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A study of the impact on academic grades, attendance, and suspension behaviors of students referred to an alternative school in a suburban community.

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**A Study of the Impact on Academic Grades,  
Attendance, and Suspension Behaviors of  
Students Referred to an Alternative School  
in a Suburban Community**

A Dissertation Presented

by

HENRY W. PERRIN, JR.

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

May, 1987

School of Education

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Dean - Mario D. Fantini

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ABSTRACT

A STUDY OF THE IMPACT ON ACADEMIC GRADES,  
ATTENDANCE, AND SUSPENSION BEHAVIORS OF STUDENTS  
REFERRED TO AN ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL IN A SUBURBAN  
COMMUNITY

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Many students in traditional high school settings are failing. These young men and women have failing academic grades, behavioral difficulties, and lack of ability to conform to guidelines in the high school environment. During the 1950-1960's if a student had poor attendance, failed academically, or was an extreme behavior problem, that person would probably become a school dropout. In the mid 1970's, with the development of Chapter 766 in Massachusetts and United States Public Law 94-142, the special education systems began to look at alternatives to provide programs for failing students that would be cost effective and be offered within the school system rather than pay tuitions for these students at private facilities. The students were those with poor behavior, attendance, and failing grades. These students often had average to above



average intelligence. This study analyzed the performance of students before, during and after attending an alternative high school in a suburban community in Massachusetts.

The purpose of this study was to examine the development of an alternative high school and the impact the program has had on students that have been referred to the school because of truancy, academic failure, and poor socialization skills. The study examined how a change in educational placement to an alternative setting can affect school performance.

The researcher reviewed students' records from the traditional high school up to their enrollment at the alternative school. Records of their performance at the alternative school after one year of attendance were analyzed. The students completed a questionnaire that identified components of the alternative school that had an effect on their attendance, behavior, and grades.

This study identified the components of an alternative school that had positive effects on students' grades, attendance and suspension behaviors. Significant gains were made in all areas.

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## C H A P T E R I

### Introduction

Alternative education has been advocated as a means for preventing violence, vandalism, and destruction in the schools. However, it is important to recognize that truancy, absenteeism, drug abuse, the dropout rate, basic skill deficiencies are usually only the obvious manifestations of larger more generalized problems. The causes are complex and frequently difficult to overcome. Approaches to these problems must have a broad perspective in order to meet the needs of the varied school population.

Fantini believes that our present educational system is more a creature of historical accident than sound educational planning.<sup>1</sup> Today our schools are openly accused of failing to account for individual differences, promoting conformity, and stifling creativity, rather than stimulating learning environments that give children an opportunity for critical thinking, problem solving, and creative behavior.

### Background

Alternative Education also has been advocated as a means for preventing juvenile delinquency. The argument has been that non-traditional educational programs tailored to the needs of students whose

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<sup>1</sup> Mario D. Fantini, Alternative Education: Source Book for Parents, Teachers, Students and Administrators, (New York: Doubleday, 1976) 21.

educational careers have been marked by academic failure and/or conflict, denoted by disruptive behavior and thereby forestall delinquent behavior.<sup>2</sup>

In the early 1970's school crime and violence was brought to the attention of the public by the hearings of the Senate Subcommittee to Investigate Elementary, Secondary and Vocational Education. In releasing the preliminary report of the Senate Subcommittee, Senator Birch Bayh (1977) commented that a survey of public elementary and secondary schools had produced a "ledger of violence confronting our schools that reads like a casualty list from a war zone or a vice squad annual report". The relatively sudden appearance of a crime problem of this apparent magnitude and seriousness caught most Americans by surprise. The knowledge and experience necessary to determine the causes of school crime or to design effective prevention programs needed to be developed. School administrators had few guidelines for attempting to deal with what many of them viewed as the foremost problem of the nation's schools.

To provide security measures that have as the primary focus the reduction of violence, vandalism, and disruptive behavior in the schools, the manifestation of the problem, without addressing the school related reasons underlying the behavior will at best be only partially effective

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<sup>2</sup> Martin Gold, "Scholastic Experiences, Self Esteem and Delinquent Behavior: A Theory for Alternative School", Crime and Delinquency, 24, (July 78): 290-308

and at worst a breach of professional responsibility to provide students the opportunity for success and fulfillment. Consequently, alternative educational programs are seen, as subsequent literature will show, as one way to revitalize the curriculum and the school environment. This implies that a broad conceptualization of alternative education is required to meet the varying needs of students who are not experiencing success in schools. These are students who may be deprived of the opportunity for success and fulfillment in the regular school setting, but who might benefit from a small alternative school with an environment that can be more sensitive to their needs than is a larger, less personal school. Alternative education needs approaches that seek solutions to the reasons associated with school disruption and failure rather than serve as curtailment of the symptoms. It must not be a strategy of reaction and containment, but rather one of professional deliberation and concern.

It should be noted that alternative programs have also been developed to meet the needs of gifted or special needs students. The programs are not all developed for failing students.

This study will present the development and effects of an alternative educational program in a suburban community which served adolescents that have failed academically and behaviorally.

### I. Statement of the Problem

Many students in traditional high school settings are failing. These young men and women have failing academic grades, behavioral difficulties, and lack the ability to conform to guidelines that lead to



success in the high school environment. This type of student detracts from the mainstream education for other young adults. Many of these students become dropouts as a result of their non-conformity.

Today's family structure and attitudes toward education has an effect on students' performance in school. Students have rights that require a public education be provided for them until they are twenty-two years of age or receive a high school diploma. During the 1950's-1960's if a student had poor attendance, failed academically, or was an extreme behavior problem, that person would probably become a school dropout.

In the mid 1970's with the development of Ch. 766, and P.L. 94-142 the special education laws, students and parents gained additional rights. An evaluation is conducted to determine why a student is not able to achieve passing grades, attend school on a regular basis, or behave properly. At the conclusion of an evaluation, a team decision is made to determine an appropriate educational program for the student. The result of this team decision could mean placement in a facility costing somewhere between \$6,000-\$25,000 per year.

School systems began to look at alternatives to provide for these students. Programs began to be developed that had a different structure than a traditional high school. The alternative programs addressed the changes in attitude toward school and home situations that these students represent. The students in need of these adjusted programs often came from environments that did not provide relationships that are needed to develop self-confidence, proper discipline, determination, or respect for



oneself and others.

Alternative educational programs are able to change the institutional atmosphere of traditional schools to a more "family oriented structure". Staff to student ratio is lower and the interpersonal dynamics between student and teacher become more of a counselor/friend relationship providing the student with a dimension of intimacy that is often absent from their life. Students are supervised in a close manner with a clearly defined code of discipline eliminating the "lost in the crowd" syndrome that affects thousands of adolescents in a high school setting.

The problem is that there is a lack of studies that discuss the effects of an alternative program and the components that have been developed to make the program successful. This paper will identify the components and measure the changes in three performance areas (academic grades, attendance, suspension behaviors).

"Since 1969, probably 100,000 students have been enrolled in alternative schools. Many of these schools come and go so quickly and they leave few physical traces of their brief existence".<sup>3</sup> In the early 1980's, Massachusetts passed a limited Taxation law known as proposition 2 1/2 that reduced school budgets drastically. Many public school communities began to establish alternative schools during this time because it was significantly less expensive than providing financial

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<sup>3</sup> Michael Barkhurst, A Study of the Diffusion Practices of Alternative Schools in the New England Area, diss., University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA, 1977

support to send students with behavioral and academic difficulties to private programs when they could not be educated in the traditional school.

In the southern suburbs of Boston, Massachusetts there were at least eight alternative schools in operation at the time of this study.

### Purpose of Study

In recent years, alternative education has been developing into a common form of schooling in many communities. These schools were designed to enroll acting out, truant, learning disabled, or emotionally unstable students. Specifically, the students were those with extreme behavioral and academic problems that cannot meet with success in the traditional high school. This researcher was involved with the development of an alternative high school in a suburban community during the impact years of Proposition 2 1/2. This writer was the director of this program from September 1981 until December 1984.

Alternative schools have been developing for more than ten years. Many have come and gone. There is a need for alternative programs to provide for today's young people who are failing and to relieve the high school of disruptive students that interfere with the learning process of students that are able to conform to the guidelines of traditional schools.

The purpose of this study was to examine an alternative high school in a suburban community and the impact this program has had on students' attendance, academic grades and behavior. What changes have

occurred for students with a history of failing, poor attendance, and behavior disturbance? Did the program provide conditions that made learning possible for these students that did not exist in the mainstream high school?

The thrust of this study was to statistically measure increases and decreases in particular observable behaviors that have an impact on students that had failed in a traditional high school. The study will examine how a change in educational placement to an alternative setting could affect school performance. The study will focus on three key areas necessary for success in school

1. Attendance - Will students in the alternative program attend classes 80% of the time?
2. Academic Grades - Will students maintain 70% average in all major subjects?
3. Suspension Behavior - Will students not be suspended for misbehavior more than one time each quarter?

Students referred to the alternative program had demonstrated that they were functioning below acceptable levels in at least two of the three categories. The researcher in this study was to identify the changes that occur, analyze the data, and determine what factors within the school had an influence on these behavior changes. Quarterly progress reports and personal interviews were used to measure behavior changes.

When a student was accepted to the program the only option available was to withdraw from school or fail.

An objective of this study was to determine if the alternative educational program in a suburban community in Massachusetts provided the necessary stimulus to alter observable behaviors that were causing students to fail in the traditional school. Attendance, grades, and acting out behaviors were the observable behaviors considered. The study also documented graduates, successful transfers and dropouts.

Techniques used to improve behaviors were reviewed and critiqued. The Level System (see appendix) A, a behavioral contract followed by each student was considered as a method that had an affect on students' actions. The study assessed behavior pattern changes in students that were observable and measurable. Through a questionnaire, students identified what components of the alternative school had an impact on their school performance.

### The Significance of Study

The significance of this study was to determine what value an alternative educational program could have for a community that is trying to provide education to students with poor attendance, behavior problems, and failing academic grades. The study may help educators that are currently involved with alternative education to evaluate the effectiveness of their programs. Educators may find value in analyzing the program and its impact on students. The study identifies components of an alternative program that have led to positive performance. The study identifies the number of people enrolled in the program, the



changes in their performance, and what the students are doing with their lives. The data obtained provides documentation that an appropriate change in school placement can keep a student in school and help the student to achieve success rather than fail.

The results of the study may provide school officials or community members with a comprehensive analysis of the impact of an existing alternative program on students with behavioral and academic difficulties.

Alternative educational models must be available to those interested in such programs because the initial stages of development can be crucial to the success of the program.

In summary, the results of this study may be of value to any educational organization that is considering the development of a program to meet the individual needs of students in their community with behavioral and academic difficulties that cannot succeed in the traditional setting. The study provides readers with clearly identified changes in behavior, academic grades and attendance as well as identifying the components that influenced the changes. The study focuses on the first three years of the program. Behavioral changes are analyzed and documented in the specific areas of attendance, behaviors resulting in suspension, and academic performance. Students in the program have demonstrated absenteeism at 50% or greater and/or have been suspended more than ten days per semester (two quarters) in the traditional school. The students in the study have failed (below 50%) in two or more major

subject areas in the mainstream program. The study documents the positive changes and describes why this change in placement improved attendance, behavior, and academic performance.

### Research Propositions

Students that are referred to the alternative school for poor attendance, failing grades, or acting out behaviors that result in suspension will improve their performance in those areas. Students who attend the school will:

1. attend classes eighty percent of the days in session.
2. maintain a 70% average in all major subject areas.
3. not be suspended for misbehavior more than one time in each quarter.

This researcher reviewed academic records of twenty randomly selected students before, during and after their attendance to the alternative school. These records will document the changes, if any, in the three areas. Students were interviewed to identify the components of the alternative school that they believe to be responsible for helping them to make changes in their grades, attendance and behavior.

Secondary questionnaires were distributed to teachers and other alternative programs for comparative and supportive data or general information about alternative schools.

### Clarification and Delimitation

A. Assumptions - It is assumed that there exists a need for an



alternative education program to meet the needs of adolescents that are unable to succeed in a traditional high school.

It is assumed that local school committees provide the funding source for alternative schools.

It is understood that the purpose of the program being studied in this paper is to provide a program for adolescents that have not been able to succeed in a traditional high school. The three major areas of difficulty for these students are behavior, academic grades and attendance.

It is assumed that all students that enter the program have experienced failure at a traditional high school and will be evaluated under Massachusetts Chapter 766 regulations before their acceptance to the school.

B. Scope of this project - Twenty students were randomly selected from sixty-five students that have attended the alternative school between 1981-1984. The students will be in grades 9-12 at the Alternative High School. The students age in range form 14 to 22. The study will identify changes in attendance, grades and suspension behavior in students when they transfer to the alternative school from a traditional school.

## Definition of Terms

Alternative Schools - Generally recognized as a school of 5 to 30 students which is designed to enroll students with severe emotional, behavioral, or academic problems.

Chapter 766 - A Massachusetts law that demands individualized education for students age 3 to 21 if they are physically, emotionally, or academically impaired. This law meets or exceeds the requirements of P.L. 94-142.

Core Evaluation - The process used to determine special needs. The team consists of a Special Educator, School Psychologist, Principal, nurse, regular education teacher, parent, and the student if of age. The team develops a diagnostic evaluation, determines if there are special needs to be addressed, and makes recommendations to the parent and students for approval.

Emotionally Disturbed - A child that is unable to function effectively because of emotional difficulties that are related to home, school, peer, or genetic background.

Learning Disabled Child - usually of average or above average intelligence, but has impaired visual or auditory processing or producing ability.

Level System - A system developed by a group of educators at an

alternative school known as "Reach High". The system was modified and amended to meet the needs of the Alternative High School in this study.

National Alternative Schools Program (NASP) - An organization that was located at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. The organization has completed research on alternative education. NASP does not exist at this time.

P.L. 94-142 - The federal law that provides rights to the handicapped. The major features of the law are: 1) a free appropriate education must be provided for all handicapped, 2) school systems must provide safeguards to protect the rights of the handicapped, 3) handicapped children must be educated with non-handicapped children to the maximum extent possible, 4) an individualized educational program (IEP) must be developed and implemented for each handicapped child, and 5) parents of handicapped children are to play an active role in the process used to make any educational decision about their child.

#### The Alternative High School 1981-1984

The Alternative High School in this study was a community of 25 students of 14-21 years of age, 15 of them boys, 10 girls. The school, established by the Administrator of Special Education of this suburban school district, was in its fourth year, preceded by REACH, a collaborative program serving youths of several towns. As a student in a School Psychology program this researcher was asked by the

Administrator of Special Education to set up curriculum, schedule, supply, and coordinate the development of and operate the new program. This writer was involved with teaching, psychodiagnostic techniques, and administrative functions for the Alternative Program. There were five staff members: one male head teacher, two male regular teachers, one female special needs/home economics teacher, and a half time female adjustment counselor. The school's four rooms and two offices occupied most of the first floor of the small building shared by a 14 student carpentry program at one end of the same floor and a building maintenance program of 12 to 15 boys in the building. The students were at the alternative school for the general reason of their inability to succeed in the mainstream schools due to behavioral and/or academic problems. Chief among the purposes of the program was the preparation of students for return to regular high school.

The building and location were important to the program's ability to change inappropriate behaviors. The group had nearly exclusive use of its area, with only occasional interaction, mostly friendly, with the boys in the carpentry program. The room arrangement enhanced the sense that it was the alternative students' own building; the area at the front steps was sided by two end extension of the building, with a "yard" effect created by the opposite wide stairway to the windowless walls of the fairly new junior high school, at the top of which steps was the large gymnasium used daily by the alternative program. Behind and below the Alternative High School building was a playing field for fall and spring



sports. The four rooms used by the students are off a wide corridor, each facing south or west, with many large windows. The home economics room ("Snack Shack") had a particular appeal due to the twice daily baking by students, pastries and juice for resale, occasional student-prepared dinners, and a friendly, assertive, caring young female teacher. Two fish tanks were also housed there. A second room was popular as the weight-lifting center, directed by a strong male teacher, a former wrestler and football player, also a staff member who related to students out of strength, authority, and personal interest. At the opposite end of the area, next to the carpentry room, were the small offices of the head teacher and counselor. Both are frequented by students at first in the morning for an informal talk, and again during sixth period art, a popular subject directed by the counselor-art teacher. With a small enrollment, a small building, frequent smoking periods, and fairly open privileges at moving from room to room to lavatories, the situation and facilities lent themselves to enhancing a sense of belonging, and probably a diminished resistance to the obligation of attending school.

The program was an academic program with an emphasis on behavioral change. Course requirements included English, Math, Social Studies, Science, Physical Education, health Education, Home Economics, Art and other electives. Each student had an individualized educational plan, and had substantial individual attention in classes of two to ten members. The curriculum had been designed to fit the objective of the student's return to the regular high school. Though a good deal of

coaxing or coercion is needed with a number of students, and some refuse to work at times, the academic course requirements are satisfied to a degree, fitting the make-up of the group. Cooking, Art and Gym, however, are much more popular and participated in more willingly than other classes, with few exceptions. The staff's attitudes, methods, and style seem to accommodate realistically the attitudes, needs, interests, and limitations of the students so that there is a blend of the academic with practical skills and social learning that fits the group.

In addition to individual teacher assistance, quizzes, tests, grades, and other traditional reinforcements, achievement was strengthened by the student's weekly to monthly work plan designed and recorded by students and teacher, a strategy that allowed greater student input into learning programs and eliminated a considerable amount of resistance to a more tightly controlled teacher dominated system. Approximately one third of the students were self-motivated, wanting to work and achieve good grades; one third worked fairly well with teacher encouragement or supervision; and one third demonstrated substantial resistance to classwork. Most of these students, however, were interested in graduating, a motive which strengthened their efforts and concern especially near the end of each term. They also took seriously their attendance, since nine unexcused absences meant automatic failure in all courses for the term.

