ABSTRACT

Terrence L. McAllister, PERCEPTIONS OF HOW VIRTUAL LEARNING AND SEAT TIME IMPACT STUDENT PERFORMANCE IN AN ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL. (Under the direction of Dr. William Grobe) Department of Educational Leadership, April, 2015.

The purpose of this study is to identify an appropriate structure to successfully serve all alternative students in an effort to increase the graduation rate and academic proficiency of the students at an alternative high school in rural Southeastern North Carolina. The following topics and subtopics will be addressed in this research: at risk, alternative learning programs/schools, high school completion, seat time, virtual learning, approaches to course credits, attendance/absences, suspension, dropouts, summary and finding, credit by mastery, results and recommendations and conclusion. The researcher addressed the following research question: To what extent, if any, did virtual learning opportunities and seat time requirements impact student performance?

Quantitative research designs were used to gain insight into academic structures that serve non-traditional students. The intent of the research was to define key elements that need to occur to increase academic performance and graduation rates. Quantitative research included descriptive statistics and compilation of the data collected from the survey results. Students, parents/guardians, faculty, staff, and administrators participated in the study. Key factors that were identified in order to improve the academic performance and graduation rates for students in alternative settings were: clear mission, positive culture and climate, parent involvement, community involvement, effective leadership, professional development, aligned and focused curriculum and instruction and monitoring and assessment. Based upon this research recommendations are: the school should be a program located on the corridor of the only high school in the district, shared core values and guiding concepts that is representative of student,

staff and administration, self-paced virtual online curriculum (credit by mastery) and a highly

qualified staff that desire to teach at the alternative school.

PERCEPTIONS OF HOW VIRTUAL LEARNING AND SEAT TIME IMPACT STUDENT

PERFORMANCE IN AN ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

by

Terrence L. McAllister

April, 2015

PERCEPTIONS OF HOW VIRTUAL LEARNING AND SEAT TIME IMPACT STUDENT

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the McAllister family, Jocelyn (wife) and my three boys—TJ, Jaymond and Jaelin. Jocelyn thank you for always believing in me and encouraging me throughout our marriage. I am very fortunate and blessed that God allowed me to meet and marry such an incredible young lady. TJ, Jaymond and Jaelin, success is about overcoming obstacles. There have been a number of obstacles in my life but with the support of your mother and God I have been able to overcome each and every obstacle. The dissertation journey began and ends with my desire of ultimately leaving a legacy for you. I love you more than you will ever know. Stay focused on your goals and maintain a personal relationship with God and you will go a long way.

Lastly, this dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Julia McAllister. My mother gave me a stable foundation to build upon and made sure that I had supreme confidence in myself. She has always told me that I can be and do anything I set my mind to. Thanks Mom, for all of your love and support. I love you!

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I would also like to thank Dr. Grobe for his direction, support and guidance throughout the dissertation process. His accountability ensures your success. Furthermore, I would like to thank the entire graduate department at both East Carolina University and UNC at Pembroke for their unrelenting support, admiration and advice throughout the dissertation process.

Thanks to all of my friends, co-workers, and extended family for always pushing me to excel. Your thoughts and kind words were valuable. Last, but not least thanks to my Pastor and church family for your continued prayers and support.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Need for the Study

The reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act*, also referred to as the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001,* changed the focus of education. This act increased the level of accountability for schools and placed a more profound emphasis on the educational practices affecting at-risk students. According to the National Center for School Engagement, at-risk students are primarily characterized as students who possess one or more of the following characteristics (www.schoolengagement.org, 2013):

1. Homeless or transient

2. Involved in drugs or alcohol

3. Abused sexually, physically, or emotionally

4. Mentally ill

5. Neglected at home or live in stressful family environments

6. Lacking social or emotional supports

7. Involved with delinquent peers such as street gangs

Based upon the fact that all the above are contributing factors to school failure; North Carolina requires that Personal Education Plans (PEPs) be written for all students who are at risk of failure. The purpose of this statute is to prevent at-risk students from falling further behind (www.dpi.state.us/alp, 2000). While this law is in place, the interpretation of the fidelity of implementation is left up to individual schools. Personal Education Plans should be implemented with allegiance for all students, but this is ever more important for students in an alternative learning setting (www.dpi.state.nc.us/alp, 2000). The school district of the rural county in southeastern North Carolina in this study has specific board policies (

3405 StudentsAt-Risk of Academic Failure, 2013) as it relates to students at risk of academic

failure. The board's desire is to ensure students acquire academic information and skills for

success in secondary education as well as career success. To support this endeavor, structures

have been identified and established to provide the needed support for students who are at risk of

academic failure and not being promoted or graduating. The school principal has the

responsibility of identifying at-risk students and providing the necessary support for academic

success (North Carolina G.S. 115C-105.41):

1. Personalized Educational Plan (PEP): These are individual plans based on student
   need to address academics and/or behavior beginning in Kindergarten. Principals are
   responsible to notify parents that their student has a PEP and must provide the parent
   and/or guardian with a copy. Parents are an integral part in the creation of this plan.

2. Transition Plan: Allows students to have social, academic, and emotional success as
   they transition school environments. This plan is in place for at-risk students to
   provide continued support and encouragement as the student transitions from
   elementary to middle and from middle to high. Included in this plan is an on-going
   evaluation of the process to include actions and goals that are being accomplished and
   updated as needed.

The North Carolina State Board of Education approved guidelines for schools to follow

when implementing and modifying alternative learning programs in 1999 in an effort to provide

opportunities for the growing at-risk population of students. The guidelines were necessary to

ensure safe and orderly learning environments for students in need of an alternative setting.

 According to the requirements set, all programs created would have to be flexible and effective

in providing the elements necessary to help students overcome the challenges that could possibly

place them at risk of inappropriate behavior and academic failure (www.dpi.state.nc.us/alp, 2000).

The county school system has used the guidelines established by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and has established specific board policies as it relates to alternative education (Policy Code: 3470/4305 Alternative Learning Programs/Schools, 2013). The purpose of the board is to set standards which provide a safe and orderly environment at each school using a Behavioral Management Plan, Parental Involvement Plan, and Conflict Resolution Plan.

The alternative learning program has been implemented as an additional option for students that continue to have challenges with behavior management and/or academics in the regular educational setting. The following have been identified by the school district as purposes of an alternative education setting:

1. To intervene and address problems that prevent a student from achieving success in the regular educational setting,

2. To reduce the risk that a student will drop out of school by providing resources to help the student resolve issues affecting his or her performance at school,

3. To return a student, if and when it is practicable, to the regular educational setting with the skills necessary to succeed in that environment, and

4. To preserve a safe and orderly learning environment in the regular educational setting.

5. Students are typically referred to schools based on their attendance area. Based on law, the board may decide to assign a student to a school outside of their district in an

effort for a student to attend a theme/specialized school or for any other reason that the board deems necessary.

Students attending an alternative school may be referred to school on a voluntary or involuntary basis.

The following is the transfer process for students according to www.NCpublicschools.org:

1. Responsibilities of Personnel at Referring School: In addition to any other procedures required by this policy, prior to referring a student to an alternative learning program or school, the principal of the referring school must:

    a. document the procedures that were used to identify the student as being at risk of academic failure or as being disruptive or disorderly,

    b. provide the reasons for referring the student to an alternative learning program or school, and

    c. provide to the alternative learning program or school all relevant student records, including anecdotal information.

2. Responsibilities of School Personnel at the Alternative Learning Program or School: If a student who is subject to G.S. 14-208.18 is assigned to an alternative school, the student must be supervised by school personnel at all times.

3. Voluntary Referral: This type of referral is encouraged whenever possible and a parent/guardian should be a part of this process. Once the transfer is approved the sending and receiving principal must arrange the transfer process. The sending principal must notify superintendent or designee of this transfer.

4. Involuntary Referral:

a. the student presents a clear threat to the safety of other students or personnel;

b. the student presents a significant disruption to the educational

c. environment in the regular educational setting,

d. the student is at risk of dropping out or not meeting standards for promotion, and resources in addition to or different from those available in the regular educational setting are needed to address the issue,

e. the student has been charged with a felony or a crime that allegedly endangered the safety of others, and it is reasonably foreseeable that the educational environment in the regular educational setting will be significantly disrupted if the student remains, or

f. if the Code of Student Conduct provides for a transfer as a consequence of the student's behavior.

Before an involuntary transfer is extended, the referring school must document all academic, social and/or behavioral problems a student is experiencing. Once those areas have been identified, the actions, steps, or consequences that have been enforced to correct behavior and/or academic performance within the regular education setting must be documented. Once the principal identifies that the steps, and/or actions, that have been put in place do not correct the academic/behavior needs of the student, the principal must recommend to the superintendent that the student be transferred to the alternative school.

The principal must provide the following to support the request for alternative placement: (1) an explanation of the student's behavior or academic performance that is at issue, (2) documentation or a summary of the documentation of the efforts to assist the student in the student's regular educational setting, if applicable, and (3) documentation of the circumstances

that support an involuntary transfer (Policy Code: 3470/4305 Alternative Learning Programs/Schools, 2013).

In many instances, traditional educational settings do not meet the academic, social, and/or emotional needs of at-risk students. Many at-risk students are suspended or choose to drop out before completing the requirements needed to achieve graduation. Research suggests that students who experience a disconnect from mainstream learning environments tend to suffer adverse effects in their adult lives. Many students find the opportunity to reconnect to the educational environment through alternative education settings (Zweig, 2003). Students who are suspended from the traditional education setting are often disciplinary referrals assigned to non-traditional schools, also known as alternative schools. These schools must be equipped to meet the academic, social, behavioral, and emotional needs of students in order to increase the likelihood of success for the student—a decrease in deviant behavior and/or graduation.

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction has determined that each alternative learning program must have seven standards in operation. In May 2005, *House Bill 1076* ordered the North Carolina State Board of Education to adopt standards, rather than policies and standards, for alternative learning programs. These standards serve as the foundation for successful educational programs and were developed based on research and historical data gleaned from functioning alternative programs throughout the country. The seven standards are:

1. Clear mission

2. Leadership

3. Culture and Climate

4. Professional Development

5. Parent/Community Involvement

6. Curriculum and Instruction

7. Monitoring and Assessment

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction has taken the seven standards and aligned them with legislation adopted in 1999 (see Appendix A).

An effective alternative program design has specific components that should prove beneficial in meeting the needs of at-risk students. First and foremost, alternative programs should be governed by leaders who are visionaries, supportive in nature, and strong in their leadership practices. These leaders should hire and retain staff members who have a genuine concern for the well-being and success of all students. All teachers and staff should demonstrate high expectations for themselves, as well as the students, and should maintain a highly engaging relationship with the students.

There should be a holistic approach to teaching and the dispensation of services to students. The student-teacher ratio should be kept to a minimum to provide for a more individualized and flexible delivery of instruction. There should also be a comprehensive counseling program that encompasses a wide range of services provided for students with varying issues affecting their academic performance. The school should be safe and orderly, maintaining a family-like atmosphere. School leaders should indeed hold students accountable for their actions, while being fair and equitable in the execution of consequences and interventions for inappropriate behaviors.

Statement of the Problem

What is the "Silent Epidemic?" Who does it impact? Why should America be concerned with the "Silent Epidemic?" These questions concerning the dropout rate may not evoke thought by many Americans because of the terminology of "Silent Epidemic." However, according to

the Gates Foundation, if one was to change the term to dropout, it would gain more attention and strike up a great deal of conversation (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006). One of the factors used when calculating the "Silent Epidemic" and the effectiveness of schools is the graduation rate. America did not recognize the severity of the issue due to the skewed data that was prevalent in the United States as it relates to dropouts. Until recently, the dropout rate data were an underestimation of dropout rates and an overestimation of graduation rates, which has led us to the "Silent Epidemic" (Bridgeland et al., 2006).

The term "dropout" as we know it simply refers to a student in education that does not complete the course of action of graduating with a high school diploma. This study shall qualify dropout to refer only to high school students in America. The following are some interesting facts about dropout rates in America: 1.2 million fail to graduate from high school, on average 71% of high school students graduate, 40-50% disparity exists between white and minority groups, and 50% of African Americans graduate (Bridgeland et al., 2006). This issue affects every state in America to one degree or another. In North Carolina, there were 19,184 dropouts in 2008-2009, males drop out more frequently than females (59% and 41% respectively), minority groups have a larger percentage of dropouts than non-minority groups, the dropout rate in 2008-2009 was 3.7%, the dropout count in 2008-2009 was 638 and the dropout rate of the county in this study was 4.27%. According to the most recent data available for the 2012-2013 school year the state dropout rate dropped to 2.45 % and the southeastern school district being studied was 4.22%. Even though state rates are being reported as declining, the southeastern school district rates are remaining constant and significantly below the state rate. Dropout rates by race/ethnicity and gender vary in North Carolina high schools for 2012-13 as reported by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction in April 2014

(http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/research/discipline/reports/consolidated/2012-13/consolidated-report.pdf) (see Figure 1). The dropout totals by race/ethnicity and gender in the southeastern school district in North Carolina for 2012-13 as reported by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction in April 2014 is high; this district had one of the ten highest dropout rates in the state for 2012-13 (http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/research/discipline/reports/consolidated/2012-13/consolidated-report.pdf) (see Figure 2).

School systems in North Carolina are required to report dropout data in grades one and higher to the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) annually (NCDPI, 2013). Each school should maintain a School Leaver Roster (SLR). A copy of the official roster should be located in the school and in the central office. The purpose of the SLR is to:

1. establish the total enrollment pool from the previous year and

2. document the status of leavers who are not in membership on the twentieth school day of the current year.

Maintaining, updating, and checking this record should be a primary ongoing responsibility. Keeping an updated roster of school leavers can reduce substantially the number of transfers who are erroneously classified as dropouts (NCDPI, 2013).

Students whose whereabouts are unknown must be included in the total count of dropouts for the reporting year for each LEA. The dropouts by student count from 2003 to 2013 vary for the school district in southeastern North Carolina (see Figure 3). Each LEA is required to report dropouts by the grade level of their last membership in the reporting year. "For example, an eighth grader who fails to return to school in the fall as a ninth grader is reported at the eighth grade level, not the ninth grade. For this reason, all sending and receiving schools should share
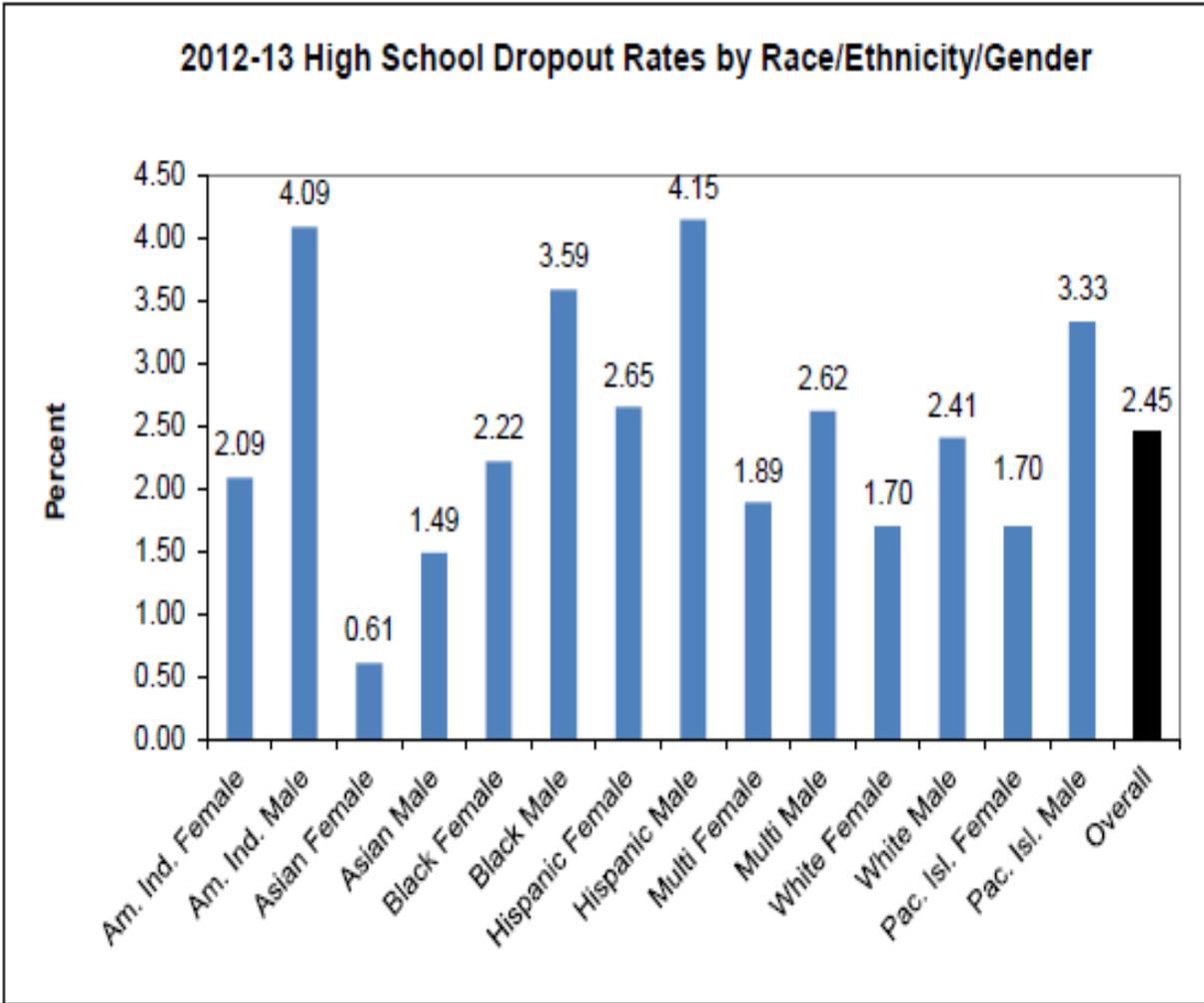
Figure 1. North Carolina high school dropout rates by race/ethnicity/gender for 2012-13.
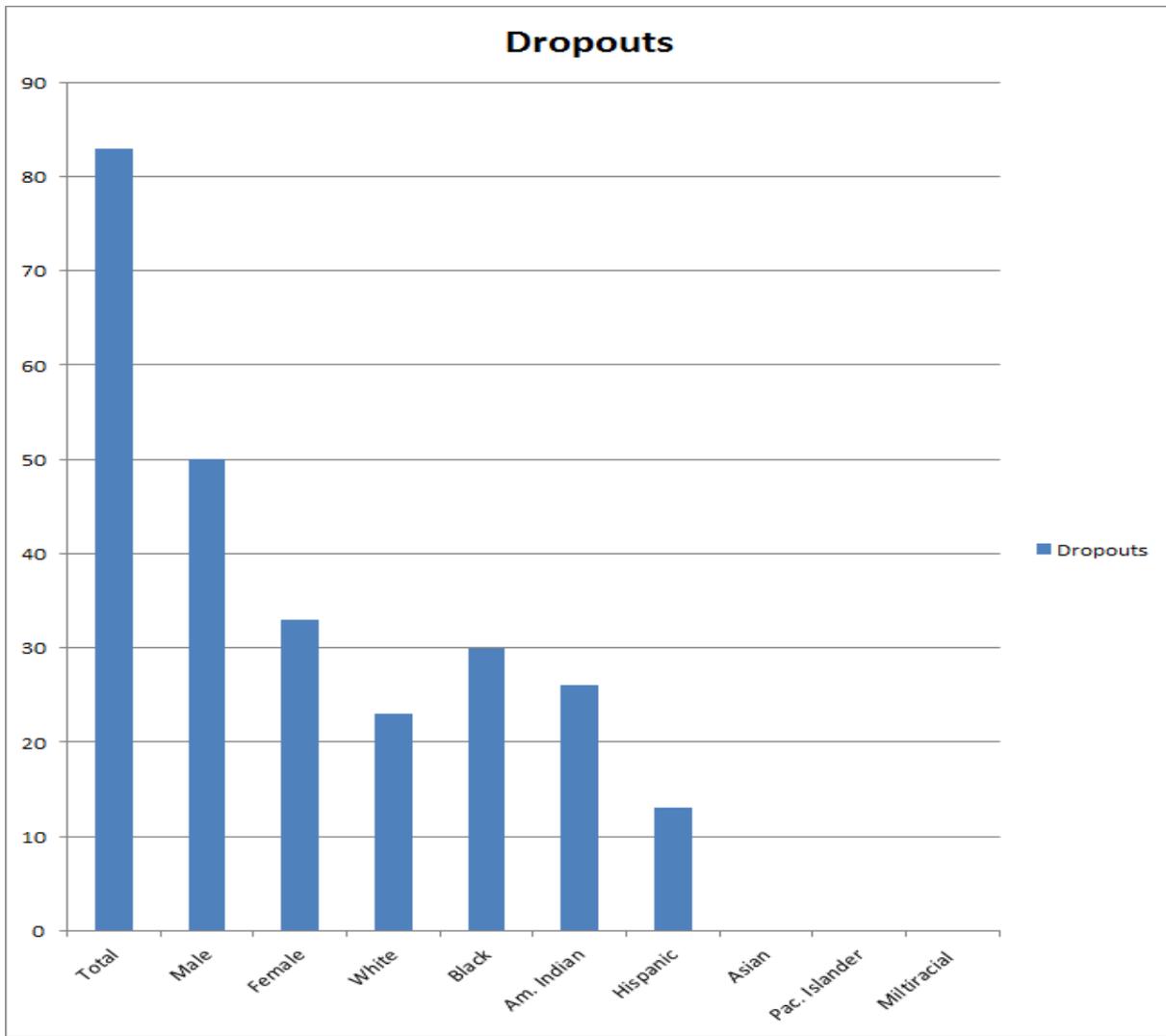
Figure 2. District in southeastern NC school dropout totals by race/ethnicity/gender for 2012-13.
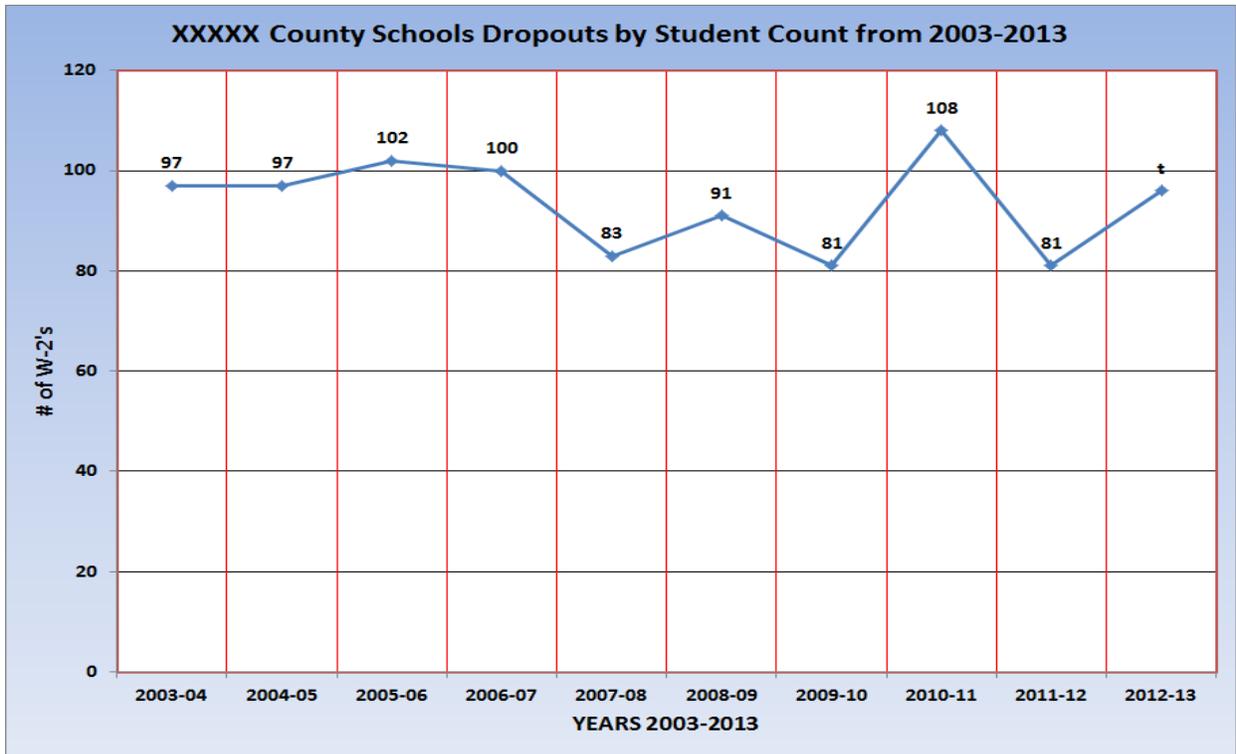
Figure 3. Dropouts by student count from 2003-2013 for the school district in southeast, NC.

information on the status of school leavers during the first twenty-day period and for the remainder of the school year" (NCDPI, 2013). North Carolina has a very specific definition for dropouts and a method for calculation. A definition for "dropout" (see Appendix B) was also established by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI, 2013).

The ten-year dropout rate for the school district in southeastern North Carolina remained constant until the 2007-2008 school year and has increased substantially since that year (see Figure 4). Based on the data, it is obvious that something needs to change in order to meet the needs of all students and prevent them from dropping out of school. In April 2014, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction reported that the school district in southeastern North Carolina has one of the top ten highest dropout rates out of the 115 school districts in the state (http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/research/discipline/reports/consolidated/2012-13/consolidated-report.pdf). Assessing and strengthening the strategies used in the alternative learning model may certainly help change these data for the positive in the future.

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction reports the following key terms as it relates to dropouts (NCDPI, 2013):

1. Dropout Referral Law: A state law that requires school systems to refer dropouts to appropriate education alternatives including community colleges. (Refer to G.S. 115C-47)

2. Initial Enrollee: A special status for students who enroll in a school system for the first time and remain in membership for twenty days or less. Students with this status are not included in the dropout count.

3. No Show: Term used to designate a student who is expected to return in the fall, but on day 20 of the new year is not in membership at the assigned school or in any other
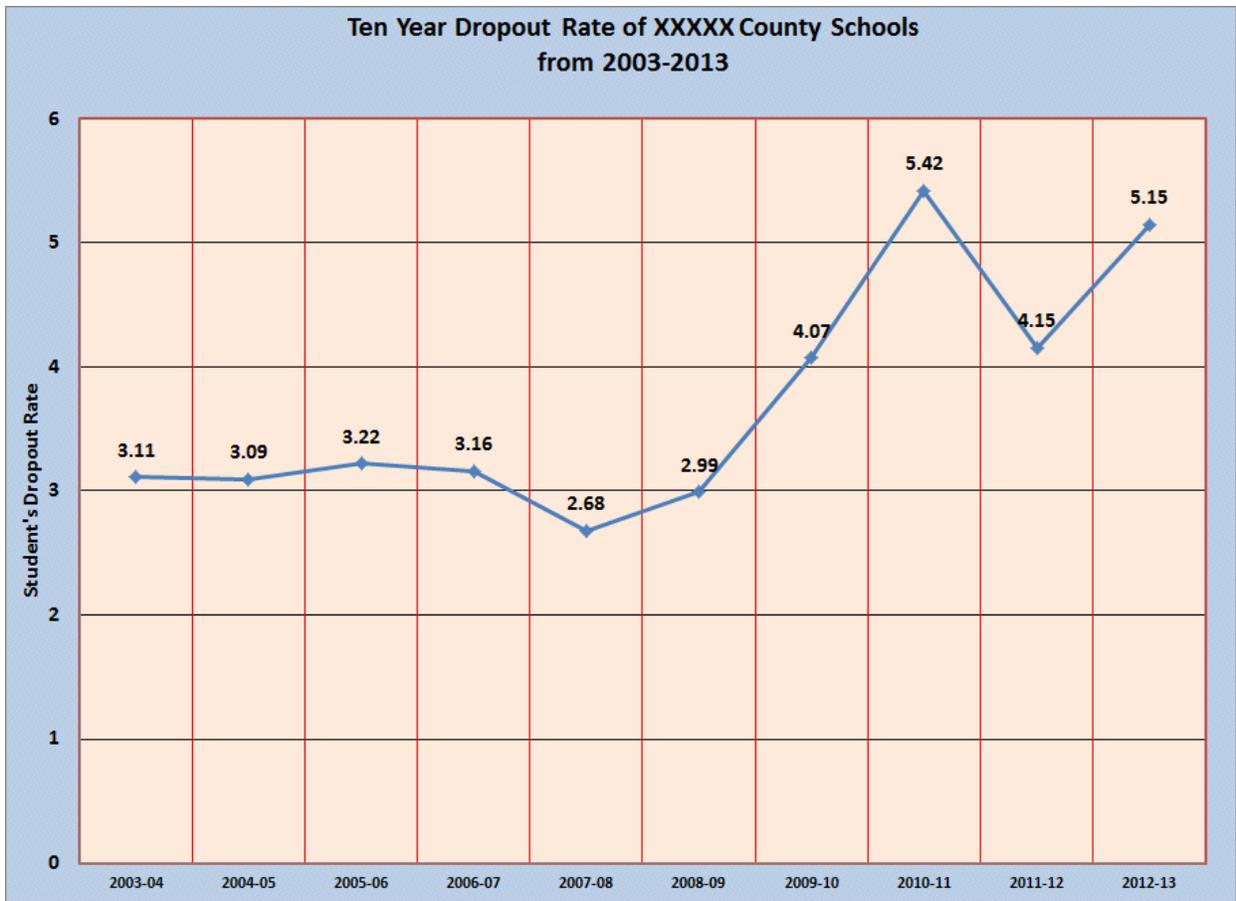
Figure 4. Ten year dropout rate from 2003-2013 for the school district in southeast, NC.

approved program. (Students whose whereabouts cannot be determined must be

reported as dropouts.)

4. Receiving School: Any school in the LEA to which a student is normally promoted

    or assigned during or at the end of a school year.

5. Reporting Exemption: Any reason, as stated in the Uniform Dropout Definition,

    which excludes a student from being reported as a dropout.

