methods to increase appropriate behavior, functional behavioral assessment, effective academic instruction, positive behavior interventions and supports, school-based adult mentors, social skills instruction, and parent involvement (McDaniel & Jolivette, 2011).

The At-Risk Students Services Assessment (ARSSA) was developed in 2002 and used to determine to what extent evidence-based practices were implemented to support at-risk students (Quinn & Poirier, 2006). The ARSSA identified similar best practices elements that Sprague and Tobin used in 2000, but greatly extended the amount of information evaluated and the level of depth used to determine implementation (Sprague, Nishioka, Yeaton, Utz, 2002). The best practices were represented by ten program features and the types of data sources used to evaluate the features.

Table 2

Alternative Education Best Practices Assessed by ARSSA

PROGRAM FEATURE	TYPES OF DATA SOURCES
Administrative support	Evaluation, job descriptions, meeting schedule/available time allotment, trainings
Behavior support and supervision	Attendance, behavior routines/expectations/outlined, verbalized, and reviewed; teaching strategies
Classroom management	Classroom routines/expectations/consequences outlined, verbalized, and reviewed; physical environment, teaching strategies
Instruction	Assessment process, curriculum, student goals, student scheduling, student-to-staff ratio
Mentoring and adult involvement	Communication plan/tracking, mentor assignments, service coordination plan/tracking
Program outcomes tracking	Attendance rates, criminal/behavioral recidivism, graduation rates, program recidivism, sustained academic improvement, success in return to sending school/full inclusion
School and work-based learning	Curriculum, school-to-work components, transition planning
Screening and referral	Intake forms, intake procedures, screening process, screening tools
Service coordination	Collaboration of key players, communication system and tracking, transition planning, into and out of program
Whole school discipline	School-wide evaluation tool

Note. Information for table was sourced from Sprague, Nishioka, Yeaton, Utz, 2002.

Evaluation criteria for alternative schools continued to develop throughout the decade. Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) identified any public high school that did not graduate at least one-third or more of its students as a school that qualified for comprehensive improvement and support (Deeds & DePaoli, 2017). Alternative schools were highly overrepresented in high schools with low graduation rates (DePaoli, Balfanz, Atwell, & Bridgeland, 2018). Many states responded with policies and procedures that

assisted with evaluation of alternative education programs. The NAEA began to compile a system of evaluation that offered focus and a means of performing an rubric based evaluation of alternative programs (DePaoli, Balfanz, Atwell, & Bridgeland, 2018). For example,

> although Kentucky's submitted ESSA state plan includes one single system of accountability for all schools, the state has gone to great lengths to ensue that alternative setting are of high quality….these criteria are aligned with the Standards of Quality and Program Evaluation developed by the NAEA. (Deeds & DePaoli, 2017, p. 12)

Those evaluations were rooted in the best practices research conducted in previous years, which eventually found alignment in the Standards of Quality and Program Evaluation developed by the NAEA (National Alternative Education Association [NAEA], 2014).

Vision and Mission

Rozycki, an associate professor of education who primarily instructed school administrators, challenged his students to question their school's vision and mission statement in order to fully understand and execute them. "Critical questions worry the casual assumptions of a vision and mission statement. Criteria questions ask how we identify items mentioned in a vision and mission statement" (Rozycki, 2004, p. 97). Hinds (2013) recognized the need for a strong and focused vision and mission to support the success of an alternative program or school. When the NAEA began constructing the fifteen exemplary elements for alternative education evaluation, vision and mission was listed first in the rubric. The NAEA defined the requirements for a functional vision and mission in exemplary practice 1.0.

> An exemplary nontraditional or alternative education school develops a guiding vision and mission that drives the overall operation of the program. All stakeholders (i.e., administrators, community representatives, parents/guardians, staff, and students) share in developing, implementing, directing and maintaining the vision and mission for the school. The vision and mission of the school includes the identification of the target student population and promotes the success of all students. Additionally, the vision and mission embody high expectations for academic achievement, and the nurturing of positive social interactions between staff and students. (NAEA, 2014, p. 4)

Specific indicators for an effective vision and mission statement for an alternative school or program were outlined by the NAEA (2014) to assist in evaluation. An exemplary vision needed clear definition and articulated goals, and was published, documented and easily accessible for staff, parents, students, and the community. All district stakeholders were involved in developing the vision, mission, goals, and projected outcomes for the school. The vision also included a profile of the student that the school or program was designed to serve and a unifying theme that evoked high levels of stakeholder and student support. The vision and mission of the alternative school were aligned with the vision, mission, and goals of the district (NAEA, 2014).

Hinds (2013) included evaluation of the vision and mission of an alternative program or school as part of his evaluation toolkit. Hinds (2013) and the NAEA (2014) evaluated the alignment of the vision and mission with state standards in their processes. Other indicators addressed and evaluated elements of student success as the focus of the vision and mission of the school, which included social competencies and career

readiness skills. The vision and mission addressed social and emotional learning, ensuring the overall education of the student. The alternative program developed school culture and student ownership of their school, evidenced through the use of symbols, ceremonies, celebrations, and the development of traditions (NAEA, 2014). Additional indicators included resources obtained to support the implementation of the vision and mission and identified barriers to achieving the vision and mission, both of which were included in the school's strategic plan. The NAEA's final indicators required that the vision and mission were monitored, evaluated, and revised as needed on a yearly basis (2014).

Leadership

"The challenge and goal is to prepare and train leaders who can lead in special schools while implementing proven alternative education principles and strategies in districts, counties, and states throughout the country" (Price, Martin, & Robertson, 2010, p. 4). In order for alternative schools to succeed and grow "it's not just the chidren who need to learn. Strong leaders are essential to academic success, and they need to be cultivated as carefully as their students" (Samuels, 2008, p. 26). An exemplary nontraditional or alternative school employs passionate, innovative, competent, and experienced leadership. The leadership team worked with teachers, staff, and community to ensure the success of all students (Hinds, 2013). The NAEA defined the requirements for an effective leader in alternative education in exemplary practice 2.0.

> School leadership purposely engages in opportunities to promote program success and strategically includes community, business, and media in celebrations. All stakeholders including administrators, teachers, and staff must be committed to

> full implementation of the mission and core values of the school. On-site leadership utilizes and engages in a collaborative approach that ensures shared decision-making, high expectations and continuous monitoring of program quality. The superintendent/designee sustains the independence of the school and allocates sufficient resources (i.e., financial or other necessary resources) to protect the integrity of the program. (NAEA, 2014, p. 5)

Specific indicators for effective leadership for an alternative school or program were outlined by the NAEA (2014) to assist in evaluation. The superintendent or district appointed representative provided sufficient oversight to ensure quality programming while protecting the autonomy of the alternative school's operation. The board of education and chief financial officer ensured adequate financial support and other needed resources for implementation of quality alternative education services were provided. These first indicators from the NAEA were supported in Hind's (2013) evaluation toolkit.

Hinds (2013) and the NAEA (2014) required that school administrators were experienced and competent, which enabled them to be engaged in all aspects of the program's operation and management. The shared vision of the alternative school was communicated by leadership through the program's mission and supported in the school or program's improvement plan (2014). School leadership also engaged stakeholders in a collaborative process when making program decisions. The use of an advisory board, or similar structure that promoted stakeholder participation in the decision-making process of the school or program was implemented. School leadership ensured that any decisions regarding operations aligned with state legislation and local policies and procedures (NAEA, 2014).

The NAEA (2014) also included leadership responsibilities concerning staffing requirements. School leadership was responsible for the recruitment, hiring, and training of highly qualified teachers and support personnel. School administrators ensured appropriate student to teacher ratios existed, that ratios reflected the needs of the student population, and that the student to teacher ratio never exceeded 12 to 1. Leadership facilitated collaboration and cooperation among the student's traditional school site, community, and home, to promote an effective learning environment for the student (Hinds, 2013; NAEA, 2014).

Ladd (2014) and the NAEA (2014) recognized the need for leadership to promote the use and analysis of reliable data and student performance measures to guide the instructional practices of the program. Additionally, school and district leaders worked together to offer transportation, food services and appropriate health services to students. The final NAEA 2.0 indicators were used to ensure the integrity of the program by performing internal evaluations. In an exemplary program, leadership conducted constructive performance evaluations of administrative, teaching, and support personnel on a consistent basis and in a timely manner (NAEA, 2014).

Climate and Culture

A research study that surveyed teachers in 29 schools found that "teacher self-efficacy and teacher job satisfaction were both related to school climate dimensions…suggest that it is worthwhile for school principals to consider factors within the school climate and how they might be enhanced" (Aldridge & Fraser, 2016, p. 291). Hinds (2013) stated that the leadership team of an alternative program or school should work with teachers and staff to ensure climate and cuture of the building was supported

and evaluated for strength and health. The NAEA defined the requirements for the desired climate and culture of an alternative education school or program in exemplary practice 3.0.

> A safe, caring, and orderly climate and culture that promotes collegial relationships among students, parents/guardians, and staff is maintained in an exemplary nontraditional or alternative school. The school culture and climate are characterized by a positive rather than punitive atmosphere for behavioral management and student discipline. School staff establish clear expectations for learning and conduct. The staff actively models and rewards appropriate student behavior. Proven practices to foster healthy communities are implemented at the school. Connections among all stakeholders that are positive and encourage academic, behavioral, and social success are actively promoted at the school. (NAEA, 2014, p. 6)

Specific indicators for an effective climate and culture in an alternative school or program were outlined by the NAEA (2014) to assist in evaluation. Indicators required that an exemplary program or school's services were efficiently organized into effective delivery systems. The alternative school or program was located in a safe, well maintained, aesthetically pleasing, and physically accessible environment that supported optimal student learning. Indicators required that rules and behavioral expectations were clearly written in the form of a code of conduct and/or a comprehensive student discipline action plan. The behavioral expectations were accepted and embraced by staff, students, and parents/guardians. The program has a designated team of stakeholders that strategically planned, monitored, and implemented prevention and intervention strategies

that reflect the culture and climate of the alternative school or program. The school actively promoted student engagement and provided students with the opportunity to have a role in shaping the learning environment to facilitate feelings of connectedness.

The exemplary alternative program or school communicated high expectations for student and staff performance and celebrated success on a regular basis. Student, parent, and staff survey feedback was presented at staff meetings and used to make appropriate programming changes. The school or program demonstrated an understanding and sensitivity to academic, behavioral, cultural, developmental, gender, and societal needs of students, parents/guardians and the community. Short and long-term goals addressed the needs of the students, parents/guardians, and staff. School growth plans were measurable and built upon student performance in the effective and affective domains, attendance, matriculation, and graduation (NAEA, 2014).

Staffing and Professional Development

Quality professional development was critical in meeting the needs of at-risk students. The ability of the staff in an alternative school environment to serve the student population was increased with continuous, applicable, and research-based professional development (Shaffer & Thomas-Brown, 2015). "The traditional training and professional development of educators continues to evolve to meet the needs of the educators in the 21st century classrooms" (Shaffer & Thomas-Brown, 2015, p. 117). Hinds (2013) stated that professional development opportunites designed for an alternative setting and of high quality were necessary to ensure effective instruction for students. The NAEA defined the requirements for staffing and professional development in an alternative education school or program in exemplary practice 4.0. "An exemplary

nontraditional or alternative school is staffed with effective, innovative, and qualified individuals trained in current research-based teaching methods that facilitate active learning, promote creativity, and encourage self-evaluation" (NAEA, 2014, p. 7).

Specific indicators for staffing and professional development in an alternative school or program were outlined by the NAEA (2014) to assist in evaluation. An exemplary program or school employed energetic, dedicated, and innovative teachers who effectively implemented multiple teaching styles. Facilitative learning was an embedded concept in the school or program and practiced with fidelity by the staff. The teacher to student ratio of the alternative school or program promoted individualized instruction and the recommended student to teacher ratio was 12 to 1. Raywid (1994) stated that low student to teacher ratio was necessary in alternative settings to allow for the one on one instruction that at-risk students required.

NAEA indicators addressed the specific professional development needs of an alternative school or program (NAEA, 2014). Exemplary programs required staff members to create written professional development plans that facilitated personal and professional growth. The personal plans identified the needs of the individual person, "established short and long term SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Results Focused, Time Bound) goals" (NAEA, 2014, p. 7), and identified professional development training that addressed the person's overall plan. Staff members created a professional learning community (PLC) that encouraged the sharing of successes and growth areas to cultivate an attitude of continuous improvement and lifelong learning. The overall focus of professional development was on student achievement, effective and affective skills development, social skills, and college and career readiness. A variety of

professional development approaches, including technology, to accomplish the goals of improving instruction and increasing student achievement were used at the school (NAEA, 2014).

Hinds (2013) included district and school structures that supported effective professional development for alternative school and program staff when developing the evaluation toolkit. The NAEA required that professional development opportunities included information related to effective collaboration with community agencies and services to support the student in the home and workplace (NAEA, 2014).

According to the NAEA, exemplary professional development increased staff capacity through training to ensure the use of research-based strategies that aligned with the needs of the program population. The district's board of education and financial leaders were required to ensure sufficient fiscal and capital resources were allotted to allow all staff to participate in workshops, conferences, and seminars. Raywid's (1994) research on alternative education supported the NAEA's (2014) final indicator that identified the need for administration and leadership to ensure ongoing professional development was geared towards the specific needs of teachers and supported personnel as it related to their role in the alternative program or school.

Curriculum and Instruction

Individualized, relevant, and challenging curriculum was a critical component in successful alternative schools. Continued evaluation of curriculum and instruction provided data that was used to guide professional development, adjust instructional practices, and update curriculum and materials (Hinds, 2013). "Not only must districts provide every student with a quality, standards-based core curriculum, school leaders

must recognize that students in alternative settings need the best teachers the district has to offer" (Anastos, 2003, p. 25). The NAEA defined the exemplary practices for staffing curriculum and instruction in an alternative education school or program in exemplary practice 5.0. "Instructional practices and curriculum are rigorous and inclusive, support the needs of second language and disabled students, and are individualized to meet the needs of all learners (NAEA, 2014, p. 8).

Specific indicators for curriculum and instruction in an alternative school or program were outlined by the NAEA (2014) to assist in evaluation. Exemplary practices required that access to the district's core curriculum was ensured at the alternative school or program. Hinds (2013) supported the need for teachers at the alternative location were highly qualified in the content area they taught, based on state standards and licensing requirements. Teachers and support staff who serviced students were competent in research-based teaching and behavior management strategies appropriate for the target student population. The school was operated in full compliance with local, state, and federal laws governing students (NAEA, 2014).

Hosley (2003) supported the need for curricular alignment with traditional educational settings, with included opportunities for blended learning and cited the ability of students in the state of Pennsylvania to earn credit by proficiency. This opportunity was supported in the NAEA indicators, noting that is opportunity should be available to alternative program students as allowed by the local education agency and/or state. This practice increased probability of alternative placement students to graduate with their cohort (NAEA, 2014).

Marsh and Willis' (2003) discussion on curriculum included analysis of instructional strategies that closed the gaps in student learning. The NAEA (2014) indicators evaluated differentiated instruction, culturally responsible teaching methods, and approaches that accommodated for a variety of learnings styles. The indicators provided for personalized learning plans and focused on Social Emotional Learning. Exemplary programs or schools provided students with opportunities to engage in elective courses in music, fine arts, physical education, technical training, and internships (NAEA, 2014).

Young (1990) evaluated several successful programs and the characteristics they shared concerning instructional strategies. Common elements from Young's research and the NAEA's exemplary indicators focused on community involvement in the alternative schools or programs. Programs used service learning as an effective strategy, with a focus on civic responsibility, community service, and assisted in strengthening the student's role and connection to their community (NAEA, 2014). Instruction integrated life skills like citizenship, decision making skills, career preparation, problem solving, social skills, self-management, teamwork, public speaking, time management, and provided students with opportunities to practice the skills in authentic environments. Indicators for project-based learning that was aligned with the student's vocational and career interests and used to build collaboration skills and teamwork were included in the evaluation (NAEA, 2014).