The disciplinary plan was laid out and administered by the level system, a one-to-ten point achievement program that students can ascend



or descend on a daily basis depending on behavior each day, with "raises" requested and voted at school meeting at the close of the day, and "drops" administered by staff or level 10 students for various misbehaviors on the 18 wall charts in the meeting room. Most students seemed to be aware of their rank, approach with some pride or self-respect the issue being raised, and take offense at being dropped. Reasons for being dropped included verbal disrespect toward teachers, skipping or leaving a class, smoking in the building, offensive language, stealing, and damaging school property. While the system seemed to capture student interest and positively affect behavior patterns, it is not clear as to its effects on behavior change. It seems that the degree of seriousness with which a student approached the system was in accordance with his or her make-up. Some demonstrate a sensitivity that suggests strong self-respect; others appeared to be superficial and temporary in their concern about their position on the step system. With most or all however, the method of behavior influence seemed to be important to student membership in the community, to the group's well being as a whole, and to the staff's rapport with and influence on students. There was still a need for suspension for more serious offenses: pot smoking, possession or distribution of drugs, verbal abuse toward teachers, and other serious violations of school standards. Suspensions, administered by the head teacher, were reported to the Administrator of Special Education and subject to his review. The system offered various privileges according to levels, the one of most concern being smoking at level 4 and above; the

highest tangible reward was dinner at a restaurant with the special education administrator after being on level ten for ten consecutive days.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### Historical Antecedents

The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature that covers the historical developments of alternative education as well as the current programs in operation and how they compare to the program in this study.

Schooling in early American times was optional. Several options were available. The children could learn at home, attend a public school, or private academy. The public schools themselves were originally alternatives. They emerged in the early nineteenth century as another form of schooling for students whose parents could afford them the luxury of not working. Thus, not only were they alternatives to the then existing diverse forms of schools, but they were also alternatives to child labor in the mills, apprenticeship programs or wandering in the streets. To avoid a dual system threatened by the academies, public schools were extended to high schools to prepare students for college as well as to offer terminal education for those not going to college. Under this system students were allowed to enter at the lower level and progress as far as their abilities would take them. From the time of the founding of the colonies in the 17th century to the revolutionary

war in the 18th century, American education resembled European patterns.<sup>1</sup> The educational approach of the colonial period was initially a carry-over from European practices that were modified during this period to meet the conditions of colonial society and religious beliefs.

From the middle of the 18th century the growth of towns and commerce and the rise of a strong middle class created demands for new types of educational institutions to meet the practical needs of the people who were going into trade and commerce.<sup>2</sup> English schools began to replace the Latin schools with an emphasis on English, languages, mathematics, navigation, surveying, bookkeeping, geography, history, music and the arts.

The founding fathers believed that all people needed to be educated for their responsibilities as citizens for a democracy. This led to the development of a system of common schools that were free universal, and an alternative for all, as opposed to European Common schools which were for the common people. These schools were publicly supported and controlled.

#### Methods 1800-1945

While additional subject matter was introduced in the new schools, methods remained much the same. Children wrote on slates, memorized written material, and recited aloud to the teacher. Strict discipline and stern punishment were the rule.

Alternative forms of education began to be developed around 1925.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert L. Church, Education in the United States: An Interpretive History, (New York: MacMillan Pub. Co., 1976) 72

<sup>2</sup> Church, 84.

Alternative at the time did not mean a school for acting out adolescents, but an alternative from traditional rote learning, recitals, and memorization.

The monitorial or Lancasterian system came into use as one alternative method.<sup>3</sup>

The Lancaster Plan. John L. Lancaster proposed to educate Boston's poor children through the use of monitors in teaching specific lessons to young students in groups. At the same time, the practice arose of dividing children into classes according to their age. Over the years this assembly line-like corporate model was to be expanded into a monolithic public school system covering the entire United States. This system stressed uniformity, punctuality, attention and silence. Class size at times were as low as 22 or as high as 200.<sup>4</sup>

#### Individualized Instruction

As a reaction to the Lancasterian uniformity a movement for individual instruction developed under the direction of the Superintendent of Schools in Pueblo, Colorado. P.W. Search observed that children differ so much that the class system and all existing types of text books must be abandoned. Each child in his schools during the 1890's was to be given the chance to proceed at his or her own rate.

The Winnetka Plan. The Winnetka Plan, initiated by C.W. Washburne, abolished the ordinary recitation and rigid time table to learn specific skills.

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<sup>3</sup> Agnes DeLima, Our Enemy the Child (N.Y.: New Republic, 1925). 65-77.

<sup>4</sup> DeLima, 78-82.



Reading, writing and arithmetic were taught by the individual method. Objectives were written for each subject. Practice books were prepared for language, history, arithmetic and geography. In using self-instructional materials the child tested himself and progressed to the next educational step in that subject area. Half of each day, part of the morning and part of the afternoon, was devoted to creative group activities. This work was not strictly related to individual academic work and yet was considered by the school personnel to be more important than the individual work. The Winnetka plan eliminated non-promotion. Results of statistical study indicated an increase of efficiency, a savings of one or two hours daily and a savings of from one to three years in eight.

The Dalton Plan. Helen Parkhurst devised a system of individualized instruction that abolished recitation in Dalton, Massachusetts. Except for certain group activities, students worked entirely as individuals. Each child was free to cover the required lesson at his or her own pace. Coldwell (1924) questioned the Winnetka and Dalton plans. He believed that individual work without group interaction and discussion led to rigidity in pupils.

The Work-Study-Play Idea. Dewey (1915) in Schools of Tomorrow, drew nation-wide attention to the work, study, play idea of William Wirt. He thought that the school day and year should be lengthened to provide constructive activities at work and play to substitute for the time children had spent on street corners in activities that were detrimental to their moral character. Two or three hours was all that was required to spend on formal subjects. Teachers were helpers, leaders, and friends of children, not



checkers and faultfinders. Dewey believed that in such a system where opportunities existed for reproducing life situations or progressive experiences, real thinking took place, rather than being thwarted as in the traditional classroom with its rows of desks, silence, and authoritarian teacher.<sup>5</sup>

### Child-Centered Schools 1900-1950

The theory of progressive schools, as one alternative to traditional education held that the natural impulses of the child are creative, that given proper materials and the opportunity to use them, the child will develop powers and abilities not suspected before this time. The children should not be allowed to run wild, but should be given the opportunity to express themselves. Following are three concepts that were present in the progressive child centered schools.

1. Healthy Minds in Healthy Bodies. Young children learn through the use of their bodies. Schools must provide activities to teach the mind, Dewey equates this idea to Rousseau's proposition that the education of the young child rests largely on whether he is allowed to "develop naturally".

2. Learning by Doing. The children must have activities which have educative content, that is, which reproduce the conditions of real life. This holds true whether they are studying history, doing problems in arithmetic, or working in a shop.

3. Motivation through the Child's Interests. Another point that most of

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<sup>5</sup> John Dewey, Evelyn Dewey, Schools of Tomorrow (N.Y. : E.P. Dutton, 1915) 54-65.

the child centered reformers (in essence, advocates of alternative education) was the attempt to find work of interest for the pupils, a departure from the traditional way of looking at school work. The attempt is not to make all the child's tasks interesting by entertainment, but to select tasks that they need to learn. The tasks that arise curiosity in children are often the activities that must be learned. In selecting work for any group of children, it should be chosen from that group of things in the child's environment which is arousing his curiosity and interest at the time. The pupil presented with a problem, the solution to which will give him an immediate sense of accomplishment and satisfied curiosity, will concentrate all his powers to the work; the end itself will furnish the stimulus necessary to carry him through the drudgery.<sup>6</sup>

#### Development of Alternatives During the 1950's-1960's

In the fifties and sixties a profusion of literature appeared pertaining to the deficiencies in the nation's public system of education. The literature included critical analyses aimed at all aspects of schooling, personal accounts of schooling within conventional and unconventional settings, and theoretical suggestions on how to alter the system. Some educators, aware of deficiencies in their own schools, became pioneers in the new "alternative" education movement.

Philadelphia's Parkway Program (1969), Berkley's Community High School (1969) and Chicago's Public High School for Metropolitan Studies

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<sup>6</sup>John Dewey, Evelyn Dewey, Schools of Tomorrow (N.Y. : E.P. Dutton, 1915) 67.

(1970) were initiated by persons anxious to explore educational alternatives.<sup>7</sup>

These three schools are viewed as mainsprings of what has come to be known as the alternative school movement " Since then, numbers of similar schools have appeared... schools that are called "open schools," multicultural schools", and "free schools". Since 1969 probably 100,000 students have been enrolled in alternative programs.<sup>8</sup>

### Summary

Alternative education is not a new phenomenon. During the colonial period in America, children of the poor received only the rudiments of reading, writing, and arithmetic. The children of the wealthy usually were tutored at home or sent to a private school. As a merchant class evolved, English schools were started to prepare the students to go into business or industry.

Enrollment in schools expanded rapidly. Different plans evolved as educators sought ways to improve the education of the children. Motivation of the children to learn was encouraged through learning by doing, in areas of interest by the students.

After the Civil War church groups sought to educate the free slaves. This movement grew into the founding of the common schools, which were to be

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<sup>7</sup> Mario D. Fantini, Alternative Education: Source Book for Parents, Teachers, Students, and Administrators, (New York: Doubleday, 1976) 92-94.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Barkhurst, A Study of the Diffusion Practices of Alternative Schools in the New England Area, diss., (University of Massachusetts, Amherst, 1977).

common to all students, not for the common people, as the European common schools had been. Segregated schools for whites and blacks in the South led to poor school and unequal educational opportunities for the black.

Until compulsory education laws were passed, the majority of the children received only elementary education. William Wirt in Gary, Indiana sought to keep the children off the streets and to overcome the demoralizing influence of modern city life on children by keeping them in school longer. Wirt devised the work-study play ideas, combining academics, vocational studies, and play. As education sought to make the learning activities in high school more interesting enrollment in high school increased (Collings, 1925).

The civil rights movement of the 60's brought boycotts of public schools by parents, teachers and communities. Freedom schools were established in storefronts and church basements to continue the education of black children.

Free schools, open education and counter culture schools were started by affluent innovators. The workers viewed public schools as repressive, authoritarian institutions which locked working class and minority group children into the same patterns of repression suffered by their parents. These educators sought to use methods which would alleviate the harm done in oppressive public schools to the students integrity and self esteem.

The schools were not designed specifically to deal with disruptive students as the school that is analyzed in this paper. However, many of the students were deficient in the basic skills of reading, mathematics, communication, and social studies. Weakness in these areas leads to failure in school, poor



self image, and eventual dropout. The alternative schools at first focused on improving these basic skills, and some eventually stressed preparation for college.

Compulsory school attendance laws leave students little or no choice about attending school. The existence of choice for its citizens is important to the American culture. Alternative schools provide a choice of a different program to students and parents. As years went by, and the individual demands of alternative schools changed, the concept of schools serving the alienated, behaviorally maladjusted student began to emerge. For a student who cannot learn in the regimented public school, an alternative public school becomes extremely important. This is particularly true for the student who cannot go outside the public school system to obtain the needed choice.

The more recent alternative concept, a school that meets the individual needs of students, is characterized by an air of discipline, but the students do not perceive it as the same sort of discipline they experience at the traditional school. Order in alternative schools comes from having staff who can relate well with the students. The schools have a sense of democracy and choice. An emphasis is on basic skill development and commitment to the needs of the individual differs from the mood of the dominant high school culture.

Alternative education permits:

1. Individually planned instructional programs to provide education of each individual according to his/her needs.



2. Different school organizational patterns to accommodate diversity.
3. Flexibility and creativity in teaching.<sup>9</sup>
4. Students to express themselves freely, learn self-control, initiative and responsibility.
5. Teachers to be helpers, leaders, and friends of students.
6. A small school atmosphere which is informal, warm, friendly, personal, and non-competitive.<sup>10</sup>
7. A program of relevant field trips and social activities to enhance the academic program and help build group cohesiveness, cooperation and loyalty.<sup>11</sup>
8. Parental interest, involvement, and support.<sup>12</sup>
9. Activities that use healthy bodies, and muscular skills to teach the mind general intelligence.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> John C. Holt, How Children Fail, (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1971) 15-30.

<sup>10</sup> Mario D. Fantini, Public Schools of Choice: A Plan for the Reform of American Education, (New York: Simon & Shuster, 1973) 60-62.

<sup>11</sup> Agnes DeLima, Our Enemy the Child (New York: New Republic, 1925) 60-62.

<sup>12</sup> John Dewey, The School and Society, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1915) 27.

<sup>13</sup> Ellis Evans, Contemporary Influence in Early Childhood Education, (New York: Rinehart and Winstanley, 1975). 21-30.

10. Activities which reproduce the conditions of real life to help the students understand the facts which he learns and help to develop standard of judgement and comparisons.<sup>14</sup>

### Contemporary Concept

In the previous section it was shown that, as the public school movement was supported by compulsory education laws, there also emerged attempts to change the system. These attempts brought about alternatives in education. The progressive movement of the thirties was an early reform movement that caused many of its ideas through the writings of John Dewey and the eight year study of the commission of the Relation of School and College. (Aiken 1942) Another group of reformers has re-emphasized that children learn as individuals and in different ways. The society, the family, the peer group, the media, and other institutions are responsible for education, as well as the school.<sup>15</sup> During the 1960's, educators were criticized because schools had shortcomings and limitations which sometimes prevented them from achieving their goals for all children.

Since 1970, at least a dozen national reports have recommended the development of optional public schools and the creation of alternative learning programs.

The 1973 Gallup Poll of Attitudes Toward Education indicated that more

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<sup>14</sup> George Dennison, The Lives of Children. (New York: Random House, 1973) 65-80.

<sup>15</sup> Mario Fantini, Alternative Education: Source Book for Parents, Teachers, Students, and Administrators, (New York: Doubleday, 1976) 114.

than 60% of parents and 80% of professional educators responding favored the establishment of alternative public schools for students who are not interested in, or bored with, the usual kind of education. The Ford Foundation Report on alternative schools, *Matters of Choice*, concluded that alternatives were necessary and could work educationally.<sup>16</sup> Their development depended on the initiative of individual schools systems rather than upon external assistance.

A National School Boards Association (NSBA) survey revealed that, of a representative survey, 28% of member school systems had alternative schools in operation. Among large school systems, those districts with more than 25,000 students, 66% had alternative schools in operation. The NSBA concluded that the alternative concept is an important part of the program in many school districts and its significance is growing.<sup>17</sup>

The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) estimated for the 1978-79 school year the following statistics:

1. At least one in three of the nation's 16,000 public school systems will have one or more alternative schools in operation.
2. Among the smallest school districts, those with fewer than 600 students, one in five will have an alternative school.
3. In districts with over 25,000 students, 80% will have one or more alternative schools.

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<sup>16</sup> Ford Foundation, *Matters of Choice: A Report on Alternative Education*, (New York: Ford Foundation, 1974).

<sup>17</sup> National School Boards Association, *Discipline in Our Big City Schools: A Report* (Washington 1977).

4. More alternative schools will be found at the high school level than in schools that serve lower grades.
5. More than 10,000 alternative schools are in operation today.<sup>18</sup>

### Classification System

Mario Fantini has classified many of the efforts currently being made by teachers, parents, students, and administrators in order to develop ways of educating the pluralistic student body. His classifications include: classroom alternatives, schools within schools, separate alternative public schools, systems of alternative schools, multi-cultural schools, community schools, schools without walls, and skills training schools.<sup>19</sup> Fantini also stated that these schools should provide choice, be significantly different, and involve parents and the local community, have their own location and not be more expensive than traditional programs.

Glatthorn delineated three types of alternative programs. The first, which he called "schools", are separate, different and have an autonomous budget. These schools range from the more radical free schools to the conservative such as the military academies or career schools. Second are "programs", which are part of an existing school's instruction and budget. Third are "paths", which exist for individual students to enable them to do

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<sup>18</sup> Stephen K. Bailey, *Disruption in Urban Public Schools*. National Association of Secondary School Principals, (Washington, D.C. (1978) 49-50.

<sup>19</sup> Mario D. Fantini, *Public Schools of Choice: A Plan for the Reform of American Education* (New York: Simon & Simon, 1973). 67-70.



something as an alternative away from school. These might include work, college television courses, or independent study.<sup>20</sup>

Still another useful classification is that of Smith, Barr and Burke who classify alternative schools by their particular emphasis on: instruction, curriculum, resources or facilities, special clients, or administration and organization.

While these schools represent a wide array of educational diversity, they are all characterized by at least four general factors.<sup>21</sup>

1. All are public schools.
2. All are available to students and teachers on the basis of choice.
3. All have educational programs that are distinctly different from comprehensive schools in the district.
4. All have a comprehensive set of learning objectives.<sup>22</sup>

From Haworth and Curriculum Report, the following characteristics are suggested:

1. Lower than average enrollment.
2. Fewer special facilities, (eg. gyms, laboratories, cafeterias, etc.)

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<sup>20</sup> Allen A. Glatthorn, Alternatives in Education: Schools and Programs (New York: Dudd, Mead & Co., 1975) 15-19.

<sup>21</sup> Vernon H. Smith, Robert Barr, & Daniel Burke, Alternatives in Education: Freedom to Choose (Bloomington, IN: Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation, 1976) 26-32.

<sup>22</sup> Smith, Burke, Barr, 44.