6. Reporting Year: A twelve-month period in which data are collected on dropouts. In

    North Carolina, the reporting year begins on the first day of the school year and runs

    through the last day of summer vacation.

7. Sending School: The school from which students are transferred or promoted during

    or at the end of the school year.

Alternative schools and programs (ALPs), reported to the North Carolina Department of

Public Instruction, 14,090 student placements in 2011-2012, almost identical to the 14,093

reported in 2010-2011. There were 12,874 individual students placed in ALPs during the 2011-

2012 school year. High schools in North Carolina reported 13,488 dropouts in 2011-2012. The

grades 9-13 dropout rate in 2011-2012 was 3.01%, down from the 3.43% reported for 2010-

2011. The decrease in dropout rate was 12.2%. The dropout rates for these school years for the

county in this study were 5.37% and 4.15% respectively (www.ncpublicschools.org, 2013).

Students drop out of school for a number of reasons and the decisions are typically not

made at the spur of the moment. It is a process that students go through over time that ultimately

leads them to making the decision to drop out. One may summarize that the root of the issue for

students is a lack of hope. Without hope students lose determination, discipline, dedication, and

diligence; this eventually stifles their potential of being successful. The following are some

reasons why students drop out of school: chronically late or absent, lack of interest in school and learning, demonstration of poor academic achievement, and non-academic challenges (poverty, health, and pregnancy). Data released by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction in April of 2014 details the coded reasons for students dropping out of school in 2012-13 (see Table 1).

Kerby (2012) states that students of color are given harsher punishments in school discipline compared to their counterparts, representing approximately 70% of the school initiated arrests or referrals to law enforcement. In the same report by Kerby (2012) based upon the *Sentencing Project*, the students that are referred eventually end up in the juvenile justice system, resulting in 58% of these black youth being sentenced to adult prisons. Another contributing factor to school success is poverty levels. Research conducted by Macartney, Bishaw, and Fontenot (2013) for the United States Census Bureau indicated that African Americans are three times more likely to be in poverty than whites.

The long lasting impact of habitual suspensions from school not only affects the life of the student and the family, it also has negative substantial effects on all of society. Consequently, the problem is not just one for individual families or schools to scrutinize, but all of the general public. Businesses, civic organizations, community leaders, mental health officials, and justice systems would be well advised and would benefit from reviewing the research and using the findings as the basis for banning together to take action to assist in addressing this alarming issue. Many school districts are currently investigating and implementing strategies to reduce suspensions, but this is disproportionately low based upon the research that demonstrates that suspension does not address its intent. The majority of school

Table 1

North Carolina High School Dropout Reason Codes Reported in 2012-13

Reason	Code	County	Percent
Attendance	ATTD	5068	45.9
Enrollment in a community college	COMM	1941	17.6
Lack of engagement with school and/or peers	ENGA	674	6.1
Unknown	UNKN	570	5.2
Academic problems	ACAD	420	3.8
Moved, school status unknown	MOVE	419	3.8
Choice of work over school	WORK	350	3.2
Incarcerated in adult facility	INCR	265	2.4
Unstable home environment	HOME	242	2.2
Failure to return after a long-term suspension	LTSU	205	1.9
Discipline problem	DISC	194	1.8
Need to care for children	CHLD	158	1.4
Pregnancy	PREG	121	1.1
Health problems	HEAL	120	1.1
Employment necessary	EMPL	114	1.0
Runaway	RNAW	90	0.8
Expectations of culture, family, or peers	EXPC	39	0.4
Suspected substance abuse	ABUS	38	0.3
Marriage	MARR	13	0.1
Difficulties with English language	LANG	8	0.1
Total		11,049	100.0

districts are still using suspensions regularly for offenses that are nonviolent. Research provided offers alternatives to this approach.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to identify an appropriate structure to successfully serve all alternative students in an effort to increase the graduation rate and academic proficiency of the students at an alternative high school in rural southeastern North Carolina and how virtual learning and seat time impacts this structure.

The county being researched in this problem of practice is located in southeastern North Carolina east of Interstate 95 and has a very unique history in the fact that from colonization to post-reconstruction, three distinct populations were established and well represented throughout the county: Native American, black, and white; "Another landmark in the lower part of the county is Stewartsville Cemetery, founded in 1785. This is one historic place in the county which has significance for all three races. The cemetery, from its earliest days, has served as burial ground for black, white, and Indian" (Myers, 2000). "In late February, 1874, a covered whiskey wagon stopped for the night on the John McNair plantation, and country people from all three races gathered for some merrymaking" (Dial & Eliades, 1996, p. 82). This is important to note because during the era of segregation following *Plessy v. Ferguson*, segregation was divided three ways in this county, a very unique structure for rural North Carolina (H.E. Bowen, personal communication, November 26, 2013). Upon the decision of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka Kansas*, schools remained segregated in this county; it was not until approximately fifteen years following this decision that voluntary desegregation began which would involve desegregating schools for Native Americans, blacks, and whites. The first

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integrated class would graduate from the main high school in 1970 (J.W. Locklear, personal communication, December 30, 2013).

The county being researched oldest public school is Central School (now closed). Built in 1909, it served as the only school for some years, containing both elementary and high school classes. The high school, a part of the public school system, was built on East Church Street in 1924 and was used as a high school until the building of the new high school. It was then used as a junior high school until it burned in 1973. In the northern part of town are two other schools of much historic interest. A private institute located in the district being studied is the county's oldest private school. This school, in its present location on McGirt's Bridge Road and in its former location in the Newtown section, has served several generations of black students. It was founded in 1904 by Mr. E. M. McDuffie and is still operated by the McDuffie family. For many years this was the only school in town for black students, and at one time it operated as both a public and a private school. One interesting feature of the private school in earlier days was the hospital, operated as a part of the school by Dr. N. E. Jackson. The school now operates as a preparatory school and has a long list of well-known graduates. I. Ellis Johnson School was the black high school until the building of the latest high school and the simultaneous integration and consolidation of all county schools. The school was named for Mr. I. Ellis Johnson, a long-time educational leader in the county and the first principal of the school (Myers, 2000).

The alternative learning program that is being studied began in one of the vacated segregated schools; this school mainly housed students with special needs until later court decisions would transition these students into their least restrictive environment (L.D. Bowen, personal communication, December 1, 2013). In 2011, the alternative learning program was moved to its present location which had previously been one of the segregated high schools, next

a middle school, and then an elementary school before finally reaching its current purpose (A. Cottone, personal communication, January 6, 2014).

Since United States Civil War post-reconstruction, the county in southeastern North Carolina thrived on agriculture and would later thrive on textile mills during the Industrial Revolution until the passage of the *North American Free Trade Alliance (NAFTA)* (Myers, 2000). The county saw growth over the years resulting in attracting other industries in fields such as pharmaceuticals, golf supplies, soup, and glass (H.E. Bowen, personal communication, November 26, 2013). This economic surge would have a positive impact on the socio-economic status of many residents and create a slight population shift in the county (H.E. Bowen, personal communication, November 26, 2013). However, this economic enjoyment halted as county taxes continued to climb, industries were annexed into the city, and some industries were moved overseas (H.E. Bowen, personal communication, November 26, 2013). Resulting from this was a slight exodus of residents who were in the higher socio-economic status category; the unemployment rate would see a significant increase and the housing market would decline with the exception of government subsidized housing (H.E. Bowen, personal communication, November 26, 2013). Therefore, the county has experienced a significant change in population, mainly socioeconomic, once again and these population shifts among the races (see Figures 5-6).

Numerous county agencies, including the school district, were reluctant to accept these changes and act proactively in addressing them; many of the actions were reactionary to the changes that occurred in the county mainly due to economic circumstances (L.D. Bowen, personal communication, December 1, 2013). This is evident in the sheriff and police departments not beginning to formally acknowledge and address street gang activity until 2013

Change in Population between 2000 and 2010, by Race - County, North Carolina	Change	Percentages	Color
American Indian and Alaska native alone	737	23.05%	■
Asian alone	94	51.65%	■
Black or African American alone	509	3.79%	■
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific native alone	1	14.29%	■
Some other race alone	221	134.76%	■
Two or more races	310	64.72%	■
White alone	-1,713	-9.24%	■

Graph: Change in Population between 2000 and 2010, by Age and Race - County, North Carolina

Note. (Retrieved from http://censusviewer.com/county/NC/).

Figure 5. Change in population between 2000 and 2010 by race for the county.

Income		
		Percent Growth or Total
2011 Est Median Family Income	$37,700	(3.3%)
2000 Census Median Family Income	$38,971	
2017 Proj Median Household Income	$32,713	14.3%
2012 Proj Median Household Income	$28,630	(7.7%)
2000 Census Median Household Income	$31,024	
2011 Est Median Worker Earnings	$23,089	
2017 Proj Per Capita Income	$18,907	1.9%
2012 Proj Per Capita Income	$17,189	9.5%
2000 Census Per Capita Income	$15,693	
Est Total Pop with Income Below Poverty Level, Last 12 months	10,296	0.3%

Note. (Retrieved from http://accessnc.commerce.state.nc.us/docs/countyProfile/NC/37165.pdf and Prepared by North Carolina Department of Commerce, Labor & Economic Analysis Division, April 2013.)

Figure 6. The income shifts in the county.

(McAuley, 2013). The issues within the county and society as a whole are reflected within the school system and create greater challenges than existed as recently as fifteen years ago (L.D. Bowen, personal communication, December 1, 2013). The "at-risk" population has grown and just as with post-reconstruction, three races still remain to be served (L.D. Bowen, personal communication, December 1, 2013). The need to study and address the needs of at-risk students, especially how their needs can be met by the school district's alternative learning school is long overdue, but has been identified as a necessity by the school district (L.D. Bowen, personal communication, December 1, 2013).

Significance of the Study

First, as with many alternative schools, there is a negative connotation associated with the alternative school in southeastern North Carolina that serves the county's middle and high school students. The community's opinion of this school is that it is where students are sent to drop out; this opinion seemingly holds true to a certain extent when assessing the graduation rate comparisons of the alternative school with the only high school in the county. Furthermore, the fact that it is a separate alternative school, adds to the stereotype that exists.

Secondly, the discipline data for students enrolled in the school district, especially the data for minority students, has a direct impact on placement of students at the alternative school, the dropout rate, and the graduation rate. There has been a major population shift in the county during the past ten years, subsequently causing a substantial increase in the minority population; however, there has not been a change in the philosophy of the school system in terms of professional development on how to facilitate instruction for diverse populations or use of effective discipline models. Many of these students are involved in gang activity, but the county is still in denial about this, which is evident because the county is not a member of the North

Carolina Gang Net Database. Professional development on how to work with gang populations and how to keep such students in school (increasing the graduation rate and decreasing the dropout rate) needs to occur as well.

Finally, these data are clear for many districts across the state--they are increasing graduation rates and reducing dropout rates through the use of virtual learning, which directly correlates with seat time. They are also achieving this through reduced credit diplomas which also have a direct correlation to seat time. Therefore, an extensive virtual plan, a reduced elective plan, and appropriate counseling practices for students must be constructed and implemented within the alternative organizational structure in order for these data to improve.

The standards, suggestions, and implementation strategies provided in this document should be considered requirements for new program development or for modification of existing programs. The information that follows may be used to create and/or modify programs that are flexible and effective in assisting students with overcoming challenges which may place them "at-risk" of academic failure and disruptive behavior, so they can learn, graduate, and become productive members of society.

North Carolina Accountability Data

North Carolina's school districts, public schools, and charter schools receive web-based reporting through the *Education Value-Added Assessment System* (EVAAS) that offers an objective way to measure student growth and the impact on student learning (http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/effectiveness-model/evaas/, 2013). EVAAS is a statistical analysis of North Carolina high stakes state assessment data, and the system provides schools with growth data to consider, in addition to achievement data (http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/effectiveness-model/evaas/, 2013). "Educators are able to make

data-informed instructional decisions to ensure academic growth and achievement of all students by using EVAAS" (http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/effectiveness-model/evaas/, 2013). Student learning, performance, and growth data for the alternative school for the 2012-2013 school year according to the SAS Institute Inc. were released by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction in November 2013 and additional detailed information may be found at: http://www.ncaccountabilitymodel.org/SASPortal/mainUnchallenged.do?unchallenged=yes. The following are the "Rules for Effectiveness Level Determination" as determined by SAS (SAS Institute Inc., 2012) (see Figure 7):

1. Exceeds Expected Growth: Schools whose students are making substantially more progress than the state growth standard/state average (the school's index is 2 or greater).

2. Meets Expected Growth: Schools whose students are making the same amount of progress as the state growth standard/state average (the school's index is equal to or greater than -2 but less than 2).

3. Does Not Meet Expected Growth: Schools whose students are making substantially less progress than the state growth standard/state average (the school's index is less than -2).

The data clearly indicates that there are failures within the current model, methods, strategies, and practices that have been in place at the school in southeastern North Carolina (see Figures 8-20). All tested areas are significantly low and while there is no significant achievement gap between any of the subgroups at the school, this is due to the fact that all subgroups are performing poorly at the school. Not only is this evident, but the fact is that this school did not meet expected growth.

2012-2013 School Accountability Growth Estimates		
School Accountability Growth Type	**One-Year Estimate**	
	Index	**Level**
Overall	-6.24	Does Not Meet Expected Growth

The index value is the growth measure divided by its standard error, and it provides a signal as to whether the progress estimate is significantly different from the expected growth. The index value also standardizes growth measures across different models, subjects, grades and/or years for a more equitable comparison than the growth measure alone.

⊟ **What is included in a school accountability growth estimate?**

NC DPI Policy
School-wide Accountability Growth composites are scores that represent growth at the school level. The table above reports the 2012-13 School-wide Accountability Growth composite. The end-of-grade and end-of-course assessments administered in the school are used to calculate the composite. Below is a table that shows the assessments included in the composite for this school.

Descriptions of School Accountability Growth Types		
School Accountability Growth Type	**School Accountability Growth Includes**	
	Test	**Subject**
Overall	EOG	Science
	EOC	Algebra I, Biology, English II

Figure 7. School accountability growth for alternative school in southeastern, NC.
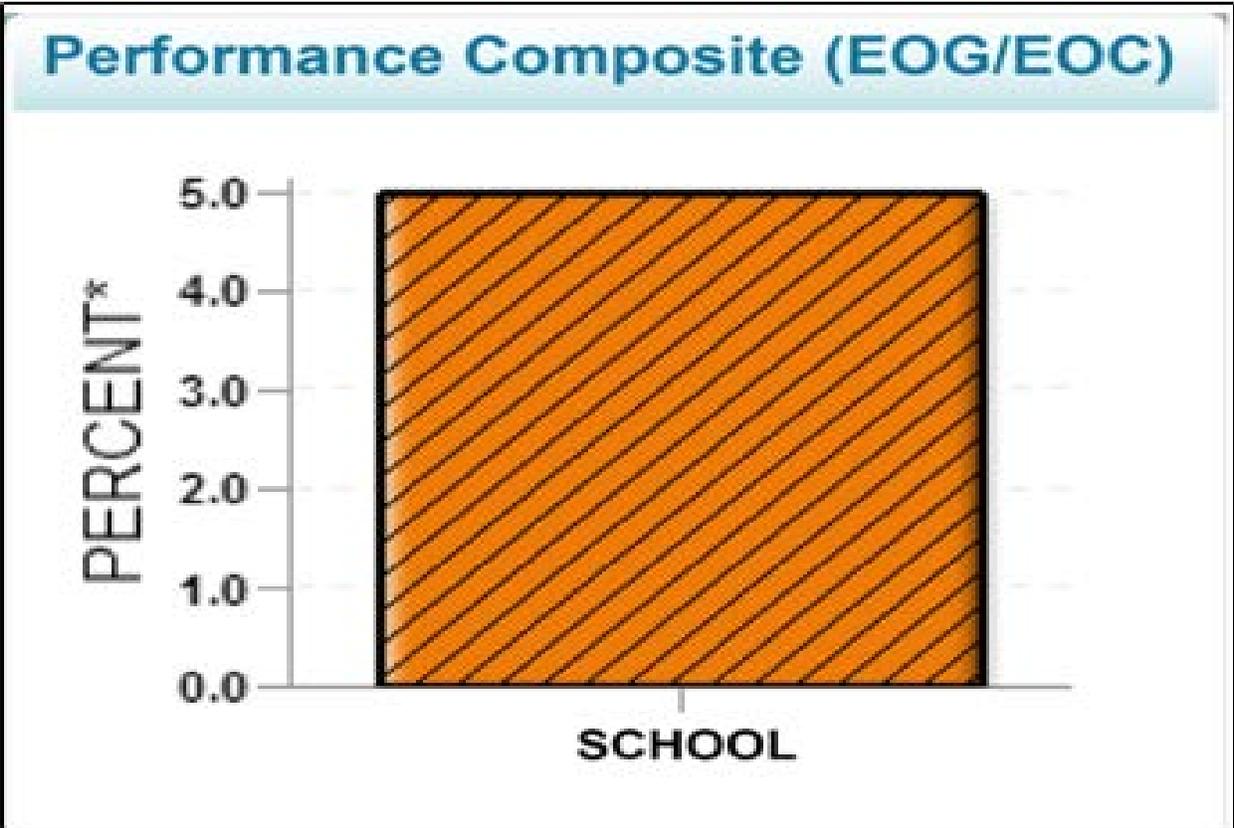
Figure 8. Performance composite for end of grade/course tests.

BY SUBJECT

SUBJECT	MA	RD	SC	M1	E2	BI	EOG	EOC	ALL SUBJ
Percent Proficient	*	5.9	*	<5	<5	*	<5	<5	<5
Number of tests taken	17	17	9	33	21	19	43	73	116
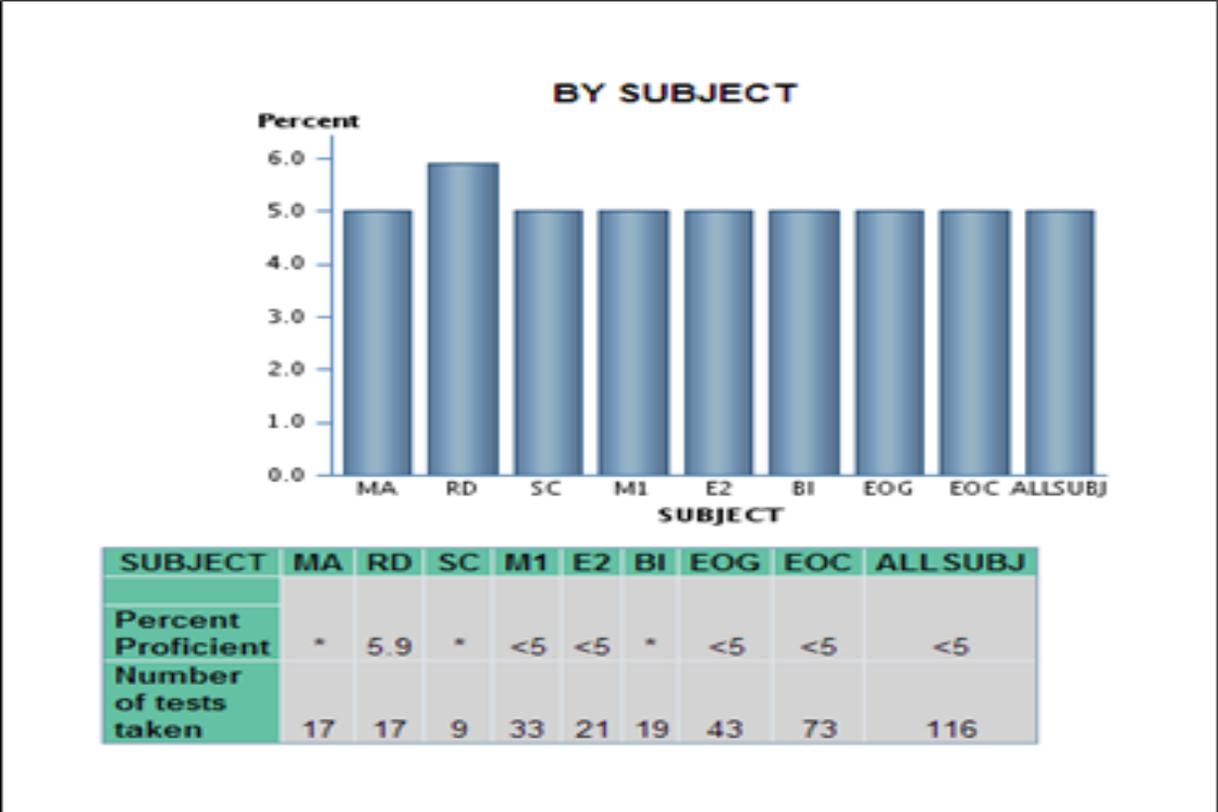
Note. EOG/EOC percent proficient by subject is calculated by dividing the number of students who scored proficient (level 3 or 4) by the total number of students tested in that subject.

Figure 9. EOG/EOC percent proficient by subject.

BY GRADE

GRADE LEVEL	07	08	EOG	EOC	ALLGRD
Percent Proficient	*	*	<5	<5	<5
Number of tests taken	12	27	43	73	116
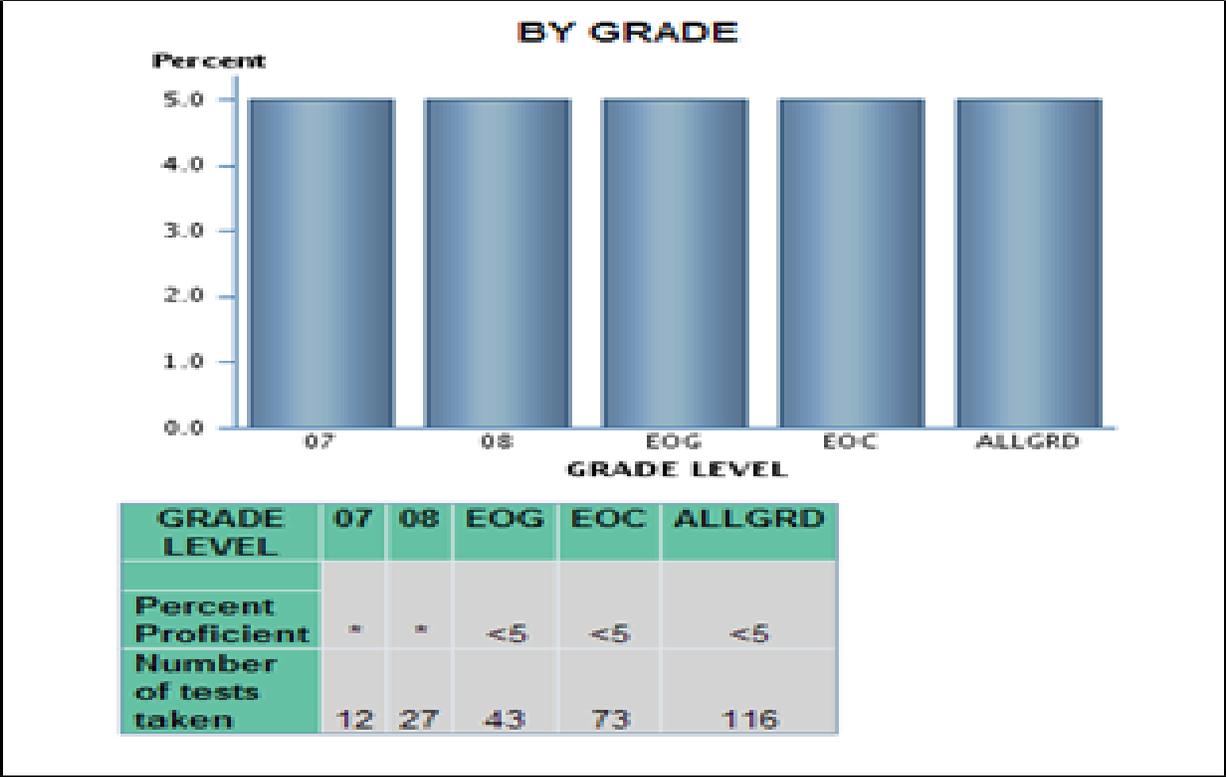
Note. EOG/EOC percent proficient by grade is calculated by dividing the number of students who scored proficient (Level 3 or 4) by the total number of students tested in that grade.

Figure 10. EOG/EOC percent proficient by grade.

BY SUBGROUP

SUBGROUP	ALLSGRP	FEMALE	MALE	AMIN	BLACK	WHITE	EDS	SWD
Percent Proficient	<5	*	<5	8.7	*	*	<5	*
Number of tests taken	116	43	73	23	69	21	101	41
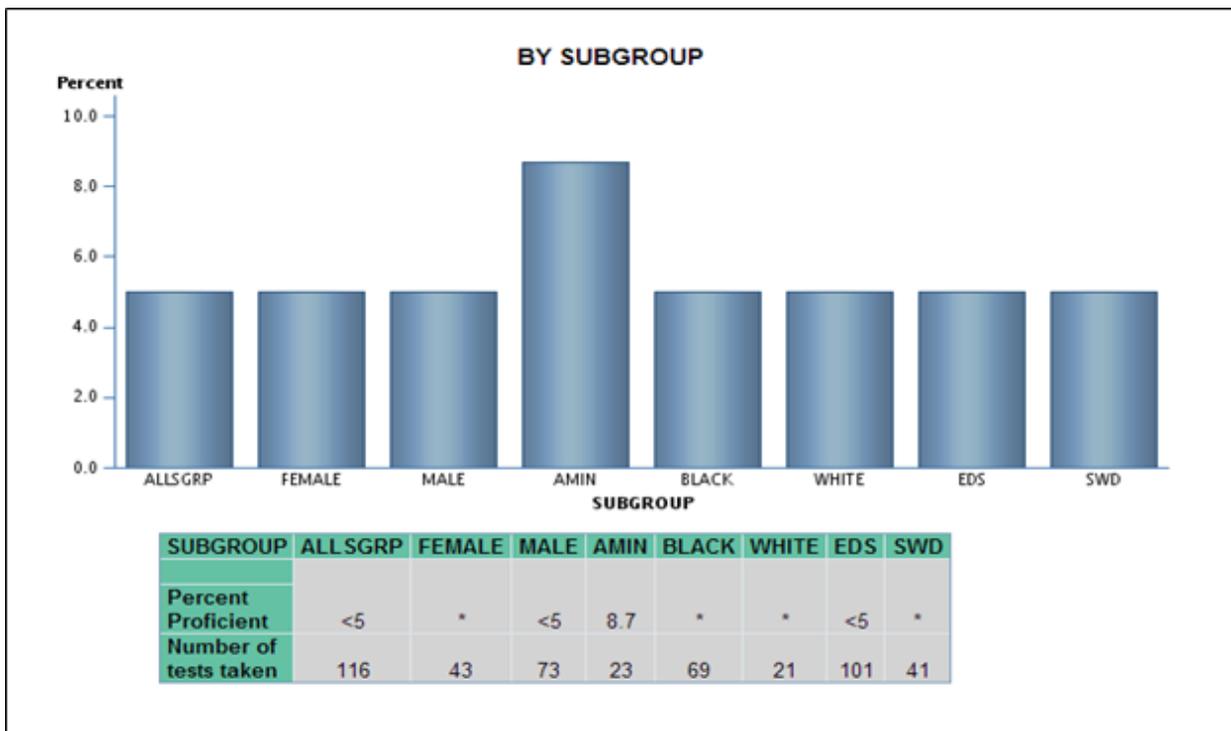
Note. EOG/EOC percent proficient by subgroup is calculated by dividing the number of students who scored proficient (level 3 or 4) by the total number of students tested in that subgroup.