Hinds (2013) evaluated the use of research-based strategies for dropout prevention. The NAEA (2014) included evaluation indicators on dropout prevention strategies focused on at-risk students in an alternative school or program. The final

indicator addressed the physical elements of curriculum with student access to up to date textbooks, technology, library media, current software, and any additional materials that are deemed necessary to support student learning (NAEA, 2014).

Student Assessment

"It is important to focus on assessment…because testing has an outsized influence on curriculum and instruction. The decentralized nature of educational governance in the U. S. has meant that assessments are often the only way to gauge educational quality" (Conley, 2015, p. 4). Hinds (2013) wrote indicators for assessment. Areas included covered use of data to make instructional decisions, student established goals, and involving teachers in the assessment making process. The NAEA defined the exemplary practices for student assessment in an alternative education school or program in exemplary practice 6.0.

> An exemplary nontraditional or alternative school includes screening, progress monitoring, diagnostic and outcome-based measurements and procedures to improve short- and long-term results at the student level. Student assessments are used to measure achievement and identify specific learner needs. The school uses reliable measures to monitor student progress and adjust program services. (NAEA, 2014, p. 9)

Specific indicators for student assessment in an alternative school or program were outlined by the NAEA (2014) to assist in evaluation. School leaders promoted assessment and data analysis to identify student needs. Leaders monitored and enforced state and location requirements for data usage connected to student learning. The purpose of each assessment is defined and shared with teachers, students, and other

stakeholders. The results were used to analyze program effectiveness, instructional strategy effectiveness, and student qualifications for graduation. The process of collecting data was clearly outlined and communicated to ensure authenticity in the results (NAEA, 2014).

Hinds (2013) required teachers to use data for making instructional decisions. Marsh and Willis (2003) supported the connection between quality assessment and effective instruction for all students but emphasized this connection as particularly important when working with an at-risk population of students. The NAEA (2014) also included data driven decision making in their evaluation process. Teachers used effective formative and summative assessments that were aligned with the curriculum, drove instruction, and assisted in tracking student progress and performance. The alternative school or program had systems in place to monitor student achievement, progress toward graduation, and student performance on state standards using both formal and informal assessments (NAEA, 2014).

Sprague, Nishioka, Yeaton, and Utz (2002) discussed a variety of assessment types in their analysis of ARSSA standards, including qualitative and quantitative assessment data. The NAEA (2014) indicator rubric evaluated the effective use of qualitative and quantitative data, used to identify and monitor student progress according to district and state expectations. Curriculum aligned assessments were used to identify appropriate instructional strategies that were effective with a wide variety of learning styles and met individual student needs. The assessment data results were used to adjust instructional strategies, inform parents of student progress, and track student individual and cohort graduation rates (NAEA, 2014).

Transition Planning and Support

Students who transitioned to and from an alternative educational setting required planned supports to increase their chance of success. These included social, academic, and behavioral support. The effectiveness of these supports often determined the student's success level during and after the transition (Jolivette, Swoszowski, McDaniel, & Duchaine, 2016). The NAEA defined the exemplary practices for student assessment in an alternative education school or program in exemplary practice 7.0.

> Clear transition criteria and procedures are in place to address student enrollment, transfers, and reintegration, if applicable, to a traditional setting at exemplary nontraditional or alternative schools. Transition plans include college and career readiness support for high school students. School counselors or transition specialists are specifically trained to address student transitions. The transition process ensures the nontraditional or alternative school is the most appropriate placement based on the student's effective and affective needs, academic requirements, and post-baccalaureate goals. (NAEA, 2014, p. 10)

Hinds (2013), while evaluating effective structures in alternative education, required that alternative schools and programs provide effective transition for students between grades, schools, work, and/or post-secondary education. Specific indicators for transitional planning and support in an alternative school or program were outlined by the NAEA (2014) to assist in evaluation. Raywid (1994) discussed specific and intentional placement of students in alternative settings. An exemplary program or school used screening committees to identify student needs and ensure a placement is the most

beneficial for the students' specific academic, social, and emotional needs. The placement aligned with the student's graduation and post-graduation goals.

For those students who participate in a temporarily placement program, a formal process for a student's transition to and from the alternative location was required. This process included an orientation, assessment of student academic need, IEP review, short- and long-term goal setting, and an individualized student plan. The transition process and the student plan afforded students the opportunity to establish, maintain, and accelerate their current progress toward matriculation or graduation (NAEA, 2014).

An indicator unique to the NAEA evaluation system was the assembly of Student Support Team (SST) that consisted of educators from the school of origin and alternative school or program, the student, parents/guardians, counselors, and other trained transitional personnel. The team was directly involved in all aspects of the transition process including program planning, assessment, and implementation of the student's transition plan. Transition planning included referral and access to community agencies, and appropriate support services. These could include, but were not limited to, mental health, public health, housing, physical fitness, and other youth services needed for student success (NAEA, 2014).

When appropriate, students were provided with opportunities to establish and develop supportive links to their school of origin. Hinds (2013) evaluated these elements through engagement. As a final indicator, the NAEA (2014) required that prior to a student's entrance and exit from the alternative program or school, transition services were coordinated by the SST to ensure successful entry into the student's next educational environment or the workforce.

Family Engagement

"Family and community engagement are increasingly seen as powerful tools for making schools more equitable, culturally responsive, and collaborative…they enhance social capital in struggling communities and expand opportunities for students, their families, and neighborhoods" (Auerbach, 2009, p. 10). Hinds (2013) evaluated an alternative school or program to ensure current policies engaged students and their families as active partners with the schools. The NAEA defined the exemplary practices for family engagement in an alternative education school or program in exemplary practice 8.0.

> An exemplary nontraditional or alternative school actively involves parents/guardians beyond parent/guardian-teacher meetings. Non-judgmental, solution-based approaches that incorporate parents/guardians as respected partners throughout the student's length of stay at the school are emphasized in non-traditional and alternative programs. The school works with parents/guardians to provide proper training and support to advance the learning and personal success of each student in the program. (NAEA, 2014, p. 11)

Specific indicators for family engagement in an alternative school or program were outlined by the NAEA (2014) to assist in evaluation. Family Engagement was recognized as vital and opportunities for involvement in the alternative school or program was evident. All families were given equal opportunity for involvement with every effort being made to reduce barriers such as transportation, geographic location, socioeconomic status, or language. Effective communication and interaction took place between family

and school staff and included consistent and timely notification of student progress (NAEA, 2014).

Young (1990) identified family/school partnerships as an element of effective alternative programs and schools. NAEA (2014) indicators recognized family as equal partners and involved in making decisions for their student and the program. The opportunities for involvement included the following: to be a member of the Student Support Team, to assist in the development of the individualized student plan, to participate in the development of the mission and purpose of the program, and to help evaluate the overall effectiveness of the alternative school or program (NAEA, 2014).

Additional indicators evaluated the extent in which student families participated as partners with the school or program to create solution-based strategies to support the affect and effect growth of their student. Opportunities for a consultation regarding strategies to support the learning and personal success of each student was made available to all families. Participating families had access to parent education programs sponsored by the alternative school or program and other community agencies. Finally, procedures were in place to address all family grievances in a timely manner, with an emphasis on accountability, flexibility, and consistency (NAEA, 2014).

Collaboration

"Research has shown that collaboration between educational institutions, teachers and families can influence pupils' and students' academic achievements, social development and sense of wellbeing in all levels of education" (Willemse, Thompson, Vanderlinde, & Mutton, 2018, p. 252). Hinds (2013) included the evaluation of a school or programs collaboration in areas of curriculum, assessment, engagement, and

leadership. The NAEA defined the exemplary practices for collaboration in an alternative education school or program in exemplary practice 9.0.

> Partnerships with community agencies, businesses and groups based on trust, open communication, clearly defined goals, and shared responsibility at exemplary nontraditional or alternative schools. Collaborative efforts enhance the student's performance in the school, home, and community. Collaborative partnerships promote opportunities for life skills, soft skills, service learning and career exploration for all students. (NAEA, 2014, p. 12)

Specific indicators for collaboration in an alternative school or program were outlined by the NAEA (2014) to assist in evaluation. An exemplary program had evidence of partnerships with community resources, which were established to help the alternative school or program solve problems and achieve goals aligned with the program's vision and mission. Partnerships were designed to support and enrich the school by including the community as a resource for funding advocacy, education, and volunteerism. A comprehensive outreach program utilized a parent advisory council established by the alternative school or program. Interagency and community partnerships existed to support the physical and mental health of students enrolled in the program (NAEA, 2014).

Aron and Zweig (2003) recognized the presence of student assistance programs which allowed for referrals to community agencies was provided at effective alternative schools or programs. The NAEA (2014) required that community representatives be included as resources during the planning phase of the individualized student plan. Student plans included employment opportunities, community participation, independent

living goals, and post-secondary education, and effort was made to ensure that community representatives reflected the unique needs of the community demographics and served to close any existing opportunity gaps. The final NAEA indicators required that community partners were utilized when integrating soft skills, life skills, college and career readiness, and service learning into the alternative school or program, and community representatives served on the Advisory Board for the alternative school or program (NAEA, 2014).

Program Evaluation

Aron (2003) conducted an evaluation of the literature that existed around alternative education. Similar literature reviews were conducted by Lange and Sletten (2002) but did not focus on the effectiveness of the programs.

> Alternative high schools serve some of the most vulnerable students and their programs present a significant challenge to evaluate…systems of accountability have either disregarded information relating to alternative high schools or unjustifiably included them in comparisons with traditional high schools. (Hinds, 2013, p. 4)

The NAEA defined the exemplary practices for program evaluation in an alternative education school or program in exemplary practice 10.0.

> Systematic program evaluations for continuous school improvement are conducted at exemplary nontraditional or alternative schools. Data triangulation is employed with three different sources of data; program implementation ratings, student achievement data, and student/parent surveys. All sources of data are

> gathered and used to assess quality, provide a course for improvement, and direct future activities of the school. (NAEA, 2014, p. 13)

Organizations such as the NAEA (2014) and researchers like Hinds (2013) have offered innovative and effective ways to assist in alternative education program evaluation. Specific indicators for program evaluation in an alternative school or program were outlined by the NAEA (2014) to assist in evaluation. Exemplary programs or schools had routine, and timely evaluations to determine progress toward achieving the vision and mission of the program and developed plans for continuous school improvement. Evaluation measures included a review of program implementation ratings based on measurable and observable data. Performance ratings were given based on alignment with state standards and the NAEA Evaluation Rubric (NAEA, 2014).

Student outcome data, such as credits earned, grades, graduation rates, disciplinary data, and dropout statistics were gathered to evaluate the success of the alternative program or school. On a yearly basis, staff, student, parent/guardian, and other stakeholders' surveys were administered by the alternative program or school to assess school improvement. Additional staff surveys were administered to assess opinions, attitudes and issues involving school climate and culture, staff-administrator and staff-staff relations, the learning environment, perceptions of program effectiveness and success relative to students' behavioral, social, and academic progress. Finally, transition services were routinely evaluated to determine the program's effectiveness in preparing the student for the workforce or next educational setting (NAEA, 2014).

School Counseling

At-risk students required wrap around services to support them in their mental health. The Metro-Nashville Public Schools used a wraparound method to provide comprehensive counseling and support services to their students (Coffey, Stallworth, Majors, Higgs, Gloster, Carter, & Ekhator, 2018). These services included prevention education, individual and small group counseling, collaboration with faculty members to address student's social and emotional issues. Some of the specific interventions provided for at-risk students were substance misuse, teen pregnancy, violence and bullying, academic failure, truancy/suspension/expulsion, and various social and emotional issues (Coffey, et. al., 2018). The NAEA defined the exemplary practices for school counseling in an alternative education school or program in exemplary practice 11.0.

> An exemplary professional school counseling program that serves nontraditional or alternative students targets academic performance, is grounded in research-based practices, and addresses the current and future needs of students. Effective and affective strategies to enhance student achievement are integrated in exemplary school programs. Professional school counselors collaborate with school stakeholders to support best practices, articulate instruction, and create effective citizens. (NAEA, 2014, p. 14)

Wagner, Wonacott, and Jackson (2005) discussed services and supports for students and parents that included guidance counseling, advisors for struggling students, and teachers who acted as counselors. Specific indicators for school counseling in an alternative school or program were outlined by the NAEA (2014) to assist in evaluation. Students attending the alternative school or program developed affective skills to become

independent and self-directed learners. Students cultivated abilities and interests to achieve academic, social, and emotional success. A focus on student preparation which introduced a wide range of post-secondary options including the armed services, trade and technical schools, and college was established at the alternative program or school (NAEA, 2014).

Exemplary alternative program had students who worked with counselors to establish individualized and challenging affective and effective academic goals. The program promoted the connection between success in school and transition to the work force, with opportunities for students to engage in service learning that aligned with their skills, interests, and goals (NAEA, 2014). Students developed self-awareness and the understood the importance of collaborating effectively in teams. Students were assisted in establishing job readiness skills and developed critical thinking and research skills. These skills included the use of technology to seek and prepare for future employment. Students developed interpersonal skills to recognize and respect the differences in others and worked to develop a clear understanding of the consequences of their choices and decisions (NAEA, 2014).

School Social Work

Teasley (2014) stressed the need for social workers, school personnel, and the community to collaborate to provide the comprehensive support that at-risk students needed to picture themselves as successful and productive members of society. Hinds (2013) included access to social workers and the services they provided as part of an internal evaluation in his evaluation toolkit. The NAEA defined the exemplary practices

for school social work in an alternative education school or program in exemplary practice 12.0.

> A social work program that is proactive, promotes educational equity, and removes barriers to learning is a characteristic of an exemplary nontraditional or alternative school. Practices are consistent with local, state, and federal mandates. The program promotes the academic mission of the nontraditional or alternative school fostering policies that are responsive, rigorous, and emphasize intervention and prevention services. To maintain sustainability, the program is receptive to growth producing feedback from community stakeholders. (NAEA, 2014, p. 15)

Specific indicators for school social work in an alternative school or program were outlined by the NAEA (2014) to assist in evaluation. Exemplary programs or schools had social workers who demonstrated knowledge of local, state and federal mandates related to privacy, informed consent, and confidentiality. Social workers assigned to alternative locations were licensed by their state board of social work had a graduate degree from a Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) accredited social work program. The social work program conducted continuous and timely assessment of students and families to assist in improving emotional and social outcomes in schools and the community (NAEA, 2014).

An NAEA (2014) exemplary program conducted annual needs assessments which targeted the interactions of students, school personnel, and families. School-based intervention, informed practices, and research and evidence were utilized in social work services. Intervention strategies used a multi-tier framework with an emphasis on home, school, and community to address a student's social and emotional growth. Annual data

related to practices were collected and analyzed. Confidential and Accurate records that demonstrated outcome and ensured service accountability were maintained. The program was organized with an emphasis on student and program needs, the availability of resources, and the professional skills of the social worker. Social workers participated in ongoing professional development activities that targeted alternative programs, alternative schools, and at-risk populations (NAEA, 2014).

The NAEA (2014) further required that social workers developed and demonstrated specific knowledge of alternative populations and were culturally responsive to stakeholders needs. Social workers took a proactive role in the development of positive school culture and climate. The final indicator evaluated the social worker's ability to provide stakeholders with training and engaged the community with an emphasis on developing equal access of service for all students (NAEA, 2014).