3. Lower pupil teacher ratios.
4. Cost levels comparable to conventional schools because of the lack of expensive auxiliary facilities
5. House apart from the regular program in a separate building, annex or wing of a public school.
6. Use of non-traditional instructors such as community volunteers, parents, and non-certified personnel
7. Are significantly different from their conventional counterparts in curriculum and instructional practices.
8. Strive for greater involvement of staff and students in decision making.
9. More flexible and therefore more responsive to evaluation and change.
10. Tend to make more use of community resources and facilities.
11. Usually have a commitment to be more responsive to some community needs than conventional schools.
12. Are usually smaller schools with enrollment between 25-400.<sup>23</sup>

### Location of Facilities

The physical location of alternative programs is an issue which must be addressed. Critics of alternative schools have charged that those alternatives physically isolated from traditional schools simply provide a means for getting rid of disruptive students.

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<sup>23</sup> William Haworth, "Are Alternative High Schools Really So Different?" National Association of Secondary School Principals Bulletin 60 (1976): 95-98.

Arguments can be presented for and against the location of an alternative program. Separate alternative schools may fail to prepare young people to deal with the bureaucratic institutions with which they must cope in the larger society, may limit the potential for mainstreaming, and may track students to low status futures.<sup>24</sup>

Positive and negative results have been reported for alternative programs within the traditional schools. (Holmes and Bernier 1978) At this point, there is not significant evidence to recommend one location or type of facility over another. Consideration should be given to the strengths and weaknesses of various sites in planning alternative programs.

The opportunities are endless. An unused schoolhouse, old storefront, church basement, or designated area within a school are all possibilities to be considered. When determining the appropriate location the availability of auxiliary areas should be considered. Is there a gymnasium, cafeteria, and ball field available for use? If there is a need for alternative programming in a community, an appropriate space can be prepared.

#### E. Curriculum Considerations

The Core Curriculum - The core curriculum is built around a team of teachers working with a group of students in a large block of time each day, studying a general area. The students study curriculum either alone or in small groups, independent projects relating to the central theme and then

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<sup>24</sup> Paul Willis, Learning to Labor, (Farnborough, England, Saxon House, 1977) 7-16.

meet in larger groups to relate their individual experiences to the overall project.<sup>25</sup> A core curriculum design facilitates staff cooperation, is flexible in terms of time, encourages the use of community resources, and helps to integrate the different subjects. Difficulties with a core course design are that students with short attention spans complain about the long blocks of time and become bored with the same teachers.<sup>26</sup>

Affective Learning - Affective learning approaches emphasize feeling, processes, decision making skills, communications skills, conflict resolution skills, and clarification of individual values. In all areas of the school's program, efforts are made to relate cognitive with the affective. Small group activities such as role playing, simulation, unstructured discussion, and improvisational drama are used extensively.<sup>27</sup> These small group approaches tend to personalize the learning and to help the students find connection with their own experiences. According to Barr, these approaches have shown promise for improving student's attitudes toward school, increasing attendance records, decreasing disruption and suspension rates, and decreasing school violence and vandalism. Warm relationships between students and teachers must be combined with a classroom orientation toward cognitive skill development and academic achievement if the goal of

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<sup>25</sup> Albert Oliver, Curriculum Improvement, (New York: Harper & Row, 1977) 114-116.

<sup>26</sup> Allan A. Glatthorn, Alternatives in Education: Schools and Programs (New York: Dudd, Mead & Co., 1975) 61-70.

<sup>27</sup> Glatthorn, 72.

academic success and delinquency prevention are to be achieved. Over-emphasis on any single learning approach leads eventually to boredom.

Basic Learning Skills - The teaching of the basic learning skills of reading, writing and basic arithmetic are stressed in the student's academic program. These courses are taught when the student shows a deficiency in these areas on an appropriate diagnostic test. The reading course would stress comprehension and word attack skills: the writing course would emphasize expressive and basic writing skills and basic computational and practical application of math concepts would be covered. Other courses would stress higher level skills in each of these areas.<sup>28</sup> The basic skill courses should be completely individualized beginning at an appropriate level and progressing to the next level of competing as the student is capable: immediate positive feedback and/or remedial assistance.

#### F. Staff

Administrative Structure - The leadership structure of an alternative high school will be affected by the size of the unit, relationship with other schools, and local district practices. Gotham reported that the large autonomous alternative schools usually have a full time director or coordinator. Some use the title of principal, director, or head teacher. The director may teach, counsel, provide leadership, develop curriculum, handle public relations, arrange bus schedules, and handle correspondence along with other

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<sup>28</sup> Allan A. Glatthorn, Alternatives in Education: Schools and Programs (New York: Dudd, Mead & Co., 1975) 76.



responsibilities. Glatthorn reported that regardless of the type of administrative structure, most alternative school people agree that some type of on-site administration is necessary. The following factors are crucial in effective administration of an alternative school:<sup>29</sup>

1. Full time - The job is complicated and demanding because of the unique population.
2. On-site - The remote leader loses influence and gets out of touch.
3. Autonomous - Accountability is possible only if authority is clear and unambiguous.

Strong leadership, consistency, and fairness appear to be more important than a particular administrative structure. The school administrator must encourage implementation of educational approaches which lead to academic success for students, establish a climate of respect for students and establish fair and consistent discipline procedures.<sup>30</sup>

### Teacher Characteristics

Promoting caring relationships between teachers and students is valuable in preventing juvenile delinquency. The National Institute of Education's (NIE) Violent Schools Safe Schools study reported that the less students value their teachers' opinions, the greater amount of violence will exist in the

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<sup>29</sup> Glatthorn, 78.

<sup>30</sup> William R. Houston, Leonard Marshall, and Henry Freiborch Staff Development for Alternative Schools: (Texas, University of Houston, College of Education, 1977) 40-58.



schools.<sup>31</sup> Arnove and Strout identified teachers as important elements in the success of alternative schools.<sup>32</sup> A combination of genuine interest in working with troubled students, patience, and determination, flexibility, adaptability to different students are more important than special training.<sup>33</sup>

### Counseling

Numerous alternative programs include specialized services such as casework and counseling. The counselor becomes an advocate for the student. A counselor may individually counsel students, meet students in small groups, teach a class of health or art. It is clearly not your typical situation. Teachers may act as counselor for students. The general atmosphere becomes therapeutic. In the program, the approach to counseling is through individual and small group sessions with an emphasis on Reality Therapy.

### Planning

Research indicates that the following factors are crucial in developing and planning an alternative high school.

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<sup>31</sup> National Institute of Education - Violent Schools, Safe Schools. The Safe School Study Report to the Congress (vol.I) M.R. Asnev and J. Broschart, (Eds.) Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1978.

<sup>32</sup> Robert Arnove, Richard Strout, Alternative Schools for Disruptive Youth, a paper prepared for the National Institute of Education, (September, 1978) 15-22.

<sup>33</sup> Martin Gold, "Scholastic Experiences, Self-Esteem, and Delinquent Behavior: A Theory for Alternative Schools", Crime and Delinquency, 24, (7-1978): 290-308.

1. Location - May be within or separate from a traditional school. Consider all options.
2. Flexibility - Teacher attitudes, scheduling, government.
3. Values - Effective learning approaches and value clarification - may be used to help improve students' attitudes towards school.
4. Structure - Even though flexibility is important, a clear cut structure should be evident.
5. Basic Learning Skills - Students should learn basic competencies in reading, writing, and math be ascending to meet individual needs.
6. Individualize - Learning programs should be tailored to meet individual needs.
7. Administration - A full-time administrator should be present. This person may be involved with teaching and other responsibilities, but will be on-site.
8. Counseling - Therapy will be provided by a counselor on a regular basis as well as through the natural therapeutic relationship of a low student/teacher ratio.
9. In service training will be provided.
10. Involvement - Students, parents, teachers and administrators will be involved in the decision making.
11. Limits- will be clearly defined.
12. Recruitment - will allow for selection of prospective students who are interested in being involved in the alternative school.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Robert Arnowe, Richard Strout, Alternative Schools for Disruptive Youth, a paper prepared for the National Institute of Education, (September, 1978) 24.

The research discussed has described the historical development of alternative education, the characteristics of alternative schools, and recommendations for development of an alternative program. The following sections of the review of the literature identifies various program strengths and components that helped to make them successful.

In subsequent chapters this author will compare the program in this study to the findings of the research and conclude to the effectiveness of the program in relation to academics, behavior and attendance.

#### H. Program Reviews

Research indicates that there is a need for alternative educational programs for students who are not able to conform to the traditional high school regulations. Many educators have sought out methods and strategies for evaluating the effectiveness of alternative schools. This researcher has reviewed several authors' studies regarding alternative programs and compared their perspectives with those of the alternative school in this study. Through a review of the research, questionnaires, and personal interviews the final result is a comprehensive study of what makes alternative schools work for troubled students and the changes that occur in the students' educational performance. A document that would help any school system. Considering the development of of an alternative program.

In one study (Duke, Perry 1978) several points of interest were described that make alternative schools appealing to certain populations. The surveys conducted in this article support the concept of alternative education. The authors concluded by demonstrating that alternative programs improve

the quality of regular education programs by removing students that distract the learning of others. An alternative school eliminates many of the confronting factors that elicit inappropriate behaviors leading toward a more productive form of education. The authors state that from data collection through questionnaire, interview, and observations at 18 alternative programs in California that behavior problems are much less a concern than when these students were in the traditional school setting. The study also concluded that behavior problems in the alternative schools were fewer in number and qualitatively less severe.

The study by Duke and Perry in 1978 supports this researcher's belief that a change in the structure of a student's educational program can affect their behavior. Certain students need the closeness of a small school and clearly defined regulations that are supervised by staff members that are aware of their needs.<sup>35</sup>

Students that are in alternative programs have a more positive self-image, higher regard for staff, a better chance of graduating, and perceive these programs as being the most effective part of their educational years.<sup>36</sup>

Mr. Silverman set out to answer the question: Can students that have a very limited chance of passing high school because of home conflicts, drug

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<sup>35</sup> Daniel L. Duke, Cheryl Perry, "Can Alternative Schools Succeed Where B. Spock, S. Agnew, and B.F. Skinner Have Failed?", Adolescence, 51 (Fall 1978): 375-392.

<sup>36</sup> Stuart Silverman, "Project Focus: A Program for the Alienated", Clearinghouse, vol. 52, (October, 1978): 65-77.



involvement, crime history, learning disabilities, truancy records, or behavioral disorders be given a different approach to high school and succeed? Stuart Silverman's question helps this researcher consider some philosophical and pertinent questions 1. Is it worthwhile to have alternative high schools? 2. Is it fair to offer programs for these students when we do not offer academically talented programs any longer because of budget reductions? 3. Do alternative programs help these students in the long range? 4. Do they help the regular schools? This writer's dissertation will demonstrate that the answer is yes to each of these questions.

In Mr. Silverman's study, 75 students in a program known as: Project Focus - A Program for the Alienated were asked to write a statement of his/her perception of where they were, where they are now, and where they see themselves going in the future. The parents of the subjects were asked to respond to similar points of interest. The results of the survey were that the students had a much more positive self-image. They had a higher regard for school and staff and 905 of the students of these students supported the project. They described their sons and daughters as having improved attitudes about home, school, and themselves. The author concluded by saying, that students who had a very little if any chance of graduating high school could graduate if given the right opportunity. The opportunities and arrangements necessary for success based on Mr. Silverman's research are:

1. Identify the failing area(s).
2. Develop a staff that can relate to the students as psychological equals.



3. Create a positive family like atmosphere to foster positive self-esteem in students.

The narrative reports of the people involved in this study clearly indicated a significant change in behavior and attitude.

Several studies identify the importance of alternative programs because they improve: attendance, attitudes, graduation statistics, and the regular educational programs in a community.

Marlene Strathe (1979) studied an alternative school which was staffed by a local school district. The students were divided into two groups. One group being a secondary school age group with a mean age of 16.5. The other group was a junior high age level with a mean age of 15. There was an 8 to 1 student to teacher ratio. Students in this program were pre-and post tested with the Coopersmith Self-esteem Inventory. A table was presented that summarized the means, values between groups. Results from the analysis of the SEI indicated significant change at the .05 level for the younger group, but not for the older.

According to Ms. Strathe's study, early adolescent students in alternative programs show significant change in their attitude toward themselves while older students do not.<sup>37</sup> This lends support to the alternative school program as a self enhancing experience for younger students. It appears to prove less valuable as a vehicle for self concept change for older students.

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<sup>37</sup> Marlene Strathe, "The Effects of an Alternative School on Adolescent Self Esteem", Adolescent, vol. XIV, no. 53, (Spring 1979): 185-189.

One case study (Malmberg 1983) of a rural alternative school showed that when alienated youths were given the opportunity and support, they tend to show significant growth in academics and social rehabilitation. Students in this study were destined to drop out of school. Through individualized instruction, reward systems, low student adult ratio, caring teachers, student involvement in decision making, and vocational oriented tasks, many of these students successfully finish high school without disrupting conventional schools.

A research report by Wedman in 1983, concluded that the affective goals subscribed to by many of the alternative school programs do have positive effects on student's attitudes toward school, self, and others, but there is no relationship between measured attitudes and reading improvement.<sup>38</sup> This writer feels that the conclusions of this study are important. However, consideration must be given to the fact that when self-image and overall attitudes improve the student will then be able to learn at a better rate. When there are serious emotional disturbances present in a student's personality, it is difficult and often impossible to make educational progress. These issues must be resolved, at least in part, in order to participate in the learning process in an active, positive manner. Many students referred to an alternative educational program have had years of frustration, let downs, poor experiences with school, difficult home life, and

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<sup>38</sup> Judy Wedman, "Attitudes and Reading Achievement of Students in an Alternative High School", Reading Psychology, vol. 2, no. 2,(1983):121-127.

overall negative life experiences. If a change in school program can reach them and alter some of these poor self images and attitudes there may be a positive change in learning style. In Mr. Wedman's report the change in attitude noted is crucial. Even though the correlation between reading and attitude was not recognized within that report, this writer believes that with time, individualized instruction and patience, most students will begin to show gains in their basic levels of functioning.

Concerned researchers have completed studies which evaluate alternative educational programs. These studies focused on the adequacy of alternative educational programs. In Johnston's report, a traditional evaluation was applied to an alternative school concept. Results indicated that an alternative educational program can withstand and should welcome evaluation.<sup>39</sup> Through proper evaluation procedures, a school's credibility may be enhanced.

John Hoyle's research report described the methodological difficulty of evaluating alternative programs in specific measurable terms. Mr. Hoyle's study focused on a program in Oxford, Ohio. He attempted to develop a model for evaluating alternative schools. The following evaluation procedures were selected:

1. Attendance and grades prior to and during the two semesters of the project year.

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<sup>39</sup> David L. Johnston, "Walden II An Alternative High School Services Evaluation", Phi Delta Kappa, vol. 56, no. 9, (May 1975): 624-628.

2. Two sets of pre-tests and post-tests questionnaires administered to twenty-five students and parents.
3. Four sets of open ended questionnaires filled out by students, parents, community agencies, and teacher advisors at the end of the project year.
4. Nine week anecdotal reports by the students.
5. Spot check interviews with students, parents and community agencies.<sup>40</sup>

Janet Gardner concluded in her study that students who had previously experienced failure in schools with traditional setting and had poor attitudes toward school could make significant academic achievement in an alternative school program and could develop more positive feeling about school.<sup>41</sup>

Michael Barkhurst and W.C. Wolf are two researchers that have been involved in alternative education. Dr. Barkhurst completed his dissertation study in alternative education at the University of Massachusetts. In their article, Public Alternative School Proliferation, the development of alternative schools is discussed. "Since 1969, probably 100,000 students have been enrolled in such alternative schools. many of these schools come and go so quickly, and they leave few physical traces of their brief existence."

"Staff of the National Alternative Schools program (NASP), housed at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst , have offered the only example of

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<sup>40</sup> John R. Hoyle, "Evaluating an Alternative High School Program: A Beginning Research Repor" Journal Announcement (June 1976): 22.

<sup>41</sup> Janet Gardner, "Evaluation of an Alternative High School", Reading Improvement, vol. 14, no 401, (1976): 95-98.



a comprehensive empirically based survey of alternative schools." (U of Mass 1975) The report by this organization focused on data related to school, staff, and student characteristics. The report did not establish cause-effect bonds based upon the data. This school is no longer in existence.

Topics such as school initiation and existence or strategies that lead toward successful alternative programs are not identified and described. With the absence of such information, interested educators are not able to explain to concerned citizens why alternative schools succeed or predict which school out of several will succeed. It is necessary for research to be present that identifies what benefits are offered to students, schools, and society in general by offering alternative educational programs.

The study by the National Alternative Schools Program (NASP) followed a descriptive research design methods which focused on school operations, practices of staff and communication practices. The results of the study described common characteristics of personnel in alternative schools in New England. The following are the characteristics sited in the study:

1. Alternative school directors have been involved in alternative education for about five years.
2. The typical alternative school has been in operation for about four and one-half years.
3. Nearly two-thirds of these schools enroll 100 or fewer students.
4. Enrollment is voluntary in four-fifths of these schools.
5. Most alternative schools are established to serve secondary level students.
6. A per-pupil expenditure of \$1,200 or less characterizes the



budget of more than half of the schools.

7. Students from low and middle socio-economic areas constitute most of the school enrollment

Public alternative schools are generally programs that are developed within a community rather than from external agencies such as the Department of Education. Teacher, parent, and student involvement during the initiation stages seemed to be crucial. Generally, other school staffs, central administrators, and school boards offered support for alternative programs.

In summary, the research study by the University of Massachusetts Team obtained data that indicated that alternative schools are localized operations, small in enrollment, and usually geared toward secondary age students. The schools are usually developed by staff members from the system with a respected established career. The study also identified that once these schools are established there is on going change to problem solve as needed. As the schools develop and mature, their operations become more formalized. An important finding of the study was that school officials do not rely on outside agencies to help them initiate such programs. They are formulated, staffed, and directed by resources by within their own system.