Figure 11. EOG/EOC percent proficient by subgroup.
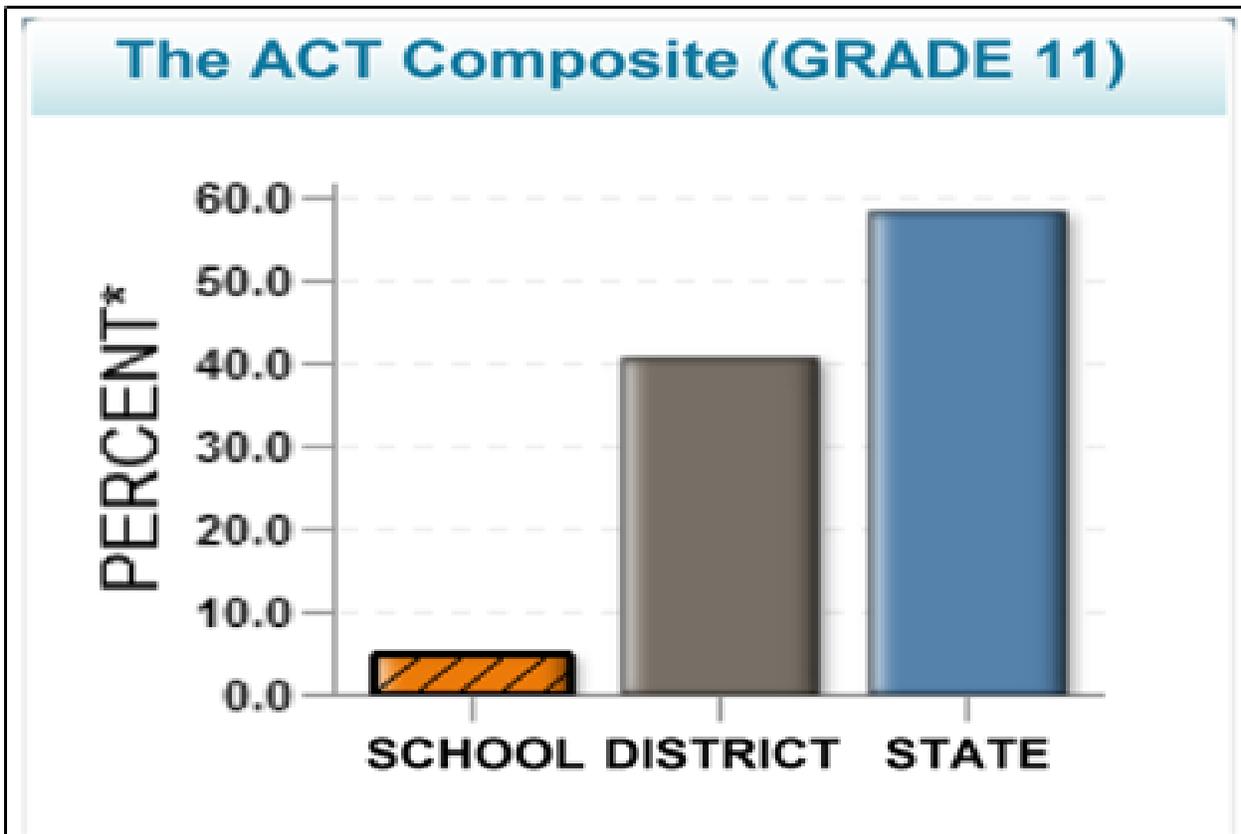
Figure 12. The ACT composite scores.
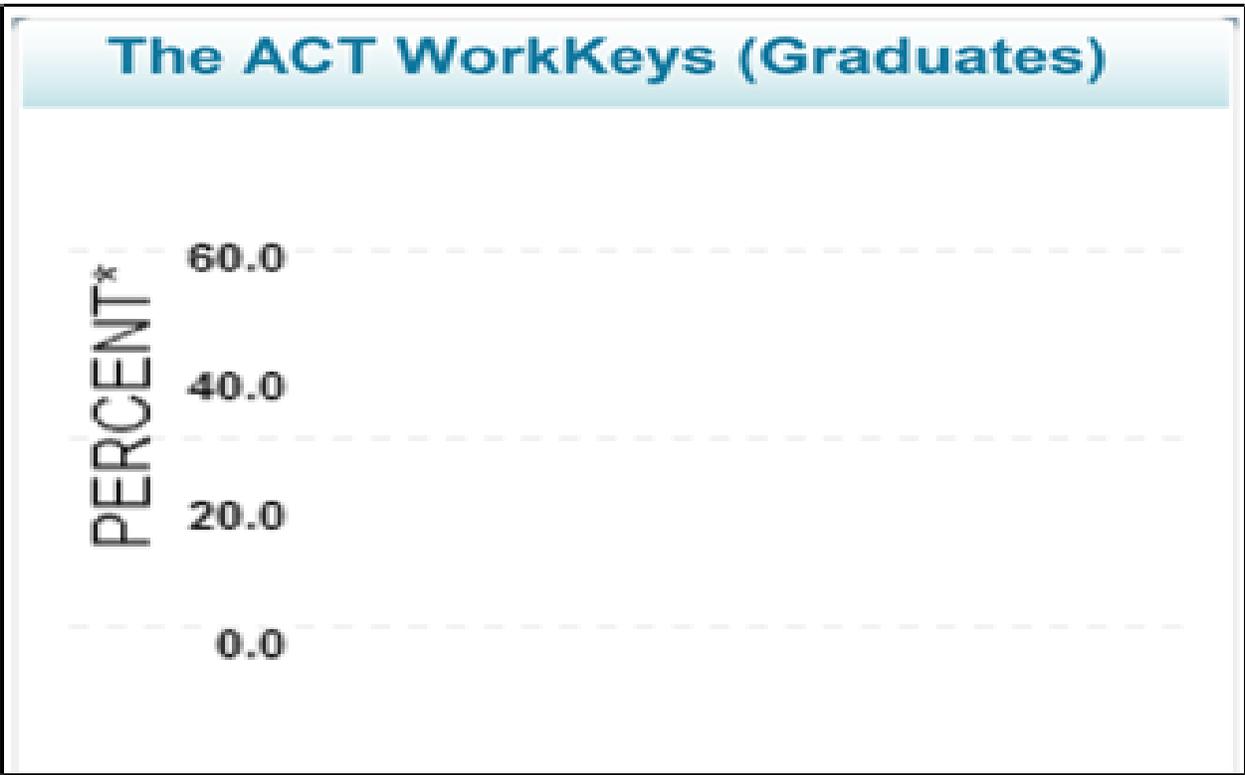
Note. Indicates that no students were tested with the assessment.

Figure 13. The ACT WorkKeys.

BY SUBJECT

Percent

| | | | | | | |
|5.0|5.0|5.0|5.0|5.0|5.0|5.0|

ACT Subject results are reported by the percent of students meeting the benchmark on a particular subject (ACTE, ACTM, ACTR, ACTS or ACTW), the percent meeting the UNC System minimum Composite Score of 17 (ACTCOM), or the overall percent of benchmarks met in a school (ACTALL).
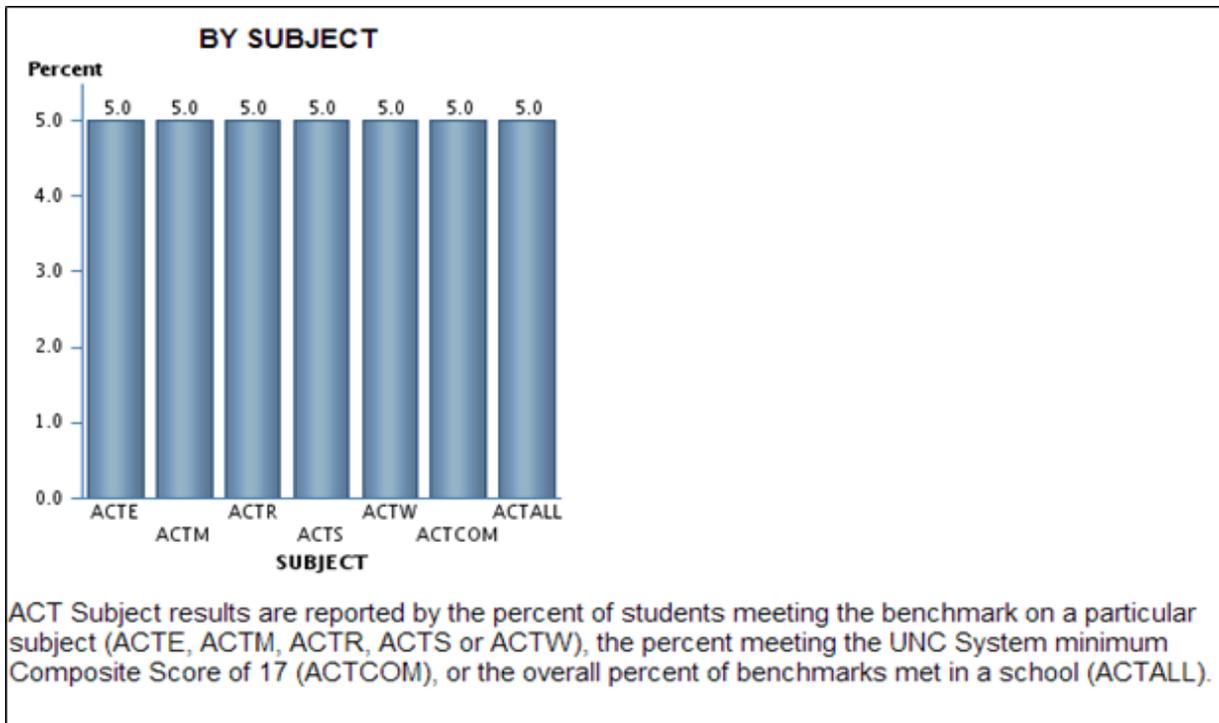
Figure 14. The ACT percent proficient by subject.
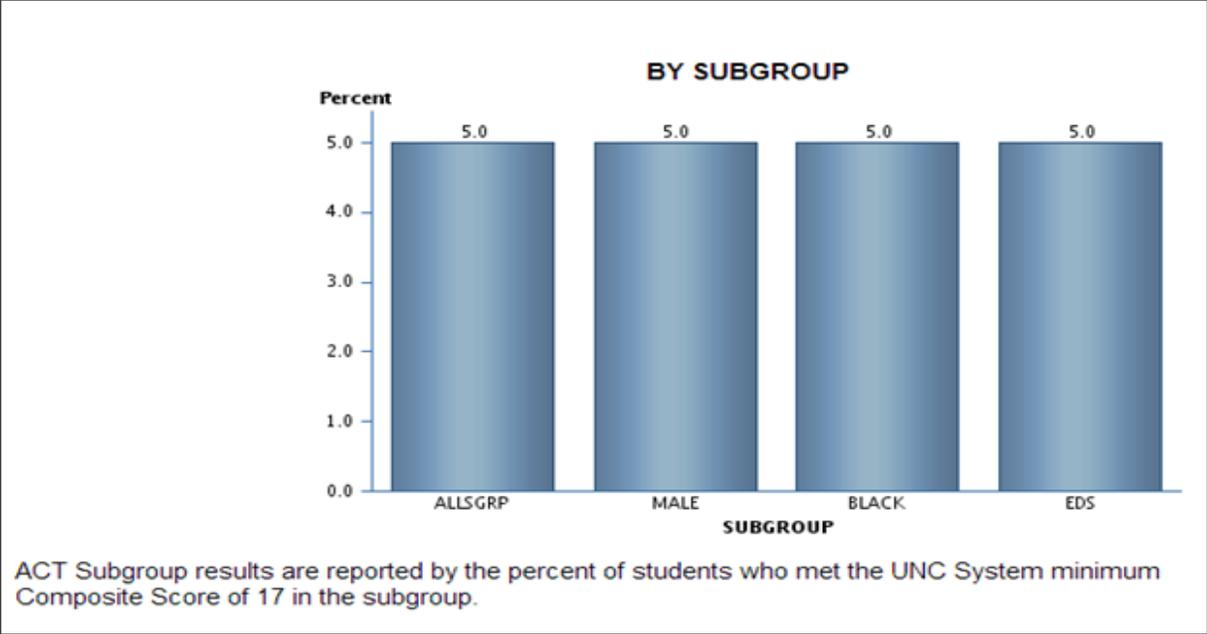
Figure 15. The ACT subgroup results.
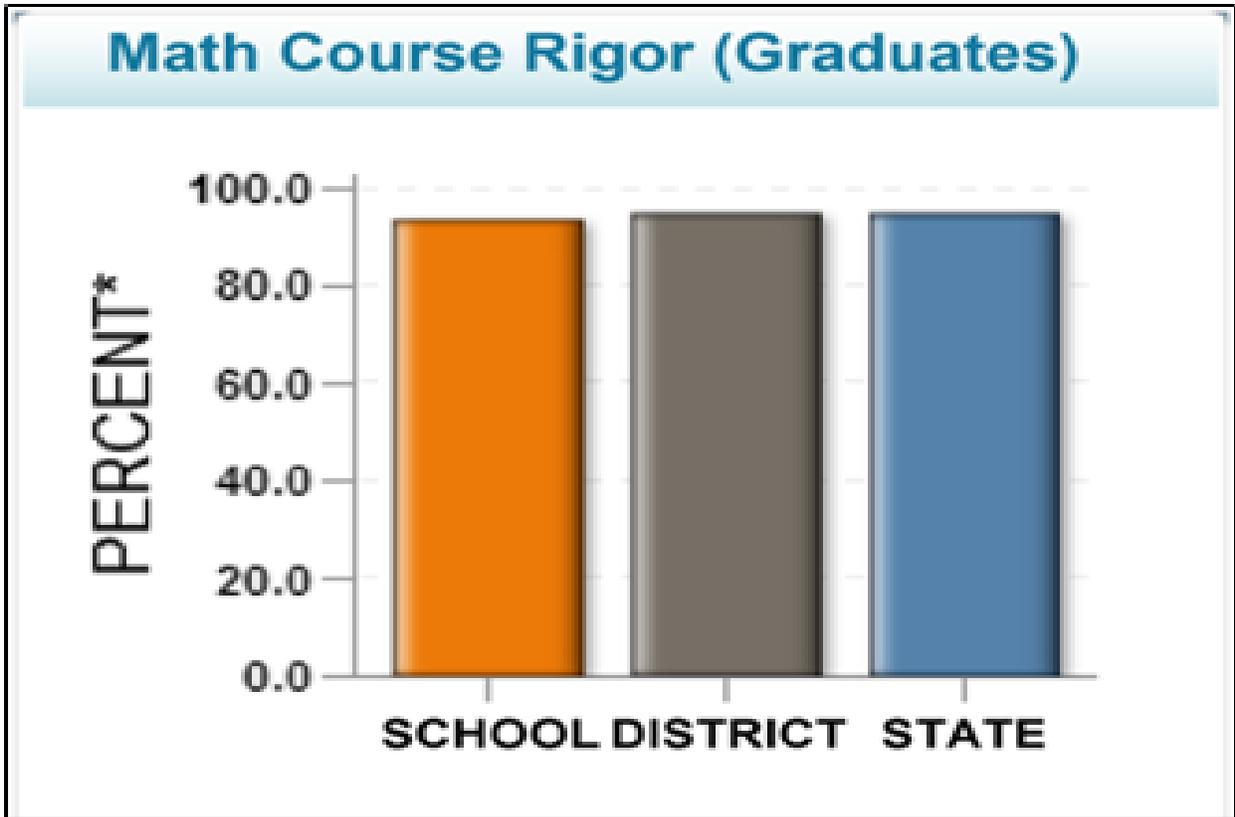
Figure 16. Math course rigor.
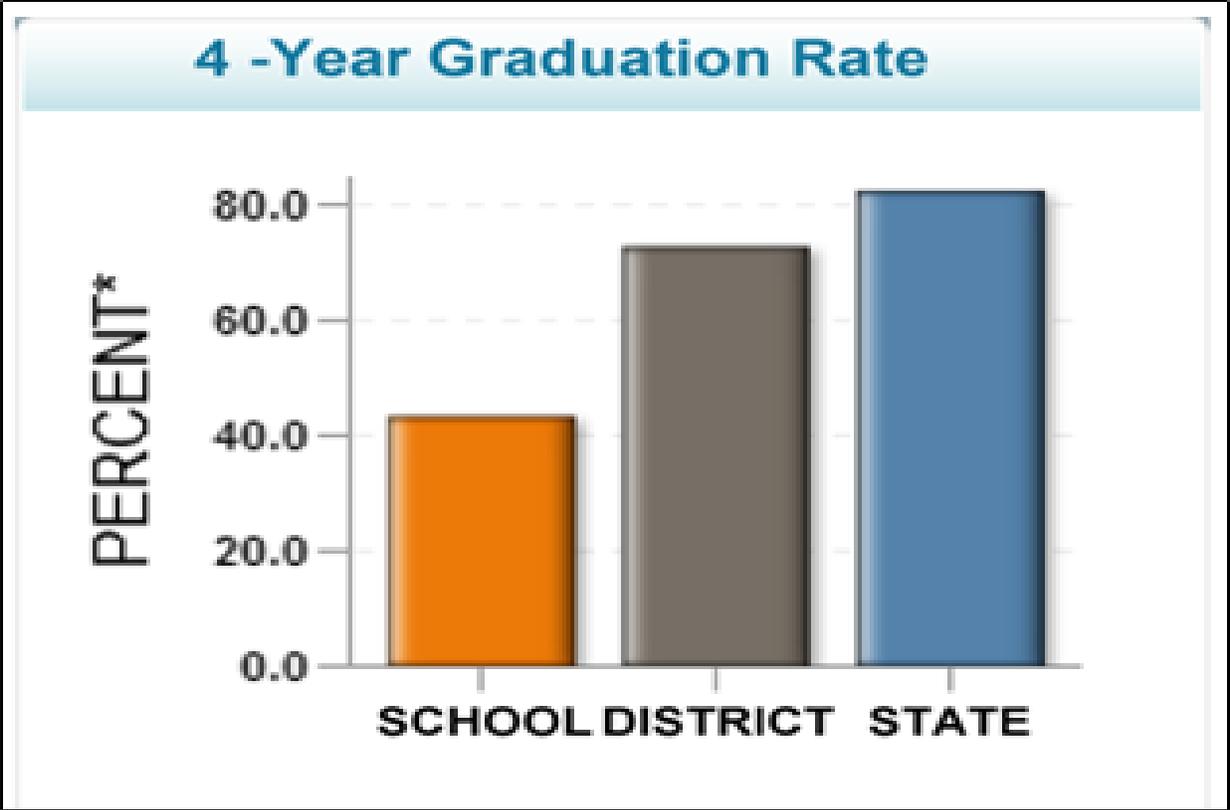
Figure 17. 4-Year graduation rate.
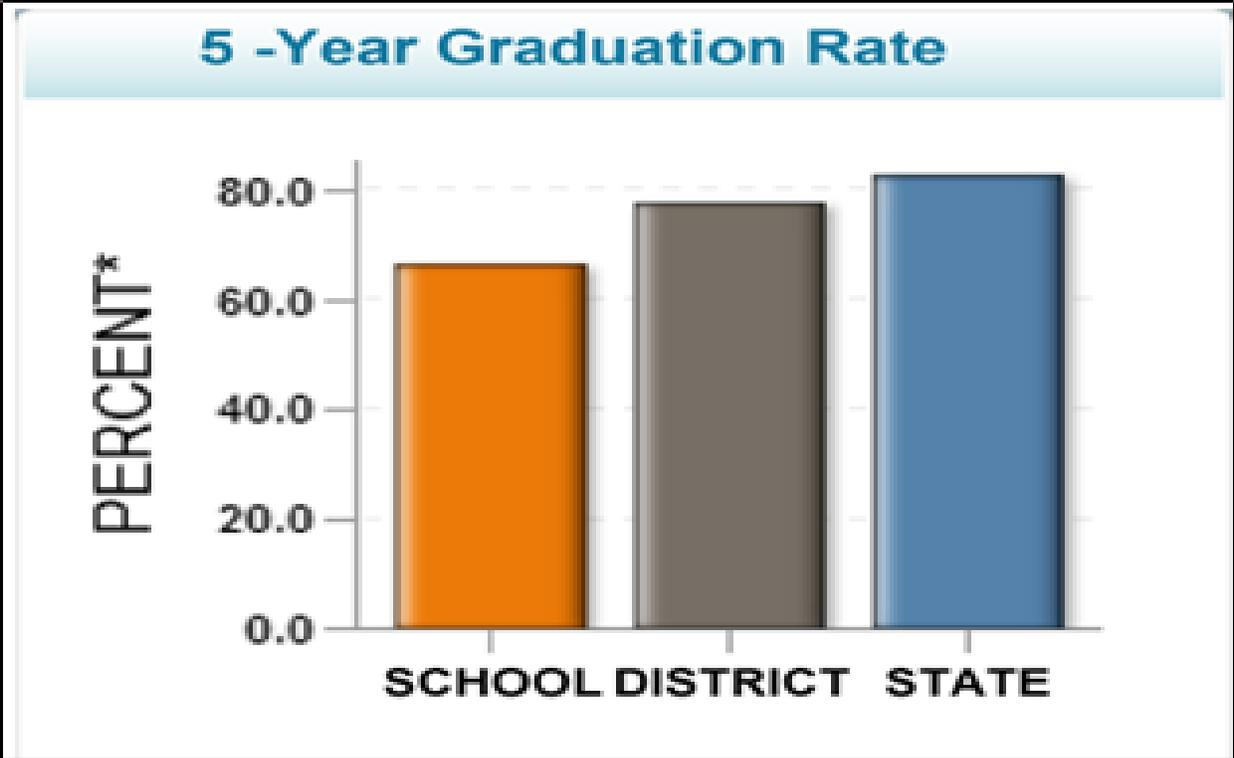
Figure 18. 5-Year graduation rate.
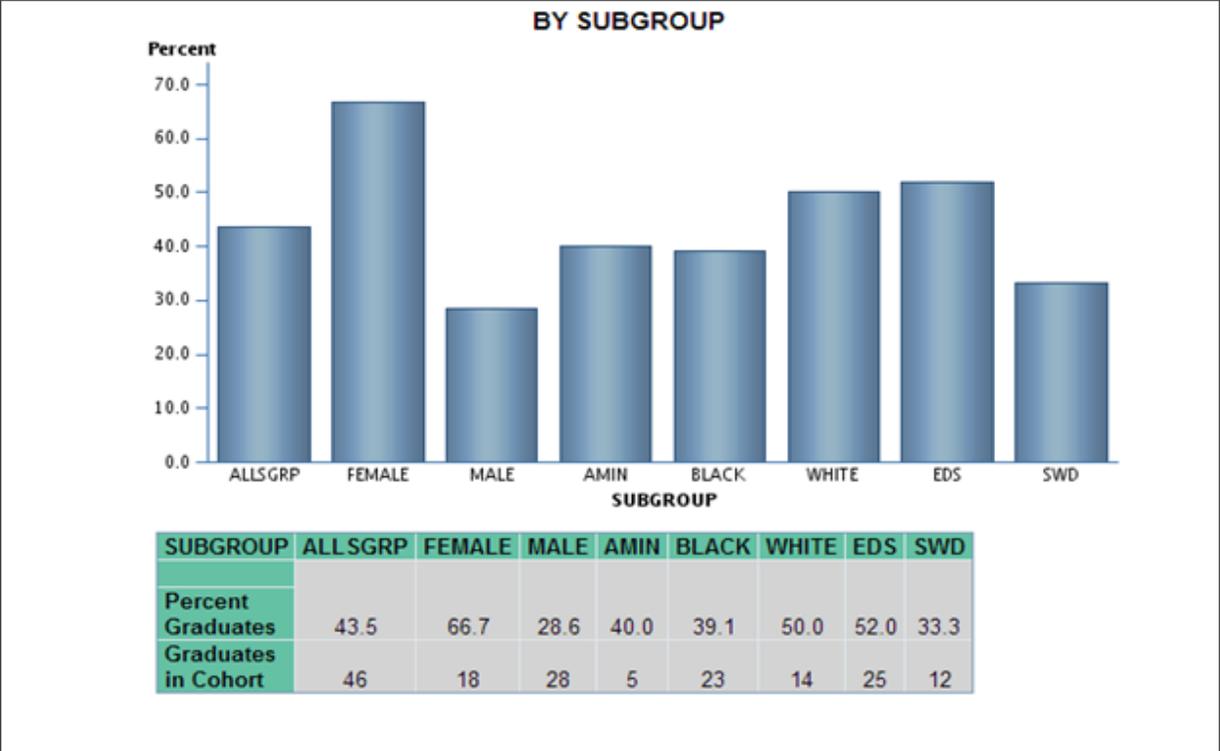
Figure 19. 4-Year graduation rate by subgroup.

BY SUBGROUP

SUBGROUP	ALLSGRP	FEMALE	MALE	BLACK	WHITE	EDS	SWD
Percent Graduates	66.7	82.4	52.6	68.0	62.5	56.3	66.7
Graduates in Cohort	36	17	19	25	8	16	6
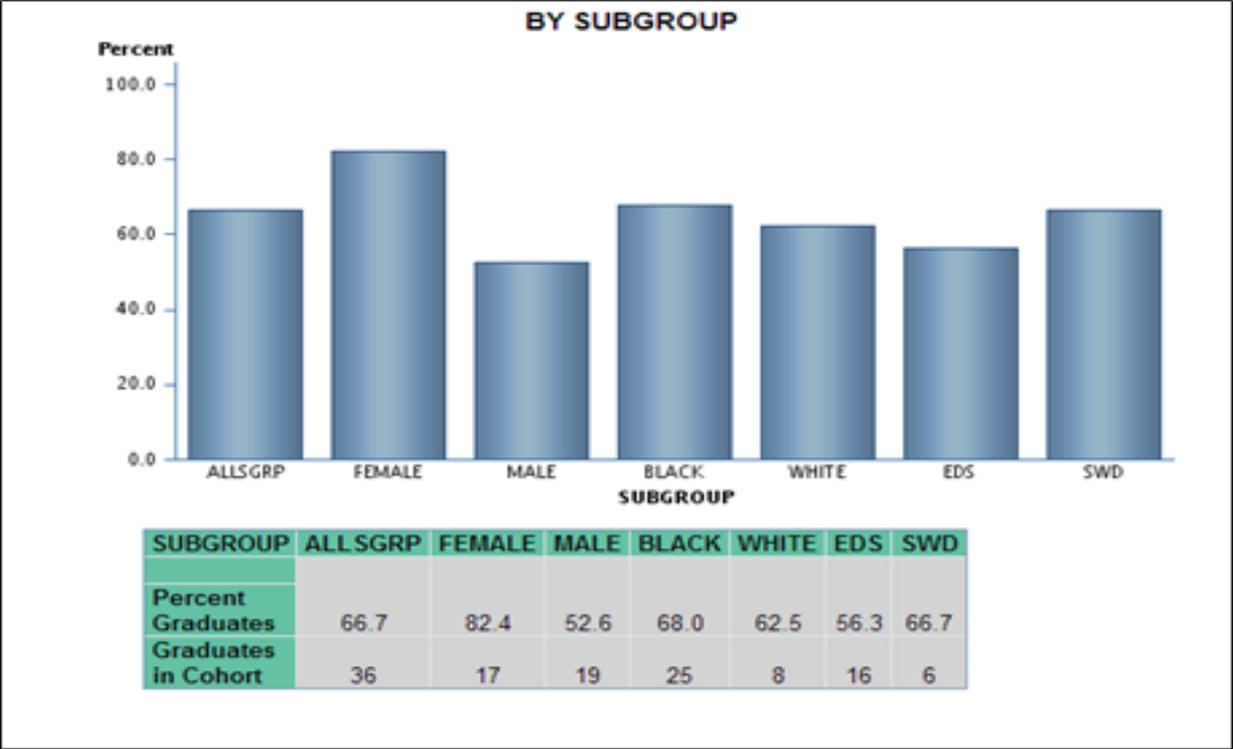
Figure 20. 5-Year graduation rate by subgroup.

In fact, the school had a significant negative impact on student learning, -6.24. In short, this indicates that students fell behind rather than growing and would have been better served through other learning approaches and strategies.

This study will attempt to address the effectiveness of various components of an alternative school in southeastern North Carolina, including the perceptions of students and adults of suspensions, seat-time, and climate as it relates to at-risk students. The intended outcome of the study will be to use the research to make recommendations, and in some cases, develop or modify specific strategies and/or programs that will help at-risk students be successful in a non-traditional school and competitive in a global society.

The study will comply with school board policy as it relates to student surveys: *Survey of Students Policy* ensures that the *Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment* are met in regards to the appropriate legal requirements. Prior to any student taking part in a survey the school system must receive prior approval from the parent and/or guardian of student taking survey. The following are the limitations outlined by this policy (NCSBA Legal/Policy Services policy.microscribepub.com--school district in Southeast, NC, Board of Education Policy Manual, 2013):

1. political affiliations

2. mental or psychological problems

3. sex behavior and attitudes

4. illegal, anti-social, self-incriminating

5. critical appraisals of other individuals with whom respondents have close family relationships

6. legally recognized privileged or analogous relationships, such as those of lawyers, physicians and ministers

7. religious practices, affiliations or beliefs of the student or the student's parents; or

8. income (other than that required by law to determine eligibility for participation in a program or for receiving financial assistance under such program).

Research Question

To what extent, if any, did virtual learning opportunities and seat time requirements impact student performance?

Overview of Methodology

This problem of practice study consists of four chapters. The components of Chapter 1 include the following: an introduction, purpose of the problem of practice study, research questions, significance of the study, definition of terms, limitations, assumptions, and an overview of the study.

Steps will be taken to attempt to maintain credibility and dependability in this research study. The group of candidates surveyed will have to demonstrate an identified set of characteristics that meet the criteria of the intended group to be studied making them purposive. Availability will be another criterion utilized when choosing who will participate in the research for this study. Intent will be to present research for interested parties to be able to extrapolate and transfer the research findings and the conclusions presented. Participants for the study will vary to include school administration, teachers, support staff, district administration, students, and parents/guardians.

The review of literature is detailed in Chapter 2. Research methods and procedures for data analysis are detailed in Chapter 3. The findings of the problem of practice study is

explained via graphs, charts, tables, data analysis, and discussion in Chapter 4, along with the case study, providing implications for the problem of practice study, as well as recommendations for future research.

Definition of Terms

The following terms, unless otherwise noted, are taken in part or in their entirety from *Dropout Prevention: Strategies for improving high school graduation rates* (Center for Child and Family Policy Duke University http://www.familyimpactseminars.org/s_ncfis04report.pdf, 2013). Not all of these terms are directly cited in this study but they will help in understanding the complexity of issues that impact dropout and graduation rates.

Age of compulsory attendance: Age until which minors are legally mandated to attend school. North Carolina and twenty-six other states require school attendance until age 16. Eight states require attendance until age 17, and 16 states require school attendance until 18.

Alternative learning center: A short-term intervention program for disruptive students who are unable to adjust to regular or traditional school setting (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

Alternative learning program (ALP): Term used in North Carolina to refer to various kinds of alternative learning environments. North Carolina law requires that every school system have at least one alternative learning program. However, each school can define the target or targets for that program. ALPs serve different populations in different school systems.

Alternative education setting: Student's placement change that usually translates to homebound instruction provided by a certified teacher (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). Alternative schools: Most states have alternative schools to serve students whose needs cannot be met in a regular education, special education, or vocational school. They can take various

forms, but generally provide non-traditional education and may serve as an adjunct to a regular school. Although these schools fall outside the categories of regular, special education and vocational education, they may provide similar services or curriculum. Some examples of alternative schools are schools for children with severe disabilities, schools for older students who want to complete their education in the evening, education provided in residential treatment centers for substance abuse, schools for chronic truants, and schools for students with behavioral problems. About 6% of schools in the North Carolina Common Core of Data files are alternative schools.

At-risk: In the context of dropping out of school, being "at-risk" means a student has one or more factors that have been found to predict a high rate of school failure at some time in the future. This "failure" generally refers to dropping out of high school before graduating, but also can mean being retained within a grade from one year to the next. The risk factors include extreme poverty, having a parent who never finished high school, living in foster care and living in a household where the primary language spoken is not English.

Average daily attendance (ADA): Attendance is the presence of a student on days when school is in session. A student is counted as present only when he/she is actually at school, present at another activity sponsored by the school as part of the school's program, or personally supervised by a member of the staff. The total number of days of attendance for all students divided by the total number of school days in a given period gives the average daily attendance (ADA).