Digital and Virtual Learning

"Online courses may be more engaging to some students than traditional face-to-face classes…programs that use online courses can address mobility issues of students who move regularly from one school in the district to another" (Watson, & Gemin, 2008, p. 14). Students were able to customize their education to meet their individual interests and needs. The integration of digital learning created optons for students that did not exist before the digial age (Watson, & Gemin, 2008). The NAEA defined the exemplary practices for digital and virtual learning in an alternative education school or program in exemplary practice 12.0.

An exemplary digital or virtual learning program implemented in a nontraditional or alternative school is accessible via the World Wide Web and in secure

> facilities. Digital or Virtual courses are aligned to state/national standards and meet local education agency course content guidelines. Digital and Virtual courses are rigorous, prescriptive, and standard and assessment based. (NAEA, 2014, p. 16)

Specific indicators for digital and virtual learning in an alternative school or program were outlined by the NAEA (2014) to assist in evaluation. Exemplary digital course content was characterized by rigor, was aligned to local and state standards, and included an overview, syllabus, and scope of sequence for delivery. The course content incorporated communication skills, literacy, was researched based, and reflected multicultural education. The course design was clear, incorporated multiple ways to engage in learning, and was organized in lessons and units (NAEA, 2014).

The digital or virtual course design provided students the opportunity to engage in critical thinking, had grade level appropriate reading alignment, and assignments were aligned to course content. Course assessments were aligned with unit objectives, valid and reliable, and provided for frequent feedback to guide teaching and learning. Grading tools and materials provided the student and teacher with immediate feedback, provided flexibility in assessment, and were easy to manage and understand. The digital platform allowed teachers to add content and activities, provided navigation parameters for students, and included varied multimedia (NAEA, 2014).

The NAEA (2014) indicators required that all digital and virtual learning courses supported varying schedules and pacing guides, identified technology requirements, and included content specific tools appropriate to support the tasks. All course materials provided learning and age appropriate access for students and student information

remained confidential aligned with the policies in the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Lastly, the course was updated regularly to reflect changes in state and national standards and was facilitated by a highly qualified and certified teacher (NAEA, 2014).

Policies and Procedures

School wide policies and procedures that supported both staff and students and enhanced the social inclusion and learning environment were essential to the success of the students, teachers, and school (Richards, Brown, & Forde, 2007). Hinds (2013) evaluated alternative school and program policies and procedures in the structures section of his toolkit. The NAEA defined the exemplary practices for policies and procedures in an alternative education school or program in exemplary practice 13.0.

> A current policies and procedures manual that is consistent with the vision and mission of the nontraditional or alternative school, approved by the local board of education, and articulated to all stakeholders in the form of standard operating procedures (SOPs) is maintained. The manual is reviewed and updated on a yearly basis. The manual is made available in an electronic and hard copy format. (NAEA, 2014, p. 17)

Specific indicators for policies and procedures in an alternative school or program were outlined by the NAEA (2014) to assist in evaluation. Exemplary programs and schools had clearly defined roles and responsibilities for all teaching and support personnel, which were written and explained to alternative program or school staff. Referral and intake procedures were outlined and facilitated timely access to program services for students. Procedures to collect, store, and share student records were used

that ensured student confidentiality. Processes were established that coordinated effective and appropriate placements, assessed student needs to match appropriate program interventions and services, and formalized the transition of students from one learning environment to the next (NAEA, 2014).

Successful programs and schools used reliable assessments that assisted in the development of an individualized student plan focused on student achievement, affective and effective growth, and college and career readiness skills (NAEA, 2014). Schools established or adopted a written code of conduct and a comprehensive student discipline action plan that outlined behavioral expectations and rules, consequences for infractions, and appropriate interventions. Program policies encouraged the active engagement of parents and guardians as equal partners in the planning, development, and implementation of the alternative school or program (NAEA, 2014).

The NAEA (2014) indicators required that policies for developing collaborative partnerships with private and public agencies were established and formalized by school and division leadership. These policies outlined the roles and responsibilities of collaborating social service organizations aligned with local education agency guidelines. A formal Crisis Management Plan was created and managed by school leadership to include strategies that promoted a well-maintained, safe, caring, and organized program environment that was in compliance with local and state policies, procedures, standards, and current legislation. School or program leadership was responsible for conducting all state mandated emergency drills, including fire, lock down, tornado, earthquake, and all drill procedures were included in the site manual and Crisis Management Plan. Finally, time and leave policies, procurement procedures, professional responsibilities, and

professional development requirements are outlined in a clear, systematic, and concise manner (NAEA, 2014).

Personalized Education Plan

At-risk students who attended an alternative school were most successful when their academic path was individualized and personal to them and teachers were supportive and involved them in the decision-making process. This was especially evident when it came to academic choices since many at-risk students were often denied the opportunity to provide input concerning their education (O'Neill et al., 2006). "Students identified as troubled…tend to flourish in alternative learning environments where they believe that their teachers, staff, and administrators care about and respect them…are flexible in trying to solve problems and take a nonauthoritarian approach to teaching" (Quinn, Poirier, Faller, Gable, & Tonelson, 2006, p. 16). The NAEA defined the exemplary practices for personalized education plans in an alternative education school or program in exemplary practice 13.0.

> Individualized curriculum and instruction is implemented using individualized learning plans at exemplary nontraditional or alternative schools. The individual student plan targets student achievement, effective and affective growth, social skill development, and college and career readiness skills. (NAEA, 2014, p. 18)

Specific indicators for personalized education plans in an alternative school or program were outlined by the NAEA (2014) to assist in evaluation. A Student Support Team was assembled and involved in forming and monitoring the student's progress on the alternative education plan while providing the support necessary for achievement. Parents and guardians are members of the Student Support Team and involved in

developing and executing the student's plan. Plans were culturally responsive based on the student's differentiated needs. Processes for the alternative education plan included reviewing current credits earned and ensured the student was making continued progress toward graduation (NAEA, 2014).

NAEA indicators (2014) required that teachers and school counselors analyzed and applied individual student data when making instructional decisions and developing the alternative education plan. Plans incorporated goals for practicing and sustaining healthy behaviors and developing effective social skills. The alternative education plan addressed required services to meet the educational needs of a student with disabilities and second language learners. Student plans were updated on a quarterly or bi-yearly basis based on student feedback, informal and formal assessment data, and student interest inventory results. The students maintained a copy of their plan and reference it during teacher conferences, school counseling sessions, and administrative meetings (NAEA, 2014).

Pamela Bruening was the current president of the NAEA and was contacted by email to assist in the origin of the exemplary practices most widely used for alternative education evaluation. The first edition of the exemplary practices was written by the NAEA in 2008. The NAEA board revised the exemplary practices every year to include the latest research in the area of alternative education. A rubric was added as a self-assessment in 2016 to provide districts and schools with a scoring tool for program evaluation. At this point, they were formally adopted by NAEA. Major renovations were logged on the title page of the fifteen exemplary practices, showing the reflection of the updates as new research added to the body of work. The best practices became the

measuring tool that states, and districts used to internally evaluate their alternative schools and programs (personal communication, December 8, 2018).

Missouri's Alternative Education Legislation

A review of historical and current alternative education legislation in the state of Missouri was conducted. The following legislation influenced the development, practices, and policies of districts, alternative schools, and programs throughout the state.

Table 3

Missouri Legislation in relation to Alternative Education

Year of Adoption	Legislation ID Code	Details
28 Aug 1990	167.280. Support services for students at high risk	Within the amounts appropriated therefor, the state board of education shall award funds for the purpose of providing support services to pupils enrolled in public and nonpublic schools who are identified as having a high risk of dropping out of school.
28 Aug 1996	167.164. Suspension or expulsion not to relieve duty to educate	Any suspension or expulsion shall not relieve the state or the suspended student's parents or guardians of their responsibilities to educate the student. Each school district or special school district constituting the domicile of any child for whom alternative education programs are provided or procured under this section shall pay toward the per pupil costs for alternative education programs for such child.
28 Aug 1996	167.335. Alternative education grants, qualifications, joint applications	The state board of education shall establish a program to award grants to school districts that apply for assistance in providing alternative educational opportunities for students whose demonstrated disruptive behavior indicates that they cannot be adequately served in the traditional classroom setting.
28 Aug 2009	160.539. School flex program	The "School Flex Program" is established to allow eligible students to pursue a timely graduation from high school. The term "eligible students" includes students in grades eleven or twelve who have been identified by the student's principal and the student's parent or guardian to benefit by participating in the school flex program.
28 Aug 2018	Senate Bill 603 Changes the Missouri Virtual Instruction Program to "The Missouri Course Access and Virtual School Program"	Allows any eligible student to enroll in program courses of his or her choice to be paid by the school district or charter school, if the student has been enrolled full-time in a public school, including a public charter school, for at least one semester immediately prior to enrolling in the program, and the course is approved by the student's school district or charter school through a procedure described in the provision'

Note. Information was sourced from Mills-Walker, 2011.

"Missouri statues did not offer a legal or operational definition of alternative education but instead provided a definition of the type of student best fitted for an

alternative program" (Mills-Walker, 2011, p. 25). The definition, along with legislation supporting alternative education options, were the standards which districts built their programs and schools. The most impactful legislation passed in the state of Missouri was article 167.164, which held districts and parents accountable for providing educational services to students under suspension or expulsion. The educational search engine, Noodle, listed 125 public and private schools in the state of Missouri, with half of those residing in urban areas (Alternative Schools in Missouri, 2018). The most current statistical data on alternative programs enrollment encompassed many of the central states, including Missouri (NCES, 2007-08).

Table 4

Student Enrollment in Central U.S. Public Schools

State or Jurisdiction	Regular School	Special Education	Vocational Education	Alternative School	Charter School	Magnet School
Illinois	2,074,359	24,791	3,480	10,175	24,753	230,062
Indiana	1,043,028	399	0	2,500	11,120	11,592
Iowa	477,035	996	0	4,173	691	*
Kansas	467,878	366	*	51	3,047	13,352
Kentucky	658,018	670	0	7,537	*	39,757
Mississippi	493,918	204	0	0	375	3,217
Missouri	910,624	2,570	1,928	2,066	14,877	16,825
Ohio	1,812,624	7,33	834	844	81,539	*
Tennessee	958,578	1,471	2,417	1,373	2,742	17,686

Note. Adapted from "Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey, 2007-08 version), * denotes not applicable or data not provided.

Summary

Chapter Two began with a history of alternative education through the decades with detailed information on the development of alternative structures. Shared characteristics that developed in alternative education were represented in a table to connect the research that supported their development. The history of alternative education concluded with a transformational timeline that showed the flow of alternative education over the last century.

Defining alternative education was a necessary part of the chapter and connected to the purpose of the research study. There were several types of alternative programs recognized by researchers. The identifying criteria was explained in four categories; whom the program serves, where the program operates, what the program offers, and how it is structured. The three types of alternative programs are framed around the last of the four criteria, how it is structured, was developed by Raywid in 1994 and still used in the 21st Century to identify alternative schools.

Due to expectations and requirements by state and local policies, it was necessary to develop and recognize industry best practices for alternative education. Best practices were eventually formalized and published by the NAEA in 2008. The NAEA developed a rubric for the fifteen best practices for use in program and school evaluation. Detailed information on the fifteen best practices and their individual standards were represented in table form, with supporting research.

The chapter concluded with an evaluation of how Missouri legislation assisted in forming the landscape of alternative education. Major pieces of legislation were reviewed to better understand the scope of influence those laws had on alternative schools and programs. One of the most influential of the laws was 167.164, which addressed the responsibility of districts, schools, and parents to ensure an equitable education to all students regardless of suspension or expulsion from school. Missouri alternative programs and schools grew to over 150 sites by the year 2018.

Chapter Three explains the methodology used for the research study. The framework for the study, including research questions and hypotheses will be discussed.

Population and sample sizes, instrumentation, and methods for data collection are addressed. The chapter closes with qualitative and quantitative analysis information.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Framework of Study

Researchers in alternative education expressed a lack of data on individual programs and their effectiveness as early as the 1980s. Raywid (1981) discussed the need for data and a way to identity the various types of alternative schools as a necessity to allow for more in-depth research to be conducted. Raywid (1994) continued her work by developing a system to categorize alternative schools that continued to be used through the 21st Century. McDill, Natriello, and Pallas (1987) and Natriello, McDill, and Pallas (1990) identified the lack of research and scientific evidence on the effectiveness of alternative programs and schools. Young (1990) wrote of the need to develop a set of key identifiers that characterized a school or program as being alternative and added to the body of alternative research work by identifying areas of high importance for a successful alternative school or program.

Research of at-risk students and the programs that served them increased as educational research moved into the 21st Century. Researchers began to gather a wide variety of data on the specific elements of alternative programs (Foley & Pang, 2006). Quantitative research was conducted to determine the effect of alternative schools on graduation rates (Mills-Walker, 2011). Hinds (2013) developed structures for internal program evaluation were developed by those working in the field of alternative education. State level research studies took shape as the focus on alternative programs and schools increased (Ladd, 2014). These studies began to offer analysis of the different types of programs currently represented in the realm of alternative education.

Alternative education was a relatively new research area of education and there were many suggestions for further study. Mills-Walker (2011) suggested that "it would be helpful to examine different types of alternative programs to determine whether some types of programs are more effective than others in increasing graduation rates" (p. 103). Mills-Walker's (2011) suggestion for further research was directly represented in Hypothesis 1. The same study further suggested that "a study comparing the graduation rates of students in Type I, Type II, and Type III programs could also prove beneficial to educators" (Mills-Walker, 2011, p. 103). The suggestion was directly represented in Hypothesis 2. Ladd (2014) suggested that "characteristics of programs that have been proven effective in aiding at-risk students in their future could be generated and shared with other alternative programs" (p. 97). Ladd's (2014) suggestion for further research was directly represented in Research Question 2. Both Ladd (2014) and Mills-Walker (2011) conducted their research in the state of Missouri, which offered a further connection to the research conducted in this study.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The following research questions and hypotheses were the explored and were the focus of the research study.

Research Question 1. What are the program characteristics of three alternative education programs in reference to the three classifications of alternative education programs, Type I, Type II, and Type III?

Research Question 2. How do three alternative education programs compare when using research-based best practices in the domains of curriculum, assessment, engagement, instruction, leadership, and structures?

Null Hypothesis 1. There is no relationship between the level of performance in the domains of program best practices and the: district graduation rate, dropout rate, and proportional attendance rate.

Null Hypothesis 2. There is no relationship between the level of performance in the domains of program best practices and the: Three classifications of programs the location offers, Type I, Type II, and/or Type III.

Population and Sample

The study required comprehensive participation by the school staff and permission from the district for the school to participate. A request to participate was sent out to school districts eligible for participation. Districts who were eligible to participate contained an independent alternative school that supported students from at least three high schools and were located in the Mid-Missouri region of the state. The requirement of three feeder high schools allowed for a larger student population served and alternative schools or programs that operated with more than 10 staff members. The first three approvals to participate were selected and each district was assigned a number. This allowed for the districts and its participants to remain anonymous.

Qualitative data were gathered in the form of constructed responses included in the Likert survey given to all certified and noncertified staff at each location. Quantitative data were gathered in the form of two surveys and data harvested from Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Educations' (MODESE) website. The first quantitative survey was for administrative staff to determine the types of programs offered at each study site. The second survey was a Likert scale survey for study site staff and determined the level of performance on the six domains of alternative

education's research-based best practices. The data extracted from the MODESE site focused on district graduation, attendance, and dropout rates over the last five years. All data extracted from the website were a matter of public record.

Instrumentation

The instruments used to collect data for the research project were two original surveys (see Appendix A and Appendix B) and district graduation, dropout, and attendance data from the MODESE website. Permission to survey the administrators and staff at each alternative location was requested and granted by each participating district. Each district was assigned a number to represent participants in the study to assure anonymity. The graduation and attendance data used from the MODESE website were a matter of public record, so no permission was needed.