Alternative programs vary from town to town. Even though common characteristics do exist, different programs have utilized key factors that have helped their program become successful. In Grundy, Illinois, the alternative program in that community was able to find success by allowing students to talk about their emotional and behavioral problems during group

meetings found in alternative schools. (Lane et al 1973)

In Ravenna, Ohio, an alternative psychoeducational program was developed for students with severe behavioral problems. The program was conceptualized in terms of intervention with the youth through the utilization of the youth services delivery system within the community. The importance of utilizing and coordination of community resources to develop and maintain an effective alternative program is emphasized. The program demonstrates that public education, community mental health, and other child related social services can collaborate and function cooperatively to create and support comprehensive services for behaviorally impaired. Outcome data on this program's first five years of functioning identified that a majority of eighty students made a successful re-entry into either school or work settings. The point to be considered is that a school program can work cooperatively with other municipal systems to effectively improve students' behavior and academic performance.<sup>42</sup>

The articles researched identify many details that are common to the alternative high school in this study. They support this researcher's opinion that alternatives to the traditional high school setting can provide successful educational experiences for troubled students. Most authors that research alternative schools have had

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<sup>42</sup> Steven M. Neuhaus, "The Cooperative Learning Program: Implementing an Ecological Approach to the Development of Alternative Psychoeducational Programs", Journal of Clinical Child Psychology, vol. 2 (summer 1982): 151-156.

experience with them and appear to want to philosophically and realistically defend their position on the alternative concept. Professionals in alternative education seem to have common personality traits. After working in a program with alienated youths, one begins to question their role as an educator. Articles reviewed support the hypothesis that a change in structure and student/teacher ratio can affect student performance.

Research on alternative education clearly defines the positive attributes this type of programming has on individuals with behavioral and academic difficulties that prohibit them from experiencing success in the traditional high school settings. Subsequent chapters analyze data obtained that measures students' progress in academics, attendance, and behavioral problems. This paper identifies the components of an alternative school in a suburban community and the changes it has had made in student's academic performance, attendance and behavior. The dissertation describes an alternative school, identifies the effects it has had on students' behavior, attendance, and academics, and identifies the major features of the program that have contributed to its success. This paper represents staff and student opinion through interview and questionnaire as well as personal observation during the years as director of the program. The paper will be informative to any school department interested in developing an alternative school or that has one in operation.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

#### A. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine an alternative high school in a suburban community and the impact this program has had on students that have been referred to the school because of truancy, academic failure, and poor behavior skills. What changes have occurred for students with a history of failing, poor attendance, and behavior disturbances? Did the program provide conditions that make learning possible for these that did not exist in the mainstream high school?

The thrust of this study was to statistically measure increases and decreases in particular observable performance areas that have an impact on students that have failed in a traditional high school. The study examined how a change in educational placement to an alternative setting can affect school performance. The study focused on three key areas necessary for success in school.

1. Attendance - Will students in the alternative program attend classes 80% of the time?
2. Academic Grades - Will students maintain a 70% average in all major subjects?



3. Behavior - Will students not be suspended for misbehavior more than one time each quarter?

Students referred to the alternative program have demonstrated that they are functioning below acceptable levels in at least two of the three categories. This study identified the changes that occurred, analyze the data, and determine what factors within the school had an influence on these behavior changes. Quarterly progress reports and personal interviews were used to measure behavior changes.

When a student was accepted to the program the only option available was to withdraw from school or fail. This study provided information if the alternative educational program in the suburban community provided the necessary stimulus to alter observable behaviors that have been the primary cause of students failing in the traditional school. Attendance, grades, and acting out behaviors were the observable behaviors considered. The study also documented graduates, successful transfers and dropouts. What behavior, attendance, or academics had improved by placement in an alternative school? Why? How has the placement in an alternative program affected the students early adulthood?

## B. Research Approach

### 1. Description

This study answered the questions presented in Chapter I through public school and alternative school record review and questionnaire.



The three questions answered were:

1. Will students in the alternative program attend classes 80% of the time?
2. Will students maintain a 70% average in all major subjects?
3. Will students not be suspended for misbehavior more than one time each quarter?

The researcher reviewed students' records from the traditional high school to their enrollment at the alternative school. Records from the alternative school were reviewed during their enrollment at the program and after they had completed one year of study at the school. The students answered questions on a survey that identified the components of the alternative school that had an effect on their performance in the three areas. These two procedures were the primary techniques used to answer the questions.

## 2. Design

The general research model used to fulfill the objectives of this study was Descriptive Research.<sup>1</sup> Qualitative or descriptive research is used to describe and understand a particular situation, event, group of people, or human interactions in depth. This model was chosen because the interest of this writer was in providing educators with a

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<sup>1</sup> Robert C. Bogdan, and Sari Biklin, Qualitative Research for Education: An Introduction to Theory and Methods (Boston: Allyn & Bacon 1982) 20-26

study that would document the changes in students' behaviors, attendance, and academic achievement, when the students are transferred from a traditional high school to an alternative program. The study clearly defined specific changes in student performances as well as identified components of the program that made it successful.

The questions asked in this study were:

1. Will students in the alternative program attend classes 80% of the time?
2. Will students maintain a 70% average in major subjects?
3. Will students not be suspended more than one time in each quarter?

The study identified the changes that occurred in attendance, behavior and academic performance. The components of the program that contributed to these changes are also identified.

### 3. Selection of the Subjects

To answer the fore mentioned questions twenty students out of sixty-five that have attended the program were randomly selected. There was no discrimination in the selection process. The students selected had attended the school for at least one year with the exception of three students. Two that dropped out in the third quarter and one that transferred to the mainstream school after two quarters.

### 4. Instrumentation

The students' academic records from the traditional school were analyzed to determine what their performance was in the three areas

being considered for one year prior to attending the alternative school (academic performance, attendance, behavior). Quarterly report cards were used to document attendance and academic performance.

Cumulative records were used to document suspensions.

The students answered a questionnaire (see appendix B). The purpose of this questionnaire was to identify particular components of the alternative school that prompted change in the behaviors.

The academic records and questionnaire were the primary instruments used to gather data toward answering the questions.

However, secondary questionnaires were sent to traditional high school teachers and alternative school directors. The purpose of this was to gain general knowledge of teacher attitudes toward alternative schools from regular high school staff members. This researcher believed that this perspective would add an important perspective to readers considering the development of an alternative program. The questionnaire sent to the alternative schools in the community provided a comparison to be considered for those interested in developing an alternative school. These were secondary in the study and are presented in a narrative summary rather than with data analysis.

### 5. Field Procedures

Records were reviewed in a confidential manner. The records were obtained from the traditional high school to establish and record the performance of the students before their acceptance to the

alternative school. On going quarterly reports provided comparative documentation.

Students were requested to complete questionnaires. It was strictly voluntary and the students were selected at random. The Human Subject guidelines were followed as approved by the University of Massachusetts. (see appendix C).

### C. Data Collection and Analysis

The questionnaires were administered in conjunction with verbal interview to clarify particular issues. A follow up telephone call was made to communicate with the student or the family to determine what the student is currently doing.

Sixty-five percent of the students referred to the Alternative Program in the sample were absent more than twenty percent of the school year while attending traditional school before they entered the alternative program. Eighty-five percent of the students in the study were failing two or more major subjects before being transferred to the alternative school. Forty-five percent of the students in the study were suspended from school more than six times in the last year that they attended traditional school.

After attending the Alternative High School for a one year period, the students' records indicated the following:

Twenty-five percent of the students or five out of twenty were absent more than twenty percent of the school year. This represents an improvement of forty percent.



Twenty-five percent of the students failed more than two subjects. This was an improvement of sixty percent.

No students were suspended more than six times within a school year. This represented an improvement of forty-five percent.

The three behaviors being identified improved significantly when compared to the performance at the traditional high school.

The following documentation was found by reviewing the records:

1. In traditional school, sixty-five percent of the students in the study were absent more than twenty percent. In the alternative placement, only twenty five percent of the students studied were absent twenty percent or more from school. This is a positive change of forty percent increase in attendance.
2. In traditional school, eighty-five percent of the students in the study failed two or more subjects. In the alternative school, only twenty-five percent of the students failed two or more subjects. This represents an increase of sixty percent.
3. In traditional school, forty percent of the students in the study were suspended six or more times during the school year. At the alternative school, no students were suspended that many times.

The next phase of the study was to survey the students to determine what they believed were the factors of the alternative school that helped to change their academic performance, absentee rate and behavior.

The results of the questionnaire are clearly described in Chapter IV.



## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS OF THE STUDY

#### A. - Overview

The Alternative High School in this study accepted approximately sixty-five students during the period from September 1981 when the doors opened until December 1984 when this researcher left the program. The students were referred to the alternative program because they were failing in the traditional program. Three consistent areas of failure were: absenteeism, grades, and acting out behaviors which resulted in suspension.

The purpose of this study was to examine the development of this suburban Alternative High School and the impact this program had had on students that have been referred to the school because of truancy, academic failure, and poor social and behavioral activities. What changes have occurred for students with a history of failing, poor attendance and behavior disturbances? Does the program provide conditions that make learning possible for these students that did not exist in the mainstream high school?

The thrust of the study was to measure increases and decreases in particular observable behaviors that have an impact on students that have failed in a traditional high school. The study focused on three key behaviors necessary for success in school.

1. Attendance - Students in the alternative program will attend class 80% of the time to be considered successful.
2. Academic Grades - Students will maintain a 70% average in major subjects to be considered successful.
3. Suspension Behavior - Students can not be suspended for misbehavior more than one time each quarter.

Students referred to the alternative program have demonstrated that they are functioning below acceptable levels in at least one of the three categories. The study identified the changes that occurred, and analyzed the data to determine what facets within the school have had an influence on these behavior changes. Quarterly progress reports and an interview questionnaire was used to measure behavior and attitude change.

The focus of this study was to identify the changes in the three behaviors and what features of the alternative program provided the impetus for change.

The intent of this research study was to provide information to future educators, school committees, or concerned citizens considering the development of an alternative school. This writer has provided case study information on individual subjects and described the key components of the program in this study.

In addition to identifying behavior changes in the adolescents that were used in this study, this writer has surveyed other staff and alternative teachers in a general questionnaire to assist other professionals in making recommendations regarding the development

of an alternative school.

### B. - The Students

The students used in this survey were selected at random out of sixty-five students that have attended the Alternative High School during the years 1981-1984. Students surveyed in this study have been selected and questioned in accordance with the Human Subject Guidelines as required by the University of Massachusetts. The format has been submitted and approved by the University Graduate School of Education and appears in the index. (see appendix C)

Following is a brief synopsis of the students' performance at a traditional high school for one year and their performance at the alternative program. Rationale and students opinions of the changes are presented later in the study.

Students are identified by a numerical code. This is to eliminate any possible identity and to maintain confidentiality.

The following information provides the reader with an overview of the randomly selected students for this study. The students' questionnaire responses will be analyzed and explained later in this chapter.

Performance Records - Taken from quarterly reports at the traditional high school and interview data at entry to the Alternative High School.

Student 1. MaleTraditional Placement

Absent- 6% in one year period

Grades - F - five out of six majors

Suspension - Six times in one year period

Alternative Placement Grade 9

Absent- 12% after a one year period

Grades - Passed with 70% or better in 7 out of 7 majors

Suspension - Three times in one year period

This student was in an emotionally disturbed classroom setting for grades 1-6. In grade 7 he was placed in a traditional junior high school with special needs support. His past attendance had been good.

Behavior in class was described as impulsive, hyperactive, and rude.

He made no effort in any classes. His IQ was in the high average range of ability. He was referred to the alternative program because the recommendation of the Core Evaluation Team was that he would not be successful in a traditional school placement. He failed grade 9.

In the alternative school this student responded well to the low student/teacher ratio. His academic performance increased in all major subject areas. The number of suspensions was reduced 50%.

Current Status:

Student 2. MaleTraditional Placement

Absent- 32% in one year period



Grades - F - four out of five majors

Suspension - Zero times in one year period

Alternative Placement Grade 12

Absent- 20% in one year period

Grades - Passed with 70% or better in 4 out of 5 majors

Suspension - One time in one year period

This student transferred from a day program known as REACH. The program in this study was developed in September 1981 as a result of Proposition 2 1/2. It was believed that by opening an alternative program within town that students attending outside district could be served at a savings to the school budget.

This student entered the REACH program in grade 9 after failing two years in grade 8. An administrative decision was made to transfer him to the alternative program in grade 9. His performance in that school was improved. However, he was never a motivated student. He attended school for the amount of time required and did what he had to do to pass his courses.

He entered the alternative program in his senior year. His behavior was extremely immature, but not violent or threatening. He was referred for alcohol counseling during the year which he refused to participate in.

The young man finished the senior year and received his diploma.



Current status:

Student 3. Male

Traditional Placement

Absent- 20% in one year period

Grades - Passed five out of six classes

Suspension - Two + times each term

Alternative Placement Grade 9

Absent- 14% in one year period

Grades - Passed seven out of seven classes

Suspension - Three times in one year period

This student was referred to the alternative school because of consistent misbehavior resulting in suspensions. He had average intelligence and was able to complete all assignments without a great deal of difficulty. He had experienced a very difficult divorce at home which created emotional behaviors in the school environment. This student transferred to the traditional vocational school after spending one year at the alternative placement. He was not able to maintain acceptable grades and behavior. He dropped out of school permanently.

Current Status:

Student 4. Male

Traditional Placement

Absent- 15% in one year period

Grades - Failed five out of six classes

Suspension - Six times in the school year

Alternative Placement Grade 10

Absent- 28% in one year period

Grades - Failed five out of six classes

Suspension - Four times in three terms

This student was not motivated to improve his academic and behavioral performances at all. Several interventional techniques were implemented to no avail. He dropped out of school after three quarters.

Current Status:

Student 5. Male

Traditional Placement

Absent- 50% in one year period

Grades - Failed three out of five classes

Suspension - Zero times in the school year

Alternative Placement Grade 9

Absent- 17% in one year period

Grades - Passed all classes

Suspension - One time during school year

This student adapted to the structured environment of an alternative school. His absenteeism had been the major concern when attending the traditional school. The close relationship of teacher and student at the alternative program provided support and reinforcement necessary to improve attendance, thus bringing failing grades to the

passing range. This young man transferred back to the traditional high school. His attendance was within the acceptable range for two quarters and then he began to lose motivation to attend school on a regular basis. He dropped out of school, took the GED (Graduate Equivalency Diploma) and joined the armed services.

Current Status:

Student 6. Female

Traditional Placement

Absent- 10% in one year period

Grades - Failed five out of five classes

Suspension - Eight times in the school year

Alternative Placement Grade 9

Absent- 20% in one year period

Grades - Passed all classes

Suspension - Four times during school year

This student was extremely aggressive. Consistent acting out behaviors, verbally and physically aggressive behaviors toward staff and students was occurring on a regular basis.

She had a very poor family and staff relationships. As a result, her own self-image was very poor. She was able to complete enough academic work to qualify for passing grades. Her behavior continued to be unacceptable. She became pregnant and left school near the end of the first year at the alternative school. She received home tutoring in order to complete that year. After the baby was born, this student

returned to the school on several occasions for "social" visits. While she had no intentions of returning to school, her general attitude and communication skills had improved tremendously. The staff at the school appeared to be "friends" rather than enemies. She had matured tremendously. She appeared to love the new baby. A frightening concept is that statistics indicate that an abused child is more apt to be an abusive parent. This young woman was so aggressive that this writer is concerned about what type of parenting skills will be acquired and practiced.

Current Status:

Student 7. Female

Traditional Placement

Absent- 70% in one year period

Grades - Incomplete

Suspension - Zero times in the school year

Alternative Placement Grade 11

Absent- 5% in one year period

Grades - Passed all classes

Suspension - Zero times during school year

This student was a school phobia that was placed in psychiatric care for approximately eight months. She was under medication and living in a group care supervised residence when referred to the alternative school

She had a history of severe child abuse (sexual and physical) by



her father and neglected by her mother.

She attended school on a regular basis; attended counseling consistently and achieved above average grades. Emotionally, she was never able to return to the traditional school full-time. However she did take two courses per day at the high school with the mainstream students. This student graduated from high school after spending two very successful years at the alternative school.

Current Status:

Student 8. Female

Traditional Placement

Absent- 60%

Grades - Failed all subjects

Suspension - Zero times

Alternative Placement Grade 9

Absent- 50%

Grades - Failed all subjects

Suspension - Zero times

Alternative Placement did not work for this student. Her grades did not improve because her attendance did not improve. Personal issues related to home situation were too involved for the staff to have an influence. She dropped out of school

Current Status:

Student 9. Female

Traditional Placement

Absent- 65%

Grades - Failed all subjects

Suspension - Zero times

Alternative Placement Grade 12

Absent- 12%

Grades - Passed all subjects

Suspension - One time

The teacher/student ratio at the alternative placement combined with the level system of reward and privileges this student responded positively to the placement. Her attendance improved. Her attitude about school improved. She worked part-time in a nursing home which provided her with an incentive to attend school to become a nurse. She graduated from high school and enrolled in a community college. She did not complete a full year.

Current Status:

Student 10. Female

Traditional Placement

Absent- 18%

Grades - Passing all subjects

Suspension - Six times in two terms

Alternative Placement Grade 11

Absent- 10%

Grades - Passed all subjects

Suspension - Zero times

This student began having personality conflicts with several teachers in the traditional high school during her junior year. She was able to maintain passing grades, however she was destined for failure as the behavioral incidents continued to escalate. At a meeting of administrators, teachers and parents a recommendation was made to transfer to the alternative program before failure occurred. The transfer was appropriate. Through counseling and support from the staff this student became one of the most positive students to ever attend the alternative school. She graduated from the alternative program.