Behavioral Intervention Plan (BIP): A functional behavior assessment (FBA) must be completed as the basis for this behavioral intervention plan (BIP). It describes the behavior and/or incident that prompted both plans. It also describes the behavior that was identified on

the functional behavior assessment (FBA) to be targeted for interventions (U.S. Department of Education, 2002)

Cohort graduation rate (as currently defined in North Carolina): The percentage of ninth-graders who graduate from high school four years later. This rate does not account for students graduating in more than four years or those who drop out of school prior to grade nine. The federal rate (also referred to as the averaged freshman graduation rate) focuses on public high school students, as opposed to all high school students or the general population, and is designed to provide an estimate of on-time graduation from high school. Thus, it provides a measure of the extent to which public high schools are graduating students within the expected period of four years.

Completion rate (high school): The high school completion rate represents the proportion of 18- to 24-year-olds who have left high school and earned a high school diploma or the equivalent, including a General Education Development credential.

Drop out (verb): The event of leaving school before graduating. Transferring from a public school to a private school, for example, is not regarded as a dropout event.

Dropout (noun): An individual who is not in school and who is not a graduate. A person who drops out of school may later return and graduate, but is called a "dropout" at the time he/she left school. At the time the person returns to school, he/she is called a "stopout." Measures to describe these often complicated behaviors include the event dropout rate (or the closely related school persistence rate), the status dropout rate and the high school completion rate.

Dropout prevention programs: Interventions designed to increase high school completion rates. These interventions can include techniques such as the use of incentives, counseling or monitoring as the prevention/intervention of choice.

Dropout rate: The percentage of students who drop out of school in a given year (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

Elementary and Secondary Education Act: A U.S. federal statute enacted April 11, 1965, that funds primary and secondary education and mandates professional development, instructional materials, resources to support educational programs and parental involvement promotion. The Act was originally authorized through 1970; however, Congress has reauthorized the Act every five years since its enactment. This act contains "Title One," which distributes funding to schools and school districts with a high percentage of students from low-income families.

Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA): A functional behavior assessment (FBA) must be completed as the basis for this behavioral intervention plan (BIP). It describes the behavior and/or incident that prompted both plans. It also describes the behavior that was identified on the functional behavior assessment (FBA) to be targeted for interventions (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

General Education Development (GED) credential: A comprehensive test used primarily to appraise the educational development of students who have not completed their formal high school education and who may earn a high school equivalency certificate through achieving satisfactory scores. The test is developed and distributed by the GED Testing Service of the American Council on Education. In North Carolina, it is administered by the NC Community College System.

High school completion: An individual has completed high school if he/she has been awarded a high school diploma; in some states, an equivalent credential, such as the General Education Development (GED), counts.

High school diploma: A formal document regulated by each state certifying the successful completion of a prescribed secondary school program of studies. In some states or school districts, high school diplomas are differentiated by type, such as an academic diploma, a general diploma or a vocational diploma.

High school dropout rate: Event, status and cohort dropout rates each provide a different perspective on the student dropout population.

High school equivalency certificate: A formal document certifying that an individual has met the state requirements for high school graduation equivalency by obtaining satisfactory scores on an approved examination and meeting other performance requirements (if any) set by a state education agency or other appropriate body.

Home school: The traditional or regular school setting (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

Individual Education Plan (IEP):   A written statement for a child with a disability developed and implemented according to federal and state regulations (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE): Criteria listed on a student's individualized education plan (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001: A federal law that reauthorized a number of federal programs aiming to improve the performance of U.S. primary and secondary schools by increasing the standards of accountability for states, school districts and schools, as well as

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providing parents more flexibility in choosing which schools their children will attend. This law

requires states to recruit and maintain "highly qualified" teachers. The progress of all public

school students is measured annually for math and reading in grades three through eight and at

least once during high school.

Non-traditional student: A public school student with any of the following

characteristics: is old for grade, attends school part time, works full time while enrolled, has

dependents or is a single parent.

Public school: A public institution that provides educational services. The age ranges

are defined by state law, but may start as early as age 3 and, for certain populations, last as long

as the early 20s. Public schools include regular, special education, vocational/technical,

alternative public charter schools. They also include schools in juvenile detention centers,

schools located on military bases and operated by the United States Department of Defense, and

the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs- funded schools operated by local public school districts.

Federal and state statutes generally require that all U.S. residents are entitled to an opportunity

for a free and appropriate public education.

Recidivism: The tendency to relapse into a previous condition or mode of behavior

and/or the returning rate of student to the alternative program (U.S. Department of Education,

2002).

Retention: Repeating an academic year of school. Students are retained in grade if they

are judged not to have the academic or social skills to advance to the next grade. Retention is

known as "grade retention," "being held back" or "repeating a grade."

School district: An education agency at the local level that exists primarily to operate public schools or to contract for public school services. Synonyms are "local basic administrative unit" and "local education agency (LEA)."

Social promotion: The practice of promoting students to the next grade, despite low achievement.

Socioeconomic Status (SES): A measure of an individual's or family's economic and social ranking relative to other families. For students, SE typically takes into account the father's education level, mother's education level, father's occupation, mother's occupation and family income.

Student perception: How the student feels about their home school and/or alternative school based on survey (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

Transition: Movement from alternative school back to home school (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

Limitations

There are limitations to this study that may occur due to the transient nature of the school's population. Subject participation may fluctuate based on exit criteria being met and other factors. Participant responses may be swayed based upon whether participants entered the alternative placement voluntarily or involuntarily. Surveys and interviews will be administered to the research participants based upon identified relevant characteristics such as being teachers, administrators, students, and/or parents/guardians involved with the school in southeastern North Carolina. Other significant documents will also be utilized including suspension data, dropout rate data, attendance data, disproportionality data, assessment data, programs that exist within the school district, demographics of the school, and the school district. This study focuses on data

from the 2010-2011 to 2012-2013 school years. A limitation to the assessment data would be the implementation of the newly adopted Common Core/Essential Standards curriculum. At the time of the study, the assessment data from DPI was," All the documents will be analyzed, compiled, and reported."

The following limitations apply to this study:

1. Students enrolled in the alternative school were the only students surveyed for this study; therefore, the results cannot be generalized to all alternative learning programs and the total number of students in the school's population is limited.

2. The survey was administered at the end of the 2013-2014 school years.

Assumptions

The following assumptions apply to this study:

1. All participants in the survey responded truthfully to the questions.

2. All participants understand the verbiage used in the questions.

All students truly believed that they would not receive adverse repercussions for answers given in the survey because of the anonymity guaranteed by the researchers.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this study is to identify an appropriate structure to successfully serve all alternative students in an effort to increase the graduation rate and academic proficiency of the students at an alternative high school in rural southeastern North Carolina and how virtual learning and seat time impacts this structure. There are many topics that address graduation rates and academic proficiency, however, in this literature review the following subtopics are discussed: at-risk students, alternative learning programs, alternative schools, school climate, school leaders, high school graduation, seat time, different approaches to course credit, school suspension background (causes and effects), in-school suspension, alternatives to suspensions, disparities of punishment regarding minorities and genders, classroom management, absences, poverty, dropout rates, gang data specific to North Carolina, case study of a dropout, developing leadership within schools to empower youths, and program structures associated with student success.

At-Risk Students

In January 2000, the North Carolina State Board of Education (NCPDI, 2009) defined an at-risk student as:

> a young person who, because of a wide range of individual, personal, financial, familial, social, behavioral or academic circumstances, may experience school failure or other unwanted outcomes unless interventions occur to reduce the risk factors. Circumstances which often place students at risk may include but are not limited to:
>
> 1. not meeting state/local proficiency standards
>
> 2. grade retention
>
> 3. unidentified or inadequately addressed learning needs

4. alienation from school life

5. unchallenging curricula and/or instruction

6. tardiness and/or poor school attendance

7. negative peer influence

8. unmanageable behavior

9. substance abuse and other health risk behaviors

10. abuse and neglect

11. inadequate parental, family, and/or school support, and

12. limited English proficiency (NCPDI, 2009)

The School Board for the county in southeastern North Carolina has followed up on this general statute with specific board policy (Policy Code: 3405 Students At-Risk of Academic Failure) as it relates to students at risk of academic failure. The aim of the board is to ensure students in all subgroups acquire academic information and skills for secondary education and career success. Lehr (2004) states, "the magnitude of the problem for student subgroups (including students of Hispanic and Native-American descent) points to the need for concerted efforts to design and implement programs and strategies that will keep youth in school and facilitate successful completion." To support this endeavor, structures have been identified and put in place to provide the needed support for students who are at risk of academic failure, lack of promotion, or not graduating. According to statute, the school principal has the responsibility of identifying at-risk students and providing the necessary support for academic success (G.S. 115C-105.41).

The actions of Dorman Jackson, a superintendent in a low performing school district in Sabine Parish, Louisiana, exemplified the manner in which the needs of at-risk students should be addressed. Upon being hired, Jackson implemented a remedial program designed to identify

learning challenges students had early on and to put strategies in place to provide the necessary

support and assistance. Initially, this program provided the needed results but eventually reached

a plateau in performance. According to Jackson, "We discovered we had carried our kids about

as far as we could" (DeAngelis, 2012).

Recognizing their limits in terms of providing the necessary support for at-risk students,

the district realized that many students identified as at risk faced various personal roadblocks.

Areas of concern identified were overworked parents, student emotional problems, and student

drug and alcohol abuse. These risk factors spurred the district to enlist the support of

psychologists Howard Adelman, PhD, and Linda Taylor, PhD, co-directors of the mental health

department at the University of California. They created a model referred to as the "enabling

component" (DeAngelis, 2012). That enabling component focused on the educational and

psychosocial barriers to student achievement.

The successful implementation of this model provided an increase in student achievement

for Sabine Parish from 2007 to 2010, with an increase in graduation rate from 73% to 81.2%

(DeAngelis, 2012). Louisiana is comprised of 60 districts and Sabine Parish started at 37th in

2003 and improved to 14th by 2012 based on student achievement (DeAngelis, 2012).

"The enabling component is designed around six areas of focus (DeAngelis, 2012):

1. Making innovative changes to classroom instruction: These changes include bringing

   support personnel into the classroom rather than taking children out of class when

   their behavior or inattention may have gotten out of control. It also calls for

   revamping teaching and intervention methods to help teachers handle problems more

   easily and effectively.

2. Supporting children through transitions: Not only are children moving back and forth

from school to home and from one school level to the next, many are also coping with family disruptions, such as a divorce.

3. Connecting families to schools and school activities: This includes offering basic parenting classes, fostering more meetings between parents and teachers and involving families in homework projects, field trips and other activities.

4. Maximizing use of community resources: Developing and maintaining strong connections with community resources can greatly enhance schools' capacity to support these youngsters. Entities to tap include public and private agencies, colleges and universities, businesses, artists and cultural institutions, faith-based organizations and volunteer groups.

5. Reorganizing crisis assistance and prevention: Schools need systems that can respond quickly and effectively in the wake of any crisis, whether it is a natural disaster, a terrorist attack, or students acting in a way that endangers others. Schools must also create safe and caring learning environments that deal preemptively with disruptive and potentially dangerous behavior such as bullying and harassment.

6. Improving links to external mental health and behavioral services: When internal resources are not enough, schools should be able to refer students and families to mental health and financial assistance services in a timely fashion.

These factors identified by DeAngelis work well, but it is important to note that these are not the only strategies to help at-risk students. Maurice Elias identified successful strategies for helping at-risk youth that may be combined with the work of DeAngelis to provide even greater support.

Additionally, in an article entitled "The Four Keys to Helping At-Risk Kids," Maurice Elias, professor at Rutgers University, identified strategies that provided support and positively impacted at-risk students (Elias, 2009).

1. Caring, Sustained Relationships: relationships are established but not sustained especially in secondary schools. The key that will sustain relationships is the need to build a sense of trust and have time to communicate the complexity, frustrations, and positive aspects of their lives in and out of school.

2. Reachable Goals: students' goals are not attainable because they are based on what they learn from mass culture. The goals that are most sustained and achieved are those that are within our reach if we apply some effort.

3. Realistic, Hopeful Pathways: students need adults to help them create realistic pathways with guardrails. Students also need what the Character Education Partnership describes as "leeway and forgiveness"--that is, the knowledge that going off the path does not destroy the dream.

4. Engaging School and Community Settings: the idea of engagement takes place when students have a chance to receive positive recognition and to make positive contributions in an environment where teamwork is evident and they realize the possibility of obtaining a new skill that is applicable to their life. Engaging students in the community is identifiable by mottos, logos, and missions that allow the student an opportunity to feel a sense of belonging. Mentors outside the school are great resources to communicate with students their choices and the consequences that are attached to those choices.

In the state of North Carolina, the development of Alternative Learning Programs attempts to fulfill the needs identified in Professor Elias's research. These four components can also be found in a varied version in some of the policies and procedures for the school board in the county in southeastern North Carolina. Furthermore, the four components that he described in his work can be found in the North Carolina state guidelines for alternative learning schools and/or programs.

Alternative Learning Programs

Alternative programs were created to "serve a population of children and youth whose education and treatment required the use of innovative and comprehensive techniques and methodologies that were, and are, largely absent from most regular educational settings" (De La Ossa, 2005). In the history of alternative education, its foundation or basis can be traced to the beliefs of religious leaders, social reformers, romantics, and individualists. The focus of alternative education lends itself to fulfill the obligation of developing the whole child (mental, physical, spiritual, and social) in an effort to see each individual student be successful, regardless of environment and/or background.

Furthermore, Timothy Young documented the history of alternative schools and determined that the foundational concept of alternative schools could be seen at the onset of education as we know it in America (Ryan, 2009). The word "alternative" is used to describe the vast range of educational settings that provide services not evident in regular education settings. Public alternative schools were defined as "a school, not located within or attached to a mainstream school that students in the public school district can choose to attend at no additional cost" (De La Ossa, 2005).

Miller (2006) identified that alternative schools were born from an attempt to provide support and assistance to students that were not successful in a traditional setting (Miller cited in Walker, 2007, p. 20). The goals for these alternative schools were: meaningful relationships, peer guidance, parental involvement, small class sizes, student decision-making, and a diverse curriculum. Miller (2006) went on to state that alternative schools provide a more flexible curriculum designed to meet the needs of the students in which the school was created to serve. Also, according to Miller (2006), these schools were designed for students that were underachieving and did not qualify for the exceptional children program (Miller, as cited in Walker, 2007, p. 20).

Furthermore, according to the North Carolina Department of Curriculum and Instruction, Alternative Learning Programs are defined as services for students at risk of truancy, academic failure, behavior problems, and/or dropping out of school. Such services should be designed to better meet the needs of students who have not been successful in the traditional school setting (NCDPI, 2009).

Alternative Learning Programs serve students at any level who are (NCDPI, 2009):

1. suspended and/or expelled;

2. at risk of participation in juvenile crime;

3. have dropped out and desire to return to school;

4. have a history of truancy;

5. are returning from juvenile justice settings or psychiatric hospitals; and

6. whose learning styles are better served in an alternative setting.

In addition, these programs are intended to provide individualized programs outside of a standard

classroom setting in a caring atmosphere in which students learn the skills necessary to redirect their lives.

An alternative learning program must:

1. provide the primary instruction for selected at-risk students;

2. enroll students for a designated period of time, usually a minimum of one academic grading period; and

3. offer course credit or grade-level promotion credit in core academic areas.

Alternative learning programs may also address:

1. behavioral or emotional problems that interfere with adjustments to or benefiting from the regular education classroom,

2. provide smaller classes and/or student/teacher ratios,

3. provide flexible scheduling, and/or

4. assist students in meeting graduation requirements other than course credits.

Alternative learning programs for at-risk students typically serve students in a facility within the regular school.

A school board's purpose is to provide a safe and orderly environment at each school using a Behavioral Management Plan, a Parental Involvement Plan, and a Conflict Resolution Plan (Policy Code: 3470/4305). The Alternative Learning program has been implemented as an additional option for students who continue to have challenges with behavior management and/or academics in the regular education setting. According to Policy Code: 3470/4305, the following have been identified by the school district in southeastern North Carolina as purposes for an alternative educational setting:

1. To intervene and address problems that prevent a student from achieving success in the regular educational setting,

2. To reduce the risk that a student will drop out of school by providing resources to help the student resolve issues affecting his or her performance at school,

3. To return a student, if and when it is practicable, to the regular educational setting with the skills necessary to succeed in that environment, and

4. To preserve a safe and orderly learning environment in the regular educational setting.

According to Policy Code: 3470/4305 students are typically referred to schools based on their attendance area. Based on school board policy, the board has the right to assign a student to a school outside of their attendance zone to allow that student to attend a theme/specialized school or for any other reason that the school board deems necessary. The county in southeastern North Carolina used the guidelines established by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and established specific board policies as it relates to alternative education.

Students attending an alternative school may be referred to school on a voluntary or an involuntary basis, according to school board policy. The following is the transfer process for students:

1. Responsibilities of Personnel at Referring School: In addition to any other procedures required by this policy, prior to referring a student to an alternative learning program or school, the principal of the referring school must:

   a. document the procedures that were used to identify the student being at risk of academic failure or as being disruptive or disorderly,

b. provide the reasons for referring the student to an alternative learning program or school, and

c. provide to the alternative learning program or school all relevant student records, including anecdotal information.

2. Responsibilities of School Personnel at the Alternative Learning Program or School: If a student who is subject to G.S. 14-208.18 is assigned to an alternative school, the student must be supervised by school personnel at all times.

3. Voluntary Referral: This type of referral is encouraged whenever possible and parent/guardian should be a part of this process. Once the transfer is approved, the sending and receiving principal must arrange the transfer process. The sending principal must notify superintendent or designee of this transfer.

4. Involuntary Referral

a. the student presents a clear threat to the safety of other students or personnel,

b. the student presents a significant disruption to the educational environment in the regular educational setting,

c. the student is at risk of dropping out or not meeting standards for promotion, and resources in addition to or different from those available in the regular educational setting are needed to address the issue,

d. the student has been charged with a felony or a crime that allegedly endangered the safety of others, and it is reasonably foreseeable that the educational environment in the regular educational setting will be significantly disrupted if the student remains, or

e. if the Code of Student Conduct provides for a transfer as a consequence of the student's behavior.

Before an involuntary transfer is extended, the referring school must document all academic, social, and/or behavioral problems a student is having within the school. Once those areas have been documented, school staff must identify what action steps or consequences have been enforced to correct behavior and/or academic performance within the regular education setting. Once the principal has determined that the steps and/or actions put in place have not corrected the academic/behavior needs of the student, the principal must recommend to the superintendent that the student be transferred to the alternative school.

The principal must provide the following to support request for alternative placement: (1) an explanation of the student's behavior or academic performance that is at issue; (2) documentation or a summary of the documentation of the efforts to assist the student in the student's regular educational setting, if applicable; and (3) documentation of the circumstances that support an involuntary transfer (Policy Code: 3470/4305 Alternative Learning Programs/Schools, 2013).

The guidelines adopted by the board perpetuate the negative connotation associated with the school because the adopted guidelines suggests that the school is a punishment rather than an alternative designed to meet an educational need that the traditional setting is unable to meet.

Alternative programs cannot work without teachers who are committed to meeting the diverse needs of the students enrolled in the program. North Carolina school districts may have alternative learning programs or alternative learning schools. The look of an alternative program can be as unique as its student population. Alternative Instructional Model (AIM), an alternative program in New York, allows students to remain connected to their home school, thus providing

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the opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities. Individualized instruction, continuous improvement, scheduling flexibility, community service projects, and an environment rich in student resources have proven to increase student success (Grobe, 2002). To gauge the success of alternative learning programs in school districts within North Carolina, it is important to understand what such organizations entail.

Alternative Schools

An alternative school is one option for an alternative learning program. This model serves at-risk students and has an organizational designation based on the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction assignment of an official school code. An alternative school is different from a regular public school in areas such as teaching methods, hours, curriculum, or location sites. Alternative schools are intended to provide many paths to the end-goal which, for some, is simply to return to a public school. Despite these differences, alternative schools are intended to meet the diverse learning needs of at-risk students.

The alternative schools in existence today are derivatives of an educational evolution that began in the 1960s. During the Cold War and the 1957 Sputnik launch, schools were deemed cold and insensitive to minority students as well as to those with specialized needs. By the end of the 1960s, the face of alternative schools began to change, becoming more specialized to meet the needs of the nation's most vulnerable students (Ianni, 2009). Alternative programs were created to "serve a population of children and youth whose education and treatment required the use of innovative and comprehensive techniques and methodologies that were, and are, largely absent from most regular educational settings" (De La Ossa, 2005).

The word "alternative" is used to describe the vast range of educational settings that provide services not evident in regular education settings. A general description of what an

alternative education program entails has been elusive. Vernon H. Smith defined an alternative school as "any school that provides alternative learning experiences beyond those provided by the traditional schools within its community and is available to all students at no additional cost" (Ianni, 2009).

Throughout the country, many schools offer alternative learning experiences, but alternative schools are traditionally known to serve students who are at risk of school failure. The United States Department of Education (2002) defined schools classified as alternative education schools as "a public elementary/secondary school that addresses needs of students that typically cannot be met in a regular school, provides non-traditional education, serves as an adjunct to a regular school, or falls outside the categories of regular, special education, or vocational education" (p. 55). There has been a significant increase in the number of alternative education programs in the last fifty years. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2010), there were 10,300 public school districts with district administered alternative schools or programs.

Data presented denotes a breakdown of the number of alternative schools and programs across the country (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010) (see Table 2). Characteristics were also provided to include the region, district enrollment, community type, and poverty concentration. Information was also presented on whether the school or program was administered by a district, another entity, or combination of both (NCES, 2010) (see Table 2).

There are various types of alternative educational settings. Alternative programs are usually sustained within an accredited school. Programs may be based within a traditional school, on the same campus as a traditional school, or at a different site within the school district. An alternative school is not affiliated with another traditional school; it has an official school

Table 2

Percent of Districts with Alternative Schools and Programs for At-Risk Students, by Administering Entity and District Characteristics

for School Year 2007-2008

District characteristic	Alternative schools and programs administered either by the district or by another entity	At least one alternative school or program administered solely by the district	At least one alternative school or program administered solely by another entity	At least one alternative school or program administered by both the district and another entity
All public school districts	64	40	35	12
District Enrollment size				
Less than 2,500	54	27	34	7
2,500 to 9,999	86	67	39	20
10,000 or more	96	91	35	31
Community type				
City	94	87	44	37
Suburban	66	43	38	16
Town	77	55	34	12
Rural	56	29	34	8
Region				
Northeast	60	30	43	13
90	90	76	26	11
Central	61	33	40	13
West	60	42	27	9

Table 2 (continued)

District characteristic	Alternative schools and programs administered either by the district or by another entity	At least one alternative school or program administered solely by the district	At least one alternative school or program administered solely by another entity	At least one alternative school or program administered by both the district and another entity
Percent combined enrollment of Black, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, or American Indians / Alaska Native students				
Less than 6%	55	26	39	10
6-20%	66	42	36	13
21 to 49%	70	54	31	15
50% or more	73	54	30	11
Poverty concentration				
Less than 10%	62	34	42	13
10 to 19%	62	38	36	12
20% or more	68	49	29	10

Note: There were a small number of cases for which poverty concentration was missing. Poverty estimates for school district were based on Title I data provided to the U.S. Department of Education by the U.S. Census Bureau. Percents do not sum to the total percent of districts with alternative schools and programs administered either by the district or by another entity because district could report using one or both types of alternative schools and programs.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Fast Response Survey System (FRSS), "District Survey of Alternative Schools and Programs: 2007-08" and "Follow-up District of Alternative Schools and Programs: 2007-08," FRSS 96, 2008.

number. In North Carolina, the school number is the sole determinant in distinguishing alternative programs from alternative schools.

School systems embrace the option of placing at-risk students in danger of failing or unable to successfully function in a regular educational setting in a separate setting. Separate settings assist students by providing a non-traditional method of acquiring an appropriate education, protect students in the regular educational setting from violent and excessively deviant behavior, meet state accountability standards and decrease the dropout rate. Similar to other students who attend alternative schools, students with disabilities may not be best suited to be successful in a traditional school setting; this population can also greatly benefit from an effective alternative setting.

Of those who attended alternative schools, 12% had a disability (Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011). Most students attend alternative schools because they are unsuccessful in the traditional educational setting. They normally have exhibited deviant behaviors such as failing grades, truancy, and disruptive and/or aggressive behavior. Others attend due to situations such as homelessness and early parenthood.

In the study conducted by Booker and Mitchell (2011), minority students were significantly more likely than Caucasian students to be placed in a disciplinary alternative setting. They were also more likely to return to the setting within the same school year. There were differences found between boys and girls, but none between students placed in the special education program and those who were not.

Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs (DAEPs) were defined as schools designed to serve students who demonstrate difficulty functioning at their home campuses (Booker & Mitchell, 2011). These schools were aimed at correcting or managing the behavior of disruptive

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students. DAEPs were not considered "schools of choice" because the enrollment was initiated by an administrative referral from the home school.

A nationwide survey conducted by the United States Department of Education suggested that there was a shortage of schools to meet the needs of at-risk students. Fifty-four percent of existing DAEPs exceeded the maximum enrollment capacity from 1999-2001. Understanding reasons students are placed might lead to a reduction in the referrals and an increase in student success at the home school (Booker & Mitchell, 2011).

Zero Tolerance policies, policies where students are suspended from school immediately for serious disciplinary incidents such as possession of weapons, were implemented by the Federal government in 1994 as a disciplinary tool to reduce violence in schools. Placement in DAEPs of students who violated the zero tolerance policy was mandatory after implementation. Zero tolerance policies expanded the discretion of administrators to "engage in the implementation of punitive and judicial forms of discipline." These forms of discipline included in-school suspension, out of school suspension, placement in discipline alternative education programs, expulsion, and placement in juvenile justice programs (Booker & Mitchell, 2011).

The offenses that warranted placement in discipline alternative education programs were much more serious in nature at the onset of this policy's implementation. As time has progressed, the discretionary practices of administrators showed that students were being recommended for placement at DAEPs for less serious infractions. A report by the Hogg Foundation reflected that, during the 2005-06 school year in Texas, 70% of DAEP placements were at the discretion of the home school (Booker & Mitchell, 2011).

Mandatory placement of students provide clear categories for behaviors that warranted disciplinary assignment. Discretionary placements allowed administrators to determine if a

student's behavior warranted disciplinary assignment to an alternative setting. This use of discretion subjected more students to the possibility of disciplinary placement. Attention needs to be given to the potential of bias and subjectivity when determining placement of students (Booker & Mitchell, 2011). It is also important to provide these students with this special attention before they make a decision to drop out of school.

The decision to drop out of school is not a "victimless" act. The effects of this decision are widespread. According to Lehr (2004), "students with emotional or behavioral disabilities had the highest rate of dropout (51%), followed by students with learning disabilities (27%)." Not only do many high school dropouts experience adverse consequences such as feelings of depression, isolation, and drug/alcohol use; they are also more likely to resort to gang activity and violence (Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011). These are societal ills that result in increased criminal activity, incarcerations, and unemployment. Many school systems have turned to alternative school enrollments to attempt to reduce these dropouts.

Enrollment in alternative schools is increasing each year; however, the research on student outcomes in alternative settings is limited. All alternative schools were not held to the same accountability standards creating difficulty in researching and collecting legitimate data. Further research is needed to measure student outcomes in alternative settings. Researchers question whether alternative schools exist to adequately serve students enrolled or to serve traditional schools by providing an educational setting for students who disrupted the traditional learning environment and provide a place for "removal" of the problem.

Raywid (1999) proposes whether alternative programs served students, schools or school districts-- Raywid suggests that there are three types of alternative schools.

1. Type I schools- Choice Schools, such as a Magnet School that have a strong emphasis on curriculum and instructional strategies.

2. Type II schools- "Last-Chance" schools- are schools with a strong emphasis on modification of student behavior. Interventions such as cool-out rooms, in-school suspension and varied placement terms are employed in these educational settings to deal with those with significant behavioral problems (Raywid, 1994).

3. Type III schools - schools with a strong emphasis on student remediation. Students are referred to this educational setting to address academic, social, and emotional deficiencies (Ryan, 2009). Students usually thrive in this educational setting.

This is evidenced through higher student achievement, better attendance and overall behavior (Gold & Mann, 1984). However, these results were often short-lived because the resources utilized in these settings usually were not replicated or available when students returned to the traditional setting. Consequently, the negative behaviors were likely to recur (Raywid, 1994). According to Carver and Lewis, most alternative schools were a mix of Type II and Type III schools (Raywid, 1999).

"Since 2000, forty states and the District of Columbia have passed new laws or established new regulations related to alternative education," demonstrating the magnitude of this issue (Almeida et al., 2010). Alternative school policies vary from state to state and are sometimes inconsistent with those of traditional schools. According to Almeida et al. (2010), there are seven policy elements that all states should integrate into their alternative education programs to ensure their effectiveness.

1. Broaden eligibility: Alternative education programs should serve all students in need of educational settings that would increase their chances for academic success, not just troublesome students who cannot function successfully in a traditional setting.

2. Clarify district roles and responsibilities: States should detail the standards of operation for all alternative programs and ensure that those standards are being implemented with fidelity.

3. Strengthen accountability for results: States should allow alternative programs to be flexible in their delivery of instruction, while maintaining the academic accountability standards placed on traditional schools.

4. Increase support for innovation: States should be willing to invest in various educational opportunities for students who need non-conventional methods to succeed academically.

5. Ensure high-quality staff: States should actively recruit, support, and retain highly qualified teachers and administrators to ensure alternative schools have the most qualified staff available for students in the greatest need.

6. Enhance student support services: States must understand that students in need of alternative education must have intense support in order to be successful. This support may have to come from outside sources, so funding should be provided to meet the vast needs of students.

7. Enrich funding: States must fund programs that will reignite students' desire for education while providing enrichment opportunities to assist them in continuing their education beyond graduation.

Forty states and the District of Columbia have enacted at least one of the aforementioned policy

elements through legislation. Most states were only implementing one or two of the elements.

The grim reality is that were not any states that embraced all seven of the policy elements by

implementing an all-inclusive program to serve alternative education students (Almeida et al.,

2010). In 1999, the North Carolina State Board of Education established minimum standards

and procedures for operating safe and orderly alternative learning programs and schools. The

result was a variety of alternative educational settings. Alternative programs were usually

sustained within an accredited school. Programs were based within a traditional school, on the

same campus as a traditional school, or at a different site within the school district. In 2000,

more specific guidelines and procedures were enacted to ensure the proper implementation and

maintenance of alternative learning programs/schools within each Local Education Agency

(LEA).