The research was conducted using qualitative and quantitative data analysis. The quantitative administrators' survey was constructed to identify the types of alternative programs each location supported. Raywid (1994) identified the three types of alternative programs in her research, labeled Type I, Type II, and Type III. Identifying the types of programs in each alternative school was necessary to answer Research Question 1 and conduct the tests for Null Hypothesis 2. The survey requested the level of implementation of Type I, Type II, and Type III program characteristics, which allowed for specific identification of each alternative school site.

The administrative survey on program characteristics consisted of 25 questions that requested each school administrator to evaluate the level of implementation of each element. The levels of implementation are briefly discussed in Chapter Four in qualitative format, but the primary function of the survey was quantitative and identified

the types of programs present at each alternative school site. Questions 1-10 collected data on general program features, including location, grades served, and transportation. Hinds (2013) found that identifying general information on each alternative school was helpful and necessary when conducting a program evaluation. Questions 11-25 used Raywid's (1983) characteristics to identify the three types of alternative programs. Questions 11-13 identified Type I program characteristics and focused on the behavioral and involuntary characteristics that identify a school or program as Type I. Questions 14-19 identified Type II program characteristics and focused on voluntary, long term placement of students and included a variety of academic programs. Questions 20-25 identified Type III program characteristics and focused on emotional, social, and substance abuse support for students and families. Quantitative data on graduation rate, dropout rate, and attendance rate were harvested from the Missouri Comprehensive Data System (MCDS) The data for each participating district were accessible through the MODESE website and available for public use.

The certified and non-certified alternative programs evaluation survey was a quantitative Likert scale survey. The survey included a qualitative element in the form of a constructed response, which gave participants an opportunity to give personal feedback on the six focus areas of the study by adding additional comments on each focus area. Collecting the survey data was necessary to answer Research Question 2 and conduct the tests for Hypothesis 1. The survey consisted of 30 Likert-scale statements. The response criteria were a 1 to 5 response selection, with 1 representing strongly disagree and 5 representing strongly agree. Each of the six sections included a space for participants to

provide additional comments in addition to their survey responses. These responses were collected as qualitative data and were analyzed for trends by domain and study site.

Hinds (2013) identified six key areas, or domains, of investigation when performing a program evaluation as curriculum, assessment, engagement, instruction, leadership, and structures. Raywid (1994), Aron, (2006), and Carver and Lewis (2010) supported the importance of these key areas in their research on alternative education. Guidance from Hinds' (2013) program evaluation toolkit and key components of the NAEA (2014) exemplary practices were used to construct the survey.

All qualitative and quantitative data were organized and stored in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet on a password protected laptop. This allowed for the manipulation of the data to analyze comparative performance and study site descriptions for Research Questions 1 and 2. It organized the data and provided the statistical calculator to perform the *t*-tests necessary for Null Hypotheses 1 and 2. Qualitative data responses were categorized by study site location and performance domain and analyzed for trends.

Data Collection

Qualitative and quantitative data were used to conduct the study. The data collection process-maintained confidentiality and accuracy to ensure the authenticity of the study (Ladd, 2014). A digital calendar of the chronological procedure was maintained and kept secure on a password-protected laptop. Approval from the Lindenwood IRB committee was needed before I contacted participating districts. After approval, an emailed invitation to participate was sent to qualifying districts. The first three qualifying districts to submit permission for participation via email were selected for the study. Confirmation emails were sent to each district and contact with each site

administrator was made via phone call. Information concerning the process of administering the surveys was shared and a request for a date made, with a follow up email to each building administrator for further clarification. The email requested a confirmation on the survey administration date. Each site was given a survey date, which was logged on the study calendar.

Each of the three research sites were provided with paper copies of the two surveys with sealed envelopes to allow for confidentiality, along with personal participation consent forms. Two separate collection envelopes were used to further preserve the confidentiality of the participants, one for the surveys and one for the consent forms. All envelopes were labeled with the school name and were always under supervision to maintain confidentially of the participating districts. Each study site was given a location number after all data were collected. All participation in the surveys was voluntary. Arrangements were made with building leaders for the administration of the surveys and data pick up. After collection, all data were entered the Excel spreadsheet and paper surveys were stored in a secured location. The data were analyzed to calculate mean, median, and mode of the Likert-scale responses to each question and to identify trends between sites. Next, a search of the MCDS was conducted from the MODESE website to extract data for the three participating districts. The years 2013 through 2017 were used for all data sets extracted from MODESE. Data on graduation rate, dropout rate, and attendance rate were extracted and recorded on the Excel spreadsheet. All Excel spreadsheets were saved on a password protected laptop. Since all district reported data were extracted from the MCDS, the means of determining those rates were independent

of district manipulation. The same state mandated formulas were used for all district calculations within the state of Missouri.

Data Analysis

The study required qualitative and quantitative data analysis to answer the research questions and conduct *t*-tests for the null hypotheses. This mixed method type of study "allows for the coexistence of both post positivistic/scientific and constructivist theory and methodology" and further required the researcher of a study using mixed methods "to become more aware that decisions regarding research and theory require a perspective that is independent from and interdependent with both camps" (McLafferty, Slate, & Onwuegbuzie, 2010, p. 52). To gain a deeper understanding of each site and evaluate their effectiveness in executing research-based best practices, a mixed method approach was chosen to conduct the research. Leedy and Ormrod (2005) stated that "data are those pieces of information that any particular situation gives to an observer" (p. 88). For this study, both qualitative and quantitative data were used to answer the research questions and hypotheses.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Cooley (2013) stated that "the richness of detail provided by qualitative research gives insights into the complicated nature of teaching and learning that would be missed through other means" (p. 250). It was determined that including an element of qualitative research in the study would provide important and relevant insight on the six research-based best practices in alternative education from the individual perspective of the certified and noncertified staff at each study site. After each section of the Likert survey, participants were given the space and opportunity to expand on their thoughts concerning

the domain elements. Data provided from those response sections were grouped two ways for analysis, by site location and by best practices domain.

Quantitative Data Analysis

Popham (1993) stated that a statistical analysis enabled a researcher to determine if a specific outcome was a random result of change or if it was a result of a specific variable. This study analyzed two types of quantitative data, the Likert scale survey of performance of the six domains of research-based best practices for alternative education and the program characteristics survey to determine the types of programs offered at each research site. A high level of detail and attention was required during the process of analyzing the data. A minor mistake of flaw in analysis and reporting could have caused significant changes to the research results (Creswell, 2005).

Research Questions

Research Question 1 required an analysis of the data in the administrator survey on program characteristics in comparison to the three types of alternative programs, Type I, Type II, and Type III (Raywid, 1994). This analysis determined which types of programs were present at each participating alternative site. A majority of positive responses to the correlating questions determined which types of programs were offered at each research site. This categorization was required to perform the statistical analysis for Null Hypothesis 2. A description of each study site's analysis and the types of programs offered at the location was used to present the results.

Research Question 2 required an analysis of the certified and noncertified alternative program evaluation survey. The Likert survey focused on the six domains of research-based alternative program best practices. The data from each site was recorded

in an Excel spreadsheet for analysis. An average score was determined for each question and domain per site. Once an average score was obtained, a comparative analysis was performed to identify trends, as well as a performance-level indicator for each domain and site. A statistical test to determine differences among the program sites and domain performance was performed using the functions in Excel. The six domains analyzed were curriculum, assessment, engagement, instruction, leadership, and structures (Hinds, 2013). It was determined that the most efficient way to represent the data results was in graph form. The pivot function in Excel was used to transform the results into a comparative bar graph.

Hypotheses

This study tested for a relationship between the level of performance in the domains of program best practices and program type, and district graduation, attendance, and dropout rates. Because the analysis used would determine if a relationship existed, first a *t*-test for difference in means was chosen as an initial method for analyzing the data in response to Hypotheses Questions 1 and 2. "The most common technique for comparing two groups is the *t*-test" (Popham, 1993, p. 269). The use of a *t*-test was considered appropriate when a researcher explored whether there was a connection between two data sets or elements (Bluman, 2010). A Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMCC) test was then selected to analyze each data set to determine if a relationship existed from year to year in graduation rate, attendance rate, and dropout rate for each research site. Since the study used averages of the survey scores in the PPMCC tests, it was relevant to consider Bluman's (2010) discussion on using averages when analyzing data. "It is not wrong to use averages, but the results

cannot be generalized to individuals since averaging tends to smooth out the variability among individual data values" (p. 536). Since it was determined that the focus on each domain was more relevant than the individual questions of each domain, it was appropriate to use the average scores for each of the six domains when performing the tests.

The focus of Hypothesis 1 was to determine if a relationship existed between the level of performance of each domain and the graduation, dropout, and attendance rates for each district. The performance of a *t*-test for difference in means on each of the six domains of alternative program research-based best practices and each study site's district graduation rate, district dropout rate, and district attendance rate was used to determine if a difference existed. Then, a Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient test was performed to determine if a relationship existed between the domain performance data and district dropout rate, attendance rate, and graduation rate. A statistical calculator in Excel was used to calculate the scores for each data set and perform the PPMCC tests.

The focus of Hypothesis 2 was to determine if a relationship existed between the level of performance of each domain and the three types of programs offered at each study site. The performance of a *t*-test for difference in means on each of the six domains of alternative program research-based best practices and the presence of Type I, Type II, and Type III programs at each study site was used to determine if a difference existed. The level of presence of a Type I, Type II, and Type III program was determined by the results on the Administrator Program Characteristics Survey. Of the 15 questions that identified the program types, each site was given one point per characteristic. This point

score was converted into a percentage and was used when performing the *t*-test for difference in proportion for relationship. A Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient test was performed to determine if a relationship existed between the performance data and the presence of Type I, Type II, and Type III programs. A statistical calculator in Excel was used to calculate the *r*-test scores for each data set.

Summary

Chapter Three began with the framework of the study. Mills-Walker (2011) and Ladd (2014) gave recommendations on future research to be conducted in alternative education. Ladd (20014) and Mills-Walker (2011) conducted their alternative education research in the state of Missouri, and it provided an initial framework for the research questions and hypotheses for this study. It was determined that a mixed-methods form of study would provide the most comprehensive data for the study. The purpose of the mixed-methods study was to determine if a relationship existed between the level of performance on the six domains of alternative education best practices and district graduation, attendance, and dropout rates. The study also determined if a relationship existed between the level of performance on the six domains of best practices and the presence of the three types of alternative programs at each site. Qualitative data were collected concerning the six best-practices domains and discussed to determine if trends were present.

Three sites that met the criteria were selected and the process of data collection was communicated to each participation site. The creation of the surveys was discussed, and specific elements and the data obtained were explained in the instrumentation and population and sample sections of Chapter Three. A detailed process for data collection

from the study sites was logged into an online calendar created for the study. Data extraction from MODESE was conducted and the data sets were recorded on an Excel spreadsheet. Analysis of each research question and hypothesis data were collected and stored on a password protected laptop. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient tests were calculated for each data set in Hypotheses 1 and 2 using a statistical calculator in Microsoft Excel. A bar graph was created to display the comparative analysis of Research Question 2.

An analysis of the data provided comparative and statistical results in reference to each research question and hypothesis. Data were transformed to either chart or graph form, depending the on appropriateness of the format. Chapter Four is comprised of the results of each data set and their corresponding analysis of each research question and hypothesis.

Chapter Four: Analysis of Data

Design Overview

The design of this study was mixed-methods. The qualitative data included constructed responses in the Likert survey. The quantitative data included responses from two surveys. The Likert scale survey examined the research site's performance in the alternative best-practices domains of curriculum, assessment, engagement, instruction, leadership, and structures. This survey provided both descriptive and statistical data for analysis. The descriptive elements of the survey examined the rating each domain received and allowed for analysis of trends between participants when rating each question. The statistical elements of the survey examined the average each question and domain received and allowed for statistical testing. The program characteristics survey examined the types of programs offered at each research site and identified program characteristics. This survey provided descriptive data for analysis. The descriptive elements of the survey examined the individual characteristics of each research site and allowed for analysis of similarities and differences between the three research sites. It also allowed for the categorization of each research site to determine which of the three types of programs the location offered (Raywid, 1994).

Each participating district was contacted to arrange administration of the research surveys. Arrangements were scheduled and the participants from each site received the appropriate survey. The two surveys were the primary means of collecting data for the study. The certified and non-certified survey, consisting of 30 Likert scale questions to gather performance data on the six domains of alternative best-practices, was the primary means of collecting data for Research Question 2 and both hypotheses. An additional

question for each domain allowed the participant to add additional comments relating to that domain element. The program characteristics survey, consisting of 25 descriptive questions to gather data on each location's program characteristics, including types of programs offered, students served, and staffing. The program characteristics survey was the primary means of collecting data for Research Question 1 and Null Hypothesis 2. Data from both surveys were typed into an Excel spreadsheet for analysis. Nonparametric statistical measures were used to analyze the data related to each research question and hypothesis.

I contacted each participating district and scheduled a date and time to administer the survey. The two surveys collected data for the study. The certified and non-certified survey, consisting of 30 Likert scale questions to gather performance data on the six domains of alternative best-practices, collected data for Research Question 2 and both hypotheses. An additional question for each domain allowed the participant to add additional comments relating to that domain element. The program characteristics survey consisted of 25 descriptive questions and gathered data on each location's program characteristics, including types of programs offered, students served, and staffing. The program characteristics survey collected data for Research Question 1 and Null Hypothesis 2. I used nonparametric statistical measures to analyze the data related to each research question and hypotheses.

Location Descriptive Data

I administered the Administrative Survey on Program Characteristics to all research site administration. The survey contained 25 questions and gathered data to describe each program location and identify which classifications of Type I, Type II and

Type III were present. Survey questions 1 through 10 provided general program characteristics for each research site. Survey question items 1 through 10 are represented in Table 5.

Table 5

Program Characteristics of Alternative Schools as Defined on Survey

1. Exists in its own dedicated building
2. Exists within a traditional school setting
3. Services K-6 grade students
4. Services 6-8 grade students
5. Services 9-12 grade students
6. Full time teachers are present in the school
7. Curriculum exists to support alternative students
8. Special education students present
9. Support for transition to traditional setting
10. Provides transportation for all students

Location 1 had one building administrator and 10 certified and noncertified personnel that participated. I collected one Administrative Survey on Program Characteristics and 10 Certified and Non-Certified Alternative Program Evaluation Surveys. The location 1 alternative program resided in its own building and serviced students in grades 6 through 12. The program employed full time, certified, and noncertified staff to support students in the program with one dedicated, full time administrator assigned to the site. The program used a dedicated curriculum to support alternative students and meet individual learning needs and provided transportation for all students. A transitional support program for students moving in and out of the alternative setting was in the process of implementation, but not fully complete. The alternative program served special education students.

Location 2 had two building administrators and 10 certified and noncertified personnel that participated. I collected two Administrative Surveys on Program

Characteristics and 10 Certified and Non-Certified Alternative Program Evaluation Surveys. The location 2 alternative program resided in its own building and serviced students in grades 9 through12. The program employed full time, certified, and noncertified staff to support students in the program. The program had one dedicated administrator assigned to the location and one administrative intern, who also had part-time teaching responsibilities. There was no dedicated curriculum to support alternative students. The program provided transportation for all students attending the program. There was a transitional support program for students moving in and out of the alternative setting. The alternative program location provided services for special education students.

Location 3 had three building administrators and 10 certified and noncertified personnel that participated. I collected three Administrative Survey on Program Characteristics and 10 Certified and Non-Certified Alternative Program Evaluation Surveys. The location 3 alternative program resided in its own building and serviced students in grades K through 12. The program employed full time, certified, and noncertified staff to support students in the program. I recorded inconsistent responses to the presence of a dedicated curriculum to support alternative students from the site administrators. The responses included curriculum was fully implemented, curriculum was in the process of implementation, and curriculum did not exist. The program provided transportation for all students attending the program. The location provided a transitional support program for students moving in and out of the alternative setting and served special education students.