Current Status:

Student 11. Female

Traditional Placement

Absent- 25%

Grades - Failed four out of five subjects

Suspension - Four times in one year

Alternative Placement Grade 10

Absent- 20%

Grades - Passed all subjects

Suspension - Three times in one year

This student was a rebellious adolescent. She defied all authority figures. Even when she enrolled in the alternative program the prognosis was not positive. She had serious conflicts with one male teacher that almost resulted in expulsion. During the summer of her

sophomore year, she took a recreational assistant position with a teacher from the alternative school. When school reopened in the fall, the bond that was formed with that teacher made an effect on the student's performance in school. Her grades and attitude improved. This student was destined for failure. The alternative school concept most definitely turned this student's educational experience into a positive direction. She graduated.

Current Status:

Student 12. Male

Traditional Placement

Absent- 60%

Grades - Failed all subjects

Suspension - Six times in one year

Alternative Placement Grade 10

Absent- 20%

Grades - Passed all subjects

Suspension - Two times

This student was referred to the alternative school because of acting out violence towards students and staff on a regular basis. He was a young man who was very angry and expressed his anger through aggressive violence for the slightest reason. An agreement was established between the traditional high school and this student that that if he attended the alternative school for two quarters with no violence and appropriate attendance he would be considered for re-entry to that



school. In the smaller alternative school setting a focus was made for this student to handle his aggressiveness more appropriately. There was a great deal of progress in his behavior and attendance. He kept his side of the deal. He was transferred to the traditional school at mid-year. He dropped out before the end of the year. He was placed in the House of Correction for six months for assault and battery in an incident not school related.

Current Status:

Student 13. Male

Traditional Placement

Absent- 18%

Grades - Three failures

Suspension - Six times

Alternative Placement Grade 10

Absent- 20%

Grades - Passed all subjects

Suspension - One time

This student had a history of emotional disturbance. He attended special classes for the emotionally disturbed through grade 6. In grade 7 he was placed in junior high school mainstream with special needs support. His behavior became so uncontrollable that he was placed in a residential school for two years. He entered the alternative school in grade 10. The structure of the school provided support and individualized academic programming which was needed. He

completed three years successfully, but never to the point where his performance would have warranted a transfer to the mainstream school program. He graduated from the alternative program.

Current Status:

Student 14. Female

Traditional Placement

Absent- 25%

Grades - Failed all subjects

Suspension - Six times

Alternative Placement Grade 10

Absent- 10%

Grades - Passed all subjects

Suspension - One time

This student had behavioral performance that presented serious problems in the traditional program as well as in the alternative school. Her behavior did improve, but there was drug and alcohol abuse in her life which affected her performance. She was able to maintain status quo. Eventually, she lost interest and dropped out before completing her sophomore year.

Current Status:

Student 15. Male

Traditional Placement

Absent- 10%

Grades - Failed seven out of seven classes

Suspension - Two times

Alternative Placement Grade 10

Absent- 40%

Grades - Failed all subjects

Suspension - One time

This student's attendance got worse when he enrolled at the alternative school. He had no interest or motivation to attend school. He did not respond at all to the structure and programming of the alternative school.

Current Status:

Student 16. Male

Traditional Placement

Absent- 75%

Grades - Failed all subjects

Suspension - Six times

Alternative Placement Grade 10

Absent- 40%

Grades - Failed all subjects

Suspension -One time

This student was school phobic. A bright young man that could not deal with the public school environment. The peer pressure and expectations of an alternative placement were also overwhelming to him. He had been admitted for psychiatric care on two occasions he took medication and received therapy on a regular basis. He dropped

out of the alternative placement.

Current Status:

Student 17. Male

Traditional Placement

Absent- 15%

Grades - Three failures

Suspension - Five times

Alternative Placement Grade 10

Absent- 15%

Grades - Four failures

Suspension - Two times

This student's behavior improved while at the alternative school.

However he did not achieve success academically.

Current Status:

Student 18. Male

Traditional Placement

Absent- 30%

Grades - Four failures

Suspension - Two times

Alternative Placement Grade 9

Absent- 18%

Grades - Passed all subjects

Suspension - Two times

This student did very well at the alternative school. His



attendance improved to acceptable levels. His grades were above average. He had no difficulty meeting academic requirements at the alternative school. This student transferred to the mainstream high school.

Current Status:

Student 19. Female

Traditional Placement

This student refused to attend school. Court involvement resulted in transfer to alternative school.

Alternative Placement Grade 10

Absent- 20%

Grades - Passed all subjects

Suspension - Zero times

This student was very responsive to the alternative school structure. The "family type" atmosphere of smaller classes, a close staff, and a smaller physical plant provided a program that met her needs. She attended the program successfully for two years. During her senior year involvement with a boyfriend led to her leaving school and having a child.

Current Status:

Student 20. Female

Traditional Placement

Refused to attend school.

### Alternative Placement Grade 10

Absent- 30%

Grades - Passed all subjects

Suspension - Zero times

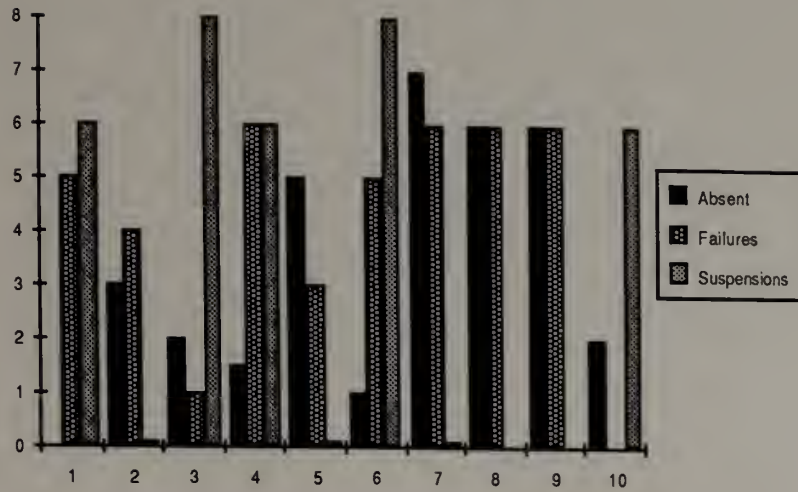
This student was referred to the alternative school through the Department of Social Services. She had been placed in several foster homes which resulted in placement in many schools. She eventually refused to attend. She agreed to attend the alternative school because it was not as difficult to adjust to as a larger school she did quite well. She moved to another foster placement after one school year and attended a traditional high school.

Figures 4.1 and 4.1a represent a summary of the students performance in academics, attendance and behavior at their traditional placement and at the alternative high school.

The purpose of providing the brief individual overview of each student is to provide the reader with a comprehensive summary of a student's prior performance prior to attending the alternative program. The information represents the "typical" referral: failing grades, attendance and behavior that results in suspension from school.

Fig. 4.1

### Traditional Placement-One Year Students 1-10



### Alternative Placement- One Year Students 1-10

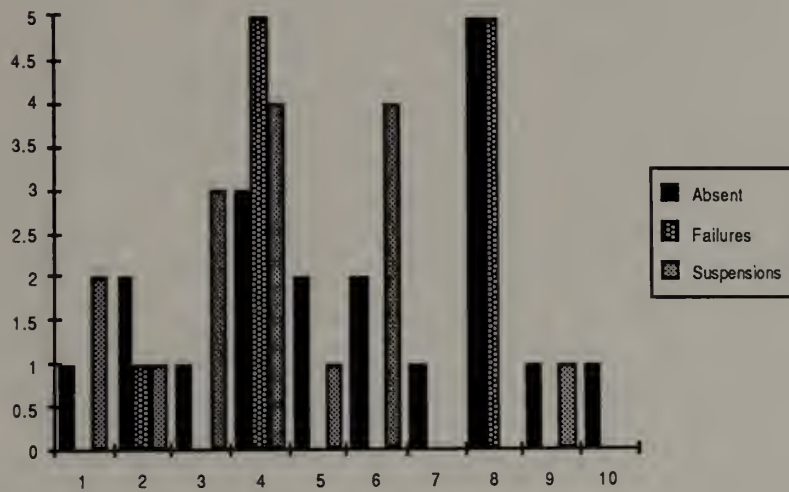
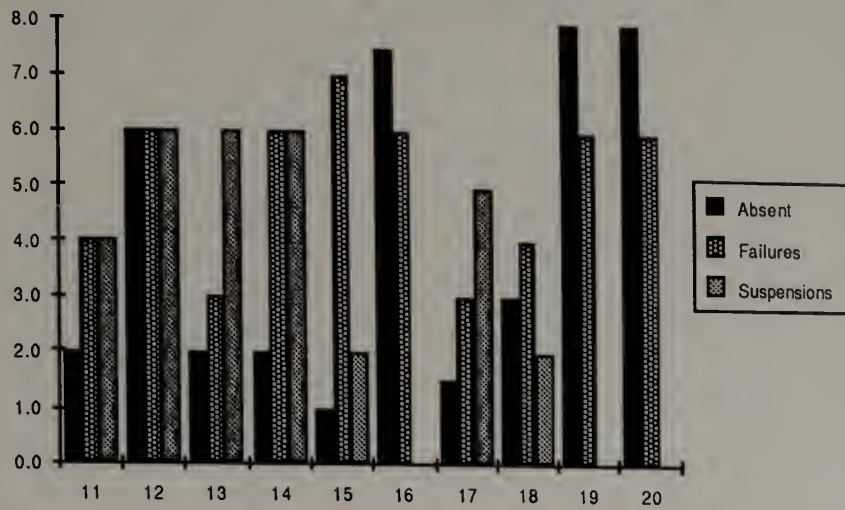
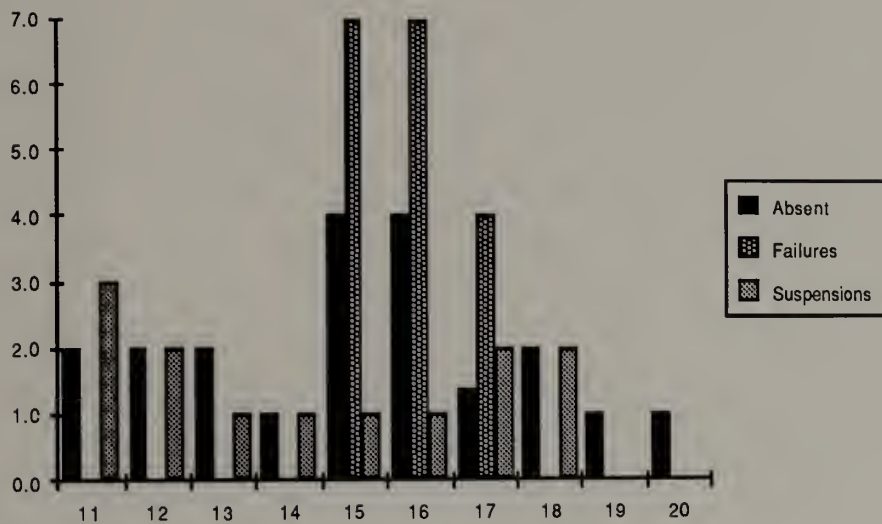


Fig 4.1 a

### Traditional Placement Students 11-20



### Alternative Placement-One Year Students 11-20



### Traditional School Performance

- |    |   |                  |
|----|---|------------------|
| A. | Absent more than 20% of school days in one year                 | 13 out of 20=65% |
| B. | Failure in more than two major subjects                         | 17 out of 20=85% |
| C. | Suspension more than six times in one school year               | 9 out of 20=45%  |
|    | Students that met the criteria in two of the above categories   | 16 out of 20=80% |
|    | Students that met the criteria in three of the above categories | 4 out of 20=20%  |

Sixty-five percent of the students referred to the Alternative High School in the sample were absent more than twenty percent of the school year while attending traditional school before they entered the alternative program.

Eighty-five percent of the students in the study were failing two or more major subjects before being transferred to the alternative school.

Forty-five percent of the students in the study were suspended from school more than six times in the last year that they attended traditional school.

After attending the Alternative High School for a one year period, the students' records indicated the following:

- |    |   |                 |
|----|---|-----------------|
| a. | Absent more than 20% of school days in one year                 | 5 out of 20=25% |
| b. | Failure in more than two major subjects                         | 5 out of 20=25% |
| c. | Suspension more than six times in one school year               | 0 out of 20=0%  |
|    | Students that met the criteria in two of the above categories   | 4 out of 20=20% |
|    | Students that met the criteria in three of the above categories | 0 out of 20=0%  |



### Alternative School Performance

If a student is absent twenty percent of the school days in session without a specific medical or legal excuse he/she will not receive academic credit.

Failure in two or more major subjects also results in failure for the year.

The suspensions incurred during a school year will not necessarily result in failure, but this researcher designated "six suspensions" as the number to indicate a severe enough behavioral concern to warrant consideration for alternative programming.

The records that were reviewed, summarized and displayed on Figures 4.1 and 4.1a lead to the following analysis:

Students are referred to the alternative school because they are failing academic subjects, absent more than 20% of the time and have been suspended on several occasions for various infractions of school rules.

Failure appears to be the leading factor or characteristic of the referred student. What comes first, the behavior or the failure? This researcher assumed that the three observable behaviors being considered were the key factors in the need for developing alternative schools for students that are failing in a traditional school.

After observing the three behaviors by quarterly record keeping it is recognized that changes occurred in a very positive direction in all three areas after transferring to the alternative program.

1. In traditional school, 65% of the students in the study were absent more than 20%. In alternative school, 25% of the students studied missed more than 20% of days in session. A positive change in 40% of the students.
2. In traditional school, 85% of the students in the study failed two or more major subjects. In alternative school 25% of students failed two or more subjects. An increase of 60% improvement in academic performance was identified after attending the alternative school for one year.
3. In the traditional school 40% of the students in the study were suspended six or more times in the school year. At the alternative placement, no students were suspended that many times. This represents an improvement of over 40%. (Please see Figure 4.1)

It appears that we are measuring negative behaviors. Yes, there is measurement in the negative. The changes recognized convert into a positive change in school performance. In all three areas observed (absenteeism, academic failures and suspensions) there were significant gains by fifteen of the twenty students studied.

By reviewing the records prior to acceptance to the alternative school and after the students had attended the alternative school for a one year period, there were obvious measurable differences in the three key behaviors. The graph 4.1 displays these differences. The changes were significant. The next phase of the study was to interview the students to determine what they believed to be the factors at the alternative program that helped to change their academic performance, absenteeism, and behavior.

### Results of the Questionnaire

The students' responses are described narratively and summarized .

The following statements summarize the findings of the questionnaire:

1. The average age of the students referred to the alternative program was 17.
2. Eleven of the randomly selected 20 students were male, nine were female.
3. The average length of attendance at the alternative school was one and a half years.
4. Eighty percent of the students referred to the alternative school were deficient in two of the three performance areas identified as the impetus for requiring placement (attendance, grades and suspension behavior). The remaining twenty percent of students were significantly below the allowed limits in one of the areas.
5. The students described their behavior as follows:
 

Quiet .....	10%
Respectful .....	0%
Rude.....	15%
Disrespectful .....	10%
Unpredictable .....	5%
Short temper .....	25%
Aggressive .....	25%
Passive.....	10%

Many students described their personalities as having short tempers

and aggressive tendencies. Some students viewed themselves as passive and poorly motivated. This researcher observed the students in the alternative school to be of two general personality areas:

Passive/Aggressive. Often the unpredictability and short temper accompany aggressive behaviors. Poor motivations and solitude are associated with the passive behaviors.

6. Forty percent of the students interviewed had been suspended at least six times during their last year at the traditional high school.

7. None of the students interviewed were suspended six times or more during one year the the alternative school.

8. Forty to 50% of the students interviewed were referred to the alternative school because their behavior resulted in suspension and led to failure. Sixty-five percent of the students believed that their behavior improved while attending the alternative program. When asked what they believed to be the reasons for the improved behavior the following reasons were given:

Counseling .....	4 students
Smaller Classes .....	4 students
Level System .....	3 students
Teachers .....	2 students
No Response.....	7 students

The students identified counseling and the smaller class size most frequently as being the significant factors that helped them to improve their behavior. The level system and a description of the counseling



strategies appear in the appendix for the reader's information. The level system will also be described later in this chapter.

9. Seventy five percent of the students interviewed stated that the teachers seem to care more about them than the teachers at the traditional high school. Twenty-five percent thought the teachers were more strict than the teachers at the traditional high schools.

10. Sixty five percent of the students selected had been absent from school more than the allowed thirty-six days in one school year.

11. Thirty percent of the students selected were absent from school more than the allowed thirty-six days after attending the alternative school for one year.

12. Students identified the following features as the incentive for attending school more regularly:

Close Supervision.....	7 students
Smaller Classes .....	4 students
To get Diploma.....	3 students
Teachers .....	1 student
No Response.....	7 students

13. Eighty-five percent of the students selected were failing two or more major subjects at the traditional high school placement.

14. After one year at the alternative school 75% of the students were passing all major subjects. The students were asked to identify



why they believed their grades improved:

Individualized work .....	5 students
Smaller Classes .....	4 students
Easier Work.....	3 students
Teacher Assistance .....	3 students
No Homework.....	0 students
No Response.....	5 students

15. When asked if the work at the alternative school was easier than at the traditional high school, six students said yes and fourteen said no.