The very nature of alternative education is to decrease the barriers that hinder the

academic success of students who have experienced difficulties within the traditional school

setting. To achieve these goals, each functioning school must develop a School Improvement

Plan and a Safe School Plan as well as obtain approval from the Local Board of Education prior

to establishing an alternative program/school (NCDPI, 2009).

According to (G.S. 115C-238.47), Alternative Learning Programs must:

1. describe the mission and goals of the program,

2. describe the services to be provided by the program,

3. describe the criteria for assignment to the program,

4. describe the process for ensuring that the assignment is appropriate for the student,

5. describe the process for the input and participation of parents in the exit/transition

    decision,

6. describe the process for ensuring a rigorous and high quality program,

7. serve students at any grade level,

8. serve students who demonstrate behaviors (i.e. academic, conduct, dropout, suspension, etc.) that put them at significant risk of school failure,

9. serve students selected by established procedures,

10. provide the primary instruction for students during the enrollment period,

11. offer course and class credit for attendance and grades in each assigned course,

12. assist students in meeting the requirements for grade promotion,

13. assist students in meeting the requirements for graduation,

14. participate in the State Accountability and Testing program as prescribed by law,

15. require attendance,

16. employ highly qualified instructors and serve students for a specific and extended period of time i.e., one grading period, quarterly, semester, etc. (This language does not include in-school suspension, short-term suspension, after/before school, tutorial, or drop-in programs. It does include extended day programs.)

Alternative schools may also have the following "Guiding Principles" (Retrieved from www.cisgawpress/07/Philosopy-and-Principles.docx):

1. Teachers in program will serve in the capacity of facilitator and students are accountable for their learning.

2. Students will master a set of knowledgeable skills that will prepare them for   success in the future.

3. The culture of the program should be one of support, hope and empowerment.

4. Parental and community support are essential to overall success of program.

5. Learning will be based on competency-based outcomes

In addition, North Carolina has adopted General Statutes as it pertains to alternative learning programs and schools (see Appendix D).

The school district in southeastern North Carolina addressed school improvement plans in their board policies. Each school has the responsibility of creating a School Improvement Plan (SIP) to address all educational goals established by the Board of Education. This plan should include objectives, strategies, action steps, and a budget to ensure that students are receiving the necessary education within their schools to be college and career ready. The success of the School Improvement Plan (SIP) is based on input from school stakeholders, parents, business affiliates, students, and agencies. The SIP should receive guidance in terms of implementation and fidelity from the superintendent based on board policy. The principal of each school should be the lead in the implementation of the SIP.

The School Improvement Plan is divided into two essential components:

1. State Program for School-Based Management and Accountability: the board fully endorses that all children should conquer basic skills that will provide a foundation for future learning. The creation of the School Improvement Plan will solidify resources and curricula are provided to ensure that students within the educational process are performing at or above grade level competencies.

   a. School Improvement Team (SIT): each school should have a SIT whose responsibility shall be to create and execute the School Improvement Plan. The school improvement team should include teachers, faculty, staff, administrators and parent representatives. Faculty and staff members selected for the School Improvement Team should be selected by peers via secret ballot. Once the SIT is

selected the principal shall oversee implementation of plan and compliance of Open Meetings Law.

b. Mandatory Components of the School Improvement Plan (NCSBA Legal/Policy Services policy.microscribepub.com-A rural southeastern Schools Board of Education Policy Manual)

   i. The plan must specify the effective instructional practices and methods to be used to improve the academic performance of students identified as at risk of academic failure or at risk of dropping out of school.

   ii. The plan must take into consideration the minimum annual performance goal established by the State Board and the goals set out in the mission statement for public schools adopted by the State Board of Education.

   iii. The plan must be, to the greatest extent possible, data driven. The team shall use the Education Value Added Assessment System (EVAAS) or a compatible and comparable system approved by the State Board of Education to analyze student data to identify root causes for problems and determine actions to address them and to appropriately place students in courses such as Algebra I (Math I). The plan must contain clear, unambiguous targets, explicit indicators and actual measures, and expeditious time frames for meeting measurement standards.

To comply with a School Improvement Plan's goal to most completely/effectively serve student needs, an alternative school/program has to consider unique challenges. "Avoidant students present a challenge to even the best schools and educators. Being persistent while maintaining a sense of hope is crucial because students often continue avoiding school only

because they see no other option" (Casoli-Reardon et al., 2012). The properly structured

alternative school could be the other option to help these at-risk students experience success.

"The ultimate goal is to get students back to school and their education. If a child truly cannot

go back to school after multiple efforts on many fronts an alternative high school might be the

answer" (Casoli-Reardon et al., 2012). Casoli-Reardon et al. (2012) stated that students who

avoid school may be grappling with many challenges in their efforts to end school avoidance.

The authors' research identified these students' needs and offered strategies to get them back in

school. School avoidance is a multi-faceted problem that is often chronic and will require

different interventions at various times (Casoli-Reardon et al., 2012). Causes of school

avoidance can be broken down into the following four groups: cultural factors, family factors,

peer factors, and neuropsychiatric factors (Casoli-Reardon et al., 2012). There are various

evidence/strategies to address this issue such as mentors, modified school schedules, safe places,

modified assignments, and extracurricular activities (Casoli-Reardon et al., 2012). Results from

a Statement About Schools (SAS) Inventory suggest that alternative schools were more

successful in meeting the needs of students than regular education schools. Students stated that

the specific factors or strategies that contributed to their lack of success in the regular education

setting were: pace of the course, teachers, class size, and instructional methods. Developed

based on Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs the Statement About Schools (SAS) Inventory

assesses how well a school meets the needs of its students based on information provided by

teachers and students. There was not sufficient evidence on what approach was used by

alternative schools to meet the needs of its students, but a description of the approaches were

presented (ncaccountabilitymodel.org).

Raywid (1999) indicated that the sole purpose of an alternative school was to provide support for students not being successful in comprehensive high schools in the areas of academic credit, career exploration activities, or vocational work experience, and extended teacher/peer support in an alternative setting where the ultimate goal was that of obtaining a high school diploma. The areas identified as support measures were coupled with methods that will motivated and inspired at-risk students. The motivation methods identified attempted to:

1. reduce the alienation and improve the self-concept of at-risk students,

2. provide at-risk students with increased access to desirable social roles,

3. increase community and parental participation in the education of at-risk students,

4. provide a flexible and integrated academic and vocationally oriented curriculum that emphasizes the importance of school in preparing for later life,

5. provide students with a success-oriented program to obtain academic and employability skills in a school environment,

6. provide a competency-based, self-paced, program with clear quantifiable objectives. Instruction will be provided in a variety of ways best suited to the individual student's needs, and

7. foster within students the responsibility for their own learning and the expectation that they will take an active role in setting their own goals.

Ianni (2009) utilized the Advocacy Design Center Model, ADC, in his dissertation to evaluate the effectiveness of alternative schools in Long Island, New York. This model was the result of collaboration between members of the faculty of Columbia University Teacher's College and Paterson Public Schools in New Jersey. The purpose of this model was to provide the public with insight on school practices, make necessary changes to those practices, and

empower stakeholders; it also served as a liaison between all stakeholders to make informed decisions about day-to-day educational practices. The ADC allowed stakeholders to explore the four components of learning institutions. Those elements were instruction, organization, governance, and accountability (Ianni, 2009).

According to Smith (1990), instruction referred to the methods in which information was imparted to students. Instruction was then broken down into two components - work and knowledge. Work and knowledge were separated again into two additional components - behavioral and constructivist orientation. Behavioral work was when learning environments consist of students working independently of each other. The assignments/activities were usually worksheets or call and response type questioning. Constructivist orientation was a more collaborative learning environment where teachers incorporated student learning teams and students are allowed to learn through self-discovery. These learning environments were usually more rigorous in nature due to the absence of rote activities and more time-on-task activities (Smith, 2009). Organization refers to the culture of the schools based upon how people work together and the general organization of the school (Ianni, 2009). Organization - this element encompassed the overall structure of the school and how things and people function. According to Smith, "organization refers to the pattern of purposeful relations that exist among individuals within the boundaries of the school's sphere of interest" (Smith, 2009). Leaders play a major role in the function of the organization, its priorities, and its successes. According to Ianni (2009), governance is defined as decisions and policies made and implemented at a school, to include who is involved in the decision-making process. Lastly, accountability is the way that schools hold teachers and students responsible for their performance.

Behavioral knowledge is demonstrated when students are able to mimic what they observe their teachers doing. Constructivist orientation knowledge is when students are able to understand the concept but discover that there are various processes involved with finding solutions and "construct" their own knowledge. Students are able to use higher order thinking skills, thus making learning meaningful.

In an effort to ensure student achievement, staff members at Oakland schools in California formulated the projects based on what motivates each individual student. According to Yocum, "It's an attempt to reinvigorate them, and get them to look at academic work differently" (Cavanagh, 2012).

The results of a quasi-experimental mixed method experiment conducted in Texas named poor student-teacher relationships as a primary factor in their inability to be successful in traditional schools. The researchers felt that, due to the varying demands placed on teachers, the ability to provide individualized attention was lacking. Students also felt that they were labeled by teachers and were subjected to the teacher's pre-conceived notions of them. They also felt that teachers required respect from them but did not reciprocate respect to their students (Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011).

Call Me Different, Not Difficult (2012) is a book authored by entrepreneur John Elder Robison. Although Mr. Robison shares strategies that teachers can adopt to help students who are autistic (as he himself is), many of the strategies mentioned are successful when working with at risk and alternatively placed students. Six relevant strategies mentioned are: Tell students exactly what you want and say exactly what you mean, be consistent and predictable, be flexible in your conversational responses, expect good manners, pay attention to sensory issues, and be sensitive to our state of mind even if we seem oblivious (Robison, 2012).

Safety was another negative factor of traditional schools cited by students in this study. The students felt that they could not perform sufficiently in an environment in which they felt unsafe. They felt that many traditional school environments were hostile with multiple disciplinary infractions. Students also felt that rules were overly rigid in many traditional schools. They understood that rules were necessary in the school environment but they felt that there should always be flexibility. At-risk students cannot be subjected to cookie-cutter rules because they all have varying circumstances that need to be addressed on a case-by-case basis. This mentality extended to their peer relationships. The cliques within the school caused them to feel uncomfortable and withdrawn. They had difficulties forming meaningful relationships with their peers because of the differences in their circumstances, sometimes turning to gangs for acceptance. It appeared that the educational systems have resorted to using alternative schools as a warehouse or "dumping ground" for underachieving students who exhibited inappropriate behaviors in traditional school settings (Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011).

Alternative schools and programs differ from state to state. North Carolina differentiates between alternative schools and alternative programs due to funding and accountability standards. Most students enrolled in alternative schools are disengaged from education. They feel that external factors are the prevailing force that controls their fate and academic success. Disengagement, which is normally characterized by absenteeism, disruptive behavior, and poor academics, is a key indicator of a potential dropout (Ryan, 2009).

Some alternative schools counter these perceptions. Students noted positive teacher relationships, expectations of maturity, understanding of individual differences and circumstances, and supportive atmospheres as components of the alternative school that proved to be factors in their success. Kopp (2011) states, "for young people who have experienced

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consistent failure, that's everything; knowing an adult believes in them even when they have given up on themselves."

Based on research by Kochlar-Bryant et al. (2005):

1. States with alternative learning programs report that 19% to 60% of the students they serve have learning, emotional, and behavioral disabilities.

2. At least 40 states have implemented Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs to manage student behavior. Minority students are overrepresented in these alternative education programs.

3. Research has shown that quality long-term alternative education programs have positive effects on students' academic performance by reducing apathy and increasing self-esteem.

4. Alternative education programs are becoming a viable educational option for students at risk of academic failure; therefore, the rate of students attending alternative schools, whether by choice or assignment, has doubled over recent years. The increase of students has prompted school officials to increase the academic standards of the alternative schools.

Due to the manifold needs of at-risk students, teachers who work in alternative schools must demonstrate strong instructional prowess in order to provide a viable opportunity for the students to be successful. "Alternative education reflects society's recognition that educational settings and models cannot be standardized and must be varied to allow each individual to find a learning environment in which they can successfully participate" (Kochlar-Bryant et al., 2005).

Many alternative learning programs abandon the guidelines observed in traditional schools to meet the needs of at-risk students. Innovations such as computer-based learning,

distance education, community service projects, and real-world activities have been implemented to meet the varying needs of the students. These innovations are geared toward restoring the respect for the students, their parents and the community, while promoting the academic success of the students. According to Raywid (1990), researchers have witnessed various practices within the nation's alternative schools. While most have adopted a common practice of individualization, positive behavior management and student-centered education, Raywid (1999) derived that three models were prevalent among alternative programs:

1. Restructured Schools: Schools that may not specifically target at-risk students but embrace practices that benefit students who have challenges in traditional schools.

2. Disciplinary Programs: Programs designed for aggressive and/or disruptive middle and high school students. These educational settings provide students with individualized attention and programs designed to help them modify adverse behavior.

3. Problem-Solving: Schools explained as programs that specifically serve at-risk students. There is an intense desire to ensure student success and rehabilitation through compassion and positive reinforcement. There is less focus on punitive actions and more focus on the academic, social, and emotional success of the students (2005; Ryan, 2009).

According to Kochlar-Bryant et al. (2005), the following components are prominent in alternative schools that have contributed to student success.

1. Comprehensive and Continuing Programs: Students tend to benefit from long-term comprehensive programs rather than short term disciplinary assignments that result in their return to a traditional school setting within a matter of weeks or months. There

is a systematic approach to planning and implementing a comprehensive/continuing program. Administrators, staff, and students are included in the planning process to achieve optimum success. Although academics are the primary focus, counseling is an integral component of the curriculum. Students actually set short and long-term goals toward their successful completion of school.

2. Choice and Commitment: There is a discernible partnership between students and teachers in alternative programs that prove successful for students. Choice is a prevailing theme. Students apply to attend. Parents are actively engaged in their child's educational experience. Students are held to high accountability standards. They set goals for themselves and are taught decision-making techniques that promote a positive self-image. Positive reinforcement is consistently utilized to encourage student attendance and achievement.

3. Caring and Demanding Teachers: This aspect of alternative education is paramount in ensuring student achievement and success. Teachers assume the role of educator, counselor, mentor and disciplinarian. Teachers hold students to high academic and behavioral standards. Teachers are clear and concise in their expectations and administrators are consistent in executing disciplinary actions in a fair and equitable manner. Students are exposed to a highly structured environment where the rules and expectations are made clear and consistently enforced. Teachers model the behavior expected of their students.

4. Flexible Structures: Students' individual schedules are considered and scheduling options are provided. Flexible schedules such as late arrival and departure, evening classes, computer-based learning, etc. are available to students. Grading procedures

are customized. Students are given opportunities to resubmit substandard work to increase the chance of earning higher grades.

5. Self-Evaluation and Continuous Improvement: Students consistently engage in self-reflection activities, formative and summative assessments to gauge student progress. Teachers also assess themselves and are consistently provided meaningful Professional Development opportunities to consistently improve their practices.

Funding for alternative programs is always challenging. Of the $7.2 billion budget for North Carolina Schools, 3% of expended state funds services Alternative Programs and Services. This equates to 18.5% ($254,192,424) of State funding in North Carolina (NCDPI, 2013). This fund is identified under the Categorical Allotment line item of the budget for North Carolina. This allotment provides services and support to special populations that include at-risk students. The funds are available to employ personnel to include: teachers, teacher assistants, and instructional support. The funds may also be extended to provide transportation, staff development, or to purchase supplies and materials (NCDPI, 2013).

According to the Informational Analysis report on North Carolina School Budget (2012), each LEA identified within the state receives the dollar equivalent of one resource officer ($37,838) per high school. The remaining funds allowed distribution based on ADM at 50% ($79.51 per ADM) and 50% based on the number of poor children, per the federal Title I Low Income Poverty Data ($357.64 per poor child). Lastly, the LEA receives approximately $237, 422, which equates to two teachers and two support personnel (NCDPI, 2013).

The Southern Regional Education Board (2006) has created a list of states and how they fund their alternative education programs (Southern Regional Board, as cited in NCDPI, 2013):

1. Arkansas: Alternative programs are funded through competitive grant process. For the 2004-2005 biennium, $3.8 million was allotted annually for grants.

2. Florida: Alternative programs are funded as part of dropout prevention. Funds allocated are based on the Florida Education Finance Program funding formula. Dropout prevention has an additional program weight applied to the base student allocation in the early stages of the formula calculation.

3. Georgia: School districts are authorized to establish alternative programs for disruptive youth; however, there has been no additional assistance from the state until year of 1999-2000. The budget for 2004-2005 included $32 million in general funds from lottery proceeds to support these grants.

4. Maryland: The state provided 16.3 million to establish a non-residential middle school for disruptive students in 2004-2005. There was an additional $500,000 available for other alternative education programs.

5. Mississippi: School districts receive funds for alternative education based on a formula calculation. Those students participating in these programs are not counted as part of the regular average daily attendance in the minimum finance program.

6. Virginia: Alternative schools are provided for in two ways. First, districts with approved programs receive the basic level of funding for students in the alternative settings. Second, pilot programs for alternative education were established in four sites for the year 1999-2000. The 2005 legislature authorized expansion to include nine sites with $15.6 million to be matched by districts based on local wealth.

Ultimately, human resources play a major role in the success of alternative schools, beginning with leadership. The most important decision that any leader will make is who to hire and who

to fire (Dr. L. Mabe, personal communication, April 5, 2011). School climate and school leaders are essential to establishing successful alternative schools.

School Climate and School Leaders

Connecting with people and building relationships is a very important function for all organizations and in education; this has a profound impact on school climate. Great leaders are always seeking potential candidates to strengthen their organization and the following factors usually help them in deciding who will be the best fit for the organization and meeting the needs of those served: attitude, generation, background, values, life experience, leadership ability (Maxwell, 2007, pp. 93-96). Important questions to examine as educational leaders are: Who is naturally attracted to each other, who have moved on and who have remained due to the leadership, and who will follow the leader when they go? These questions will help determine the law of magnetism as it applies to students in the school and the connections that they make daily. "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care" (Maxwell, 2007, p. 102). Students are especially concerned about who cares about them and once they have a sense of care, they will bring one into their inner circle.

Maxwell (2007) pointed out that it is important for leaders to surround themselves with other leaders within their organization and outside their organization to serve as their mentors (pp. 118-119). Educational leaders need to do this as well, and need to serve as a mentor for the identified student leaders within a school that can help bring about positive change when they are empowered. Brendtro and Larson (2006) emphasized the importance of building caring and trusting relationships with students in order to be successful in *The Resilience Revolution* (pp. 55-57). Maxwell (2007) described how great leaders cultivate and empower leaders to either lead within the organization or to move on and lead elsewhere (p. 119). Educational leaders

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must empower leaders within their school or district and nurture them to move on and become leaders elsewhere for the greater cause of improving education in the district, in the state, and in the nation. Additional leaders will help to create buy-in on a much greater scale.

"Once people have bought into someone, they are willing to give his vision a chance. People want to go along with people they get along with", (Maxwell, 2007, p. 147). Educational leaders need to be able to sell themselves to their school and district. They need to establish relationships and make all stakeholders believe in them before they will buy-in to any vision. Practice what is preached, visit churches, attend community events, and support the students to get the stakeholders to buy-in to the vision. Unity of vision, diversity of skills, and a leader dedicated to victory and raising players to their potential are the components of victory (Maxwell, 2007, pp. 161-162). Educational leaders need to celebrate the successes for the team and the students. Even small wins are victories and should be celebrated within schools and districts which will lead to momentum. Jaime Escalante, a well-known educator who achieved great success in working with at-risk youth and gang members, according to Maxwell (2007) used the law of motivation to achieve continued success (pp. 165-171). Educational leaders can apply this true story and law to their everyday goals of student achievement empowerment.

Priorities change depending on the school, environment, class, year, and other factors, but priorities are needed to be in line if educational leaders plan to accomplish anything. Maxwell (2007) provided three guiding questions to help get priorities in line: What is required? What gives the greatest return? What brings the greatest reward? One priority that should be constant is empowering students to lead to improve the school. This will require some of the adults in the school to sacrifice some of their power. "Effective leaders sacrifice much that is good in order to dedicate themselves to what is best" (Maxwell, 2007, p. 190). Educational leaders must be in the

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business to help kids, love kids, and have the passion needed in order to make sacrifices and do what is in the best interest of kids. Knowing when to empower and when to sacrifice are important timing decisions. "Reading a situation and knowing what to do are not enough to make you succeed in leadership. Only the right action at the right time will bring success. Anything else exacts a high price. That is the Law of Timing" (Maxwell, 2007, p. 203). According to Maxwell (2007), this is the only reason that Jimmy Carter became president (pp. 193-195). Knowing when to implement and execute certain initiatives is important for educational leaders and this will lead to growth.

"Here's how it works. Leaders who develop followers grow their organization only one person at a time. But leaders who develop leaders multiply their growth, because for every leader they develop, they also receive all of that leader's followers" (Maxwell, 2007, p. 208). This is important in schools with the faculty, but especially with the students. Educational leaders who understand this can have a huge impact on turning around a school and creating a legacy. Maxwell (2007) pointed out that significant leaders empower and train future leaders to take over the organization when they are gone (p. 221). Educational leaders who truly care about the schools, districts, and communities that they serve will do this as well, and will truly create the leaders of tomorrow.

Therefore, excellent leadership within alternative schools is imperative to the success of the school. Furthermore, excellent leaders (school administration) will be able to use their leadership abilities to mentor and empower the youth of the school to lead for positive results.

Developing Leadership within Schools to Empower Youth

When people think of great leaders, they initially think about Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and John F. Kennedy, they often do not initially consider leaders such as Adolf Hitler,

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Napoleon Bonaparte, Fidel Castro, and Stanley "Tookie" Williams. The unrecognized leaders

are overlooked because of their ethics, but they are in fact great leaders. Therefore, if educators

are going to transform schools and save students, they must begin to look for the "overlooked

leaders" in their schools such as Tookie, the "Godfather of the Crips." One could even conclude

that these "overlooked leaders" in our schools are what Malcolm Gladwell identifies as

"Outliers."

In *School Climate That Promotes Student Voice*, Maurice J. Elias (2010) makes the

argument that promoting student voice paves the way to greater academic engagement and

performance. This is important because students who do not feel heard or engaged are in danger

of dropping out unlike students who can express themselves help create their own education

(Elias, 2010). The purpose of alternative schools should be to offer a smaller learning

environment for students to feel heard and offer more opportunities for engagement rather than

reducing the number of opportunities for engagement as a punishment which is a common

practice. "Engagement has the same meaning for students as it does for teachers: wanting to be

in class and actively participating in their learning" (Budig & Heaps, 2012). Elias (2010)

provides ample amount of research and findings to support his claim. The most compelling of

these findings is a study by Lee and Burkan (2003) in which they concluded that one of the main

reasons for students dropping out of school is the perception that no one, neither adults or their

peers, care for or are interested in them; this was supported later by the national High School

Survey of Student Engagement from the Center of Evaluation & Education Policy at Indiana

University (CEEP, 2010). Elias acknowledged that it is highly important that individuals

promoting student voice must have genuine motivation in order for positive effects to occur

(CEEP, 2010). Students often check-out emotionally and intellectually long before they drop out

physically and this is the reason why student voice and social-emotional and character development is so important (CEEP, 2010).

Larry K. Brendtro, Martin Brokenleg, and Steve Van Bockern (2002) identified four ecological hazards in the lives of at-risk youth as destructive relationships, climates of futility, learned irresponsibility, and loss of purpose (p. 8). Educational leaders need to help students overcome these four hazards and they can do so by understanding what is going on with the youth.

Henry Ford did not understand the law of empowerment; as a result of his need to be in control of everything, he almost ruined what would become one of America's top automakers (Maxwell, 2007, pp. 121-126). Educational leaders cannot possibly do everything themselves either. Therefore, as leaders, they must find the people within their school or district, like Stanley Tookie Williams an outlier with great leadership potential, and then empower them and cultivate them into helping the school and/or district reach even greater potential. This does not only apply to the faculty but to the students as well. The goals that can be accomplished when student leaders, including gang leaders, are empowered are truly amazing.

The law of empowerment is one of twenty-one laws described by Maxwell (2007) in, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership: Follow Them and People will Follow You*. Maxwell (2007) developed an action plan and rule book for leaders that will assist them in gaining followers, but this book also helps to understand leadership and how to grow leadership, including student leadership. *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership: Follow Them and People will Follow You* is not an educational leadership book; only one chapter in the book even cites an example from education. However, the laws discussed by Maxwell are applicable to all CEO's, pastors, managers, foreman, coaches, teachers, and principals, who seek to strengthen their leadership

abilities and gain followers. Educators can apply these laws in mentoring and guiding non-traditional learners and at-risk students.

The Law of the Lid is an individual's level of effectiveness determined by his or her ability to lead (Maxwell, 2007, p. 1). The "lid" is the cap on their ability to lead. Maxwell (2007) illustrates this with a discussion about Dick and Maurice McDonald who began a restaurant chain but their "lids" on leadership would only allow them to go so far; it was not until Ray Kroc purchased their chain from them that McDonald's grew into the mecca of fast-food restaurants that exist today (pp. 1-6). Maxwell (2007) pointed out that the law of the lid can be raised (p. 10). High expectations equal high results! Allison Zmuda (2010) stated why lowering expectations does not work in *Breaking Free From Myths About Teaching and Learning*. Allison states, "When teachers design learning tasks to be easy … They end up more exhausted, and students end up more passive, further alienated by the lack of challenge in the work" (Zmuda, 2010, p. 137). Educational leaders often have expectations for their faculty and students but they also need to focus on their expectations for themselves. They need to study the law of the lid, do a self-inventory, and determine where their "lid" is and how to raise it in order to become more effective. This will have a great impact on the level of effectiveness for the whole organization, which will help them with their influence.

Princess Diana was influential. Maxwell focused on Princess Diana because he stated that she never was described as a leader but she did have great influence over many people (Maxwell, 2007, pp. 11-20). As administrators working with students, finding those who have influence over their peers is extremely important for school-wide management. Equally important is to understand how to have influence on those who influence others. In *From Rage to Hope,* Kuykendall (2004) stated, "Children of color must believe that academic achievement

will improve their status, benefits, and general prosperity" (p. 96). Maxwell emphasized the importance of leadership by stating, "No matter what anybody else tells you, remember that leadership is influence – nothing more, nothing less" (Maxwell, 2007, p. 17). Educational leaders need to continuously improve their public relation skills. The ability to influence others will determine how many followers the leader will have, this includes all stakeholders. As Maxwell (2007) pointed out, the title will only buy you a little time, but influence will last you a lifetime (p. 14).

Great leaders did not become so overnight. Educational leaders in many cases only see a small part of what has led to students being recognized as leaders in the school. Attending school and community events, being visible and watchful in the school, and studying cumulative records will give a better understanding of how these students became leaders, but often it is what happens on the streets that lead to their skills for leadership. Leadership is a collection of skills and abilities that are acquired overtime and improved on continuously throughout life (Maxwell, 2007, p. 23). Leaders must understand this and be committed to being lifelong learners if they plan to be successful (Maxwell, 2007, p. 24). The implication of the law of process for school leaders can be summed up by doing two things. First, educational leaders must continuously reflect, learn from their successes and failures, and they must work with students on this as well in order to empower them. Second, educational leaders must seek professional development throughout their careers, while working to provide positive opportunities for students to receive leadership development training. One way to do this, according to Kuykendall, is to provide students the opportunities to learn about and experience the strengths of their culture (Kuykendall, 2004, p. 168). The notion of professional development for students was brought to the forefront by Kathleen Cushman (2005) in *Sent to*

the Principal: Students Talk About Making High Schools Better. School leaders typically put a lot of work into the professional development of teachers. But often they forget to coach students in the tools that can help them make a real difference in their daily life.

With some training in survey techniques, focus group facilitation, or other fieldwork methods, for example, students can carry out important research about important issues in their own school. Their work may bring in even more accurate feedback than that gathered by administrators, because students feel more invested and more willing to speak candidly to their peers. (Cushman, 2005, p. 37)

People naturally want to follow leaders stronger than themselves (Maxwell, 2007, pp. 70-71). The law of respect for educational leaders has a great deal to do with those who will follow, work with, and strive to impress the leader. The law of respect for gang leaders has a great deal to do with who is willing to take a risk, such as making a drug deal, stealing a car, or murdering an individual, in order to gain rank. "Violent gang members cite honor as an essential value. They invoke such language as respect, reputation, self-respect, and status as emblematic of honor, while to them dishonor is tantamount to insult and disrespect (Price, 2008, p. 36). Respect is an important component of street gang life and it is important for administers to gain the respect of their students if they are going to achieve success in empowering them. Maxwell (2007) used examples of quarterbacks and military leaders to illustrate the law of intuition because no matter how well the law of navigation is; there are always factors that can destroy a game plan. Once the game plan is destroyed, this is when the law of intuition kicks in, some have it and some do not, it is vital that quarterbacks and military leaders have it as Maxwell (2007) pointed out, but it is also vital that educational leaders have it as well; "the great ones can see things others can't, make changes, and move forward before others know what's happening"

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(p. 78). This is also an especially strong skill for gang leaders because when taking huge risks, the percentage of the game plan being altered is high. These students can be empowered and this skill utilized, especially for athletics.

The law of navigation is one of the most powerful for street gang leaders; they are always prepared for what will happen next on the streets but it is important to develop this tremendous skill for preparation in school. Maxwell (2007) emphasized the importance of being prepared. He stated, "…the secret to the Law of Navigation is preparation. When you prepare well, you convey confidence and trust to the people" (Maxwell, 2007, p. 42). Student leadership plans, community service projects, lesson plans, SMART Goals, Pacing Guides, etc… educational leaders must have a plan for their district or school if they expect people to follow their lead and progress to be made.