Research Question 1

What are the program characteristics of three alternative education programs in reference to the three classifications of alternative education programs, Type I, Type II, and Type III?

This research study investigated the characteristics of three alternative programs in order to classify them as Type I, Type II, and/or Type III, which the research literature in alternative education identified as relevant to servicing the needs of students in an alternative program or school (Raywid, 1994). A research location could be classified as containing more than one type of program. The Administrative Survey on Program Characteristics was used to determine which types of programs were offered at each research site and determine a score for the site that was used to perform the *t*-test for difference in means, followed by a PPMCC for relationships. While questions 1 through10 addressed general program characteristics, questions 11 through 25 addressed classification of each program type. In locations where two or more surveys were completed, responses were tallied and an average for each section was used to determine whether the type of program was present.

Type I programs offered full time, multi-year educational options for students who needed an individualized educational program to be successful. The instructional program provided all the credits necessary for a student to graduate and spanned multiple years in placement. The program was primarily voluntary and often required an application process (Raywid, 1994). Survey questions 11through 13 identified the presence of a Type I program. For the purposes of analyzing data in reference to Research Question 1, 'fully implemented' responses were scored as positive; all other

levels of implementation responses were scored as negative. Positive responses for 2 out of 3 questions signified a Type I program existed at the alternative program location. Survey question items are represented in Table 6.

Table 6

Type I Program Characteristics as Defined on Survey

11. Credit recovery program only
12. Voluntary placement is offered
13. Program offers alternative paths to earning diploma (Missouri Options, GED, etc.)

Type II programs focused on discipline. This type of school served to separate, contain, and rehabilitate or reform a student and was typically involuntary. Placement was usually assigned by a student's school or origin or at the district level for a specifically stated length of time. These programs were not designed to assist a student in graduating (Raywid, 1994). Survey questions 14 through 19 identified the presence of a Type II program. Positive responses for 4 out of 6 questions signified a Type II program existed at the alternative program location. Survey question items are represented in Table 7.

Table 7

Type II Program Characteristics as Defined on Survey

14. Combination program with credit recovery and suspension students in same location (Type I & II)
15. Service long term suspension students (90+ days)
16. Service short term suspension students (-90 days)
17. Students placed for behavioral issues
18. Students placed for truancy issues
19. Involuntary placement is present

Type III programs focused on the student's social and emotional health. They provided short-term therapeutic support for students with emotional and social problems

that created barriers for their success in a traditional educational setting. These programs were primarily voluntary in nature (Raywid, 1994). Survey questions 20 through 25 identified the presence of a Type III program. Positive responses for 4 out of 6 questions signified a Type III program existed at the alternative program location. Survey question items are represented in Table 8.

Table 8

Type III Program Characteristics as Defined on Survey

20. Character/behavioral education present
21. Drug/substance abuse treatment offered
22. Emotional/physical abuse treatment offered
23. Supplemental counseling is available
24. State/county support for families is available
25. Students placed for emotional/social issues

Research location 1 had one administrator that participated in the survey. An analysis of the survey data recorded 2 out of 3 positive responses for Type I questions, 6 out of 6 positive responses for Type II questions, and 5 out of 6 positive responses for Type III questions. The data verified that location 1 housed Type I, Type II, and Type III programs.

Research location 2 had two administrators that participated in the survey. The survey results for each administrator were identical so the data were treated as one set. An analysis of the survey data recorded 2 out of 3 positive responses for Type I questions, 5 out of 6 positive responses for Type II questions, and 1 out of 6 positive responses for Type II questions. The data verified that location 2 housed Type I and Type II programs, but did not house a Type III program.

Research location 3 had three administrators that participated in the survey. The survey results for each administrator were inconsistent. A total of all survey responses

was recorded to determine a positive response for each program type. An analysis of the survey data recorded 8 out of 9 positive responses for Type I questions, 17 out of 18 positive responses for Type II questions, and 6 out of 18 positive responses for Type III questions. The data verified that location 3 housed Type I and Type II programs, but did not house a Type III program.

RQ1 Theme 1 – Development of Type III program services

After the program characteristics survey information was collected, a theme was identified concerning the development of Type III program services. Each location was in various stages of reaching full implementation of a Type III program. At location 1 a Type III program was identified by achieving the minimum score needed for program classification. The other elements that were not fully implemented were in various stages of development. Each of the two alternative programs that did not contain a Type III program were in various stages of development and implementation.

Location 1 was in the development stage of offering state and/or county support for families either through coordination with the off-site organizations or at their location. All other Type III services were already offered in the program. Location 2 offered emotional/social support for students placed in the program. Drug and substance abuse treatment was in progress of implementation, but not complete. Emotional, social, and physical abuse treatment was also in progress of implementation, but not complete. Character and behavior education were being considered, but not yet in development. Location 3 offered supplemental counseling on location. Character and behavior education were in progress of implementation, but not complete. Emotional, social, and physical abuse treatment was also in progress of implementation, but not complete.

This was impactful information in reference to what characterizes a Type III program and what research says concerning at-risk students. The characteristics of a Type III program addressed the mental, social, and emotional health of its students. It also provided programs for drug, alcohol, and other substance abuse rehabilitation, often working with local court-appointed personnel to support students. These programs were necessary to assist in breaking the cycle of at-risk behaviors that caused students to be unsuccessful (Raywid, 1994). Hinds (2013) and the NAEA (2014) included assessment of implementation of these services to support at-risk students in their evaluation tools.

RQ1 Theme 2 – 100% implementation of Type II programs

After the program characteristics survey information was collected, a theme was identified concerning the implementation of Type II program services. Alternative programs in the late 20th and early 21st centuries focused on the isolation and containment of students with undesirable behaviors (Aron & Zweig, 2003). Out of the three program types, only the Type II program characteristics were 100% implemented at all three locations. Type II characteristics included short- and long-term suspension placement, students placed for behavioral issues, and truancy placement. All these placements were involuntary and assigned through a discipline hearing process for a specific span of time. In comparison to RQ1 Theme 1, containment of students with these behaviors was fully implemented; however, the support services that research showed would assist in breaking the at-risk cycle were the least represented in all three locations.

Research Question 2

How do three alternative education programs compare when using research-based best practices in the domains of curriculum, assessment, engagement, instruction, leadership, and structures?

This research study investigated how three alternative programs compared when using the six domains of alternative education best practices, which the research literature in alternative education identified as relevant to servicing the needs of students in an alternative program or school (Hinds, 2013). A 30-question Likert survey was used to assess performance on the research-based best practices in alternative education. The survey statements were constructed using Hind's (2013) research toolkit on evaluating alternative education programs. Survey participants were asked to rate the level of implementation for each domain that existed at their program location. The six domains assessed were curriculum, assessment, engagements, instruction, leadership, and structures. Each domain consisted of five statements. The scoring scale options for survey participants were: 1 – strongly disagree, 2 – disagree, 3 – neutral, 4 – agree, and 5 – strongly agree.

RQ2 Theme 1 – Lack of district support concerning curriculum

Domain 1 assessed performance in the research-based best practices area of curriculum. Hinds (2013) and Aron (2006) referenced the need for adaptive curriculum in an alternative setting to support student success and the individual needs of at-risk students. The NAEA (2014) supported those statements by including indicators to evaluate curriculum in their exemplary practices 2.0 standards of quality for alternative education. The theme of lack of district support was defined through the data provided

by the research participants. According to participants, district level personnel did not provide adequate support to the alternative locations in the development and implementation of district-mandated curriculum. Statements 1 through 5 on the survey assessed curriculum development, implementation, and support and are represented in Table 9.

Table 9

Survey items addressing curriculum

Item	Survey Statement
1.	Teachers in our school are involved in a process to develop/align curriculum to determine what students need to know, understand and able to do.
2.	Instruction is aligned with the expectations of the district and state i.e. diploma, essential skills, performance tasks.
3.	The classroom instruction at other schools in the grade level or subject have similar expectations for student performance.
4.	There is a process for monitoring, evaluating, and revising curriculum to ensure successful student transitions.
5.	Curriculum practices are aligned with standards, assessment, student outcomes.

Location 1 reported a 4.22 out of 5 average score, with statement 3 receiving the lowest average score of 4.0 out of 5 and statement 1 receiving the highest average score of 4.40 out of 5. Location 2 reported a 4.46 out of 5 average score, with statement 3 receiving the lowest average score of 4.10 out of 5 and statement 2 receiving the highest average of 4.70 out of 5. Location 3 reported a 3.32 out of 5 average score, with statement 3 receiving the lowest average score of 2.60 out of 5 and statement 1 receiving the highest average score of 3.80 out of 5. The comprehensive curriculum domain average for all three locations was 4.00, the second lowest of the six domains represented on the survey.

Survey results, combined with participant written responses, revealed a consistent theme related to the lack of district support for curriculum in the alternative program locations. Addressing the domain of curriculum, one participant wrote, "We are not asked to participate when new curriculum is written but we have to use it at our school. It never works because they write it for a traditional classroom and traditional students." This lack of participation in the development stage of curriculum writing was referenced by a second participant from a different location. The participant wrote, "District teams write the curriculum for the regular schools and do not invite us to be a part of it." Both participants expressed their frustration with the lack of representation from the alternative programs during the curriculum development and writing stages.

The lack of district support for curriculum also manifested in the area of implementation. A participant included on the survey, "We have to really work at adjusting the district curriculum to our classroom and for our students. We do not get any help from the district curriculum office." A participant at a different location wrote,

> The district offices do not seem to care that the regular curriculum they expect us to follow does not work for our students. They don't even know what we do, yet expect us to make it work. The rules about how to use it are not always the same for everyone.

The written responses aligned with the lowest scoring statement in the survey by all three locations.

Statement 3 asked participants whether instructional expectations concerning curriculum were consistent in grade level and subjects between schools in the district. The combined results from the survey and written responses from participants indicated

that alternative program staff believed expectations were not consistent throughout the district concerning curriculum implementation. Alternative staff felt underrepresented at the district level concerning curriculum development, writing, and implementation procedures. The alternative staff was expected to implement a curriculum they felt was not designed to serve the needs of their at-risk students and the districts did not provide support to the alternative programs to assist in altering the curriculum.

RQ2 Theme 2 – Inconsistency in assessment practices

Domain 2 assessed performance in the research-based best practices area of assessment. Hinds (2013) identified the need to conduct formal and informal assessment to determine program effectiveness and ensure support for all students. The NAEA (2014) supported those statements by including indicators to evaluate assessment in their exemplary practices 2.0 standards of quality for alternative education. The theme of inconsistency in assessment was defined through the data provided by the research participants. According to participants, assessments were used ineffectively and/or inconsistently to support student success at the alternative locations. Statements 6 through 10 on the survey assessed assessment and are represented in Table 10.

Table 10

Survey items addressing assessment

Item	Survey Statement
6.	Program uses multiple assessments to evaluate learning, instruction, and interventions.
7.	The teachers practice data-based decision making to effect student learning.
8.	Program uses the results of assessments to modify curriculum and instruction.
9.	The program establishes classroom and school goals of assessment literacy.
10.	Those involved in the process of teaching and learning regularly use student, classroom, and program data in the decision-making process.

Location 1 reported a 3.62 out of 5 average score, with statement 8 receiving the lowest average score of 3.30 out of 5 and statement 6 receiving the highest average score of 4.0 out of 5. Location 2 reported a 4.38 out of 5 average score, with statement 8 receiving the lowest average score of 4.20 out of 5 and statement 6 receiving the highest average score of 4.50 out of 5. Location 3 reported a 3.68 out of 5 average score, with statement 10 receiving the lowest average score of 3.40 out of 5 and statement 8 receiving the highest average score of 4.00 out of 5. The comprehensive assessment domain average for all three locations was 3.89, the lowest of the six domains represented on the survey.

Survey results, combined with the written responses from participants, revealed a theme related to the inconsistent and/or ineffective use of assessments to affect student performance. Addressing the domain of assessment, the inconsistent use of assessment was referenced as one participant wrote, "We don't use data to do anything with our classrooms. It's all about the credits." The reference to a focus on credits instead of student performance was also reflected in a second participant's comment. The participant wrote, "We don't evaluate learning, only credits." Both participants stressed the focus on credits over student learning in their written comments and reinforced it with low performing scores on the survey.

The theme of inconsistency also manifested itself in the ineffective use of assessment at the research sites. One participant wrote, "We collect data, but we don't do anything with it. It's just about meeting a district requirement to give the assessment." Referencing the use of assessments, another participant wrote, "No check for learning or understanding – just EOC state testing." All participants that wrote comments

concerning assessment rated the program's use of multiple assessments to evaluate learning, instruction, and interventions a two or below when completing the survey.

RQ2 Theme 3 – Active engagement through teacher/student relationships

Domain 3 assessed performance in the best practices area of engagement. Raywid (1983) discussed the advantages for both students and families when high levels of engagement were present in an alternative program. The NAEA (2014) supported those statements by including indicators to evaluate engagement in their exemplary practices 2.0 standards of quality for alternative education. The theme of active engagement through teacher/student relationships was defined through the data provide by the research participants. According to participants, the positive relationships between staff and students encouraged and facilitated active engagement to support student success at the alternative locations. Statements 11 through 15 on the survey assessed engagement and are represented in Table 11.

Table 11

Survey items addressing engagement

Item	Survey Statement
11.	Students are able to identify what they need to know, be able to do, and understand their role in the process of learning.
12.	Teachers are able to identify what they need to teach and what the students need to know, be able to do, and understand their role in the process of learning.
13.	Students participate in self-directed learning, know where to get help if needed.
14.	Administrators encourage and support teachers in maintaining communication with staff and their families.
15.	School policies, programs, and organization engage students and their families as active partners with the school.

Location 1 reported a 4.10 out of 5 average score, with statement 11 receiving the lowest average score of 3.30 out of 5 and statement 15 receiving the highest average score of 4.60 out of 5. Location 2 reported a 4.74 out of 5 average score, with statement

11 receiving the lowest average score of 4.40 out of 5 and statement 14 receiving the highest average score of 4.80 out of 5. Location 3 reported a 4.08 out of 5 average score, with statement 15 receiving the lowest average score of 3.70 out of 5 and statement 14 receiving the highest average score of 4.60 out of 5. The comprehensive engagement domain average for all three locations was 4.30, the second highest of the six domains represented on the survey.

Survey results, combined with participant written responses, revealed a consistent theme related to the active engagement of students through positive teacher/student relationships. Addressing the domain of engagement, one participant wrote, "Students have a more one on one connection at our school. Our small class sizes make it easier to know your students and give them what they need." Another participant wrote, "We have the time and class sizes to build close relationships with our kids." Smaller class sizes were an element included in the internal evaluation tools created by both Hinds (2013) and the NAEA (2014).

According to the high scores reflected on the survey, the students in the alternative programs had the ability to direct their own learning. Those high scores were supported by written responses from two participants. One participant wrote, "Students know what they need to succeed and like being in charge of their own destiny." Another participant wrote, "Our students control how fast or slow they move in the program." One participant wrote, "[Location] is set up and designed to meet each and every student's needs." Active engagement through teacher/student relationships evoked positive written responses from participants and data averages that supported the theme.

RQ2 Theme 4 – Supportive and responsive building leadership

Domain 5 assessed performance in the best practices area of leadership. Young (1990) discussed lack of effective leadership as one of the most significant factors in the failure of an alternative school or program in his research. The NAEA (2014) supported the importance of leadership in an alternative school or program by including indicators to evaluate leadership in their exemplary practices 2.0 standards of quality for alternative education. The theme of supportive and responsive building leadership was defined through the data provided by the research participants. According to participants, building leadership was supportive, responsive to student and staff needs, and promoted a positive learning environment. Statements 21 through 25 on the survey assessed leadership and are represented in Table 12.