16. The students were asked what they believed would have happened to them if they did not have an alternative program to transfer to. The responses were:

Dropped out.....	75%
Expelled .....	25%
Graduated .....	0%

17. Ten students said that the alternative school improved their academic skills. Seven students believed that their behavior was improved by attending the school. Three students did not report improvement.

18. Fifty percent of the students interviewed did not feel that basic skills were acquired that would help them in the future. Fifty percent felt they gained skills that were beneficial.

19. Sixty five percent of the students interviewed believed that

alternative schools are needed because it gave students a second chance at completing their high school education. Forty percent of the students interviewed felt that an alternative school was needed to provide a smaller more personal atmosphere that many students need in order to be able to be successful in school.

20. This researcher contacted the students to identify what they are doing now. The following finding resulted:

Twelve students were working full time. Some of the positions held are: gas station attendant, landscaper, construction, waitress, nurses aide and clerk.

1 student worked part time

3 students were unemployed

2 students were single mothers

1 student was in college

1 student was in a drug/alcohol rehabilitation center (court mandated)

The results of this questionnaire provides the reader with certain findings that assist in determining the value of alternative programs. The review of students' quarterly report cards and records indicated documented changes in each of the three considered behaviors. There was an increase in student attendance of 40%. Sixty percent of the students had improved academic grades. Finally, 100% percent of the students that had been suspended more than six times in one school year had improved their behavior to the point that no one reached that level

during one year at the alternative school.

For years it has been accepted that there is a need for alternative schools. Some alternative schools are for students that are exceptionally bright, some are for students with behavioral and academic needs such as the school in this study. This researcher recognizes that these changes have occurred for certain reasons. In an attempt to identify the reasons that caused the changes, twenty students were selected to respond to a questionnaire. The purpose of the survey was to determine what the students realized to be the important factors that led to change in their educational performance.

The questionnaire highlighted important characteristics of the alternative school that an educator involved in the development of an alternative school should be aware.

### Narrative Summary of the Questionnaire

Students at the alternative school are the average age of 17. They spend an average length of one and a half years at the school. They describe themselves as having short tempers and aggressive behaviors in one major category and as being passive in another category.

Generally, the school had students referred that were either acting out aggressively or passive with very low motivation and interest in school.

While attending traditional school settings, forty percent of the students in the survey had been suspended six or more times within a school year. After transferring to the alternative school no student was suspended more than four times in one year. Only fourteen of the

twenty students were suspended during the year of attendance and of that an average of two suspensions prevailed.

Students were asked what components of the school helped them to behave in a more appropriate manner. Three students identified the level system (a behavior management program with positive and negative reinforcers) which includes ten levels that students ascend or descend depending on the behavior. The students meet as a group at the end of the school day to discuss each student's case to determine whether or not they deserve a step up in the level system. A copy of the system appears in appendix A. Four students identified counseling. There is a full time counselor on staff that provides regular therapy as well as crisis intervention. The model used is "Reality Therapy." This approach to therapy was developed by William Glasser and emphasizes personal involvement on the part of the therapist. According to Corey, "the counselor functions as a teacher and confronts the client in ways that help the client face reality and fulfill basic needs without harming himself or others. The heart of reality therapy is acceptance of personal responsibility. This approach is based on the single premise that there is a single psychological need that is present throughout life: the need for identity. The goals of reality therapy are to guide the individual toward learning realistic and responsible behavior and to develop a success identity versus a failure identity." Elizabeth Tamborella, counselor at the Alternative High School, addresses the impact of Reality Therapy in this alternative program in her proposed dissertation: The Impact of a



Reality Therapy Program on a Suburban Alternative High School. Her study focused on the Reality Therapy model and the impact on student behavior.

Two students identified teachers as the most important factor to their change in behavior. Students express that teachers seem to care more and pay closer attention to them than in the traditional school. This researcher believes that the low student/teacher ratio had an influence on that perception. A teacher that works with 25 students each day rather than 125 will be able to provide individualized attention to the students. This added attention is the change in environment that can keep certain students on track. The smaller class size was also identified by four students as providing them with a more manageable school situation.

Sixty-five percent of the students in this study had missed more than thirty-six days of school during their last year in traditional school. In the alternative school, this improved to thirty percent. Students identified smaller classes, closer supervision and the motivation to get a high school diploma as the major factors encouraging them to attend school.

Academic performance was in the failing range for more than ninety percent of the students in two or more subjects. Seventy-five percent of the students passed all subjects when attending the alternative school. Individualized work and smaller classes were identified by many students as most important in improving their academics. Three



students felt that the work was easier at the alternative school.

All of the students in the survey felt that they would have either dropped out of school or have been expelled if they did not have the opportunity to attend an alternative program.

Fifty percent of the students state that their academic skills improved but not to the point where it would provide help to them in the future. Many students recognized an improvement in their ability to get along with others.

Sixty percent of the students believe that there is a need for an alternative school program because it gives students a second chance at completing their education. The other students believe that the smaller school with a more personal atmosphere is needed by many students because of emotional and learning needs.

Twelve of the students are currently working full-time as productive members of our society. One student is working part-time. Three students are unemployed. Two are mothers. One student is in college. One student is in a drug/alcohol rehabilitation center (court mandated).

Six of the twenty students involved in this study graduated from high school. Fourteen dropped out on their own accord. No student was expelled.

In the survey, the students stated that they would have quit school if they did not have the alternative placement. Six successfully graduated and one is in college. This researcher identifies those six as successful

cases. However, it does not indicate that the other students have failed. There were significant changes in many behaviors and in each case they gained at least one additional year of schooling. At the time of this writing many other students have enrolled and completed semesters of classwork and will be graduating this year. One added year of schooling could be enough to help keep a student out of trouble at home and in the community. Even though they may not graduate from school the added program may provide support to help them deal with emotional concerns and ultimately affect their life.

The focus of this study was to identify the changes in three key behaviors that lead to success in school for adolescents that have not been able to meet those standard in a traditional school. This study identified absence, grades and suspensions as the three key behaviors that must be maintained at a certain level in order to pass in any school. Students often drop out of school for failure or excessiveness in one or more of these categories.

The changes that have occurred in the three areas of study were significant. They are summarized in different ways throughout this section. This final breakdown simplifies and identifies the significant changes.

	<u>Traditional</u>	<u>Alternative</u>
Attendance- absent more than 20%	65% .....	25%
Academics - failing more than two subjects	85% .....	25%
Behavior - suspended six or more times/year	45% .....	0%

These figures clearly identify positive changes in the three performance areas.

The students identified certain components of the alternative school as important characteristics to providing a program that will foster change. The Level System (see appendix A), the Reality Therapy approach to counseling, and individualized academic programs were identified as key factors in developing a successful program. The students state that these characteristics are significantly different than the programs offered in traditional school. These features provide a smaller, more personal atmosphere for learning that certain students require to meet their individual academic and behavioral needs.

The Alternative High School was developed because of a need to provide programs for students that were failing academically. Under state and federal law, public schools are required to provide programs for students to their twenty-second birthday. The cost of providing these programs can be astronomical and devastating to a local education association or school budget.

Our society has changed dramatically over the past several years. Family structure, drugs, alcohol, peer pressure and economic conditions are complex entities along with other factors that produce an environment that can make the normal passage through adolescence a tremendous journey that can not be made easily by young people today.

The program in this study was initiated to help deal with the effects of Proposition 2 1/2, a limited taxation law in Massachusetts. The town

was going to provide a program for students that had been sent to schools outside of the district at high tuitions, thus saving thousands of dollars by providing a program within town.

The school was set up to be directed at a ratio of one adult to five students. A ratio that provides very close interaction between teacher and student. The program was designed to use students' individual education plans as the basic curriculum. This provided the mode of providing academics at the student's level of functioning rather than at a higher level where frustration could lead to acting out behavior.

The school staff developed a behavior management system known as the "Level System" which incorporated many rewards for appropriate behaviors. Through this system students worked through a democratic process to raise their level and consequently their esteem. This system put students in control of their behavior. They could make choices. The Level System provided the structure to encourage appropriate behaviors but allowing the student and peers to participate.

The idealistic results of an alternative school situation would be that each student received a high school diploma. This was not the case at this school. Six out of the twenty in this study did graduate from school. That is significant, considering their chances of passing would have been infinitesimal if there was not an alternative program for them. The other students recognized positive changes in their behavior, control and academics even though they did not graduate. One year in a structured program during a turbulent time in an adolescent's life can



certainly affect their future. An alternative placement can affect a student's educational performance significantly.

Behavior, attendance, and academic performance can be improved by providing students with a structured behavior management plan, smaller classes, and individualized academic programming.

There are advocates and critics that can address the philosophical value or harm of such programs. This paper clearly defines that changes can occur that are positive and indicative that a properly staffed alternative school can enhance a public school system by providing a program for students with unique needs that cannot be met in a traditional school.

There are several recommendations that will be offered in the next section of this paper that will help to provide answers to many questions that arise when considering the development of an alternative school.

The purpose of this study was to identify the significant impact a change in placement can have for certain performance areas. Another objective is to share the developmental and experimental factors that helped to establish a successful program.

The following chapter will make recommendations that could assist school officials in developing a program by identifying the important concepts and strategies needed to develop an appropriate program.



## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS-RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Overview

The Alternative High School opened in 1981. The students that were referred to the school were those that were unable to sustain successful achievement at their traditional school placement. Three observable behaviors were noted as the significant factors that led to the students failure in school. These behaviors were attendance, grades and acting out behavior. The researcher randomly selected twenty students that had attended the school for a one year period and recorded their absenteeism, grades and number of times suspended prior to their referral to the alternative program. The next phase of the study was to record the frequency of these same three behaviors while attending the alternative school. The third step in the study was to interview the students to identify what they believed were the key components of the program that assisted or motivated them to change their behavior in school. The following pages will summarize the results of the questionnaire as described in Chapter IV. In addition to the summary, this researcher will describe observations over the three year period that he served as director of the program. This paper was developed with the intention to offer information that would be useful to other

educators interested in the concept of starting an alternative school. The personal experience combined with the research and students' responses certainly offers a comprehensive study of the effects when there is a change in academic placement. By reviewing this research paper an educator planning to start an alternative program could draw important conclusions to assist them in their strategies to implement the program.

The students referred to an alternative school are either failing school or not attending at all. The school system is obligated by state law Chapter 766 in Massachusetts and federal law 94-142 throughout the United States to provide an education that meets the needs of these students through the age of 21. The alternative school concept is an approach that does this at minimal expense. The alternative concept is used for students at both ends of the spectrum. There are program for students that are gifted and talented as well. However, the focus of this study was on the troubled adolescent that is exhibiting failing grades, poor attendance and behavior difficulty. Grades are the key factor that usually lead to referral. It is generally accepted that a student with poor behavior and attendance will have poor grades.

With many students this is true. However, some of the students referred to the alternative school are very bright intellectually and are able to pass despite poor attendance and behavior.

As director of the program, this writer had a desire to determine whether or not the program was effective and worthwhile. When working in a school set up with low teacher/student ratios the staff got to

know the students on a very personal level. This personalized involvement will present the biased opinion that there is such a need for a school to provide the support that these students need. However, an outside person with an objective perspective might not have that same opinion. Often a person not involved or understanding the needs of these students becomes the opponent. The educator attempting to develop the program is often confronted with questions such as: "Why do we need a special school for punks? My child tries very hard and behaves himself and he receives no special attention!" or "Gee... the middle of the road child gets nothing and we develop all of these special schools for kids that don't give a damn about anything!" or "Let them quit school and learn the hard way."

The people that make statements like this have been the ones that have been fortunate to have children that have been able to find success in the traditional structure of schools. They should be thankful. Years ago the students now at the alternative school would have quit school. Today they would have as well if there was not a placement for them.

If you are one of the parents of an adolescent that has not been as fortunate you begin looking for anything to help turn your child in the right direction. Often the teenager needs a few months in a specialized program to help them to work out personal problems. This should be considered progress in education. The children are given a second chance rather than simply dropping out. If it doesn't work for them at the alternative school they can still quit school.

There is without a doubt a need for alternative placements. By removing certain students from the traditional high school, the quality of education provided to the "middle of the road" student is improved. We are having an impact on regular education. In a typical high school, when fifteen of the most difficult to manage teenagers are removed, there has to be a dramatic change in the percentage of lost time through distraction and discipline procedures.

Today's culture is obviously much different than that of twenty year ago. There are many families that do not exist as your typical two parent household that provided the love and encouragement that is needed for a child that is going through adolescence. Alcohol, drugs, divorce, and abuse are four common characteristics that this writer has been able to identify in the lives of the student that have had an influence on their behavior. Is it a child's fault that they act out in school when there is no one available at home to talk with them, to do constructive activities with them?

On the other side, there are families that are intact that do everything conceivably possible to provide a positive environment, yet the child still becomes involved with a poor peer group or becomes a problem child on their own accord. There are no clear cut answers why the students do not conform. Perhaps it is part of their way to identify as individuals.

In developing an alternative school, the program development person must convince many adverse groups of the need. An important



starting point is with the school administration. Once their support is gained the Parent Teachers Association must be approached. The School Committee and Finance Committee must also support the project. It is not an easy process and this writer's intention is not to go into detail on that issue except to emphasize that it is a lengthy process that must go through the necessary channels within a given community. Establish a positive, well accepted group of advocates and gain support from each segment necessary and proceed with caution. The Alternative High School in this study was established in 1981 and the Junior High Alternative school was established in 1982.

The purpose of this study was to examine the development of the Alternative High School and the impact this program has had on students that have been referred to the school because of truancy, academic failure and poor socializations skills. What changes have occurred for students with a history of failing, poor attendance and behavior disturbances? Does the Alternative Program provide conditions that did not exist in the mainstream high school?

### The Development of the Alternative High School

The impetus of the development of this program was the passing of Proposition 2 1/2, a limited taxation law in Massachusetts. In lieu of sending students to a private day placement at considerable expense, the utilization of an existing building and staff were used to initiate the program. The town was funding a program for eleven students outside of the town at the time that would automatically transfer to the



new program. Additional students would be referred as needed. The referral procedure would not be as difficult as when a student was transferring out of district.

The building chosen was beside an existing junior high school. The alternative school consisted of four spacious classrooms and two offices. The facilities of the junior high school were available (physical education area, cafeteria).

The Director of Special Education was responsible for school staff. This writer was asked to be the director of the program because of his background in special education and graduate study in School Psychology. A certified special needs teacher was selected because of her background with emotionally disturbed adolescents. The counselor chosen had transferred from the facility that was serving the students that were going to be attending the school. A general subject teacher volunteered to join the staff because of his interest in working with difficult students. Even though he was not a certified special needs teacher, his certification in regular education, personal experience and expertise in many athletic areas certainly provided a compliment to the staff. One additional staff member was included who was placed at the school for administrative convenience.

The school was staffed by the following personnel; a) A male director with experience in special education certified in special education, regular education and school psychology; b) a female certified special education teacher with extensive background in

emotional disturbance and an outstanding teaching reputation; c) a female counselor who has worked with many of the students in the past; d) a male regular education teacher with expertise in athletics and recognized as a firm disciplinarian and experience working with troubled youngsters; e) a male regular education teacher than was transferred from a counseling position as an administrative decision by the Superintendent. This was an outstanding staffing arrangement with the exception of the one teacher administratively placed. The school was adequately staffed with personnel that were motivated and experienced. Five full time staff members with eleven students. One would believe that this would lead to a smooth beginning. This was not the case. The eleven students seemed like one hundred students. Our experiences and educational backgrounds did not provide the training necessary to deal with these youngsters. They tested our judgements consistently. They confronted our every suggestion. It took a few months until they believed in our sincerity and consistency that we were trying to provide. It was difficult to build a trusting relationship. It was crucial that the team worked closely and met on a daily basis to discuss strategies. We learned a great deal during the first year and the number of students increased gradually until we reached twenty-five. This was to be the limit.

At the beginning of the second year of the school this researcher became aware of a continuing education project available through the University of Massachusetts, Amherst known as the Boston Secondary

School Project. This project was developed to improve the quality of education through a "team" approach. Teams would work to develop strategies to improve their educational environment. Four of the five staff members agreed to participate in the project. This continued to improve staff relations and also helped to develop some important projects that greatly helped in the organization of the school. The level system and school handbook were two key projects that were crucial to the continued effective development of the school. There is no doubt that the positive influence of the Boston Secondary School Project had an impact on the successful development of the school. It must be recognized that it is always very difficult when there is a small group of people working in a confined area with a population such as that of the students in this program. There were difficult times when staff disagreed. Hostility and resentment surfaced for various reasons. However, a general family atmosphere continued and the program developed in a positive way. The point to be made here to professionals considering the development of an alternative school is to realize that the chemistry of the staff selected is critical. During the first years, there will be trial and error. Difficult circumstances will arise as the staff learn how to effectively deal with these students. The staff must work to develop a structure that works. The level system, one of the projects developed under the supervision of the Boston Secondary School Project was a guideline that provided the structure that the students and staff needed. The level system is included in the

appendix section of this document. The reader may use it in its entirety or in part for any educational purpose.

By the middle of the second year in operation, the school had gained a favorable reputation throughout the school system. This researcher was asked to coordinate the efforts to establish a program for younger students. This researcher sent a survey to regular educators throughout the town to get their perspective on the program. There appeared to be a need to do this because staff felt as though they were not considered in high regard by others in the system. Some important points recognized and shared with the staff were:

1. 100% of the staff that responded to the survey agree with the need for a program.
2. 66% of the staff that responded believed that quality of mainstream education improved as a result of the alternative school.
3. 81% of the staff agree that it is necessary to make the provisions of an alternative school
4. 100% of the respondents believe that there is a need and should be an alternative school.

The general feeling of the alternative school by staff at the traditional high schools is that there is a need for the program and that there should be one in this town. The perception of the school is that it is a good program that is easier than the mainstream school and is composed of students that have significantly disturbed mainstream education.