The law of E.F. Hutton focused on identifying those people that everyone listens to. Within organizations there are several leaders and it is vital for "the" leader to identify these other leaders, tap into their potential, and bring them on board with their vision and mission (Maxwell, 2007, pp. 43-53). Principals must do the same things within their schools. Identifying leaders within the school from all positions and using them for the good of the school will help improve the school climate and allow for progress to be made. In order to identify these student leaders, it is critical for school administration to conduct careful observations before school, during lunch, between class changes, and after school. These are moments when identifying those on solid ground is critical as well. "Character makes trust possible. And trust makes leadership possible. That is the Law of Solid Ground" (Maxwell, 2007, p. 58). This one statement by Maxwell defined the law very well. Educators emphasize character education for the students, but they must model this and seek ways to empower students through character

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education and service learning projects. In *Developing Character in* Students, Dr. Philip Fitch

Vincent (1999) stated, "I believe that we can educate for good character, that we can develop

students who are respectful, responsible, caring, and kind towards others in the school" (p. 43).

Educational leaders must maintain trust and good character if they wish to stand on "solid

ground" with their school or district.

One main accountability measure of effective leadership in alternative schools is the data

related to high school completion. Therefore, positive results in high school completion data are

essential to the success of alternative schools.

High School Completion

High school completion rates represent the proportion of 18-through-24 year olds not

enrolled in high school and have not received high school diploma (Labyer, 2004). According to

Labyer, completion rates rose slightly from the early 1970s to the late 1980s but have remained

fairly constant during the 1990s (Labyer, 2004). High school completion rates increased for

white and black young adults between the early 1970s and late 1980s but have remained

relatively constant in the 1990s. By 2000, 91.8% of white and 83.7% of black, 18-through-24

year olds, had completed high school. Labyer stated that white and Asian/Pacific Islander young

adults in 2000 were more likely than their black and Hispanic peers to have completed high

school (Labyer, 2004).

Various estimates were conducted throughout the year in regards and were reported to the

U.S. Department of Education under No Child Left Behind as well as to the National Center for

Education Statistics (Barton, 2006). The following were some results provided by various

researchers:

1. Jay Greene (Manhattan Institute) reported a high school completion rate of 71% for 1998

2. Christopher Swanson and Duncan Chaplin (Urban Institute) reported 66.6% for 2000

3. Thomas Mortenson (Postsecondary Education Opportunity) reported 66.1% for 2000

4. Andrew Sum and colleagues (Northeastern University) reported 68.7% for 1998

5. Walter Haney and colleagues (Boston College) reported 74.4% for 2001

Paul Barton (2006) completed a study that looked at the high school completion rates of other researchers in an effort to confirm the reported percentages. While conducting this research, Barton leaned upon the consensus count of the population cohort that would be of graduation age (17 or 18) in spring 2000 and the number of high school diplomas awarded that year by the National Center for Education Statistics (Barton, 2006). Barton was able to ascertain through this research that 69.6% of youth that were at the appropriate age of graduation received a diploma in 2000.

Further research has identified other challenges in regards to high school completion rates. Elaine Allensworth conducted a research study in Chicago that tracked students based on their records. Based on this information, black male students identified in this research study graduated at the rate of 19% by the age of 19. Latino male students were at a 58% graduation rate; whereas 58% of Caucasian male students. Female students in this study did somewhat better than their male counterparts with 57% for black students, 65% for Latino and 71% for Caucasian (Barton, 2006).

A key area that is significantly impacted by educational attainment is annual income. An individual annual income will increase or decrease based on the level of educational attainment (see Table 3). The more education one has, the more income they will earn; less education

Table 3

Earning Statistics According to Educational Attainment

Educational Attainment (25 and Over)	Median Earnings (2000)
Less than 9th grade	$15,241
9th-12th grade, no diploma	$17,337
High school graduate	$25,264
Some college	$27,696
Associate degree	$30,773
Bachelor's degree or more	$43,683

equates to less income. Colorado Literacy Research Institute (2001) conducted a study on adults age 25 or over based on educational attainment. A major factor in high school completion data is that of attendance. Furthermore, attendance is greatly impacted by seat time requirements.

Seat Time

According to Berrett, in an effort to address the dropout issue, researchers are reviewing how students are awarded high school credit for class work. Since 1906, schools have used the Carnegie Unit to award high school credit for coursework (Berrett, 2012). So, instead of the basis of measurement on a mastery of skills and an individualization of the needs of students, credit for graduation is determined by Carnegie Units based upon contact hours or "seat time." Seat time is still the measurement that is used by many states as the determining factor of whether students receive credit for a course or not and leading to enough credits to graduate. Since the history of this concept is rooted in the Carnegie Units, the Carnegie Foundation is now trying to decide if it should continue using this model to solidify course credit or if it is now time for a change in the way of thinking in the educational system (Berrett, 2012). According to Elena Silva, a senior associate for research and policy for Carnegie, the use of the unit happened by default and a time-based measurement has endured as the metric largely because its meaning can be universally understood (Berrett, 2012). Mrs. Silva feels now that "we're at a point where we could do better" (Berrett, 2012).

Based on research conducted by Adams, the Carnegie Unit is defined as one hour of faculty-student contact per week and two hours of outside work over a 15-week semester (Adams, 2012). Thomas Toch, a researcher at Carnegie, used the following example to describe this concept: a total of 120 hours in one subject, meeting four or five times a week for 40 to 60 minutes, for 36 to 40 weeks each year earns the student one "unit" of high school credit (Adams,

2012). When this unit was designed it was primarily implemented to determine whether or not

faculty members would have the opportunity to receive a pension plan (Adams, 2012). Much of

the academic enterprise employs this unit as its foundation, including student and faculty

workloads, schedules, financial aid, and degree requirements (Adams, 2012).

Western Governors University has popularized a concept of basing a standardized unit on

a measure of competency, instead of time spent within a classroom (Berrett, 2012). Elena Silva

simply believed that a competency based measure would not replace time as the standard unit of

measure (Berrett, 2012). She stated that "To come up with a universal metric for competency is

a challenge I don't know if we can meet" (Berrett, 2012). According to Silva, and other

researchers in the Carnegie organization, the credit hour served as a simple way of awarding

credit to students as a means to help them matriculate through our educational system, and a

change in this way of thinking will result in a major shift in education (Berrett, 2012).

The information that was ascertained from this study provided a comparison of course

credit accrual and cumulative course credits earned between students that dropped out of school

from spring 2002 to August 2004 and those who actually graduated in four years (U.S.

Department of Education, 2007). The study identified three separate categories in which to place

the students (U.S. Department of Education, 2007):

1. Tenth-grade dropouts (who did not earn any additional course credits in high school
   beyond the 2001-2002 academic year).

2. Eleventh-grade dropouts (who did not earn any credits beyond the 2002-2003
   academic year).

3. Twelfth-grade dropouts (who did not earn any credits beyond the 2003-2004

academic year). Tenth graders in Spring 2002 who completed high school by August

2004 were defined as on-time graduates.

The results from the Course Credit Accrual and Dropping out of High School study were as

follows (U.S. Department of Education, 2007):

With the credit hour being established as a means of matriculation and support, as a

method of accountability, federal legislation requires all educational facilities to provide

graduation rates, which instantly provides insight into the "Silent Epidemic." There has

been varying research that addresses this concern. Allensworth and Easton (2005)

completed a survey in 2005 that examined the relationship between the number of course

credits that students accumulate each year and students' high school status (Allensworth

and Easton, as cited in U.S. Department of Education, 2007, p. 1). Allensworth and

Easton research studied 10th grade students in both the public and private sector of

education in spring of 2002, to determine and/or identify the timing of students dropping

out and the number of credits earned by the high school student (U.S. Department of

Education, 2007). The study provided information in regards to the average number of

course credits received by high school graduates and dropouts within a school year, as

well as across academic years (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). The study also

examined the accrual of course credit based on subject area as well to include: English,

Mathematics, and Science.

1. Eighty-two percent of students who were 10th-graders in the spring of 2002 graduated

   from high school on time.

2. Five percent left school without earning a high school diploma or alternative

   credential.

3. Two percent were still enrolled without a formal award as of August 2004 (non-graduates).

4. Twelve percent graduated early (before the 2003-04 academic year) or received an alternative diploma, such as a General Educational Development (GED) certificate or certificate of attendance.

5. On-time graduates earned more course credits than did high school dropouts within each academic year. For example, on-time graduates earned, on average, 6.6 credits in the 2000-01 academic year, while dropouts earned, on average, 5.1 credits; 12th-grade dropouts earned 5.4 credits, 11th-grade dropouts earned 4.4 credits, and 10th grade dropouts earned 3.9 credits.

6. Tenth-graders earned, on average, 6.4 course credits in both the 2000-01 and 2001-02 academic years (9th and 10th grades, respectively, for on-time students). The average number of course credits earned by these students decreased over the subsequent 2 academic years due, in part, to 11th-and 12th grade dropouts earning fewer credits.

In order to provide insight into this issue, Carnegie will meet with faculty, deans, and administrators to come up with a new policy in terms of the credit hour. Silva and Toch used a grant from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation to reach out to the education community.

This study exemplified the importance of obtaining credits and that those who drop out of high school receive fewer credits than do on-time graduates within each academic year (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). Furthermore, the gap between course credit accrual between the dropouts and on-time graduates increases substantially across academic years.

Other forces, including technology, improved measurement methods, and new insights into how students learn, have also influenced Carnegie's decision to reconsider the credit hour,

said Ms. Silva, allowing students to learn at their own pace. Silva also proposed that a change in the credit hour is also likely to affect and further connect learning on the primary and secondary levels with what happens in postsecondary education.

The impending change in the credit hour is also part of a larger rethinking of curricular divisions of breadth and depth, said Carol Geary Schneider, president of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (Berrett, 2012). The credit hour and breadth-and-depth structures were put in place a century ago to bring a measure of congruity to higher education. Referring to both the credit hour and the breadth and depth structures, Schneider stated in an e-mail, "are creaky and decidedly out of date" (Berrett, 2012). These comments reinforce the premise that schools are not meeting the needs of 21st Century learners by operating on antiquated educational practices and beliefs.

According to the State Board of Education for North Carolina, in reference to the "Course for Credit", the policy states the following (sbepolicy.dpi.state.nc.us):

1. Must consist of 150 clock hours of instruction in a traditional schedule; or

2. Must consist of a minimum of 135 clock hours of instruction in a block schedule; developed curriculum guides, or Advanced Placement syllabi in which high school students are enrolled; and

3. Must be directed by a teacher

    a. English I, II, III, IV

    b. Algebra I, Algebra II, Geometry, and higher level mathematics course

    c. Biology, Earth/Environmental Science, and a physical science course that

    d. is used to fulfill the third science requirement

    e. Civics and Economics, US History, World History

   f. First year of a World Language

   g. Second year of the same World Language

Furthermore, the policy stated that courses taken for high school graduation at community

colleges, public/private colleges are exempt from the 135 or 150 instructional hours with the

exception of the following (Retrieved from sbepolicy.dpi.state.nc.us):

   1. One credit of Health/Physical Education

Lastly, the policy granted an explanation of how students can receive course credit for e-learning

classes. Exploring these alternatives to students technically being in school, but still meeting the

"hours" mandated to meet the identified standards while simultaneously meeting the

differentiated needs of students, perhaps assisting in them staying in school until they graduate

(Retrieved from sbepolicy.dpi.state.nc.us). If students are going to receive credit for e-learning

courses they must meet the following criteria:

  Any K-7 e-learning course or 8-12 course taken for credit toward a diploma must first be

  approved for credit by the NC Virtual Public School (sbepolicy.dpi.state.nc.us).

   1. E-learning courses offering instruction in courses included within the NC Standard

    Course of Study must meet the Standard Course of Study competency goals and

    objectives. E-learning courses offered for Advanced Placement (AP) or

    International Baccalaureate (IB) credit must align with nationally validated

    standards for AP and IB, where available.

   2. E-learning courses offering instruction in courses not included in the Standard

    Course of Study curriculum must have rigor, depth, and breadth comparable to

    courses included in the Standard Course of Study.

   3. Enrollment in an e-learning "for credit course" shall count toward satisfying local

board requirements related to minimum instructional days, seat time policies, student attendance, and athletic and/or extracurricular obligations. Furthermore, Local Education Agency (LEAs) is instructed to be purposeful in establishing processes and procedures to enroll and manage such e-learning students in an environment where they can be successful.

The extensive study of seat time and its evolvement, or the lack there of, has led researches to dive deeper into the understanding of course credits and alternative methods of awarding those credits. Therefore, it is important to understand the research surrounding the different approaches to earning course credits.

Different Approaches to Course Credits

Practitioners are considering moving away from the "course for credit" requirement to "credit by mastery." As stated earlier, the "course for credit" requirement, initially implemented and created by Carnegie, focused on seat time that was necessary for a student to be in class to receive credit for a course. Whereas, "credit for mastery" was solely based on a student's command of course material at a level that demonstrated a deep understanding of the content standards and application of knowledge. Amy Laitinen, deputy director for higher education at the New American Foundation, stated that, "If the founder is saying, 'There's something wrong with the unit itself,' it adds a lot of weight and gravitas to the question: What is it that we're actually measuring?" (Berrett, 2012). Laitinen also believed that the credit unit is at the root of what plagues higher education and she shared her sentiments in a report entitled "Cracking the Credit Hour" (Berrett, 2012). Another staunch advocate of the change from course for credit is Pamela Tate, president of the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning. Mrs. Tate applauded

the announcement by Carnegie to reassess the course for credit, calling it "long overdue" (Berrett, 2012).

The new vision of high school is schooling that puts students at the center of their learning. Everything we need to know regarding how to get each student excited about his/her education is in each student's head and is available, free for the asking. Creating an environment where students feel acceptance and empowerment, motivating them to stay in school and learn, instead of turning to the streets for their education. Education's job must be to develop skilled professionals who know how to ask the right questions and know what to do with the answers.

A variety of schools in New Hampshire have implemented Extended Learning Opportunities (ELOs) that ultimately will match the unique interest, abilities, needs, developmental levels, and talents of the students they serve. These opportunities derived from student interest, teacher support and inspiration, and any opportunities that are supplied within the community. The students that take part in ELOs are given credit for learning provided outside a classroom, to include independent study, private instructions, internships, community service, and work study.

The opportunity to participate in ELOs presented various outlets for all students, but more specifically for the students that struggle in a regular academic setting, according to Freeley and Hanzelka (2009). For example, an 18-year-old student at Manchester Central High School failed the civics course she needed to graduate. For her extended learning opportunity, she worked at the Manchester City Hall Social Service Department. Her completion of this extended learning opportunity enabled her to graduate on time (Leather, as cited in Freeley & Hanzelka, 2009, p. 64).

Newfound Regional High School in New Hampshire also used ELOs as opportunities for students to acquire credits. One of the graduating seniors at this high school took advantage of the ELOs to gain access to the information about his interest in the military, which he plans on entering once he graduates from Newfound Regional High School. After conducting the necessary research needed the student produced a portfolio, a journal, and a final exhibition according to Freeley and Hanzelka (2009). Thus, these projects provide relevant, meaningful life learning experiences which motivated the individual students.

According to Freeley and Hanzelka (2009), in order for students to use the process of an ELO, the student must ask the following questions: How do I like to learn? What are my interests? Why do I think an ELO would work for me? After students are able to answer these questions and realize that they still have an interest in the program, each student is assigned a team that consists of the following: coordinator, teacher, counselor, parent, and community partner. This team meets periodically to identify resources and come up with a plan that is specific to the student's interest, as well as evaluating the ELO the student has taken on.

Schools that offer ELOs align their goals and expectations to that of the school's educational goals and objectives. Each individual school in this process determines how credits will be awarded to the students. The students that are involved in ELO opportunities are primarily assessed through teacher check-ins, reflections, and student exhibitions (Freely & Hanzelka, 2009). According to Freely and Hanzelka (2009), these student exhibitions were presented to a team of reviewers; usually, each reviewer completed a rubric illustrating how well the student has mastered the competencies identified as goals of the extended learning opportunity.

North Carolina was currently in the process of implementing a Credit by Demonstrated Mastery (CDM) policy change; according to the North Carolina State Board of Education (2013), beginning in the fall of 2014, students began having the option of using CDM for earning high school credits. Using CDM will also be optional for Local Education Agencies to implement in middle schools. The rational identified for this policy change was stated as follows, "Every student deserves a high-quality education, and the Credit by Demonstrated Mastery Policy ensures that every student has the opportunity for the most rigorous and appropriate course of study based on academic progress and need" (SBE-GCS-M-001, Section 13, p. 8). According to the NC State Board of Education, North Carolina will be joining nineteen other states which have a similar policy in place to include: Texas, New York, Tennessee, Oregon, Alabama, Iowa, Missouri, Ohio, Idaho, Utah, Oklahoma, Wisconsin, and Michigan (SBE-GCS-M-001, Section 13, p. 8-9).

Case in point, Franklin High school allowed for its students to earn two credits by using ELOs in either core or elective classes. The two ELOs that students used toward graduation have to include a portfolio, a community partner, and a presentation. Another requirement that Franklin High School expects of its 400 students is that each ELO has what is called a "leave behind" (Freely & Hanzelka, 2009). For example, while studying music and guitar, one student worked with a local music store and developed as his leave-behind portfolio a series of lesson plans for teaching guitar.

According to information collected by the New Hampshire Department of Education, and stemming from the Nellie Mae Foundation grant, early data from four area high schools (Laconia High School, Franklin High School, Newfound Regional High School, and Manchester Central High School) indicated that ELOs accounted for approximately 337 students who participated in

the ELO program in 2008 (Freeley & Hanzelka, 2009). The study which was conducted by the

Nellie Mae Foundation also identified that the dropout rates of the participating schools had

decreased from 7-8% in 2003 to below 4% in 2008. The report further concluded that 96% of

participants took part in the creation of their ELOs and approximately 65% of those students

reported that they were extremely involved. Board members, community workers, and

superintendents stated that the ELOs were extremely rigorous based on the standards identified

by the state. Steven Beals served as the principal at Laconia High School and made the

following statement about ELOs: "Students who are engaged are capable of far greater rigor and

do it without feeling overwhelmed by the expectations. We keep our focus on each student and

find the item of interest or hook for his or her learning to take off" (Freeley & Hanzelka, 2009).

Another example of an effort to help these views become a reality, the New Hampshire

school board incorporated a new statewide initiative in 2005 entitled "Follow the Child," which

required the school system to get away from seat time (Freeley & Hanzelka, 2009). The school

system's goal was to accomplish this initiative within a three year period of time and to exert

more of an effort geared toward competencies. The state legislature in New Hampshire felt like

getting away from seat time would afford the schools greater flexibility. Based on the flexibility

afforded by the new initiative, schools were able to create programs that focused on personalized

learning, student engagement, and alternate approaches to student assessment (Freeley &

Hanzelka, 2009).

Other states have created and/or established policies in an effort to loosen the standard of

seat time as the only means by which a student can receive course credit. The intent of

implementing these new policies, according to Sean Cavanagh (2012) in his article "States

Loosening Entrenched 'Seat Time' Requirements," is to make it easier for struggling students to

catch up, exceptional students to race ahead, and students facing geographic and scheduling barriers to take the courses they need. The article further stated that thirty-six states have established that credits can be received based on student proficiency, as opposed to the amount of time a student physically is in a seat in a traditional setting. Furthermore, there are a number of states that are applying for a seat time waiver in an effort to rid themselves of the seat time issue.

Jason Glass, the director of the Iowa Department of Education, stated that "merely having a seat in the class doesn't guarantee you anything" (Cavanagh, 2012). Mr. Glass, along with the governor of Iowa, Terry Branstad, is asked the lawmakers in their state to give students an opportunity to prove their ability in a variety of ways in an effort for them to obtain course credit. They both believed that this can be accomplished through testing, demonstration of skills, and the completion of projects (Cavanagh, 2012). Mr. Glass believed his state is allowing students to move on based on minimal competencies in the courses that the students are taking. Glass states that "the concept is 'still sort of cutting edge,' but he stills wants Iowa experimenting with it" (Cavanagh, 2012).

Elizabeth Utrup, a spokesperson for the U.S. Department of Education, noted that at the federal level, districts and states are encouraged to be creative and to implement practices that they feel will be effective for the students they serve (Cavanagh, 2012). She further stated that the U.S. Department of Education believes the implementation of those practices will allow districts and states to have more flexibility, which will allow for more productivity. Based on the belief of the US Department of Education, various states have implemented policies that take them away from focusing on seat time as the only means of awarding course credits. There are a

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number of states that now allow credits based on proficiency and/or mastery, according to the

U.S. Department of Education (Adams, 2012):

1. Since 2003, Oregon has allowed districts and schools to use proficiency-based approaches for awarding credit to students. From 2004 to 2006, the state piloted the policy in several school districts. In 2009, state policy was expanded to require that all in-class work be tied explicitly to demonstrated proficiency or mastery of academic standards.

2. Oklahoma requires schools to allow students, upon request, to earn credits toward graduation in core academic subjects based on demonstrations of mastery through tests. Students are required to score grades of 90% or higher on those tests to receive credit, according to state officials.

3. In 1987, Maryland incorporated an outcome-based system in Frederick County involving 30,000 students and 46 schools based on five essential learner behaviors. The essential learner behaviors are as follows: effective communication, problem solving and critical thinking, social cooperation and self-discipline, responsible citizenship in community and environment, and a lifestyle that values wellness and aesthetics.

4. In 2007, Michigan created a policy to grant waivers from seat time requirements to districts on a case by case basis. More than 200 schools have requested some sort of waiver over the past year, and about 5,500 students are currently making use of the flexibility, most of them through a blended-learning approach, combining in-person and online instruction.

Presently, Genesee County, located in Michigan, has implemented the "Seat Time Waiver" into their school system (Cavanagh, 2012). The idea initially started as an experiment, but now it is being adopted statewide. The program began with 1,300 students in the county who applied to become a part of the Genesee Intermediate School District (GISD) Seat Time Waiver Program. The course allowed students to stay at home and take courses, according to Genesee Intermediate School District Superintendent Lisa Hagel. Mrs. Hagel stated that "the program appealed to students who have health or mobility issues or athletes who travel a lot" (abclocal.go.com). According to Hagel (2011), "I think this is harder than going to class every day with a teacher because the student has to be self-motivated." Kassondra Noyce, a student in the program agreed that the course work is much more difficult than she thought it would be and that one has to be dedicated in order to be successful in the courses (abclocal.go.com).

Gary Miron, a well-known professor at the University of Kalamazoo, believed the seat time initiative is a monumental step in educational reform in order to increase student achievement throughout the United States (Cavanagh, 2012). Mr. Miron recognized not only a shift in traditional education in regards to seat time, but also believed it is a shift from "regulatory accountability" of schools, toward more "performance-based or market accountability." He believed that the latter accountability model affords supporters of non-traditional schools an opportunity to provide results that can be judged, as well as offering more attractive options for the parents involved with these students.

Since the beginning of 2012, over 200 schools requested a waiver in the state of Michigan and approximately 5,500 students are taking advantage of this waiver according to Barbara Fardell, educational technology manager for the State Department in Michigan (Cavanagh, 2012). According to the information provided by Mrs. Fardell, the students involved

in this initiative were doing some form of blended learning, combining a traditional approach with a virtual approach. This method is allowing educators and administrators in Michigan to lure dropouts back into the school system. The combination of the traditional approach with the virtual approach provides an opportunity for the dropout or at-risk youth to become reacquainted with the educational process and to acquire course credits more effectively and quickly. This approach also equips dropouts to come back to school without the stigma that students would normally feel, according to Mrs. Fardell (Adams, 2012).

Oakland Schools located on the outskirts of Detroit, has implemented a program that impacted 17 school districts through the Widening Advancements for Youth initiative (Tomassini, 2012). This agency has taken full advantage of the flexibility that the seat time waiver provided for its students. Widening Advancements for Youth (WAY) is based out of Belleville, Michigan, and is a nonprofit organization that provided instruction through online lessons and mentoring based on the needs of each individual student. This program started accepting students in September of 2012 and had approximately 160 students enrolled with continuous growth. WAY offered instruction to all of its students through online and person-to-person sessions, both of which are in laboratories, and students are expected to attend these sessions to seek support if needed. Michael Yocum, who served in the capacity of executive director of learning services for Oakland, stated that students work on projects in various subjects in order to receive course credit. The staff determines whether the projects completed by the students meet the competencies established by the districts. If so, the students are awarded course credit for the subject area in which credits are lacking (Tomassini, 2012).

Seat-time does restrict students who have mastered skills from progressing at a more rigorous pace, but what happens to students who need more help consistently missing seat-time due to attendance and suspensions, and what alternative measures can be used to address this?

Attendance and Absences

Seat time has much to do with attendance, especially in North Carolina (www.ncga.state.nc.us). The *Compulsory Attendance Law* requires that every child between the ages of seven and sixteen years old attend school on a regular basis. This requirement is the responsibility of every parent and/or guardian (www.ncga.state.nc.us):

1. No person shall encourage, entire or counsel any child of compulsory school age to be unlawfully absent from school. The parent and/or guardian, or custodian, of a child shall notify the school of the reason for each known absence of the child, in accordance with local school board policy.

2. The principal, superintendent, or designee of the principal or superintendent shall have the right to excuse a child temporarily from attendance on account of sickness or other unavoidable cause that does not constitute unlawful absence as defined by the state Board of Education. The term "school" as used in this section includes all public schools and any nonpublic schools which have teachers and curricula that are approved by the State Board of Education.

3. All nonpublic schools receiving and instructing children of compulsory school age shall be required to make, maintain, and render attendance records of those children and maintain the minimum curriculum standards required of public schools. If a nonpublic school refuses or neglects to make, maintain, and render required attendance records, attendance at that school shall not be accepted in lieu of

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attendance at the public school of the district to which the child shall be assigned. Instruction in a nonpublic school shall not be regarded as meeting the requirements of the law unless the courses of instruction run concurrently with the term of the public school in the district and extend for at least as long a term.

4. After ten accumulated unexcused absences in a school year, the principal or the principal's designee shall review any report or investigation prepared under G.S. 115C-381 and shall confer with the student and the student's parent, guardian, or custodian, if possible, to determine whether the parent, guardian, or custodian has received notification pursuant to this section and made a good faith effort to comply with the law. If the principal or the principal's designee determines that the parent, guardian, or custodian has not made a good faith effort to comply with the law, the principal shall notify the district attorney and the director of social services of the county where the child resides. If the principal or the principal's designee determines that the parent, guardian, or custodian has made a good faith effort to comply with the law, the principal may file a complaint with the juvenile court counselor pursuant to Chapter 7B of the General Statutes that the child is habitually absent from school without a valid excuse. Upon receiving notification by the principal or the principal's designee, the director of social services shall determine whether to undertake an investigation under GS 7B-302.

The county in southeastern North Carolina addressed this in two board policies: School Calendar and time for learning, and Attendance (NCSBA Legal/Policy Services policy.microscribepub.com--school district in southeast, NC, Board of Education Policy Manual, 2013).

The school calendar identifies and establishes time requirements that will impact educational goals and objectives. An integral part of the time requirement is to allot the necessary time to facilitate student learning and to permit time for the assessment of learning targets to increase student achievement. The key areas identified in this policy include: instructional time, school day, opening and closing dates, and school calendar. Calendars selected and used by the board should have the following requirements (NCSBA Legal/Policy Services policy.microscribepub.com--school district in Southeast, NC, Board of Education Policy Manual, 2013):

1. The calendar will consist of 215 days and shall meet state requirements for the minimum instructional days and/or the minimum instructional hours.

2. At least ten of the days on the calendar will be designated as annual vacation leave days.

3. The calendar will include the same or an equivalent number of legal holidays as those designated by the State Personnel Commission for State employees, including Veteran's Day if it falls on a weekday.

4. School will not be scheduled on Sundays.

5. The total number of workdays for teachers employed for a 10-month term will not exceed 195 days.

6. The calendar will designate "instructional" days, when students must be present.

7. The remaining days will be scheduled by the board, in consultation with school principals, as flexible days, for use as teacher workdays, additional instructional days, or other lawful purposes. Before scheduling these flexible days, each principal shall

work with the school improvement team to determine the days to be scheduled and the purposes for which they should be scheduled.

8. Of the flexible days described in subsection D.7, the board will designate at least two days as protected days on which teachers may take accumulated vacation leave. All other "flexible" days may be designated as days on which teachers may take accumulated leave, but the board will give teachers at least 14 calendar days' notice before requiring a teacher to work instead of taking vacation leave on any of these days. A teacher may elect to waive this notice requirement for one or more of these days.

9. The board may, due to school closings because of inclement weather or other reasons, use any of the flexible days designated in subsection D.7 above as make-up days for those instructional days that were missed. If necessary, these make-up days may be scheduled after the last day of student attendance. If either of the two protected days described in subsection D.8 above are scheduled as a makeup day, teachers may take accumulated vacation leave on the make-up day and will not be required to work.

10. If the school calendar requires students to attend school on September 17, which is Constitution and Citizenship Day, each principal shall ensure that the signing of the United States Constitution is commemorated in the school on that day. If students are not required to attend school on September 17, the principal shall ensure that Constitution and Citizenship Day is commemorated during the preceding or following week.

Students must be in attendance on a regular basis in order for effective teaching and learning to take place. The state of North Carolina requires students from years of age 7-16 to attend school regularly. The responsibility to ensure that students are in school resides with parents and guardians. The other responsibility to ensure regular attendance by students falls on the schools in the accuracy of record keeping of student attendance based on Compulsory Attendance Law of North Carolina.

Excused Absences are permitted when a student misses a day of school due to the following reasons:

1. personal illness or injury that makes the student physically unable to attend school,

2. isolation ordered by the State Board of Health,

3. death in the immediate family,

4. medical or dental appointment,

5. participation under subpoena as a witness in a court proceeding,

6. a minimum of two days each academic year for observance of an event required or suggested by the religion of the student or student's parent(s),

7. participation in a valid educational opportunity, such as travel or service as a legislative or Governor's page, with prior approval from the principal,

8. pregnancy and related conditions or parenting, when medically necessary, or

9. visitation with the student's parent or legal guardian, at the discretion of the superintendent or designee, if the parent or legal guardian (a) is an active duty member of the uniformed services as defined by policy 4050, Children of Military Families; and (b) has been called to duty for, is on leave from, or has immediately returned from deployment to a combat zone or combat support posting.