Table 12

Survey items addressing leadership

Item	Survey Statement
16.	School has a vision and mission that is supported by teachers and administrators.
17.	The school has focused attention and support for identifying, discussing, and dealing with serious problem areas.
18.	Systemic efforts are in place to monitor, evaluate, and sustain student achievement progress.
19.	Progress toward the established goals are monitored and publicly reported by school and/or district.
20.	The leadership team works with teachers and staff to ensure climate and culture of the building is supported.

Location 1 reported a 4.28 out of 5 average, with statement 25 receiving the lowest average score of 4.00 out of 5 and statement 22 receiving the highest average score of 4.70 out of 5. Location 2 reported a 4.78 out of 5 average, with statement 24 receiving the lowest average score of 4.60 out of 5 and statement 22 receiving the highest

average score of 4.90 out of 5. Location 3 reported a 4.22 out of 5 average score, with statement 24 receiving the lowest average score of 3.80 out of 5 and statement 22 receiving the highest average score of 4.50 out of 5. The comprehensive leadership domain average for all three locations was 4.42, the highest of the six domains represented on the survey.

Survey results and participant written responses revealed a consistent theme surrounding building leadership. Addressing the domain of leadership, one participant wrote, "Our principal really cares about our school and the students." Another participant wrote, "We always talk about our school vision and how we can support each other. Our principal leads the charge and is very positive." The last participant to give a written response combined the responsive qualities of building leadership with a negative comment about district level support. The participant wrote, "Our administrators are always available to assist you in any way you need. They have to be because the district office doesn't send support for very much." Written responses of positive support from administrators correlated with the survey scores. Staff perception concerning leadership was the highest rated domain on the survey, eliciting high scores and positive feedback from staff.

RQ2 Theme 5 – Lack of applicable professional development

Although out of order, I combined Domain 4 on instruction and Domain 6 on structures in theme 5. Each domain included indicators that addressed professional development. Survey scores and written responses in each domain revealed a theme surrounding the lack of relevant and applicable professional development from the district level. Domain 4 assessed performance in the best practices area of instruction.

Hinds (2013) identified instruction as an important element connected to student success in an alternative program. The NAEA (2014) supported those statements by including indicators to evaluate instruction in their exemplary practices 2.0 standards of quality for alternative education. Statements 16 through 20 on the survey assessed engagement and are represented in Table 13.

Table 13

Survey items addressing instruction

Item	Survey Statement
21.	The school provides time for teachers to meet regularly to review curriculum and information about how students are doing and plan RTI.
22.	The school administration/teachers are continually monitoring classroom instruction to ensure that there is alignment with state and local standards.
23.	The school is providing professional mentoring and professional development opportunities to ensure high levels of quality instruction.
24.	Administrators provide targeted interventions for low-performing teachers in using research-based instruction that is aligned with state and local assessments.
25.	Administrators and teachers use student assessment data to guide professional development of teachers

Location 1 reported a 4.02 out of 5 average score, with statement 20 receiving the lowest average score of 3.80 out of 5 and statement 18 receiving the highest average score of 4.20 out of 5. Location 2 reported a 4.54 out of 5 average with statement 16 receiving the lowest average score of 4.50 out of 5 and statement 18 receiving the highest average score of 4.60 out of 5. Location 3 reported a 3.60 out of 5 average score, statement 20 receiving the lowest average score of 3.40 out of 5 and statement 16 receiving the highest average score of 3.90 out of 5.

Domain 6 assessed performance in the best practices area of structures. Hinds (2013) included evaluation elements on program structures in the alternative schools evaluation toolkit. The NAEA (2014) supported the need for effective alternative

program or school structures by including indicators to evaluate structures in their exemplary practices 2.0 standards of quality for alternative education. Statements 25 through 30 on the survey assessed structures and are represented in Table 14.

Table 14

Survey items addressing structures

Item	Survey Statement
26.	Teachers with low-performing students' have adequate assistance and support.
27.	There are professional mentors or other ongoing classroom supports that are intended to ensure high levels of student achievement.
28.	The school provides effective transition for students between grades, schools, work, and/or post-secondary education.
29.	There are academic and behavioral systems with other state and regional services to support students and their families with both formal and informal interventions.
30.	A flexibility in the school day/schedule is designed to support student's achievement and success.

Location 1 reported a 3.62 out of 5 average score, with statement 26 receiving the lowest average score of 3.30 out of 5 and statement 30 receiving the highest average score of 4.10 out of 5. Location 2 reported a 4.74 out of 5 average score, with statement 26 receiving the lowest average score of 4.60 out of 5 and statement 30 receiving the highest average score of 4.70 out of 5. Location 3 reported a 3.76 out of 5 average score, with statement 26 receiving the lowest average score of 3.10 out of 5 and statement 30 receiving the highest average score of 4.60 out of 5. The comprehensive structures domain average for all three locations was 4.04, ranking third of the six domains represented on the survey. The comprehensive instruction domain average for all three locations was 4.02, ranking fourth of the six domains represented on the survey.

Survey results, combined with written responses from the participants, revealed a consistent theme across the two domains concerning professional development. Lack of

applicable and relevant professional development was the theme revealed by the data. Addressing the theme of professional development, two participants recorded responses in the instruction section of the survey. One participant wrote, "The professional development (too much of it) is insulting to our intelligence. I mean at the district level, not building level." Another participant wrote, "District PD is never what we need. We are different here and people at district don't seem to realize that." The theme surrounding professional development continued with another response. The participant wrote in the structures domain section, "As far as having professional support and mentors, there isn't any from district. All of the professional development money is used for the regular schools and designed for the regular classrooms. It doesn't include us." Participants revealed a level of disconnect and frustration with district support in the area of professional development. The reference to district office was very similar to theme 1 concerning lack of district support with curriculum. Both themes identified participant's belief that district programs and structures were not created with the alternative locations in mind.

Additional Survey Responses and Survey Data Trends

There were written responses on the surveys that did not fall into any of the RQ2 themes but were informative and they are relevant to the research study. One participant wrote, "I love my job! I get to make a difference, a real difference in my student's lives. I didn't get that kind of feeling in my regular teaching job." Another participant wrote, "Our schedule in sessions lets more students attend the programs." A participant wrote, "We need better funding for our programs so we can help more students." The longest statement in written responses was included at the end of the survey.

> Half of the faculty here are dedicated professionals who work hard to excel at their craft and utilize the most effective, research-based methods. The other half actively oppose professional development and collaborative planning. They skirt responsibility at every opportunity and treat their profession as a glorified babysitting job. I wish they would quit. They make my job harder.

Specific statement data trends were evident in the survey data. Locations 1, 2, and 3 recorded statement 26 assessing whether teachers with low performing students had adequate support as the survey response with the lowest average score. Locations 1, 2, and 3 recorded statement 30 assessing the flexibility of the school day to meet student needs as the survey response with the highest average score. Structures was the only domain that identified the lowest and highest survey statements the same at all three research locations. Location 2 reported higher averages in all six domains compared to the other two locations. Location 3 reported equal or lower averages than location 2 and lower averages than location 1 in all six domains.

Domain 1, addressing curriculum, had an overall average of 4.00 and ranked fifth on the survey. Domain 2, concerning assessment, had an overall average of 3.89 and ranked last on the survey. Domain 3, on engagement, had an overall average of 4.30 and ranked second on the survey. Domain 4, assessing instruction, had an overall average of 4.02 and ranked fourth on the survey. Domain 5, concerning leadership, had an overall average of 4.42 and ranked first on the survey. Domain 6, addressing structures, had an overall average of 4.04 and ranked third on the survey. Domain performances by location are represented in Figure 2.

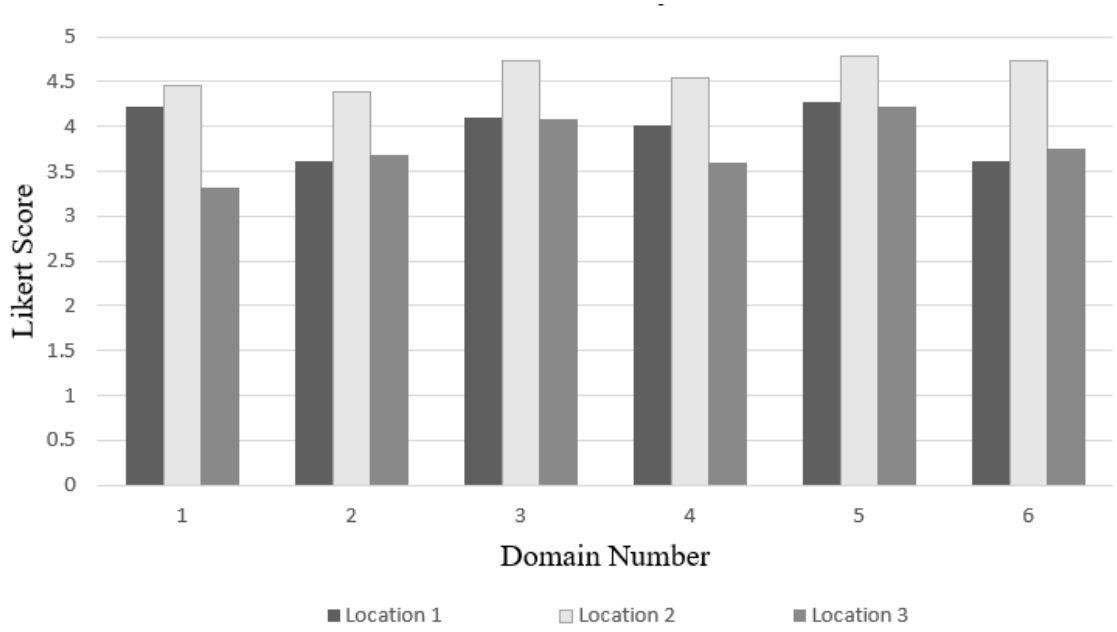

Figure 2. Alternative education research-based best practices domain performance by location as scored on the Likert survey.

Hypothesis 1

Null Hypothesis: There is no relationship between the level of performance in the domains of program best practices and the: district graduation rate, dropout rate, and proportional attendance rate.

I conducted a Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient to determine whether there was a relationship between district data and domain scores. The analysis revealed there were significant relationships between the district data and domain scores. I rejected the null hypothesis and concluded that there were relationships in 4-year graduation rate, 5-year graduation rate, dropout rate, and attendance rate and domain average scores. There was an overall score relationship to 4-year graduation rate in years 2016 and 2017 (*r*-critical = .666; *r*-test value = .747; *r*-test value = .763; respectively), Domain 1 relationship to 4-year graduation rate in years 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, and 2017 (*r*-critical = .666; *r*-test value = .945; *r*-test value = .962; *r*-test value = .875; *r*-test

value = .993; *r*-test value = .995; respectively), Domain 4 relationship to 4-year graduation rate in years 2013, 2014, 2016, and 2017 (*r*-critical = .666; *r*-test value = .755; *r*-test value = .791; *r*-test value = .878; *r*-test value = .899; respectively), and Domain 5 relationship to 4-year graduation rate and 2017 (*r*-critical = .666; *r*-test value = .667). For non-significant relationships, the PPMCC values are displayed in Table 15.

Table 15

PPMCC table for 4-year graduation data in relationship to domain scores

Domain	1	2	3	4	5	6	Overall Average
2017	.995	.533	.613	.889	.667	.495	.763
2016	.993	.512	.594	.878	.649	.474	.747
2015	.875	.149	.245	.631	.313	.105	.440
2014	.962	.370	.459	.791	.521	.329	.632
2013	.945	.317	.408	.755	.471	.275	.587

There was an overall score relationship to 5 year graduation rate in years 2015, 2016 and 2017 (*r*-critical = .666; *r*-test value = .676; *r*-test value = .669; *r*-test value = .753; respectively), Domain 1 relationship to 4-year graduation rate in years 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, and 2017 (*r*-critical = .666; *r*-test value = .885; *r*-test value = .953; *r*-test value = .976; *r*-test value = .974; *r*-test value = .994; respectively), Domain 4 relationship to 4-year graduation rate in years 2014, 2015, 2016, and 2017 (*r*-critical = .666; *r*-test value = .771; *r*-test value = .825; *r*-test value = .819; *r*-test value = .882; respectively). For non-significant relationships, the PPMCC values are displayed in Table 16.

Table 16

PPMCC table for 5-year graduation data in relationship to domain scores

Domain	1	2	3	4	5	6	Overall Average
2017	.994	.520	.601	.882	.656	.482	.753
2016	.974	.414	.501	.819	.561	.374	.669
2015	.976	.423	.509	.825	.569	.383	.676
2014	.953	.340	.430	.771	.493	.299	.608
2013	.885	.169	.264	.646	.332	.125	.458

There was an overall score relationship to district dropout rate in years 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, and 2017 (*r*-critical = .666; *r*-test value = -0.696; *r*-test value = -0.740; *r*-test value = -0.722; *r*-test value = -0.709; *r*-test value = -0.666; respectively), Domain 1 relationship to district dropout rate in years 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, and 2017 (*r*-critical = .666; *r*-test value = -0.982; *r*-test value = -0.992; *r*-test value = -0.988; *r*-test value = -0.985; *r*-test value = -0.973; respectively), Domain 4 relationship district dropout rate in years 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, and 2017 (*r*-critical = .666; *r*-test value = -0.840; *r*-test value = -0.872; *r*-test value = -0.860; *r*-test value = -0.850; *r*-test value = -0.817; respectively). For non-significant relationships, the PPMCC values are displayed in Table 17.

Table 17

PPMCC table for district dropout data in relationship to domain scores

Domain	1	2	3	4	5	6	Overall Average
2017	-.973	-.410	-.497	-.817	-.558	-.370	-.666
2016	-.985	-.464	-.548	-.850	-.606	-.425	-.709
2015	-.988	-.481	-.564	-.860	-.621	-.442	-.772
2014	-.992	-.503	-.585	-.872	-.641	-.465	-.740
2013	-.982	-.448	-.533	-.840	-.592	-.408	-.696

There was an overall score relationship to the district attendance rate in years 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, and 2017 (*r*-critical = .666; *r*-test value = .919; *r*-test value = .743; *r*-test value = -0.944; *r*-test value = .733; *r*-test value = .850; respectively), Domain 1 district attendance rate in years 2013, 2014, 2016, and 2017 (*r*-critical = .666; *r*-test value = .978; *r*-test value = .992; *r*-test value = .990; *r*-test value = .998; respectively), Domain 2 district attendance rate in years 2013 and 2015 (*r*-critical = .666; *r*-test value = .758; *r*-test value = -0.999; respectively), Domain 3 district attendance rate in years 2013, 2015, and 2017 (*r*-critical = .666; *r*-test value = .818; *r*-test value = -0.992; *r*-test value = .723; respectively), Domain 4 district attendance rate in years 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016,

and 2017 (*r*-critical = .666; *r*-test value = .984; *r*-test value = .875; *r*-test value = -0.846; *r*-test value = .868; *r*-test value = .947; respectively), Domain 5 district attendance rate in years 2013, 2015, and 2017 (*r*-critical = .666; *r*-test value = .857; *r*-test value = -0.980; *r*-test value = .771; respectively), and Domain 6 district attendance rate in years 2013 and 2015 (*r*-critical = .666; *r*-test value = .729; *r*-test value = -0.999; respectively). For non-significant relationships, the PPMCC values are displayed in Table 18.

Table 18

PPMCC table for district attendance data in relationship to domain scores

Domain	1	2	3	4	5	6	Overall Average
2017	.994	.653	.723	.947	.771	.619	.850
2016	.990	.495	.577	.868	.634	.456	.733
2015	-.585	-.999	-.992	-.846	-.980	-.999	-.944
2014	.992	.507	.589	.875	.645	.469	.743
2013	.978	.758	.818	.984	.857	.729	.919

Hypothesis 2

Null Hypothesis: There is no relationship between the level of performance in the domains of program best practices and the: Three classifications of programs the location offers, Type I, Type II, and/or Type III.