The results of this questionnaire provided the staff with the



encouragement that they needed. Working in an environment engulfed in negativism, hatred, and low esteem can become discouraging. Teachers can begin to question their own self worth and personal goals. It is important to develop and maintain a positive attitude. Getting the school started is difficult, but to continue operation in a positive mode is another challenge.

The school had been open for two years. The staff in regular educational programs have given their approval. Several students have now entered the program. Some have graduated, some have failed. During the third year modifications were made to the curriculum, level system and handbook. There had been very little staff change, the person that did not want to be there originally and the counselor that transferred only stayed one year. Therefore there was consistency in staff. The dedication and determination persevered through two turbulent years. With the support of the Boston Secondary School Project and the Public School Administration, the school was holding a strong position as far as its potential for operation is concerned.

In establishing a school of this nature, administrators would benefit from recognizing some of the positive characteristics that influenced the positive development of the program.

1. The school was established away from the traditional school. This eliminates the possibility of conflict in many areas. Highly recommended, if possible.
2. The staff that were a positive attribute of the program had

volunteered for the assignment and had experience in the field of special education or had worked with adolescents in some capacity.

3. The staff to student ratio did not exceed five to one.
4. A structured behavioral management system was established.
5. Staff meetings were held at the conclusion of each school day to discuss the happenings and to assess the strategies and techniques being implemented.
6. The staff worked as a team and not as individuals. Communication on a regular basis was crucial.
7. The program should start with as few students as possible and gradually increase the numbers as the staff is able to make adjustments.
8. The school had a gymnasium and a field nearby for daily use.
9. The school should be staffed by regular education and special education personnel and include a counselor.
10. Students that attend the school should have a desire to have an opportunity an an alternative school rather than being placed there against their will.

### Summary of Student Performance

Sixty-five percent of the students accepted to the alternative school in the sample studied were absent more than twenty percent of the school year while attending traditional school. Eighty-five percent were failing two or more major subjects. Forty-five percent were suspended from school more than six times in the last year that they attended traditional school.

After attending the school for a one year period, school records indicate that twenty-five percent of the students in the study were absent more than twenty percent of the time. Twenty-five percent of the students failed more than two major subject. Zero percent were suspended more than six times in the year. The decreases in the identified behaviors were significant.

The students were interviewed to determine what they believed to be the factors at the alternative school that helped to change their academic performance, absenteeism and behavior. The questionnaire highlighted important characteristics of the alternative school that an educator planning an alternative school should be aware.

Students referred to the alternative school are at the average age of seventeen. They spend an average of one and one-half years at the school. They describe themselves as short tempered and aggressive or extremely passive with low self-esteem and poor motivation.

Students were asked what components of the school helped them behave in a more appropriate manner. Three students identified the Level System which is a behavior management program with ten levels including positive and negative reinforcers. The students and staff meet at the end of each day to assess the students' daily behavior and to vote whether or not they qualify for a raise. Four students identified counseling as a factor. There is a full time counselor that provides therapy on a regular basis. This approach to therapy was developed by William Glasser and emphasizes personal involvement on the part of

the therapist. According to Corey, the counselor functions as a teacher and confronts clients in ways that help them face reality and fulfill basic needs without harming himself or others. The approach is based on the single premise that there is a single psychological need that is present throughout life: the need for identity.

Two students identified teachers as the most important factor leading to their change in behavior. Students expressed that teachers seem to care more and pay closer attention to them than in the traditional school. The lower student/teacher ratio has an influence on how much time a teacher is able to spend with a student. A teacher working with twenty-five students each day rather than one hundred twenty-five will be able to provide more individualized attention to the students. This added attention can be the change in environment needed to help certain students.

Smaller class size was identified by four students as being the major influence in helping students be able to manage their school situation.

Students identified smaller classes, closer supervision, and the motivation to get a high school diploma as the major factors encouraging them to attend school more regularly

Ninety percent of the students referred were failing two or more academic subjects. Seventy-five percent passed all subjects when they attended the alternative school. Individualized work and smaller classes were identified by many students as most important in



improving the academics. Three students reported that the work at the alternative school was easier.

All of the students in the survey believed they would have dropped out or have been expelled from school if they did not have the opportunity to attend the alternative program. Students believed that there was need for the alternative school because it gave students a second chance at completing their education. Some students felt that the smaller school with a more personal atmosphere is needed by many students because of emotional and learning needs.

Half of the students surveyed stated that their academic skills improved but not to the point where the skills helped them in the environment. Many of the students recognized that their increased ability to get along well with others had a more important effect on them.

Twelve students in the study are currently working full time as productive members of society. One student is working part time. Three students are unemployed. Two are mothers. One student is attending college. One student is in a drug rehabilitation center.

Six of the twenty students graduated from high school. Fourteen dropped out on their own accord.

The students identified the following components of the alternative school as important characteristics that foster change:

1. The Level System
2. Counseling

3. Smaller classes
4. Caring teachers
5. Closer supervision
6. Individualized academic programs

Students state that these characteristics are significantly different than the program offered in traditional schools. These features provide a more personal atmosphere for learning that certain students require to meet their individual academic and behavioral needs.

### Recommendations

Alternative Programs for adolescents not able to be successful in mainstream schools should be developed on an as needed basis.

The impetus should be that the traditional school programs are being affected by particular behaviors of students and that a small percentage of students appear to be in need of additional services in order to succeed. Some students really need a change from the larger less personal school to a smaller more "family like" atmosphere. These students need structure and consistency that is closely monitored.

When consideration is given to opening a school, the focus should be on establishing the location which ideally is separate from another school. The teacher/student ratio should be kept at approximately the one to five range. The academics offered should be individualized to student needs and not be of a group approach. Behavioral difficulties do arise from students that are experiencing

frustration over their inability to succeed with academics. The teachers selected must have an understanding of the commitment that is necessary to establish a rapport that will foster positive change in students. Teachers should have experience in the area of special education or dealing with adolescents wherever possible. If not, the personality should be one of a person who is firm in their techniques, fair to all students, consistent yet flexible in their philosophical viewpoints toward education. Teachers involved in alternative education should want to be there and not be transferred or "demoted". A teacher placed in a program through administrative decision is not committed to the program, affects the morale of other staff and their esteem, and ultimately affects the program that the student is in. It creates unnecessary problems.

A handbook should be established (see appendix D) that clearly outlines the expectations and responsibilities of the students. A behavior management system (see appendix A) should be developed or acquired from an existing school so that the school begins with a system in place. There is not a need to redevelop something that has already been proven successful. These documents could become the basis and guidelines for a staff that is trying to offer consistency.

An attempt must be made to open the doors of communications between the school and home. The staff will need the support of the home. It is important to work together rather than adversely. Parents/Guardians should be involved on a regular basis not merely

during crisis intervention.

The first months of a new program are an adjustment for students and staff. With the proper guidance and support, the experience during the beginning weeks can form the foundation of a successful program.

The intent of this dissertation was to identify the positive changes in behavior and the reasons they occurred and to provide guidance to future educators involved in alternative education.

In an effort to provide a more substantial base for the identification and recognition of the factors attributed to the effectiveness of the alternative school this researcher had two informal surveys completed. One was discussed earlier in this section regarding regular education staff's attitudes and opinions toward special educational alternative programs and the other was a general survey of the format used in other suburban schools. The purpose of these two surveys were not to complicate the original data collection of student information, but support to the hypothesis that alternative schools have an impact and are necessary.

The general survey conducted was sent to five suburban communities south of Boston, Massachusetts. Each town contacted was involved with an alternative school either on their own accord or through a collaborative program. For general information and summary of alternative schools in the area the following were noted:

1. Average number of students was 24



2. Average number of staff was 5.5
3. Four out of five had a counselor
4. All programs had certified special needs staff
5. Programs are six hours each day
6. All students enrolled were Chapter 766 or P.L. 94-142
7. Attendance, Academics and Behavior were the three most common referral to all schools.
8. The average class size was six
9. The average length in operation was five years.
10. The age range of students was 14 to 22
11. A level system, Point System or reward system was used by each of the schools
12. Four out of the five schools were located within another school

There is a fairly consistent format to the development of the alternative schools. This writer was surprised to learn that many schools are functioning within a traditional high school. This is important to note because the initial recommendation of this writer was to establish a separate school if possible. Often logistics would not allow such geographic arrangement. Many programs have been successful within a school.

### Summary

Alternative programs are needed to complement today's educational system. Certain students can be successful providing there

is a change in the structure of their program.

The questions that this writer set out to answer have been resolved. Significant changes have occurred in all three areas that were identified. Students that attended the alternative school in this study attended school more regularly, had better grades and were seldom suspended from school. The students identified the Level System, regular counseling, teachers that care about the students, smaller classes, closer supervision and individualized academic instruction as the major factors contributing to their improved performance.

The students did describe the academics as not preparing them as well as they should be for the future.

It is recommended that alternative schools have a structured individualized curriculum that has high realistic expectations for its students. By placing students at their level of instruction and providing assistance they should progress to higher levels. The students must be challenged.

One weakness of the program was that the academics did not have the emphasis that should be appointed to that area. The students certainly completed more work than they would have ever done in a regular high school, however they did not complete work that developed skills to their fullest potential. Most students referred to the alternative program have average to above average intelligence and are capable of excelling once the deficit areas are remediated and they

are motivated.

A well structured and staffed alternative educational placement will provide adolescents that are not able to meet the needs of the traditional school setting with an option other than leaving school in its entirety. The expense can be minimal in comparison to the long range effects that could result from a young person being on the streets and not being able to find a job. Even though many students that will graduate from high school will end up working in the same capacity, the drop out loses socialization and academic training that might be beneficial in the future.

The alternative school is designed to guide students through a difficult time in their education. Often after 6 to 12 months in a school setting such as the Alternative High School, the students personal or academic problems are resolved and he/she can return to the traditional school. When working in an alternative school the teachers do not have a real true knowledge of the needs and problems of the student at first. Within a few weeks, a bond of trust is formed and changes in behavior are recognized. A year later the alternative "family" is ready to allow one of their "children" to go out on their own. It is a terrific experience to see the change in self-esteem and attitude toward life.

If we pass through life and have a positive effect on a few young people we have been successful in our efforts. An alternative program may lead to many years of productive happiness that might not have

happened without that additional support for a few months.

This writer recommends that each community be prepared to alter traditional education for certain people with special needs. It is a very small percentage that need this particular extra help, but it is undoubtedly worthwhile.



## Appendices

## Appendix A

### The Level System

## ALTERNATIVE HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL SYSTEM

The Level System at the Alternative High School is designed to help the student better understand the consequences of his/her behavior. Levels range from zero (suspension level) to ten (assistant staff level). Responsibilities and privileges increase as the student reaches higher levels

**Level "0" -- Suspension Level** (Out of School)

Students will remain under the supervision of parents or guardians at home.

Conferences will be scheduled with parents or guardians to establish the conditions for the student's return to school.

The Assistant Superintendent for Pupil Personnel Services will make the final decision on all drops to Level "0".

Conditions for Raising to Level 1 -- a student will return to school on Level 1 and must work his/her way up the level system once again, one level at a time.

**Level 1 -- In-school Suspension** (Minimum time in this level: one successful day)

Student will be under staff supervision at all times. The student will not have any privileges or breaks during the day.

Criteria for Dropping to Level 1 -- Staff member may (at any time) recommend a student for drop to Level 1.

A student receiving two replacements on Level 2 will automatically be dropped to Level 1.

Conditions for Raising to Level 2 -- In order to be raised to Level 2, a student must make a reasonable attempt not to disrupt classes or fellow students during the course of the day.

There must be a sincere effort on the student's part to cooperate and control behavior in order for a student to be raised to Level 2.

**Level 2 -- Probation Level** (Minimum time in this level: one successful day)

A student in Level 2 is subject to the following restrictions:

No smoke breaks either in the morning or afternoon

No field trips

No overnight outings



No athletic events with other schools  
 No vote in school meeting

Criteria for Dropping to Level 2 -- a student may be dropped to Level 2 for:

Fighting  
 Stealing  
 Failure to cooperate with the restrictions of Level 3

Conditions for Raising to Level 3 -- A student must first speak to his/her LSG teacher, then bring up a plan at the school meeting to prevent further problems related to his/her poor behavior. The student's plan must include a minimum of two behavior changes that the student intends to improve upon.

Generally it is a good practice for the student to work out this plan in LSG the morning before, requesting a raise to Level 3.

Students will be expected to sit in their classes without being disruptive and to begin to do work in their classes prior to being raised to Level 3.

**Level 3 -- Restriction Level** (Minimum time in this level: one full successful day)

In Level 3 a student is subject to the following restrictions:

All restrictions in Level 2, except vote in school meeting.

Criteria for Dropping to Level 3 -- Failure at Level 4

Conditions for Raising to Level 4 --

Being on time to meet provided transportation  
 Being reasonably behaved in vehicles  
 Shows ability to voice criticism  
 Shows tolerance for staff errors  
 Communicates whereabouts to staff  
 Respects other peoples' things  
 Uses self restraint

Takes care of one's own materials and cleans up after oneself  
 Comes to class equipped  
 Tolerates minimal disruptions in class and deals with them appropriately  
 Raises one's hand; waits one's turn  
 Sits in class without being disruptive

**Level 4 -- Beginning Student Level** (Minimum time in this level: three good days)

Responsibilities and privileges:

Smoking breaks  
 Physical Education- Competition in teams sports at \_\_\_\_ High School  
 Class Outings

**Criteria for Raising to Level 5 --**

Does not interrupt others  
 Listens quietly when others give feedback (criticism)  
 Gives constructive feedback to staff  
 Appeals and/or complains at appropriate time and place  
 Forgives and forgets  
 Communicates school information to parents  
 participates enthusiastically  
 Demonstrates good behavior in unfamiliar settings  
 Restrains oneself when baited by others into irresponsible behavior  
 Talks to someone when upset  
 Being responsible about money and pays debts  
 Phones in before school (8:30-9:30am) when late/sick  
 Asks for help  
 Comes to class mentally and physically prepared to work  
 Adds to the quality of the class discussion  
 Takes tests willingly  
 Does assigned work in all classes  
 Takes notes  
 Meets with counselor at assigned time

**Level 5 Student Level**-- (Minimum time in this level: three good days)

Responsibilities and privileges:

- Field trips
- Athletic events with other schools
- Bringing in guest/visitors with approval of Head Teacher
- Approved study
- Special lunches with school group

**Criteria for Dropping to Level 5** -- Failure at Level 6

**Conditions for Raising to Level 5** --

- Shares one's own problems and solutions to help others
- Accepts and uses corrections in academics/sports
- Shows good sportsmanship
- Helps to clarify another's position or feelings or points of view
- Reminds staff of their obligations
- Curbs baiting behavior of oneself or with others
- Expresses anger appropriately
- Owens up to one's own feelings
- Respects feelings of others
- Includes others in activities
- Helps fellow students in class
- Uses humor (not sarcasm) to help others feel better
- Entertains at appropriate times
- Follows through on responsibilities and tasks
- Helps to clean up class/building/grounds
- Concentrates in class
- Completes written work
- Participates in class discussions
- Tolerates minimal distractions and irritations, and deals with them appropriately by moving out of range

**Level 6 -- Good Sport Level** (Minimum time in this level: three successful days)

Responsibilities and privileges:

Use of entertainment equipment (especially football game)  
 Overnight outings - camping trips  
 Record school meetings  
 Special P.E. privileges

**Criteria for Dropping to Level 6 -- Failure at Level 7**

**Conditions for Raising to Level 7 --**

Being where you say you are going to be  
 Records school meeting and other tasks  
 Accepts consequences with good grace  
 Accepts behavioral criticism well  
 Encourages teammates - others  
 Gives everyone a chance to play  
 Being friendly to strangers and newcomers  
 Shows people around the building  
 Rises to the occasion  
 Respects others' need for space  
 Helps others in times of crisis or bad mood  
 Tolerate minimal disruptions/irritations and deals with them  
 appropriately by reasonably requesting fellow students to cut it  
 out  
 Has an exceptional positive effort in class

**Level 7 -- Young Adult Level** (Minimum time in this level: five successful days)

Responsibilities and privileges:

Organize school party/functions. inter-schools sports  
 Run school meetings  
 Work-study with approval of director or counselor. Students may



leave early

Criteria for Dropping to Level 7 -- Failure at Level 8

Conditions to Raising to Level 8

Takes the initiative  
 Leads others away from irresponsible behavior without becoming the teacher's pet  
 Bounces back from negative experience  
 Is able to set a personal growth goal  
 Exercises patience in a trying situation  
 Considers the larger community  
 Voices criticism in a constructive manner so someone can accept it  
 Initiates creating academic projects  
 Makes contracts to complete work  
 Demonstrates exceptional performance in class or other school activities

Level 8 -- Adult Level (Minimum time in this level: five good days)

Responsibilities and privileges:  
 Independent study with staff approval  
 Answering phone during breaks and lunch  
 use of phone with special permission  
 Lunch out with a staff member (24 hours notice to be given)

Criteria for Dropping to Level 8-- Failure at Level 9

Conditions for Raising to Level 9

Evidence of working sincerely on personal growth goals  
 Asserts oneself - asks for won level advances  
 Speaks for oneself  
 Prevents or thwarts "ganging-up" on other pupils  
 Seeks best way to resolve conflicts or clashes of personality  
 Expresses feelings clearly

### Level 9 -- Leader Level (Minimum time is this level: five days)

#### Responsibilities and privileges:

Staff vote

Use of phones -- breaks, lunch, before school

Possibility of remaining in WAHS building with a staff member at lunch time

#### Criteria for Dropping to Level 9 -- Failure at Level 10

#### Conditions for Raising to Level 10

Has reached a personal growth goal

Lets others speak for themselves (allows silence)

Knows the criteria of the complete level system

### Level 10 -- Assistant Staff Level

#### Responsibilities and privileges:

Power to drop students for breaking rules

Power to represent students on various issues at staff meetings

Power to represent student views at parent or community meetings

Responsibility for helping staff supervise other students during breaks/lunch/PE? transitions

Eligible to sit in on initial interviews for prospective students and staff members, and voice preferences or reservations

Attend staff meetings

Possible free study period --7th period if approved by staff

Valle's Steak House for lunch with Mr. Lambros

#### Automatic Drops

Cutting      Drop to Level 4 for anyone in Levels 5-7:  
                     Drop two levels for anyone on Levels 8-10:  
                     Replacement on Levels 1-4.