Excessive absences are not permitted because school attendance is an essential part of teaching and learning. If a student is absent from school five or more days within a semester, the principal or designated committee will determine if the student's grade will be decreased or not (NCSBA Legal/Policy Service policy.microscribepub.com---school district in Southeast, NC, Board of Education Policy Manual, 2013). The following recommendations may be taken into account (NCSBA Legal/Policy Service policy.microscribepub.com---school district in southeast, NC, Board of Education Policy Manual, 2013):

1. the student will not receive a passing grade for the semester,

2. the student's grade will be reduced,

3. the student will receive the grade otherwise earned, or

4. the student will be given additional time to complete the missed work before a determination of the appropriate grade is made.

5. According to this policy, students with excused absences due to documented chronic health problems are exempt (NCSBA Legal/Policy Service policy.microscribepub.com---school district in Southeast, NC, Board of Education Policy Manual, 2013).

Some students are absent due to the need to take care of themselves and their families. Rules pertaining to attendance punish these students for making mature decisions that have a great impact on their life because of circumstances due to socio-economic status. Many of these students endure an ongoing struggle to overcome the everyday poverty of their lives.

Another reason for frequent absences is suspensions. Student perceptions of suspensions are often that the suspension is a day off from school (Iselin, 2010). In order to effectively participate in educational environments students must possess certain abilities such as academic

achievement, impulse and self-control, conflict management, and problem-solving regarding relationship issues (teachsafeschools.org). Since these students do not have coping mechanisms that assist in demonstrating positive outlets for their feelings, the inappropriate behaviors surface in the school setting and are punished repeatedly. Punishment is often suspensions resulting in putting these students at a further academic deficit.

A study conducted by Arcia (2007), supported that suspensions were given to the students who are already lacking in the area of academics and suspensions put these students at even higher risk for failure. Concerns regarding these matters have been identified by healthcare professionals (Committee on School Health, 2003). First, for school systems and community leaders to provide an environment and resources that decrease the incidents of student behaviors that result in suspensions. Second, lack of supervision and support offered to students when they are suspended. Third, the educational and learning opportunities that are missed when students are not in attendance at school, recognizing that education are directly connected to health and safety (Committee on School Health, 2003).

Disparities of Punishment Regarding Minorities and Genders

Iselin (2010), Hinojosa (2008), and Mendez and Knoff (2003) researched that African-American students are disproportionately suspended more than Caucasian students. Most frequently suspended are African-American students who have been identified with emotional or behavioral disabilities (Iselin, 2010). Data collected by the Civil Rights Project (2010) regarding 9000 middle schools, reported an overall suspension rate of 11%; in the same schools, suspension rates for black students averaged over 28%. Data provided by Hinojosa (2008), based upon the United States Department of Education, 2001, denotes that black students

comprise 17% of the school population, but make up 32% of the population that is suspended (p. 175).

Males are suspended at much higher rates than females from schools (Streitmatter, 1985-1986, p. 141). The discipline gap refers to the "tendency for African American students to be overrepresented in discipline in proportion to their enrollment, Hispanic students to be proportionally represented, and Caucasian and Asian students to be underrepresented" (Booker, & Mitchell, 2011). Students of color reported perceiving discrimination as it relates to disciplinary treatment. The disparities in how discipline is handled for diverse populations in other forms of discipline are well documented. African-American students were more frequently referred to the office than Caucasian students (Booker & Mitchell, 2011).

Research by Booker and Mitchell (2011) indicated that Caucasian students are referred to the office for specific infractions such as smoking, vandalism, truancy, while African-American students are referred for more subjective infractions such as disrespect and threats. Boys are more likely than girls to receive an office referral. Disproportionate rates for suspensions are consistent with office referrals. Boys are more likely to be referred and suspended than girls are (Booker & Mitchell, 2011).

In a study conducted by Mendez and Knoff (2003), African-American students were disproportionately represented in out-of-school suspensions more than Caucasian and Hispanic students. African-American students were disproportionately suspended for infractions such as insubordination, disruptive behavior, and fighting. Caucasian students were disproportionately suspended for tobacco, weapons, drug, and alcohol possessions (Mendez & Knoff, 2003). Mendez and Knoff (2003) indicated that the rates of suspension of students increased when they

entered middle school and decreased in high school. This study did not address the distinction between regular education students and students with disabilities.

Data released by the U.S. Department of Education (1993), urban districts with higher populations of minority students were more likely than suburban and rural districts to have alternative schools for at-risk students. Districts with high minority populations were also more likely to disciplinary assign students for behavioral issues only, rather than other at risk factors such as truancy, parenthood, or mental health issues. Therefore, the conclusion can be made that minority students are more at risk of disciplinary assignment to an alternative school for discretionary reasons. Students placed in the special education program that were assigned to DAEPs were proportionate to the overall population of students with disabilities (Booker & Mitchell, 2011).

Limited research on the perceptions of at-risk students who attend alternative schools exists. Few researchers have sought to understand the perspectives and opinions of at-risk students attending alternative schools through quantitative research methods (Lagana et al., 2011). There is an evident need for qualitative research on the perceptions of at-risk students and the components of the alternative schools they attended that helped them succeed in ways traditional schools did not.

At-risk students tend to struggle academically and perform significantly lower on standardized tests than their peers. Due to the academic challenges confronting at-risk students, the likelihood to drop out of school is much greater than those not considered at risk. The population of students classified as "at-risk" continues to increase within our schools.   For example, in 2005, ethnic minority groups comprised 42% of the entire student population (Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011).

Disparity exists in students between race/ethnicity and gender and, proportionally, minorities and males are suspended at a much higher rate than their peers (see Table 4).

Disparity in students between race/ethnicity and gender that exist nationwide also hold true in North Carolina (see Figures 21-23). Demonstrated in these charts that were released by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction in April of 2014 is that, proportionally, minorities and males are suspended at a much higher rate than their peers (Retrieved from http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/research/discipline/reports/consolidated/2012-13/consolidated-report.pdf).

An analysis of a study by Arcia (2007) indicated that common factors exists that reinforce the incongruence of suspension rates between black students and their non-black peers. Characteristics include the schools that have a high percentage of suspensions overall, to include non-black students, a difference in achievement existed between black and non-black students, and the instructional staff was inexperienced (Arcia, 2007). Understanding the background of school suspensions, including the causes and effects, help to understand the disparities discussed above.

Schools Suspension Background, Causes, and Effects

Violence in schools is a topic of national debate following current events. When examining violence in schools, discipline procedures are scrutinized and analyzed. Discipline is crucial in schools to successfully maintain order and provide a constructive learning environment. The *Guns Free School Act* (1994) prompted schools to implement "zero-tolerance" policies. Resulting from this zero-tolerance ideology, many states developed guidelines outlining school behaviors that would, or could, result in school suspensions or expulsions. To ensure the success of the educational process and provide procedures and

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Table 4

School Suspensions by Strietmatter, 1985-1986, p. 141

School	Total N	Percent in Total Populations	Percent Represented in Suspension	Percent Represented in Suspensions
SCHOOL A 1843	White	93.2$	93.1%	Male 64.1%
	Black	.6%	0%	Female 35.9%
	Hispanic	4.9%	6.8%	
SCHOOL B 2001	White	76.8%	72.4%	Male 65.4%
	Black	5.7%	6.6%	Female 34.6%
	Hispanic	13.9%	21.1%	
SCHOOL C 1911	White	32.6%	25.5%	Male 72.1%
	Black	7.8%	15.3%	Female 27.9%
	Hispanic	53.4%	591%	

Note. The minority groups of Native Americans and Asians were not included due to small numbers.

	American Indian	Asian	Black	Hispanic	Multi Racial	White	Pacific
2008-09	3.61	0.38	4.15	1.34	1.67	1.08	
2009-10	3.14	0.35	3.97	1.30	1.70	1.02	
2010-11	2.94	0.36	3.86	1.24	1.80	0.98	1.93
2011-12	3.07	0.28	3.78	1.20	1.75	0.91	0.16
2012-13	3.03	0.25	3.67	1.11	1.71	0.84	0.12
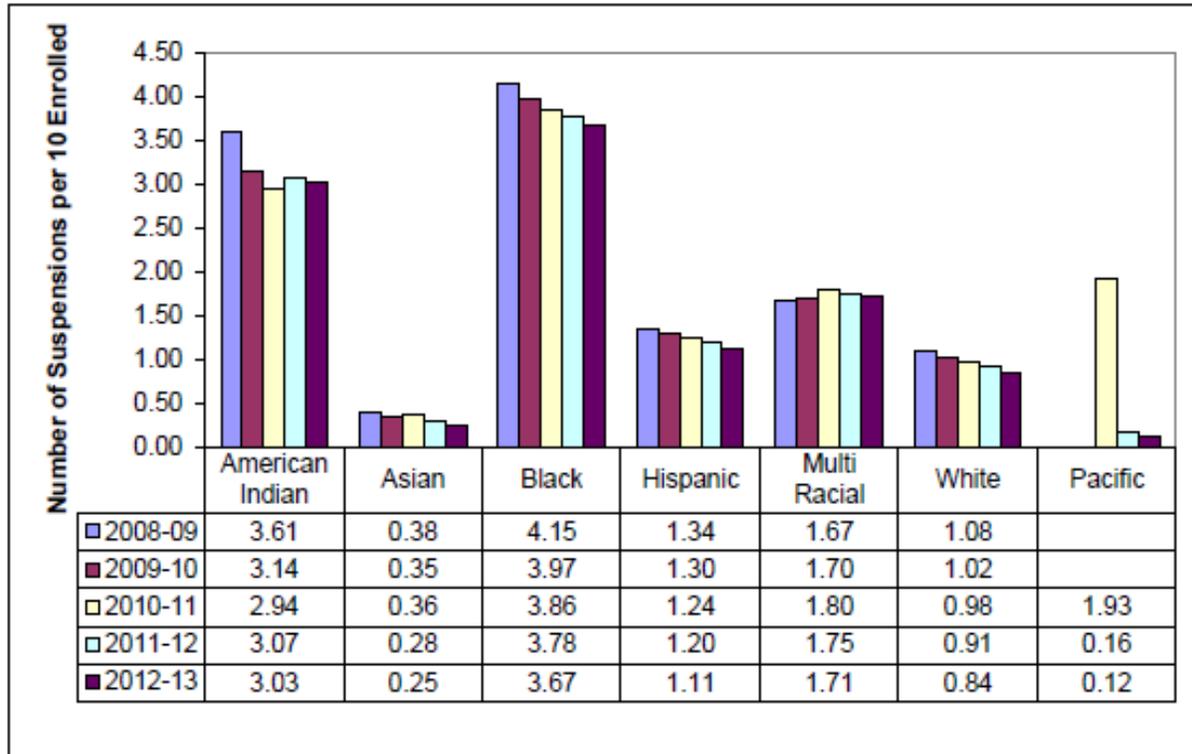
Note: Race/Ethnicity was not reported or was reported as "Other" for 2,069 short-term suspensions in 2008-09, 1,776 in 2009-10, 77 in 2010-11, 110 in 2011-12, and 264 in 2012-13. Rates calculated by dividing number of suspensions in race/ethnicity category by membership in that race/ethnicity category and multiplying by ten.

Figure 21. North Carolina short-term suspension rates by race/ethnicity .

	Female	Male
2008-09	112	371
2009-10	107	345
2010-11	73	281
2011-12	43	172
2012-13	38	150
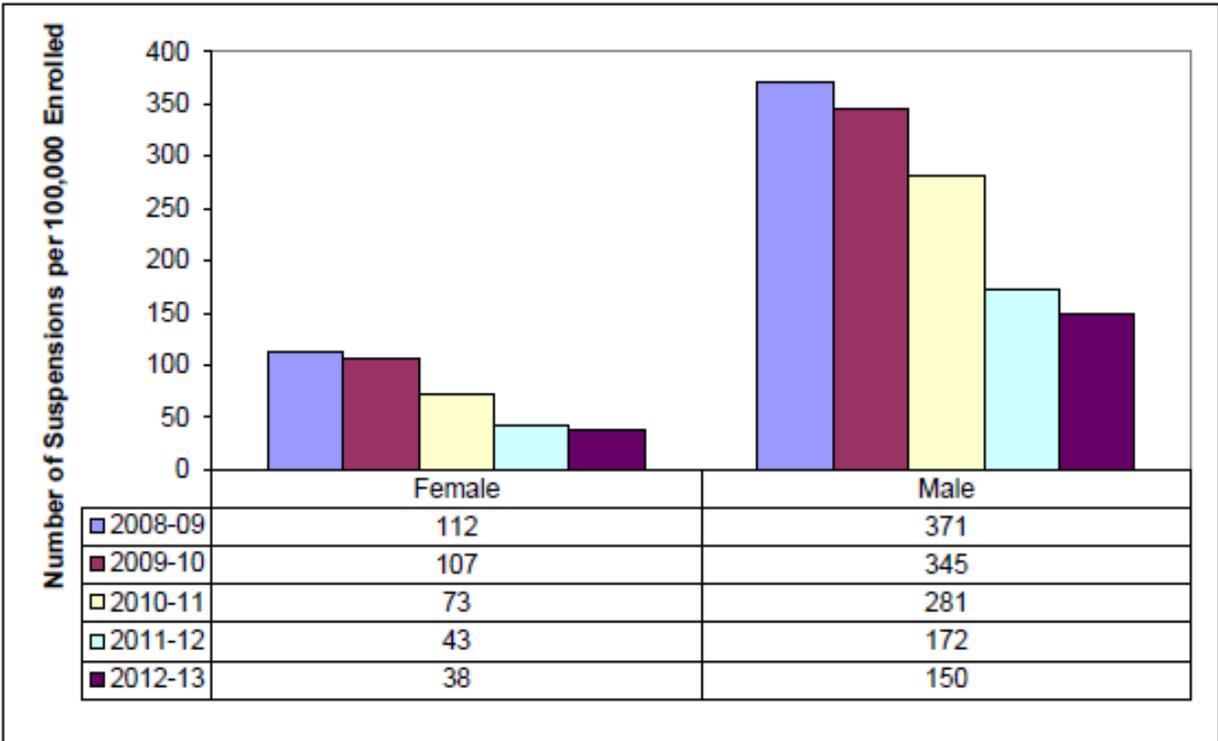
Figure 22. North Carolina long-term suspension rates by gender.

	American Indian	Asian	Black	Hispanic	Multi Racial	White	Pacific
2008-09	366	61	513	215	182	122	
2009-10	473	38	475	206	175	116	
2010-11	129	53	360	153	146	103	639
2011-12	139	24	225	105	118	55	0
2012-13	136	13	199	89	112	47	0
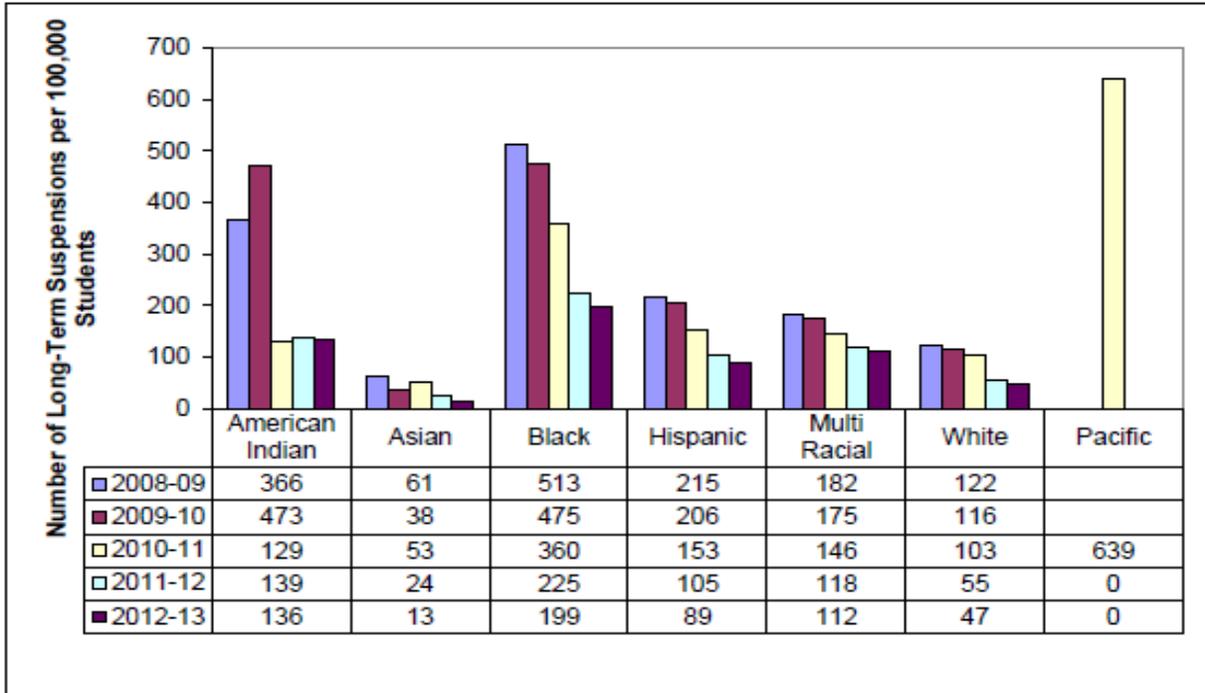
Note: Race/Ethnicity was not reported or was reported as "Other" for 29 suspensions in 2008-09, 44 suspensions in 2009-10, two suspensions in 2010-11, and five suspensions in 2012-13. Rates calculated by dividing number of suspensions in race/ethnicity category by membership in that race/ethnicity category and multiplying by 100,000.

Figure 23. North Carolina long-term suspension rates by race/ethnicity, LTS per 100,000.

processes for a safe and orderly environment, the North Carolina General Assembly has recognized the need for strategies for teachers and school officials in regards to maintaining discipline. To that end, the General Assembly also recognizes the removal of students from schools will increase behavioral problems, diminish academic achievement, and increase dropout rates. Discipline has to maintain balance within the school setting to allow for teaching and learning to take place successfully.

The following Discipline Policies (www.ncleg.net) have been prescribed:

1. Local boards of education shall adopt policies to govern the conduct of students and establish procedures to be followed by school officials in disciplining students. These policies must be consistent with the provisions of this Article and the constitutions, statutes, and regulations of the United States and the State of North Carolina.

2. Board policies shall include or provide for the development of a Code of Student Conduct that notifies students of the standards of behavior expected of them, conduct that may subject them to discipline, and the range of disciplinary measures that may be used by school.

3. Board policies may authorize suspension for conduct not occurring on educational property, but only if the students' conduct otherwise violates the Code of Student Conduct and the conduct has or is reasonably expected to have a direct and immediate impact on the orderly and efficient operation of the schools or the safety of individuals in the school environment.

4. Board policies shall not allow students to be long-term suspensions or expulsions for specific violations unless otherwise provided in State or federal law.

5. Board policies shall minimize the use of long-term suspension and expulsion by

restricting the availability of long-term suspension or expulsion to those violations

deemed to be serious violations unless otherwise provided in State or federal law.

Evidence does not support that suspensions deter behaviors (www.teachsafeschools.org).

The Committee on School Health (2003) identified that between 79% and 94% of schools have

policies based upon the "zero-tolerance" concept and that 90% of Americans are in support of

these established policies. Research on suspensions has expanded over the last 30 years.

Regarding suspensions, it is impossible to determine that one factor causes an outcome.

One cannot surmise that a school's culture causes high or low suspension rates. One can,

however, associate characteristics with outcomes. Suspensions are considered effective in

removing disruptive students from the learning environment, heightening the awareness of

inappropriate student behavior to parents, and allowing a sense of relief to frustrated staff and

students.

Research has been conducted for many years regarding the effectiveness of using

suspension from schools as a means of a disciplinary method. Nationally, suspension rates have

been on an increase over the past decade. According to Lee, Cornell, Gregory, and Fan (2011),

over 3.3 million students are suspended out-of-school every year. According to

teachsafeschools.org, the Chicago school system suspended more than 20,000 students in 2003,

doubling the amount from the previous decade; programs that are alternatives to suspensions

have been implanted in many school districts nationally. When examining the effects of

suspension, factors that contribute to the behaviors that result in suspensions must also be

analyzed. American schools frequently use suspensions, both out-of-school and in-school, as a

common disciplinary action. Suspension, with no additional support or interventions, has not

proven to result in change in behaviors for the long term (Mati, 2011). Iselin's research (2010)

supported that the higher frequency of suspensions has a correlation with greater likeness of future involvement of the repeatedly suspended students in the juvenile justice system and the students' demonstration of antisocial behaviors. Cicek's (2012) research shares that students are often suspended without any proactive interventions or follow up evaluation to address the underlying issues.

An example of proactive interventions is using various behavior support programs decreased office referrals and suspensions (Iselin, 2010). Identified by Mati (2011) was the importance of a positive relationship between teachers and students in influencing positive choices regarding behaviors. Achievement and safety in schools improved when school-wide positive behavior supports (SWPBS) were adopted, along with reduced suspensions (Civil Rights Project, 2010). Suspending students impacts school climate negatively and does not promote social growth to change behaviors that originally caused the suspension (Skiba & Peterson, 2003).

Based upon data from the *Civil Right Project* (2010), suspensions were typically given for offenses other than serious violence, drugs, or weapons. Suspensions were frequently given for non-violent offenses such as unacceptable language, dress-code violations, disruptions, and truancy (*Civil Rights Project*, 2010). Arcia (2007) stated that, frequently, suspensions were used for minor infractions or the repetition of minor violations and an alternative, not as academically crippling, should be explored. Examined by Cicek (2012) were an assortment of Student Code of Conduct Handbooks, from various states and areas. A comprehensive list of offenses were compiled to be able to examine the offenses that resulted in suspensions with no prior intervention and many being non-violent (Cicek, 2012).

Policies as they relate to the discipline data that was collected were from the county in southeastern North Carolina and their policies were adapted from the policies written by the North Carolina School Board Association (see Appendix E). Noted in these policies are the identified non-violent behaviors that result in out of school suspensions, in school suspensions, expulsions, and placements in alternative programs. No follow up support is identified to address the root cause of the adolescent's behaviors.

While out-of-school suspensions completely remove students from the educational setting, there has been a trend in schools to address discipline issues with in-school suspension. However, the degree to which in-school suspension programs use research based strategies to help rehabilitate discipline issues varies greatly. Therefore, it is important to note that in-school suspensions have a huge impact on at-risk students.

In-School Suspensions and Other Alternatives

In-school suspension (ISS) is also used as a discipline option in schools. By using in-school suspension the students are at least provided supervision and many programs require the students to complete their classroom work while they are there in ISS. In-school suspensions can serve the same purpose as out-of-school by removing the problematic student from the classroom, but does not reward the bad behavior by sending the student home to unsupervised situations (Patterson, 1985, p. 98).

Johnston (1987) suggested creating an in-school suspension environment that has high expectation for school work completion and self-discipline and a structured, accepting environment, rather than viewed as a place for punishment (p. 122). Most commonly, students were sent to ISS for skipping classes and disruptive behaviors (Johnston, 1987, p. 123). Students

were surveyed by Johnston (1987) regarding their perceptions of ISS and the majority of students responded that it was necessary and effective (p. 129).

Presented by Morris and Howard (2003) is the importance of counseling as part of an effective ISS program (p. 157). According to Guindon, an ISS program that is inclusive of counseling services aids students in behavioral reflection (as cited in Morris & Howard, 2003, p. 157).

Chin, Dowdy, Jimerson, and Rime (2012) conducted a case study regarding an alternative to suspension (ATS) program. A Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS) Team developed a list of consequences other than suspensions as follows:

1. Self-management plan

2. Debriefing and reflection assignments

3. Behavior contracts

4. Natural consequences

5. Individualized social-emotional training/learning

6. Counseling

7. Parent Involvement

8. Intervention rooms/in-school suspension

Results were that suspensions were reduced, compared to other years (Chin, Dowdy, Jimerson, & Rime, 2012).

The improvement noted may be attributed to the "Hawthorne Effect". Defined as people's social behavior being impacted by the behaviors of others around them, which also impacts their own innate ability ("The Hawthorne effect", 2008).

Also, suggested by Peterson (2005), are ten alternatives to suspensions:

1. Problem solving contracting

2. Restitution

3. Mini-courses or skill modules

4. Parent involvement/supervision

5. Counseling

6. Community service

7. Behavior monitoring

8. Coordinated behavior plan

9. Alternative programming

10. Appropriate in-school suspension

A few of these strategies were being used by some schools; but limited schools were using most

of these strategies and even less were using it as a systemic strategy to improve behaviors that

are expressed as school expectations (Peterson, 2005, p. 11). Offered as alternatives to

suspensions that were examined by the Committee on School Health (2003) were parents being

required to accompany the offending student during the school day and community service after

school hours. Schools must focus on classroom management if they plan to reduce the number

of suspensions.

Classroom Management and Behavioral Sciences

Classroom management plays a significant role in the rate of suspension of students.

Schools that serve the greatest population of high risk students typically have the highest

turnover rates of staff and the most novice teachers (Newsandobserver.com, 2011).

One of the common issues that many educators identify as most challenging is classroom management, especially those new to the practice of teaching. Consistently teachers deal with this issue in their effort to successfully educate children. How a teacher manages a classroom or how an administrator manages a school is often an extension of that individual's personality. Therefore, psychology has a major impact on how a school or classroom is managed. Understanding this, one must conclude that increasing knowledge of the major psychological theories that shape educational practice is imperative to being a successful administrator with a well-managed school. Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) applies the theories of behaviorism and humanism, two major camps in the field of educational psychology, to school-wide management.

Brookover et al. (1982) stated that "faculty and administration must share the responsibility for creating an orderly learning climate in which academic pursuits are not disrupted." Goodwin and Miller (2012) made the claim that everyone, from the principal on down, is expected to model and encourage appropriate behavior in *For Positive Behavior, Involve Peers*. They stated that, "The best approaches to behavior management don't simply zero in on problems after they occur but proactively enlist everyone in the school to establish and reinforce clear expectations for student behavior" (Goodwin & Miller, 2012). The authors stated that the following have roles for establishing positive behavior in a school: the administrator's role is creating an oasis of safety, the teacher's role is establishing a positive classroom culture, and the student's role is providing peer support (Goodwin & Miller, 2012). Goodwin and Miller (2012) also stated that, "Research suggests that students who challenge us require a mix of supports," and that "Student behavior can be improved by creating a positive peer culture". This is essential in an alternative school setting.

William Sterrett (2012) sought to answer the question, "What can school leaders do to support teachers in building stronger relationships with students?" in *From Discipline to Relationships*. He stated that, "In our evolving world of education, one thing remains constant: our success hinges on our ability to build effective relationships with students" (Sterrett, 2012). Sterrett (2012) offered personal examples from his time as a principal to reduce discipline by building relationships and "creating classroom communities," while providing educators with the support and professional development needed to accomplish this. "Moving from a focus on discipline to a focus on relationships has implications for all stakeholders. For students it clearly sends the message, you belong here…For parents, the implications are enhanced communication and a greater focus on their student as an individual" (Sterrett, 2012).

Behaviorism is a field of psychology that focuses on how the environment evokes specific reactions from people. This field of psychology can be traced back to Ivan Pavlov and his theory of operant conditioning. Behaviorists believe that changing the environment can produce changes in human behavior. Thus, if an educator desires a change in student behavior, then the school environment must be changed. The leading proponent of applying behaviorism to education is B.F. Skinner. Skinner believes that, "almost all living things act to free themselves from harmful contacts" (Skinner, 1971, p. 36). Therefore, students may be controlled through the consequences of their environment, positive and negative reinforcement (Skinner, 1971, pp. 36-37).

An example of positive reinforcement would be an exciting activity sponsored by the school administration at the end of the week for students who accumulated a designated number of positive points. This reinforcement would evoke the students to have positive behavior because they desire to go to the school activity. An example of negative, or aversive,

reinforcement would be students having positive behavior because they do not want to have their parents called by the teacher. Both positive and negative reinforcement use the environment to control the behavior of the students. Behaviorists argue that students wish to escape aversive controls and that inner states such as feelings, emotions, and desires do not have an impact on the behavior of the students because these are not measurable changes in behavior, therefore, they are only convenient myths that are proposed by humanist thinkers (Skinner, 1971, pp. 40-41).

"In the minds of most behavioral scientists, man is not free, nor can he as a free man commit himself to some purpose, since he is controlled by factors outside of himself" (Rogers, 1983, p. 42). Humanism is in direct contrast to behaviorism because humanists believe that individuals have an understanding of their own behavior and therefore, individuals are free to make choices. The choices that individuals make are often based on inner feelings (Rogers, 1983, p. 45). Behaviorists disregard these inner feelings because they argue that such feelings are not measurable by the scientific method. However, many humanists disagree by asserting that, "none of what we do is caused by any situation or person outside of ourselves . . . what goes on in the outside world never makes us do anything" (Glasser, 1986, p. 18-19). William Glasser compiled his book, *Choice Theory In The Classroom*, from a humanist perspective and argues that by helping students understand their choices, and that better choices exist, an educator can increase positive behavior among the students. Gerald Gutek also has a similar belief that is evident in the following statement, "The years of adolescence and youth … is the time when young people begin to understand that making choices is what life is about" (Gutek, 2004, p. 89). Rogers stated that everything can be taken from a man but his ability to choose his own way and decide his own attitude (Rogers, 1983, p. 45).

Robert J. Marzano (2003) identified motivation as a major factor that accounts for student achievement (p. 124). Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS) seeks to motivate students to have positive behavior and to excel academically by applying the theories of behaviorism and humanism. PBIS applies behaviorism theories through the use of a positive reward system. PBIS also applies the theories of humanism by teaching students character traits that will help them analyze situations that they may encounter so that they may make better choices. While behaviorism and humanism are two distinctively different psychological camps, PBIS effectively applies the theories of both to assist in school-wide management.