I conducted a Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient to determine whether there was a relationship between program types and domain scores. The analysis revealed there are significant relationships between the program types and domain scores. I rejected the null hypothesis and concluded that program type is significantly related to the performance in Domain 2, Domain 3, Domain 5, Domain 6, and overall average (*r*-critical = .666; *r*-test value = .881; *r*-test value = .831; *r*-test value = 790; *r*-test value = .901, .700; respectively). For non-significant relationships, the PPMCC values are displayed in Table 19.

Table 19

PPMCC table for Type I, II, and III in relationship to domain scores

Domain	AVE
Domain 1	0.1618
Domain 2	0.8818
Domain 3	0.8316
Domain 4	0.5197
Domain 5	0.7901
Domain 6	0.9017
Overall Average	0.7002

Summary

The data analysis of chapter Four began with a review of how the research study was designed. Two surveys were distributed to the three participating alternative program sites. One survey recorded responses from building administrators on the program characteristics. This information was required to identify if Type I, Type II, and/or Type III programs were present at the research site. The data were analyzed to determine which types of programs were present at each site. Each location site was given a percentage score in proportion to how many program type characteristics were present. The second survey was a Likert scale survey that determined the performance level of each research-based practices domain. The six domains were curriculum, assessment, engagement, instruction, leadership, and structures. The data were analyzed for performance by location and trends.

A location description was given for each research location. General program information was gathered on the administrative survey. Information reported included grade levels served, types of programs offered, and general operations procedures. Research Question 1 data that determined which types of programs were present at each site were analyzed and discussed. Survey items that correlated with each program type were presented and survey results identified which type of programs were offered at each

location. Research Question 2 data that determined performance in the six research-based best practices domains for alternative education were analyzed and discussed. Survey items that correlated with each domain were presented and survey results were used to determine an average score for the six domains for each location.

Hypothesis 1 explored a possible relationship between location performance within the six best practices domain and the district's graduation rate, attendance rate, and dropout rate. A Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient test for relationships was performed for each location with each data set by district. According to the tests, a significant relationship was present for the district's 5-year graduation rate, 4-year graduation rate, attendance rate, and dropout rate and overall domain average performances. Hypothesis 2 explored a possible relationship between location performance within the six best practices domains and the presence of Type I, Type II, and/or Type III programs. A Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient test for relationships was performed for each location and the type score. According to the tests, program type and domain performance was significantly related to Domain 2, Domain 3, Domain 5, Domain 6, and Overall Average.

The data results concluded with an analysis of the qualitative data collected on the Likert surveys. Each domain included a section for participants to write additional thoughts in relation to each domain. The data were analyzed for discussion and to identify trends. The most significant trends were an expressed dissatisfaction with district support in the areas of professional development and curriculum.

Chapter Five restates and outlines the purpose of the research study, the research questions and hypotheses used to guide the study, the limitations encountered during the

course of the study, the methodology utilized, and the results. It also discusses implications for future practice in alternative education and recommendations for further research.

Chapter Five: Summary, Implications, and Recommendations

Aron and Zweig (2003) discussed the challenges at-risk adolescents experienced in the pursuit of their education and how this effected the transformation of alternative education in the United States. In his research on alternative education, Hinds (2013) developed an internal evaluation toolkit to assist districts and program directors in assessing and improving alternative education programs and schools. The NAEA (2014) established an evaluation protocol of alternative education exemplary practices to assist districts in program improvement and performance. Those studies provided the framework and indicators for this mixed-methods study which was to identify and compare program characteristics of three Mid-Missouri alternative programs and determine if a relationship existed between program performance on research-based best practices for alternative education and district performance data in graduation rates, dropout rates, attendance rates, and program Type I, Type II, and Type III.

Data sources for the study included two surveys created to identify program characteristics and determine the level of execution of research-based alternative education best practices. All district data for graduation rates, dropout rates, and attendance rates were extracted from the MODESE data reporting website. The goal of the study was to determine if a relationship existed between the performance of a program in the domains of alternative education best practices and the district data and program type. The following two research questions and two hypotheses provided the direction necessary to complete the study:

Research Question 1. What are the program characteristics of three alternative education programs in reference to the three classifications of alternative education programs, Type I, Type II, and Type III?

Research Question 2. How do three alternative education programs compare when using research-based best practices in the domains of curriculum, assessment, engagement, instruction, leadership, and structures?

Hypothesis 1. There is a relationship between the level of performance in the domains of program best practices and the: district graduation rate, district dropout rate, and district proportional attendance rate.

Hypothesis 2. There is a relationship between the level of performance in the domains of program best practices and the: three classifications of programs the location offers, Type I, Type II, and/or Type III.

This study included a review of the literature surrounding alternative education, starting with a history of alternative education in the United States. It was important to define alternative education and discuss the Type I, Type II, and Type III classifications of alternative education to give clarification for the research questions and hypotheses. Raywid (1998), Hinds (2013) and the NAEA (2014) contributed to the research of evaluating alternative education programs and provided a framework for the study. The literature review concluded with past and current Missouri legislation that addressed alternative education. Research studies focused on best practices and program improvement recommended alternative school and/or program evaluation as a vital means for improving alternative education.

Statement of the Problem

There was a gap in the current research and program guidelines in the state of Missouri on what characteristics are defined as effective for alternative education programs. This research contributed to the body of research in alternative education in the state of Missouri by conducting program analysis using research-based best practices taken from the current research. Aron (2006) explained the need for alternative program evaluation in the study conducted for the U.S. Department of Labor. Aron (2006) identified both the inconsistency in alternative education programs and the lack of state guidelines for alternative education programs. Using current research in alternative education evaluation, this study examined three Mid-Missouri alternative programs and performed analysis for relationships in alternative education best practices and district data.

Review of the Methodology

Researchers in alternative education expressed a lack of data on individual programs and their effectiveness as early as the 1980s. Raywid (1981) discussed the need for data of alternative schools as a necessity to allow for more in-depth research to be conducted. Alternative education was a relatively new research area of education and there were many suggestions for further study. Mills-Walker (2011) suggested an examination of alternative programs by type to determine the effectiveness of different types of programs in assisting students in reaching graduation, which was represented in Hypothesis 1. The same study further suggested that comparing the graduation rates of students in a Type I, Type II, and/or Type III program would assist future programs, which was represented in Hypothesis 2. Ladd (2014) suggested that research on proven

effective characteristics of alternative programs could be added to the body of research and assist future programs, which was represented in Research Question 2. Both Ladd (2014) and Mills-Walker (2011) conducted their research in the state of Missouri, which offered a further connection to the research conducted in this study.

Districts who were eligible to participate contained an independent alternative school that supported students from at least three high schools and were located in the Mid-Missouri region of the state. The requirement of three feeder high schools allowed for a larger student population that was served and alternative schools or programs that operated with more than 10 staff members. The first three districts to grant permission to participate were selected and arrangements for data collection were finalized. The instruments used to collect data for the research project were two original surveys and district graduation, dropout, and attendance data from the MODESE website.

Each of the three research sites were provided with paper copies of the two surveys and personal participation consent forms. Each study site was given a location number after all data were collected. All participation in the surveys was voluntary. Arrangements were made with building leaders for the administration of the surveys and data pick up. The data were analyzed to calculate mean, median, and mode of each question and to identify trends between sites. Next, a search of the MCDS was conducted from the MODESE website to extract data for the three participating districts. The years 2013-2017 were used for all data sets extracted from MODESE. Data on 4-year graduation rate, 5-year graduation rate, dropout rate, and attendance rate were extracted and recorded. Since all district reported data were extracted from the MCDS, the means of determining those rates were independent of district manipulation. The

same state mandated formulas were used for all district calculations within the state of Missouri.

The study required qualitative and quantitative data analysis to answer the research questions and conduct PPMCC analyses for the hypotheses. It was determined that including an element of qualitative research in the study would provide important and relevant insight on the six research-based best practices in alternative education. After each section of the Likert survey, participants were given the space and opportunity to expand on their thoughts concerning the domain elements. Data provided from those response sections were grouped two ways for analysis, by site location and by best practices domain. This study analyzed two types of quantitative data, the Likert scale survey of performance of the six domains of research-based best practices for alternative education and the program characteristics survey to determine the types of programs offered at each research site. Research Question 1 required an analysis of the data in the administrator survey on program characteristics in comparison to the three types of alternative programs, Type I, Type II, and Type III. Research Question 2 required an analysis of the certified and noncertified alternative program evaluation survey. The Likert survey focused on the six domains of research-based alternative program best practices. This study tested for a relationship between the level of performance in the domains of program best practices and program type and district graduation, attendance, and dropout rate and a relationship between the level of performance in the domains of program best practices and Type I, Type II, and Type III alternative programs. Because the analysis used would determine if a relationship existed, a PPMCC analysis was chosen as the primary method for analyzing the data in response to hypotheses questions

1 and 2. A Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient test was selected to analyze each data set to determine if a relationship existed from year to year.

Summary of Results

The study collected qualitative and quantitative data for analysis. Two research questions and two hypotheses were used to guide the direction of the study. Research Question 1 used data from the administrative program characteristics survey to analyze each research site and used the data to determine the presence of Type I, Type II, and/or Type III programs at each location. Type I programs offered full time, multi-year options for students unsuccessful in the traditional educational setting. The program provided all the credits necessary for a student to graduate and was usually a placement until graduation. The program often included an application process and was voluntary (Raywid, 1994). Survey questions 11through 13 identified the presence of a Type I program. With a majority of positive responses on the survey, location 1, location 2, and location 3 contained a Type I program.

Type II programs focused on discipline, and served to separate, contain, and rehabilitate or reform a student. The program was typically involuntary, with placement usually assigned by a hearing officer or the student's school of origin. Program attendance was for a specific time period and did not assist in graduation (Raywid, 1994). Survey questions 14 through 19 identified the presence of a Type II program. With a majority of positive responses on the survey, location 1, location 2, and location 3 contained a Type II program.

Type III programs focused on social/emotional health and provided short-term therapeutic support for students that experienced difficulty finding success in a traditional

school setting. These short-term programs were not designed to graduate the student and were voluntary in nature. With a majority of positive responses on the survey, only location 1 contained a Type III program.

Two themes emerged from the data collected for Research Question 1. The first theme was the continued development of a Type III program at each research site. Only location one was classified as housing a Type III program with a four out of six response on the survey. Location 1 was in the implementation stage of the remaining characteristics. Locations 2 and 3 were not classified as housing a Type III program. Each location was in the planning and development or implementation stage for all of the Type III program characteristics. The second theme that emerged from the data was the 100% implementation of the Type II program characteristics at all three sites. Type II programs focused on isolation and separation of behavior problem students from the rest of the student population. Raywid (1994) stated that treating the causes that often defined a student as at-risk was imperative to break the cycle. All three locations contained the restrictive elements to contain at-risk students but were in the development and implementations stages of elements that would assist students in breaking the cycle of being considered at-risk.

Research Question 2 used data from the Likert survey to compare the three alternative education programs using the research-based best practices domains of curriculum, assessment, engagement, instruction, leadership, and structures. The quantitative data provided a performance score for each location in the six domains. Five themes emerged from the Likert scale survey once the data were analyzed.

Survey Domain 1 examined curriculum performance at each location. All three locations recorded the lowest response average for statement 3, which asked participants to rate whether instructional expectations were consistent in grade level and subjects between schools in the district. Two of three locations recorded the highest response average for statement 1, which asked participants to rate the level of their involvement in the development, alignment, and implementation process of curriculum at the building level. The first theme emerged when the data surrounding curriculum was analyzed. There was a perceived lack of district support concerning curriculum. This lack of support manifested in two specific areas, the development of curriculum and the implementation. Written responses and survey scores expressed a frustration with the lack of representation from the alternative sites when curriculum was written and developed at the district level. The second area that provided written responses was the implementation of district curriculum. According to responses by participants, alternative sites were required to implement district curriculum without the support needed to make adjustments for the program.

Survey Domain 2 examined assessment performance at each location. Two of three locations recorded the lowest response average for statement 8, which assessed the program's use of assessments to modify curriculum and instruction. Two of the three locations recorded the highest response average for statement 6, which assessed the program's use of multiple assessments to evaluate student learning, instruction, and interventions. The second theme emerged from the data surrounding assessment. There was inconsistency in assessment practices identified in the data. Written responses and survey data revealed two areas of concern, the inconsistent and ineffective use of

assessments and the data provided at the program site. Assessments were used inconsistently at each site, with written responses focused on earning credits or assessing student learning. Written responses referenced the ineffective use of assessments. Programs gave district assessments to meet a requirement but did not use the data to effect student learning or performance.

Survey Domain 3 examined engagement performance at each location. Two of the three locations recorded the highest response average for statement 11, which assessed the student's ability to identify what they need to know, be able to do, and understand their role in the learning process. Two of the three locations recorded the lowest response average for statement 14, which assessed the ability of administrators to encourage and support teachers in maintaining communication with staff and their families. A third theme emerged from the data surrounding engagement. Written responses and survey data revealed the positive teacher/student relationships that promoted active engagement of the students attending the programs. With smaller class sizes and the opportunity for one on one instruction, students actively engaged in their learning and set personal goals.

Theme 4 emerged from the survey data of domain 5, which examined leadership performance at each location. Two of the three locations recorded the lowest response average for statement 24, which assessed if the progress toward the established goals were monitored and publicly reported by school and/or district. All three locations recorded the highest response average for statement 22, which assessed whether the school had focused attention and support for identifying, discussing, and dealing with serious problem areas. Written responses and survey scores ranked leadership as the top

scoring of the six domains. Participants wrote positive responses supporting their building leadership. Building leaders supported staff and cared about student success. Teachers felt building leaders listened to issues and responded in a timely manner. Building leaders cultivated a positive climate and culture in their buildings and earned the loyalty of their staff.

Domains 4 and 6 included specific indicators that evaluated professional development and theme five emerged from the data. Theme 5 addressed the lack of applicable and relevant professional development to support the alternative program staff. Survey Domain 4 examined instruction performance at each location. Two of the three locations recorded the lowest response average for statement 20, which assessed if administrators and teachers used student assessment data to guide professional development of teachers. Two of the three locations recorded the highest response average for statement 18, which assessed the school's ability to provide professional mentoring and professional development opportunities to ensure high levels of quality instruction. Survey domain 6 examined structures performance at each location. It was the only domain that recorded the lowest and highest survey statements the same at all three research locations. The lowest response average was for statement 26, which assessed whether teachers with low performing students had adequate assistance and support. The highest response average was for statement 30, whether the flexibility in the school day/schedule was designed to support student's achievement and success.

In opposition to some of the high scores for indicators on building level professional development, written responses from participants displayed frustration with professional development at the district level. Participants stated alternative location

personnel were not included in the development and writing of professional development at the district level. Participants were frustrated with the lack of representation concerning professional development, representation they felt would allow them to have a voice in how it was developed. As with curriculum, alternative locations were expected to follow district initiatives taught through district level professional development without being part of the development process. Written responses included comments on the relevancy of the professional development provided at the district level and lack of support in implementation of district initiatives that were presented through professional development.

Hypothesis 1 explored if there was a relationship between domain performance and district 4-year graduation, 5-year graduation, dropout, and attendance data. A series of Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient tests was used to determine whether the relationships existed. I rejected the null for all four tests and concluded that there was a relationship between domain performance and 4-year graduation rates, 5-year graduation rates, dropout rates, and attendance rates.

Hypothesis 2 explored if there was a relationship between domain performance and the three classifications the program offers for Type I, Type II, and/or Type III programs. A Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient test was used to determine whether the relationship existed. I rejected the null and concluded that there was a relationship between domain performance and the three classifications the program offers for Type I, Type II, and/or Type III programs.