Cutting is defined as skipping school, not going to classes, or not

calling in to school before 9:00 am when a student expects to be late or sick.

Dealing: Exclusion (parents will be notified)

Usage: Exclusion or suspension (parents will be notified)

Suspicious of being under the influence of alcohol or drugs on school time or on school property: exclusion, suspension or automatic drop to Level 3 or below (parents will be notified).

Fighting: Drop to Level 2 with discussion and/or appeal at next school meeting to establish plan for preventing the behavior in the future.

Stealing: Drop to Level 2 with discussion and/or appeal at next school meeting. Restitution is mandatory.

Ignoring staff warning about rough-housing or throwing things: drop one level

Smoking out of bounds where it is not permitted: drop one level.

Destroying Property: drop one level with plan for restitution.

Verbal Abuse to staff or fellow students: drop one level

Leaving School ground without permission; drop to Level 3, plus 10 days restriction

Striking or Assaulting Staff Member: exclusion from school for that academic year.

Continued Class or School Meeting Disruptions: staff decision on level drop with possible ten days' restriction.

### General Information

Raises: Students must bring themselves up for raises in LSG prior to requesting a raise in school meeting. Students must receive a

majority of "in favor" votes in order to receive raises.

Veto: A unanimous staff vote in opposition to any motion for rules changes, level raises or drops, appeals or decisions on issues will constitute a veto which is final. The veto must be unanimous. One staff member who abstains or opposes will negate the veto.

Drops: A student may be dropped one level by a staff member at any time. Generally a student who proves that he/she is unable to manage responsibilities at his/her current level will be dropped either one level or to the level which realistically matches his/her current behavior.

Replacements: Generally a student will only receive replacements when he/she is on Level 2. Two replacements on Level 2 constitute an automatic drop to Level 1. Replacements may also be given by a staff member for behaviors that are felt by the staff member not to warrant the severity of a drop. Replacements are given automatically to students on Level 1-4 for not calling into school before 9:00 a.m. on days the student expects to be late or absent.

Appeals: Students may appeal drops or replacements that they feel they do not deserve.

#### AUTOMATIC DROPS ARE NON-APPEALABLE

Appeals must be discussed in LSG prior to the appeal.

The LSG teacher must determine if the appeal is legitimate and/or appealable.



Amendments: can be made by:

1. raising the issue for discussion in school meeting
2. making a motion based on the proposed amendment.
3. voting on the amendment, in which case school meeting approval is required for ratification or a unanimous staff vote in opposition constitutes a final veto.

## Appendix B

### Questionnaires

## Student Questionnaire

1. How old are you?
2. What grade are you in?
3. How long were you in the Alternative School?
4. Why were you placed in the Alternative School?  
Behavior \_\_\_\_\_  
Attendance \_\_\_\_\_  
Grades \_\_\_\_\_
5. What would best describe your behavior?  
\_\_\_quiet, \_\_\_respectful, \_\_\_rude, \_\_\_disrespectful  
\_\_\_unpredictable, \_\_\_short temper, \_\_\_aggressive, \_\_\_passive
6. Were you ever suspended from your regular high school?  
If yes: \_\_\_ How many times? (approx)  
Why? Gives examples.
7. Have you been suspended at the Alternative High school?  
If yes: \_\_\_ How many times? (approx)  
Why? Gives examples.
8. Do you feel that your behavior has improved at the Alternative School?  
Why?
9. Do you notice any difference about the teachers at the Alternative School compared to the regular high school? Explain briefly.

10. How was your attendance at the regular school?  
Absent 5 days each term? \_\_\_\_\_  
Absent 10 days each term? \_\_\_\_\_  
Absent 15 days each term? \_\_\_\_\_
11. Has your attendance improved since your have been in the Alternative School?
12. If so, what makes you want to go to school more now than before?
13. Were you failing any subjects at your regular school?  
Which? \_\_\_\_\_
14. Did your grades improve when you transferred? \_\_\_\_\_
15. Do you think the school work in the Alternative School is easier? \_\_\_\_\_
16. If you did not have an Alternative to transfer to, what do you think would have happened?
17. How do you think the Alternative School helped you?
18. Do you feel that you learned basic skills that will help you in the future at the Alternative School?
19. Why do you think it is important to have an Alternative School?
20. Briefly describe what you are now doing?



Questionnaire

Attitudes and Effects of an Alternative High School in a Suburban  
Community

Student: Henry Perrin  
Level: Doctorate  
School: University of Massachusetts  
Area: Educational Administration

Please check one:

- Teacher  
 Special Needs Teacher  
 Counselor  
 Psychologists  
 Administrator

1. Do you know know there is an alternative high school in your town for students with behavioral and/or academic difficulties?  
Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_
2. How many students do you believe attend the school? \_\_\_\_\_
3. What do you feel the student-teacher ratio should be?  
5:1 8:1 3:1 Other \_\_\_\_\_
4. Have you ever referred a student to the Alternative High School?  
Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_
5. Do you agree with the alternative education concept?  
Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_
6. A. Have you recognized a decrease in classroom discipline problem since 1981?  
Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_  
B. . . . an increase? Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_
7. Would you like to visit the program to see it in operation?  
Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_
8. Would you like to have a staff member explain more about the program to you?  
Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_

9. Do you feel the staff at the Alternative High School has an effect of the quality of mainstream education?  
Yes\_\_\_\_\_ No\_\_\_\_\_
10. Do you feel we should not make provisions for these students?  
Yes\_\_\_\_\_ No\_\_\_\_\_
11. What would we do for these people if we did not offer the Program?
12. What do you think the long range effects of this program will be on the students?
  - a. No effect
  - c. moderate positive effect
  - c. Moderate negative effect
  - d. a great positive effect
  - e. a great negative effect
13. Would you be interested in changing positions for one school year with a teacher at the Alternative High School?  
Yes\_\_\_\_\_ No\_\_\_\_\_
14. How should the diploma be printed for these students?
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_High School - North or South respectively?
  - b. \_\_\_\_\_Alternative High School?
  - c. other: \_\_\_\_\_
15. What suggestions could you make to improve the alternative program?
16. How long should a student attend the Alternative High School before being allowed back to the mainstream?
17. Is there an obvious need for an alternative education?
18. Please describe any experiences that you have had with with an Alternative High School student that has returned to your school.
19. Could your high school absorb 12 of these students without cause major disruption?

Yes\_\_\_\_\_ No\_\_\_\_\_

20. What have you heard through other students and/or staff members about the Alternative School?
  - a. "an excellent program"
  - b. "a good program"
  - c. "an easy program"
  - d. "a joke"
  - e. "a place for bad kids"
21. What is the Administration's view on the Alternative High School?
  - a. extremely positive
  - b. positive
  - c. negative
22. If staff cuts had to be made, would you prefer:
  - a. to cut out the Alternative School
  - b. to reduce the staff
  - c. to leave it as is
23. Please make any general comment toward Alternative Education in your town that would be helpful in understanding the attitudes and effects as the program as the staff in the high school perceives it.

## Appendix C

### Written Consent Forms Human Subject Guidelines

Submitted to: Dr. Earl Seidman  
From: Henry W. Perrin, Jr.  
Date: January 23, 1986

In order to conduct research for my study, I will be engaging human subjects to collect necessary data regarding their opinions and perceptions of the Alternative School Program. I intend to utilize in-depth structured interview procedures.

Permission has been granted to carry out my individual research by \_\_\_\_\_, Superintendent of the \_\_\_\_\_ Public School and by \_\_\_\_\_, Administrator of Special Education, \_\_\_\_\_ Public Schools.

I will receive permission from each student's parent prior to any interview.

I will take the following precautions to insure the rights and welfare of the participants engaged in the study:

1. Interview data, inventory data and subsequent documentation will be coded in order to maintain full anonymity.
2. In all the documentation resulting from information illicited from the subjects, names of participants, specific names of others identified during the course of data gathering, as well as the name of the school, will not be used in the study.
3. At anytime during the data gathering process, individual subjects may freely elect to withdraw from participation and request that any information illicited will not be used in my research.
4. Participants may withdraw their consent to have specific excerpts from the interview used in any documentation by notifying me in writing within thirty days of the interview.



## WRITTEN CONSENT FORM

The Growth and Development of an Alternative High  
School: A Study of the Impact on Academic  
Performance and Behavior Patterns that have Failed  
Academically and Behaviorally in a Traditional High  
School

Research Conducted by: Henry W. Perrin, Jr.

Dear Parent:

As a doctoral candidate of the University of Massachusetts, School of Education at Amherst, my individual research is focused on Alternative Secondary School Program development. My work as a Psychologist and Head Teacher in the Alternative High School during the past three years has given me the opportunity to work closely with the staff and students at the high school. This experience permitted me to gain insight into the issues and needs of all individuals directly involved in the program.

One major component of the research for my dissertation study is to interview with 20 randomly selected Alternative High School students. I am requesting your voluntary written consent for \_\_\_\_\_ to participate in one thirty-minute interview.

The interview will entail a series of questions pertaining to opinions and perceptions about the school's academic and behavioral programs. The intent of the interview will be to gather appropriate data in terms of how students view the Alternative High program as well as their opinions regarding program change. Results of my research will be available by September 1986.

Any questions you have concerning the research can be addressed to me at any time at: 312 Long Pond Road, Marstons Mills, MA 02648, (617) 428-8819.

In all the documentation that may result from your interview, your name, the name of your school, or the specific names of others identified during the course of the interview will not be used. I will use the results of the interview in my dissertation, subsequent journal

articles, presentations, and related academic work.

I \_\_\_\_\_ agree to let \_\_\_\_\_  
participate in the interview process.

I \_\_\_\_\_ disagree to let  
\_\_\_\_\_ participate in the interview process.

Thank You,

Henry W. Perrin Jr.

## Appendix D

### Alternative High School Handbook

## INTRODUCTION

This handbook is designed to help guide Alternative High School students toward self-improvement in both academic and behavioral areas. The level system is used on a daily basis to help the students better understand the consequences of their behavior and to accept responsibility. A new student must learn the level system process. The policies and courses in the Alternative High School handbook adhere to the general policies of both North and South High School and the Vocational-Technical High School. A main goal for new students should be how to work toward returning to one of the major high schools.

The curriculum at Alternative High School will meet the requirements of the town's high school. This will meet the requirements of the town's high schools. This will include health, physical education, math, history, and English in accordance to state laws. When a student graduates their diploma will be from their respective school.

### Greetings

The teachers at the Alternative High School welcome each and every new pupil and wish them best wishes in their new educational setting. The teachers will make every effort to help you at all times. However, if you are going to achieve the best result, you must make every effort to conduct yourself in a proper manner, and do your lessons as they are assigned.

When you are accepted into this program it is understood that for one reason or another you were having difficulty in your former school. The staff at the Alternative High School certainly hopes your new school will be a new beginning. The teachers here will strive to treat you with respect and will expect the same from you as a student.

Each year your educational achievement will be reevaluated under Chapter 766 regulations and adjustments will be made to develop your Individualized Educational Plan.

Welcome and Good Luck.



### Student Rights and Responsibilities

The School Committee in adopting regulations relative to student conduct does so in the belief that current practices in our schools have been, and will continue to be, reflective of the rights of students as citizens while giving necessary attention to accompanying responsibilities.

If a student feels that his rights have been abridged in any way, that student should bring the matter to the attention of a teacher, guidance counselor, or building administrator.

All students should be aware that both federal and state regulations have been enacted which prevent the school from discrimination against students in regard to sex, color, race, religion, or national origin. This non-discrimination regulation applies to all educational programs or activities which it operates. No child shall be excluded from, or discriminated against in admission to a public school or in obtaining the advantages, privileges, and courses of study of the public schools on account of race, color, sex, religion, or natural origin. Any questions or complaints concerning these regulations should be directed to the office of the Superintendent of Schools.

The policies contained in this handbook are effective relative to student's behavior in any school facility or school activity.

### School Attendance Policy

Absence: It is expected that the student's parent or guardian will write a note describing the reason for absence or tardiness within two days. The excuse may be verified by the Head Teacher by calling the home. It will be the student's responsibility to make up any work that is missed which his/her teachers feel is necessary. Students should consult with their teachers concerning make-up work the day they return to school.

An effort should be made by all students to attend school on a regular basis. Excessive absenteeism will result in failure in academic course work and a loss of credit. If a student misses 20% of any scheduled class, credit will not be given for the term. When a student is absent 20% of an entire year, no credit will be given.

Excused absences include illness, medical appointments or legal obligations. An effort should be made to try to schedule any appointments after school. If a student wishes to be excused for an appointment, a note from the student's parent or guardian should be presented to the director twenty-four hours prior to the appointment. Each request will be checked as a matter of verification before permission is granted. Unexcused absences will be considered as truancy, and the student's parent or guardian will be notified either in writing or by telephone contact. The student will be reprimanded in accordance with the level system.

### Physical Education Policy

All students must participate in, and pass, four years of Physical Education in order to be able to graduate. Physical Education will be held on a daily basis. If a student is to be medically excused from Physical Education, a note from the student's physician must be on file with the Alternative High School.

### General Regulations

Classroom Behavior: Your school is your home away from home. Please help in keeping it presentable as a place for learning and living. Destruction of school property will not be tolerated. Repair and/or restitution for destroyed property will be required especially when the destruction is deliberate.

Overall, your attitude and deportment should be acceptable at all times so as not to interfere with the rights of other students to learn. Students should not disturb other student nor should teachers be interrupted during lessons. Team work and cooperation are essential and will be greatly appreciated.

### Conduct and Discipline

All students will be expected to act in a manner that demonstrates a respectful attitude toward adults and classmates with whom they come in contact throughout the course of the school day.

In accordance with the level system, a student's behavior may warrant an in-school suspension or a suspension from school for a designated period of time. In either case, parents or guardian will be

notified of the suspensions, and conferences will be held in order to discuss possible methods for improving behavior. The discretion of the Director of Pupil Personnel, the Head Teacher, and the staff may be used to decide what action will be taken in certain situations.

Students may be promptly suspended for:

1. continued disregard for the Alternative High School level system and/or improper conduct
2. suspicion of use and/or possession of drugs or alcohol (Distribution cases will be referred to the School Committee for disciplinary action)
3. endangering the health and safety of staff or other students
4. continued use of vulgar language
5. threatening or striking a staff member
6. fighting
7. leaving school property without permission
8. sounding a false alarm for fire
9. repeatedly disturbing the class
10. carrying a weapon

All students must attend lunch in the cafeteria.

Smoking is permitted only in the smoking area in front of the Alternative High School building. Students are requested to help keep this area presentable and dispose of smoking materials properly. Students are not permitted to smoke in the building. Students may not smoke on the way to lunch or on the return from lunch. Students may



not smoke on the school buses. Students may not smoke at fire drills.

### Alternative High School Drug Policy

The use, distribution or possession of drugs or alcohol in the school building or on school grounds, or while involved in a school sponsored activity is forbidden. Violators of this policy are liable to detention, suspension or expulsion or a combination of these disciplinary steps as the facts of the case may warrant.

A student distributing drugs will be suspended and a parent conference will be required as soon as possible. The case will be reported in writing to the Superintendent of Schools and the School Committee who will review the situation and take any further action which may be deemed necessary and appropriate.

### Student Evaluation

Report Cards: Report cards are issued four times a year at the end of each quarter. Each teacher grades students for achievement, effort and conduct. If problem areas arise in any one grading are, conferences will be called to discuss methods for improvement.

### Final Examinations

All students will be required to take mid year and final examinations. These exams will count as \_\_\_\_% of the mid year grade and \_\_\_\_% of the final grades.



### Diploma Regulations

A fourth year student who is ineligible to receive a diploma because of a deficiency may participate in the graduation ceremony and receive the diploma after one of the following:

1. attend summer school to complete the requirements, providing the student meets all the regulations regarding eligibility for summer students and the attainment of credit.
2. attend the Evening High School Diploma Program on a space available basis, and as fee-paying student, providing that the high school principal gives specific permission in advance and that the course work is completed within five (5) years after the student's class has graduated. In this circumstance, to receive a diploma, a student would have to satisfy requirements which were in force at the time his/her original class graduated.
- c. return for a fifth year
- d. see reverse side of report card for promotion requirements.

### Guidance and Counseling

Each student at the Alternative High School will receive individual counseling on a weekly basis. It is hopeful that this will help each student understand his/her aptitudes, interests and abilities so that he/she will be better able to know and respect himself/herself as an individual.

### Automobile and Bus Policy

Students are requested to obtain permission for the Assistant

Superintendent for Pupil personnel Services prior to driving their own vehicles to school.

Students are reminded that it is a privilege to ride the bus to school. This privilege can and will be revoked for being disrespectful to drivers, damaging property, transferring tickets, or for any other reason that might cause a safety hazard to any students on that bus. Students must carry their bus passes at all times. If passes are lost, replacement passes are available for twenty-five cents.

Students are not permitted to smoke on the bus. Appropriate behavior is expected at all times.

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