Implications for Educational Leadership

The most significant results of this study were from the data gathered on the Likert scale survey. Although domain score averages varied from location to location, specific themes surfaced in the study data. The research-based best practice of leadership was the highest averaging domain at each location. Teachers and staff felt supported by their building administration, especially in identifying, discussing, and dealing with serious problem areas at the location. Survey responses indicated that leaders at the alternative sites communicated well with staff, worked as a team to solve problems, and worked with teachers to build a positive climate and culture. Leaders communicated the school vision and mission and staff had an understanding of the program's goals for students. Alternative education leaders could benefit from performing an internal evaluation of their program. Trends in positive data can be useful tools to help develop and nurture a positive building culture and climate. The NAEA's (2014) evaluation tool assessed vision/mission, leadership, and climate and culture as the first three quality indicators when performing an internal program evaluation.

The quantitative and qualitative data collected correlated with the lowest average survey scores. The specific areas of district curriculum and professional development were identified across all three locations as the lowest average scoring items in the study. Teachers and staff expressed a frustration with district curriculum that did not fit into the alternative setting. All three locations recorded Likert averages and written responses that addressed the low performing areas. The qualitative data responses from participants focused on having to adjust, rewrite, and further alter curriculum written at the district level. Teachers expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of representation during the

curriculum writing process and the lack of support from the district level in making adjustments for the alternative sites. The quantitative data collected on the Likert survey aligned with the written responses. District leadership could benefit from a stronger connection and deeper understanding on how decisions with curriculum and instruction will affect the alternative programs in the district. Curriculum design teams could include representatives from the alternative setting. Supports may be necessary to assist alternative program teachers in adjusting district curriculum to suit the format, structure, and needs of the alternative setting. It is possible that the alternative programs and/or schools need a curriculum of their own that reflects the district curriculum and is aligned with state standards. Hinds (2013) listed curriculum as the first best practices domain examined in his evaluation toolkit for alternative programs. A strong, state standards aligned curriculum that supports an alternative setting was essential for the success of an at-risk student population (Hinds, 2013).

Professional development was also rated very low on the Likert survey and received written responses from participants. Participants felt that district level professional development did not represent the alternative setting. Feedback identified a high frustration level within the alternative community with a ‘square peg, round hole’ mentality that left teachers and support staff feeling like they wasted their time in attending the training. A desire to be part of the process in planning professional development was included in the written responses. District leadership could benefit from collecting data on the unique and specific professional development needs of the alternative program. Representation from the alternative site during professional development planning could help identify gaps in application of the district planned

training and its application in an alternative setting. Supports may be necessary to assist alternative program teachers in interpreting the training and applying it in the alternative setting. Exemplary district programs provided professional development that focused specifically on the needs of alternative educators and emphasized the implementation of research-based alternative education practices (NAEA, 2014). The NAEA (2014) included indicators for professional development in their exemplar alternative education practices evaluation document.

The two hypotheses in the study examined whether a relationship existed between performance on research-based best practices domains in alternative education and district data and program type. Although strong relationships were identified when the PPMCC tests were performed, state data reporting procedures made it impossible to conduct testing aligned with the specific locations. The alternative sites in each district were considered programs, not schools. This classification allowed state reported data for students who attended the alternative program to reside with their school of origin. Since the MODESE (2019) did not require districts to include the performance of their alternative program in a district's Missouri School Improvement Plan (MSIP), individual site reporting was not available. State education legislation that required additional coding for students who attended alternative programs could enable external evaluation of the program's performance. The presence of external data could promote internal evaluation of alternative programs with the goal of providing support and allocating district resources to promote growth and improvement. Aron (2006) discussed the lack of available data produced by states and districts on alternative program and school performance. Hinds (2013) created the alternative evaluation toolkit to provide districts

in the state of Oregon with a resource to conduct internal evaluations of their alternative programs.

This study revealed several consistencies among the three research site locations. Although there was a positive commonality in the support of alternative program leadership, there were multiple data points that identified a strong disconnect between the alternative programs and the decision makers at the district level, especially in the areas of curriculum and professional development. In order for alternative education to continue developing to meet the unique needs of our at-risk students, a method of bridging this gap must be found.

Limitations

There were several limitations for the study. The sample came from three alternative programs and may not have represented all alternative programs and/or the population of students attending those schools. This was a limitation because the three districts are a small sample size of the total districts in the area. The sites were chosen based on the size of the district and a minimum number of three traditional high schools that fed into the alternative location. Even though the requirement provided a larger staff at each program location eligible to participate, it was a limitation in that it excluded alternative programs from smaller districts. The districts that participated were selected by the first three responses to the invitation to participate and did not consider demographics, socioeconomics, or other geographic characteristics. This was a limitation in that it may not represent all districts in the Mid-Missouri area and did not allow for comparisons of demographics socioeconomics, or other geographic characteristics. The data collection of the study was confined to 1 calendar school year and only included the

staff currently employed at the alternative site. This was a limitation because prior staff that supported the students were not available to participate. Data for parts of the study were extracted from the MODESE website by district. This was a limitation in the way that districts report data. Individual student results from the alternative programs were not available so both hypotheses analyses were performed using total district data. The study was confined to the Mid-Missouri geographical area and may not represent schools in different areas of the country.

Recommendations for Further Research

After assessing the success of alternative education in the 1990s, Raywid (1990) questioned if future alternative schools and programs would have the ability to meet the challenges of America's at-risk student population. In the earlier period of alternative education research, the lenses of evaluation focused on the short-term goals of improved student behavior, continued academic participation, and attendance. With the introduction of MSIP, accountability measures are more long term and focus on setting goals and tracking results over years, such as graduation rates and student academic performance. Because of this change, intentional focus must be given to the alternative programs that will support the at-risk population of students in reaching these goals.

This study examined the performance of alternative education programs in the research-based best practices using a Likert scale survey. Future studies need to perform a comprehensive program evaluation using a detailed evaluation tool, such as the ones developed by Hinds (2013) or the NAEA (2014). Future studies could also perform evaluations at multiple locations to identify trends in the data. Additionally, since these results identified a relationship in domain performance and district data, future studies

that explore a relationship with the specific alternative education student populations would be beneficial in analyzing the effectiveness of the programs.

Missouri does not include alternative education in their evaluation and reporting format for public education. Since this may not be true of all states, future studies on data reporting and state policies could be beneficial to state legislation in supporting the development and growth of alternative education. Additionally, states identified as having alternative education reporting requirements could be analyzed and/or compared to Missouri to identify if overall performance in the areas of graduation, academics, discipline, and attendance exist. Future research examining federal legislation pertaining to alternative education would also add to the body of work and would be beneficial for educational leaders.

This study identified a significant trend in the lack of alternative curriculum support across all three locations. Future research on alternative education curriculum is needed to provide guidance to district and building leaders. A study that conducted an analysis of curriculum practices and procedures in alternative programs in the state of Missouri would provide districts with usable data to assist in their own curriculum development. Another curriculum study could assess the effectiveness of district curriculum at the alternative site by comparing End of Course exam scores of students who attended the alternative program with those at the traditional schools. Educational leaders would benefit from a study that explored the curriculum development process of a district and how the alternative education program was considered and/or represented throughout the process, including any additional resources or supports that were provided for alternative program implementation.

This study revealed a high level of frustration and disconnect between the district provided professional development and the educators at the alternative program locations. Future studies could identify research-based best practices in professional development for alternative education professionals. Additionally, an evaluation of district practices in providing alternative education specific professional development and training would benefit educational leaders. Since Missouri school districts must include a comprehensive professional development plan in their MSIP, a future study could analyze the plans of a specific geographical area for elements of support for alternative education.

Finally, this study explored a relationship between domain performance in research-based best practices and programs Type I, Type II, and Type III. Future studies could create a detailed evaluation tool districts would use to examine the level of implementation of each program type. A study that explores the relationship between program types and district performance in graduation rate, attendance rate, dropout rate, and academic performance would assist educational leaders in determining which program types might be beneficial to their students. Further research in the area of alternative education will assist educational leaders in making informed decisions when planning, developing, and implementing alternative programs in their district. Ultimately, further research will assist state legislators in planning, developing, and implementing reporting requirements that include the at-risk population of students serviced by alternative education programs.

Conclusion

This mixed-methods study examined the performance of three alternative education programs in Mid-Missouri in the research-based best practices domains for alternative education. The study explored relationships between domain performances and district data and program type. The conceptual framework revealed that research in the area of alternative education focused primarily on the types of programs in existence in the United States and was lacking in the area of what made a program effective. Key researchers in the field, such as Young (1990), Raywid (1994), and Aron (2006), and Hinds (2013), identified a need for program evaluation in alternative education. As the landscape of public education changed, programs that provided for the at-risk student population needed to be highly effective in supporting social, emotional, and academic needs of the students.

This analysis provided performance data on three alternative programs in the areas of curriculum, assessment, engagement, instruction, leadership, and structures. Data trends identified negative participant responses across all three locations in the areas of curriculum and professional development. Teachers and support staff expressed a disconnect between district level decision makers and the implementation of curriculum at the alternative program sites. Alternative educators felt underrepresented throughout the curriculum development process, but stated they were still expected to make the traditional curriculum fit without support from the district level experts. Professional development was viewed as a waste of time and not applicable for alternative program educators, with no attempt from the district to develop, modify, or assist in supporting

quality training that addressed the unique and specific needs of the programs or the at-risk population the programs served.

The data also supported a positive trend in building level leadership for all three locations. Teachers and support staff at all three alternative sites felt supported by their building leadership team. Communication was identified as a positive element and staff had confidence in their leadership team to deal with student concerns, safety issues, and staff relations in a professional and timely manner. Building leaders communicated the vision and mission of the school consistently and supported a positive school culture and climate. Alternative educators at all three locations expressed a feeling of support from building leaders with classroom instruction, which was in opposition with the lack of support for district curriculum that was noted in the prior results.

By performing the PPMCC test, it was determined that statistical relationships existed between domain performance in the research-based best practices for alternative education and district data and program type. This data reinforced the importance of effective alternative education programs in public schools. As district data collection shifted from short term results to long term goals, the focus on alternative education and its purpose changed. While MODESE did not require district reporting for alternative programs in MSIP, the performance of the at-risk students that attended the programs was ultimately included in the district's overall performance results. This increased level of state and federal accountability heightened the need and focus for alternative programs that serve the needs of students who did not find success in a traditional school setting.

This study can serve as a baseline for future research. Districts can use the results from this study to further examine their alternative programs, especially in the areas of

curriculum and professional development. To support the educators at the alternative schools, district leaders must understand their unique needs and provide accordingly. Sufficient resources should be provided and re-evaluated frequently to ensure the success of at-risk students. Finally, the active involvement of state legislators in support of alternative programs will ensure that the work continues to move forward, and the quality of the programs continues to improve. The end result is a greater ability to serve the needs of all students.

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Appendix A – Administrator Survey on Program Characteristics

Please indicate your response in the columns provided. Use the criteria guide below to determine the level of implementation your program has on each element.

Not present: We do not have this element in our program.

Not present but being considered: We are discussing this element, but nothing specific has been developed.

In development, on paper: We have an action plan to add this element to our program.

Implementation in progress but not complete: We are spending money on this element now, i.e. – hiring staff, purchasing materials, building or adding facility requirements.

Fully implemented: This is currently offered in our program.

Please indicate your response to each characteristic by checking the selection that best describes your program.	**Not present**	**Not present but being considered**	**In development on paper**	**Implementation in progress but not complete**	**Fully implemented**
Exists in its own dedicated building					
Exists within a traditional school setting					
Services K-6 grade students					
Services 6-8 grade students					
Services 9-12 grade students					
Full time teachers are present in the school					
Curriculum exists to support alternative students					
Special education students present					
Support for transition to traditional setting					
Provides transportation for all students					
Credit recovery program only					
Voluntary placement is offered					
Program offers alternative paths to earning diploma (Missouri Options, GED, etc.)					
Combination program with credit recovery and suspension students in same location					
Service long term suspension students (90+ days)					
Service short term suspension students (-90 days)					
Students placed for behavioral issues					
Students placed for truancy issues					
Involuntary placement is present					
Character/behavioral education present					
Drug/substance abuse treatment offered					
Emotional/physical abuse treatment offered					
Supplemental counseling is available					
State/county support for families is available					
Students placed for emotional/social issues					

Appendix B – Certified and Non-Certified Alternative Program Evaluation Survey

Evaluate each statement by circling your response. Please add additional comments in each section.	**Strongly Disagree**	**Disagree**	**Neutral**	**Agree**	**Strongly Agree**
1. Teachers in our school are involved in a process to develop/align curriculum to determine what students need to know, understand and able to do.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Instruction is aligned with the expectations of the district and state i.e. diploma, essential skills, performance tasks.	1	2	3	4	5
3. The classroom instruction at other schools in the grade level or subject have similar expectations for student performance.	1	2	3	4	5
4. There is a process for monitoring, evaluating, and revising curriculum to ensure successful student transitions.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Curriculum practices are aligned with standards, assessment, student outcomes.	1	2	3	4	5
Additional Comments:					
6. Program uses multiple assessments to evaluate learning, instruction, and interventions.	1	2	3	4	5
7. The teachers practice data-based decision making to effect student learning.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Program uses the results of assessments to modify curriculum and instruction.	1	2	3	4	5
9. The program establishes classroom and school goals of assessment literacy.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Those involved in the process of teaching and learning regularly use student, classroom, and program data in the decision-making process.	1	2	3	4	5
Additional Comments:					
11. Students are able to identify what they need to know, be able to do, and understand their role in the process of learning.	1	2	3	4	5
12. Teachers are able to identify what they need to teach and what the students need to know, be able to do, and understand their role in the process of learning.	1	2	3	4	5
13. Students participate in self-directed learning, know where to get help if needed.	1	2	3	4	5

14. Administrators encourage and support teachers in maintaining communication with staff and their families.	1	2	3	4	5
15. School policies, programs, and organization engage students and their families as active partners with the school.	1	2	3	4	5
Additional Comments:					
16. The school provides time for teachers to meet regularly to review curriculum and information about how students are doing and plan RTI.	1	2	3	4	5
17. The school administration/teachers are continually monitoring classroom instruction to ensure that there is alignment with state and local standards.	1	2	3	4	5
18. The school is providing professional mentoring and professional development opportunities to ensure high levels of quality instruction.	1	2	3	4	5
19. Administrators provide targeted interventions for low-performing teachers in using research-based instruction that is aligned with state and local assessments.	1	2	3	4	5
20. Administrators and teachers use student assessment data to guide professional development of teachers	1	2	3	4	5
Additional Comments:					
21. School has a vision and mission that is supported by teachers and administrators.	1	2	3	4	5
22. The school has focused attention and support for identifying, discussing, and dealing with serious problem areas.	1	2	3	4	5
23. Systemic efforts are in place to monitor, evaluate, and sustain student achievement progress.	1	2	3	4	5
24. Progress toward the established goals are monitored and publicly reported by school and/or district.	1	2	3	4	5
25. The leadership team works with teachers and staff to ensure climate and culture of the building is supported.	1	2	3	4	5
Additional Comments:					
26. Teachers with low-performing students' have adequate assistance and support.	1	2	3	4	5

27. There are professional mentors or other ongoing classroom supports that are intended to ensure high levels of student achievement.	1	2	3	4	5
28. The school provides effective transition for students between grades, schools, work, and/or post-secondary education.	1	2	3	4	5
29. There are academic and behavioral systems with other state and regional services to support students and their families with both formal and informal interventions.	1	2	3	4	5
30. A flexibility in the school day/schedule is designed to support students achievement and success.	1	2	3	4	5
Additional Comments:					