As stated by Emmer, teachers with a lack of experience may resort to an authoritative disciplinary method of classroom management sometimes resulting in fight or flight situations between themselves and students (as cited in Skiba & Peterson, 2000, p. 336). Often the lack of behavioral strategies may be due to lack of teacher professional development, even though that classroom management is rated as highly important by both teachers and administrators (Skiba & Peterson, 2000, p. 337).

Ross W. Greene (2010), in *Calling All Frequent Flyers*, stated that if a school discipline program is not working, then collaborative problem solving may be the key to repairing the program. He made the claim that punitive discipline systems do not work with today's youth, "Rewards and punishments don't teach kids the skills they lack." Ross made a very important point, as it would relate to the staffing of a school, "The behaviorally challenging students being sent with great regularity to the office aren't the only frequent flyers in the building. The teachers sending them are frequent flyers, too."

Behaviorism and humanism are different, the proponents of each make very good arguments as to why their method is superior, thus educators are still debating this issue of which

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theory should shape educational practice. Should behaviorism or humanism shape educational practice? The ideal conclusion is to apply both methods – PBIS does this effectively.

All humans have choices and for every choice, there is a positive or negative consequence. Behaviorism should be used to help control certain behaviors through the use of positive and negative reinforcement. PBIS uses positive reinforcement to help control and promote desired behaviors at school. However, educators should understand that many students are in fact filled with emotions and feelings that may cause their behaviors to be uncontrollable through the use of behaviorist techniques. The best method of addressing this issue is to supplement behaviorist techniques with humanist techniques.

Humanist techniques help students understand why they make the choices they make and show students that by making better choices, they will reap the benefits of desired positive outcomes; this is another important aspect of PBIS. A good example of this humanist thinking that dates back for many years is the story of Job in the *Bible*; regardless of how much was taken from Job or how much his environment changed, he maintained a positive attitude. Instilling the choice to maintain a positive attitude such as Job, in the minds of students, is the goal of humanist educators in attempting to best help shape educational practice.

Through the use of both behaviorism and humanism, positive outcomes of classroom and school-wide management will increase. PBIS does an excellent job of linking these two psychological camps to address many needs within a school. Teachers and staff receive staff development in positive reinforcement and a new tool for classroom management, which results in less classroom disruptions due to discipline. Positive behaviors are occurring in the classrooms, which allows for increased time-on-task and results in improved delivery of curriculum and instruction. Students are gaining more from experiences in the school and in the

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classroom, which improves their learning. This also leads to a positive school climate with an

inviting atmosphere for all stakeholders. Parents and community members have opportunities to

be involved in the school in exciting ways through the PBIS program. All of these effects result

in increased teacher satisfaction, retention, and effectiveness. PBIS, if properly implemented and

molded to meet the needs of a given school, will ultimately result in an administrator's ability to

effectively and efficiently manage a school to reach its fullest potential.

Methods such as these must also be used to increase the desire of all students to be

present in school. The inability to rehabilitate discipline problems and build positive

relationships with students leads to increased senses of not belonging. Their participation in

school continues to decline until ultimately they dropout, negatively impacting dropout rates.

Dropout Rates

Student dropout rates are the "silent epidemic" the United States is presently facing and it

is controlling our communities, schools, and society. This "Silent Epidemic," as it is regularly

referred to, is the high school dropout issue that confronts all Americans in some way or another.

According to a report by Civic Enterprises, one third of all public high school students and

approximately one half of blacks, hispanics, and Native Americans fail to graduate on time with

their original classmates. Based on a report the majority of these students abandon school with

two or less years of schooling remaining prior to obtaining their high school diploma

(Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006).

This epidemic continues to rear its ugly head even though education has been on the

public agenda for the past few decades. Margarita Donnelly (1987) stated that educational

reform has changed the rules before the system has had a chance to accommodate to an

increasing number of students who are dropping out and becoming a burden to society. Others

believe it is due to incorrect and inappropriate data, believing that the public has been deceived about the severity of this problem and the number of dropouts continues to grow in our society.

Research conducted by Costenbader and Markson (1994) noted that reporting by school administrators was between 51% and 55% of students who dropped out of school had been suspended during their school careers (p. 107). Peterson (2005) pointed out research that the suspension of students does not deter or change behaviors, but instead puts the student academically further behind and at greater risk of dropping out of school (p. 10).

Once a student decides to drop out of school their life ultimately takes a downward spiral to despair. According to many reports, dropouts are much more likely than their peers who graduate to be unemployed, living in poverty, receiving public assistance, in prison, on death row, unhealthy, divorced, and single parents with children who drop out from high school as well (Donnelly, 1987). These students are now referred to as at-risk students. At-risk students are defined as students who are not experiencing success in school and are potential dropouts (Donnelly, 1987). According to Donnelly (1987), at-risk students tend to be low academic achievers who also exhibit low self-worth. She goes on to say that unbalanced numbers of these students are males and minorities, and generally, they come from families of low socioeconomic status. Students who occupy both low income and minority status are at higher risk, potentially due to the fact that many of them have parents of low educational backgrounds and who may not have high educational expectations for their children. Furthermore, at-risk students tend not to participate in school activities and have a minimal identification with the school. These students have disciplinary and truancy problems that lead to credit problems and they exhibit impulsive behavior and their peer relationships are problematic. Family problems, drug addictions, pregnancies, and other issues prevent them from participating successfully in school (Donnelly,

1987). As they experience failure and fall behind their peers, school becomes a negative environment that reinforces their low self-esteem.

Karen Gavigan and Stephanie Kurtts (2010) identified data that was collected as a result of federal and state legislation. This data was a good indicator of which students were meeting standards and which students were most at risk. For example, the White House reported that approximately half of our dropouts are Latinos and African American students (CNN.com, as cited in Gavigan & Kurtts, 2010, p.10). Also, as a consequence of the large dropout rate, it is estimated that the United States loses almost $320 billion in potential earnings each year (CNN.com, as cited in Gavigan & Kurtts, 2010, p. 10).

Communities are also negatively impacted by the dropout issue. The loss of productive workers and the higher costs associated with increased incarceration, health care, increased gang memberships, and social services are by-products of the dropout issue. This leads many educators, administrators, parents, and political figures to wonder why so many students decide to make this decision to drop out of school. During their early school years, students have dreams and aspirations that they want to conquer and achieve, but many ultimately decide to put those dreams off and go in another direction. What can we do to increase the number of students that are deciding to pursue a high school diploma? Once at-risk students have been identified, the challenge is to implement comprehensive school-wide initiatives for keeping them in schools and to close the existing achievement gap. Leadership must be chosen that supports this philosophy.

Civic Enterprises (2006) cited a number of reasons that students drop out of school to include: a lack of connection to the school environment, a perception that school is boring, feeling unmotivated, academic challenges, the weight of real world events. A report by Civic

Enterprises in association with Peter D. Hart Research Associates for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation provided the following insight as it relates to why students drop out (Bridgeland et al., 2006):

1. Nearly half (47%) said a major reason for dropping out was that classes were not interesting. These young people reported being bored and disengaged from high school. Almost as many (42%) spent time with people who were not interested in school.

2. Nearly 7 of 10 respondents (69%) said they were not motivated or inspired to work hard, 80% did an hour or less of homework, 80% did one hour or less of work each day in high school, two-thirds would have worked harder if more was demanded of them (higher academic standards and more studying and homework), and 70% were confident they could have graduated if they had tried.

3. Many provided personal reasons for leaving school. A third (32%) said they had to get a job and make money; 26% said they became a parent; and 22% said they had to care for a family member. Many of these young people reported doing reasonably well in school and had a strong belief that they could have graduated if they had stayed in school. Also, these students were the most likely to say they would have worked harder if their schools had demanded more of them and provided the necessary support.

4. About 35% of the students surveyed said that "failing in school" was a major factor for dropping out; three out of ten said they could not keep up with school work; and 43% said they missed too many days of school and could not catch up (Lehr, 2004).

5. Approximately 32% were required to repeat a grade before dropping out and 29%

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expressed significant doubts that they could have met their high school's requirements for graduation even if they had put in the necessary effort.

6. Ranging from 59% to 65% of respondents missed class often the year before dropping out. Students described a pattern of refusing to wake up, skipping class, and taking three hour lunches; each absence made them less willing to go back. These students had long periods of absences and were sometimes referred to the truant officer, only to be brought back to the same environment that initially led them to become disengaged.

Another study that provided insight to the silent epidemic is the 2012 High School Dropouts in America survey. This survey was conducted by Harris/Decima, which is a division of the Harris Interactive, on behalf of Everest College. The rationale for conducting this survey was to provide some insight to policymakers and educators in an effort for them to gain a clearer understanding of why students are dropping out and what could be done to re-engage students and increase high school graduation rates nationally. Graduation rates are great indicators of whether the programs implemented in schools are really working (Ryan, 2009). The research provided information from participants ranging in age from 19 to 35. The total number of adults surveyed was approximately 513 and they responded to the following question: "Which, if any, of the following reasons prevented you from finishing high school?" The following are the responses to that question:

1. Absence of parental support or encouragement (23%)

2. Becoming a parent (21%)

3. Lacking the credits needed to graduate (17%)

4. Missing too many days of school (17%)

5. Failing classes (15%)

6. Uninteresting classes (15%)

7. Experiencing a mental illness, such as depression (15%)

8. Having to work to support family (12%)

9. Bullied and did not want to return (12%)

The survey, which was conducted in October of 2012, identified that 55% of the participants began looking into the GED equivalency program, thus opting to drop out and attain a GED as opposed to graduation from high school and contributing to the dropout rate numbers. Thirty-three percent of the dropouts involved in this study are either employed full time, part time or self-employed; another 38% of the men and 26% of the women were unemployed. The ability to re-engage these participants in education is a daunting task. The 2012 High School Dropouts in America survey also stated that many of the participants do not have an interest in returning to the same school and would like some flexible options to obtaining a high school diploma, perhaps alternative school options being able to meet the identified needs (www.nodropouts.org).

In a 2002 study conducted by Algozzine and Algozzine, they established a more definitive definition of dropout in their research study. A dropout is a student that has left the school or the district for one of the following reasons:

1. The student quit school after reaching the compulsory attendance age.

2. The student dropped out of school and the district system prior to reaching 16 or completing tenth grade.

3. A dropout is any person who has legally left school for reasons other than graduating,

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transferring to another school or comparable program, enrollment in the armed

services, marriage, or illness.

4. A dropout is a pupil who leaves school before graduation or completion of a program

of studies without transferring to another school.

Aiken (2001) conducted research entitled, "The High School and Beyond" and he was

able to provide the following insight: (a) Dropouts were also more likely to be older than their

peers, to be males rather than females, and enrolled in public school in urban areas in the South

or West, (b) Dropouts tended to come from homes with a weaker educational support system.

After completing a comparative analysis with dropouts and staying in school the data identified

that dropouts: (a) had fewer study aids present in their homes, (b) had less opportunity for non-

school related learning, (c) were less likely to have both natural parents living in the home, (d)

had mothers with lower levels of formal education, (e) had mothers with lower educational

expectations of their offspring, (f) had mothers who were more likely to be working, and (g) had

parents who were less likely to be interested in monitoring both in school and out-of-school

abilities (Aiken, 2011).

A Nation at Risk, published in 1983 by the National Commission on Excellence in

Education (NCEE), focused on the challenges that confront public education (Labyer, 2004).

The publication did a comparative analysis of academic achievement of American students with

students in industrialized nations. The study reported and identified that student achievement in

the United States was not adequate. Furthermore, approximately 23 million Americans were

categorized as functionally illiterate with about 13% of 17 year olds classified as functionally

illiterate (Labyer, 2004). The publication noted a major concern in math in science to the point

of using the term "Disturbing inadequacies" (Labyer, 2004). The research pinpointed that 35

states involved in the research where graduating students with one course in math and science. The study further goes on to state that student achievement was suffering due to a reduction in standards and expectations. This publication has brought to the forefront the need to focus on students identified as at risk and the need to ensure that the educational needs of each student described are met (Bell, 1993).

Students not performing academically have been a trend in education throughout the establishment of American education. Before the beginning of World War II, the mediocre academic student in America failed to graduate from high school. During this time in American history quite a few teenagers left high school and received employment in both unskilled and/or semi-skilled jobs. Students were able to receive these jobs without a high school diploma to the extent that there were some students that obtained highly skilled jobs (Labyer, 2004).

A study conducted by National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported the following findings as it pertains to dropouts and completion rates in 2000 (Labyer, 2004):

1. Five out of every 100 young adults enrolled in high school in October 1999 left school before October 2000 without successfully completing a high school program. The percentage of young adults who left school each year without successfully completing a high school program decreased from 1972 through 1987. Despite year-to-year fluctuations, the percentage of students dropping out of school each year has stayed relatively unchanged since 1987.

2. In 2000, young adults living in families with incomes in the lowest 20% of all family incomes were six times as likely as their peers from families in the top 20% of the income distribution to drop out of high school.

3. In 2000, about three-fourths (75.8%) of the current-year dropouts were ages 15 through 17.

4. Over the last decade, between 347,000 and 544,000, 10th-12th grade students left school each year without successfully completing a high school program.

5. In October 2000, some 3.8 million young adults were not enrolled in a high school program and had not completed high school. These youths accounted for 10.9% of the 34.6 million 16 through 24 year olds in the United States in 2000.

6. The status dropout rate for whites in 2000 remained lower than the rate for blacks, but over the past three decades the difference between the rates for whites and blacks has narrowed. However, this narrowing of the gap occurred during the 1970s and 1980s. Since 1990, the gap has remained fairly constant. In addition, Hispanic young adults in the United States continued to have a relatively high status dropout rate when compared to Asian/Pacific Islanders, whites or blacks.

7. In 2000, the status dropout rate for Asian/Pacific Islander young adults was lower than for young adults from all other racial/ethnic groups. The status rate for Asian/Pacific Islanders was 3.8% compared with 27.8% for Hispanics, 13.1% for blacks, and 6.9% for whites.

Policymakers are examining the dropout rates in the United States. Realizing that if addressed properly and effectively, it can benefit many students as well as their families. There is a direct correlation between the increase in alternative schools and the increase in at-risk students who seem detached from school and high school dropouts. Policymakers in North Carolina have addressed this by establishing a *Committee on Dropout Prevention* (§ 115C-64.6. *Committee on Dropout Prevention*). This was established to provide insight and leadership to

local school administrative units, schools, agencies, and nonprofits. The committee consisted of approximately fifteen members whose primary objective is to reward dropout prevention grants to deserving schools, agencies, and nonprofits. The decision to reward dropout grants is based on the following criteria:

1. Grants shall be issued in varying amounts up to a maximum of one hundred seventy-five thousand dollars ($175,000).

2. These grants shall be provided to innovative programs and initiatives that target students at-risk of dropping out of school and that demonstrate the potential to (i) be developed into effective, sustainable, and coordinated dropout prevention and reentry programs in middle schools and high schools and (ii) serve as effective models for other programs.

3. Grants shall be distributed geographically throughout the State and throughout the eight educational districts as defined in G.S. 115C-65. No more than three grants shall be awarded in any one county under this section in a single fiscal year.

4. Grants may be made to local school administrative units, schools, local agencies, or nonprofit organizations. Applications from nonprofits shall be subject to the additional fiscal accountability controls described in G.S. 115C-64.8.

5. Grants shall be to programs and initiatives that hold all students to high academic and personal standards.

6. Grant applications shall state (i) how grant funds will be used, (ii) what, if any, other resources will be used in conjunction with the grant funds, (iii) how the program or initiative will be coordinated to enhance the effectiveness of existing programs,

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initiatives, or services in the community, and (iv) a process for evaluating the success of the program or initiative.

7. Programs and initiatives that receive grants under this section shall be based on best practices for helping at-risk students achieve successful academic progress, preventing students from dropping out of school, or for increasing the high school completion rate for those students who already have dropped out of school.

School systems in North Carolina are required to report dropout data on all dropouts in grades one and higher to the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) annually (http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/research/dropout/reports/dropoutmanual.pdf). Students whose whereabouts are unknown must be included in the total count of dropouts for the reporting year for each local education agency (LEA). Each LEA is required to report dropouts by the grade level of their last membership in the reporting year. "For example, an eighth grader who fails to return to school in the fall as a ninth grader is reported at the eighth grade level, not the ninth grade. For this reason, all sending and receiving schools should share information on the status of school leavers during the first twenty-day period and for the remainder of the school year" (http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/research/dropout/reports/dropoutmanual.pdf). North Carolina has a very specific definition for dropouts and a method for calculation (see Appendix A).

Each school should maintain a School Leaver Roster (SLR). A copy of the official roster should be located in the school and in the central office. Dropout rates by race/ethnicity and gender in North Carolina High Schools for 2012-13 were reported by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction in April 2014 (Retrieved from

http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/research/discipline/reports/consolidated/2012-13/consolidated-report.pdf) (see Figure 1).

Dropout totals vary by race/ethnicity and gender in the southeastern District in North Carolina for 2012-13 as reported by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction in April 2014; this district had one of the ten highest dropout rates in the state for 2012-13 (http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/research/discipline/reports/consolidated/2012-13/consolidated-report.pdf) (see Figure 2).

The student dropout count for the county in southeastern North Carolina remained constant until the 2007-2008 school year and it has fluctuated since that year (see Figure 3).

The ten year dropout rate of the county in southeastern North Carolina remained constant until the 2007-2008 school year and has increased substantially since that year. Based on the data, it is obvious that something needs to change in order to meet the needs of all students and prevent them from dropping out of school (see Figure 4). The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction reported in April of 2014 that the district in southeastern North Carolina has one of the top ten highest dropout rates out of the 115 school districts in the state (http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/research/discipline/reports/consolidated/2012-13/consolidated-report.pdf). Assessing and strengthening the strategies used in the alternative learning model may certainly help change this data for the positive in the future. The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction reports the following key terms as it relates to dropouts (http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/research/dropout/reports/dropoutmanual.pdf):

1. Dropout Referral Law: A state law that requires school systems to refer dropouts to appropriate education alternatives including community colleges. (Refer to G.S. 115C-47)

2. Initial Enrollee: A special status for students who enroll in a school system for the first time and remain in membership for twenty days or less. Students with this status are not included in the dropout count.

3. No Show: Term used to designate a student who is expected to return in the fall, but on day 20 of the new school year is not in membership at the assigned school or in any other approved program. (Students whose whereabouts cannot be determined must be reported as dropouts.)

4. Receiving School: Any school in the LEA to which a student is normally promoted or assigned during or at the end of a school year.

5. Reporting Exemption: Any reason, as stated in the Uniform Dropout Definition, which excludes a student from being reported as a dropout.

6. Reporting Year: A twelve-month period in which data are collected on dropouts. In North Carolina the reporting year begins on the first day of the school year and runs through the last day of summer vacation.

7. Sending School: The school from which students are transferred or promoted during or at the end of the school year.

Because there is currently a focus on dropout rates and how to decrease them, many strategies obviously revolve around how to provide better support to students. Students of low socio-economic status pose a unique challenge to schools today.

Poverty

There are many urban educators that face an uphill battle in educating children in poverty (U.S. Department of Education, 1990). Students in poverty face emotional and physical challenges, health care, poor nutrition, dysfunctional family units and inner city neighborhoods

(Dubow & Luster, 1990). These challenges hamper and prevent students from receiving a quality education. Furthermore, students in poverty are often placed in adult roles in terms of duties and responsibilities which impact their academic performance. Some of the roles that students in poverty take on are financial, social and/or emotional. These students are caught in a cycle of either generational or situational poverty that does not provide an opportunity to escape their situations or challenges. Once a student has identified that there is no way out of this situation they become hopeless and helpless, which takes away the importance of obtaining a quality education. Also, a major issue that students in poverty face is lack of resources. These issues continue to hamper students in the educational arena more than lack of motivation and attentiveness. These issues lead many educators to place the blame of low student performance on the student, when it is simply that the student's basic needs are not being met. The fact that these needs are not being met lends to inattentiveness, lack of motivation, discipline and lack of focus. Students placed in this situation are then labeled as slow learners and placed and classes that are low level.

Schools with lower socio-economic students have higher suspension rates (Iselin, 2010). Based upon research by Brooks-Gunn and Duncan (1997), poor children were more often identified with behavioral and emotional issues compared to their counterparts. Children from low socioeconomic households demonstrated higher incidents of problems with internalizing and externalizing behaviors (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997). Externalized behavior transpired into acts of aggression and violence. Internalized behavior in poor children often resulted in depression, anxiety, and social issues (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997).

Based upon research by The Committee on School Health (2003), the school population

that were habitually suspended from school were the least likely to have adult supervision while they served the suspension.

Furthermore, many of the youth who suffer from poverty often turn to street gangs as a financial means -- this activity often flows over into the schools and is no longer limited to cities, street gangs are now very active in rural areas as well.

Understanding the History of Street Gangs and How

They are filling the Need of Adolescents

Street gangs were once only prevalent in inner-city schools, but they now have a presence in rural schools. "In American popular culture, the word 'rural' invokes images of sunny farms and little red schoolhouses – while 'urban' means drugs, poverty, and crime. But those who know the reality of both worlds will tell you that rural schools face many of the same challenges as their urban counterparts" (Lockette, 2010). On December 13, 2005, Stanley "Tookie" Williams, co-founder of the Crips, was executed. This worldwide news was the main topic of discussion for many students in both urban and rural schools. Administrators too often attempt to stop street gang affiliation due to laws and policies that have been enacted, but this is a difficult task. The goal of administrators, in order to be successful, is to acknowledge and uphold the laws that exist while understanding that the law or policy will not end the problem. Therefore, rather than combating the issue with consequences for breaking the laws and/or policies, administrators should also seek to first understand the policies of the street gang and then to manipulate those policies so that these students can begin to understand how to function in society as well as in a public school. Gaining the trust and respect of the students is an important part of this process.

The *Governor's Crime Commission* (GCC) (2011) has investigated and published several reports on the existence of criminal gangs in North Carolina, since 1997. "Once thought of as a juvenile activity or not significant enough to investigate or report, these activities earned a dominate role in criminal justice activities in the first decade of the 21st century" (GCC, 2011). A codified definition of what constitutes a criminal street gang has been established due to events within the past ten years. The major new law enacted for North Carolina was the *North Carolina Street Gang Suppression Act*. This law, along with enhancements to existing laws and sanctions has been implemented and a tremendous amount of state and community funding has been expended in efforts to deter, prevent, divert, investigate, and suppress street gang activities (GCC, 2011). These efforts have led to increased communications across jurisdictions, law enforcement agencies, state and federal prosecutors and corrections in order to support the North Carolina Street Gang Suppression Act (GCC, 2011).

The North Carolina Street Gang Suppression Act is found within the North Carolina General Statutes Section 14, Article 13A. The laws in this act provide legal definitions of street gangs and the various criminal offenses deemed as street gang activity. "The *North Carolina Street Gang Suppression Act* under article 13A was enacted into law on December 1, 2008, in an effort to protect North Carolinians against gangs and their criminal behavior" (North Carolina Gang Investigators Association, 2009).

The first active gangs in Western civilization were documented to be the existence of gangs of highway robbers in Great Britain during the 17th century (Howell & Moore, 2010). Although one could argue that in the United States, the existence of gangs date back to colonization and the Sons of Liberty, a gang led by Patrick Henry that terrorized the British Army that occupied the American Colonies. However, Powell and Moore (2010) stated that the

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history of street gangs in the United States began around 1783, as the American Revolution concluded.

The south would be the last geographic region of the United States to experience emergence of street gangs, while the rest of the United States would experience this emergence due to increased immigration and poverty (Howell & Moore, 2010). During times of immigration, gangs would be support networks for immigrants, rather than criminal activity being a primary focus (Howell & Moore, 2010). Over time, gangs would evolve into focusing on regional/territorial control with an emphasis on crime which would evolve over time into the modern day street gangs of today (Howell & Moore, 2010). The North Carolina Gang Awareness Association (NCGIA) identifies the following most common modern gangs in North Carolina and their histories:

1. Bloods: The original Bloods were formed in the early 1970's to provide protection from the Crips street gang in Los Angeles, CA. The United Blood nation (UBN) is an East Coast entity which started in 1993 in New York City (NCGIA, 2009).

2. Crips: The Crips street gang was established in Los Angeles in the early 1970s by Raymond Lee Washington and Stanley Tookie Williams (NCGIA, 2009).

3. Folk: Folk Nation began as an affiliation of Chicago street gangs in the 1980's that were allies of the Gangster Disciples (NCGIA, 2009).

4. People Nation Gangs: People Nation began as an affiliation of Chicago street gangs in the 1980s. People Nation gangs that are located in North Carolina include Latin Kings and Vice Lords (NCGIA, 2009).

5. Surenos a.k.a SUR 13: The term Sureno (meaning southerner) originated in the 1960s in the California prison system. Throughout the 1990's until present day, as

the Hispanic population grew, the Surenos have significantly increased their numbers in North Carolina and is one of the largest gangs in the state (NCGIA, 2009).

6. Latin Kings: The Latin Kings formed in Chicago in the mid-1960's with the goal of helping Puerto Rican immigrants overcome racial prejudice by forming an organization of "Kings" (NCGIA, 2009).

7. 18th Street: The 18th Street Gang was founded by undocumented Mexican immigrants and youths of mixed Mexican ancestry in the 1960s near 18th Street and Union Avenue in the Rampart area of Los Angeles, CA (NCGIA, 2009).

8. MS13: Salvadoran nationals came from war-torn El Salvador in the 1970s and 1980s and settled in the Rampart area of Los Angeles, CA, where they integrated with other Hispanic immigrants. This gang is aligned with the Mexican Mafia (NCGIA, 2009).

9. Asian Gangs: The most recognizable Asian Gangs in America are defined as Tiny Rascal Gang, Boys In Style and America are defined as Tiny Rascal Gang, Boys In Style, and Asian Boyz. Asian Gangs are not turf orientated like many other street gangs (NCGIA, 2009).

10. Motorcycle Gangs: An outlaw Motorcycle Gang is an organization whose member uses their motorcycle club as a conduit for criminal enterprises. The three major gangs in North Carolina are the Hell's Angels, Outlaws, and Pagans (NCGIA, 2009).

11. Extremist/White Supremacists: Extremist and White Supremacist groups emerged early in American history as proponents of white racial superiority but became notorious in the 1960s with the rise of the Ku Klux Klan and the Aryan Brotherhood in prison systems (NCGIA, 2009).

12. Hybrid / Non-traditional Gangs: Hybrid gangs are more frequently encountered in

most North Carolina communities in which gang activity has emerged since the late

1990s. These gangs may have several of the following characteristics: a mixture of

racial/ethnic groups, male and female members, display symbols and graffiti of

different gangs, or have members who sometimes switch from one gang to another

(NCGIA, 2009).

Along with the *North Carolina Street Gang Suppression Act* came creation of agencies to

help uphold this law. The NC Gang Investigators Association, N.C.GangNET, Project Safe

Neighborhoods, the High Point Model and other efforts were all designed to confront the issue of

criminal street gangs and they provide a wealth of data related to gangs (see Figures 24-27)

(GCC, 2011).

GangNET is a data base for North Carolina that has strengthened the collection

meaningful data with the partnership of counties willing to identify and report on the activities of

criminal gang members and the gangs they represent (GCC, 2011). Interestingly, not all counties

participate in the reporting, to include the southeastern, North Carolina county being researched

in this literature review. "Today data is now available to provide a meaningful snapshot of what

the data tells us about criminal gangs and their members in North Carolina" (GCC, 2011).

A review of the North Carolina Criminal Justice Analysis Center (NCCJAC) reports on

the subject reveal that gang activity has been present in North Carolina communities since well

before initial research on the topic started back in 1997 and was present in many communities

before law enforcement was willing to accept or acknowledge its existence (GCC, 2011).

Today, GangNET (2011) provides an information resource to tap in order to obtain a snapshot of

gang activity in the state. The picture continues to be a bit fuzzy as there is law enforcement

agencies that do not have the personnel resources to enter information into the N.C.GangNET
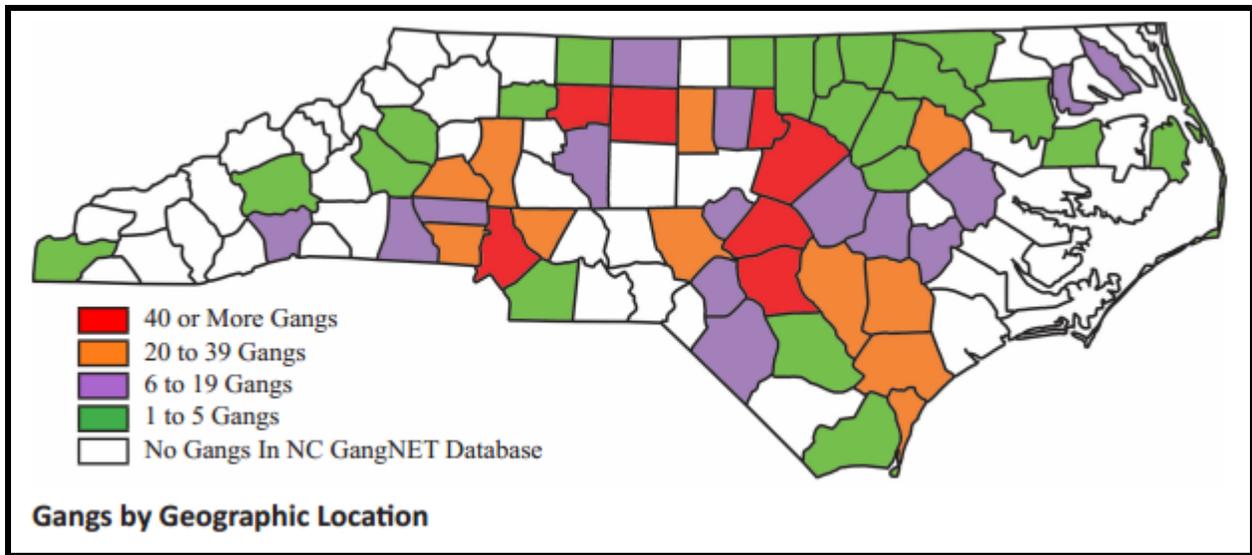
Figure 24. Counties in North Carolina who indicate gang activity (GCC, 2011).
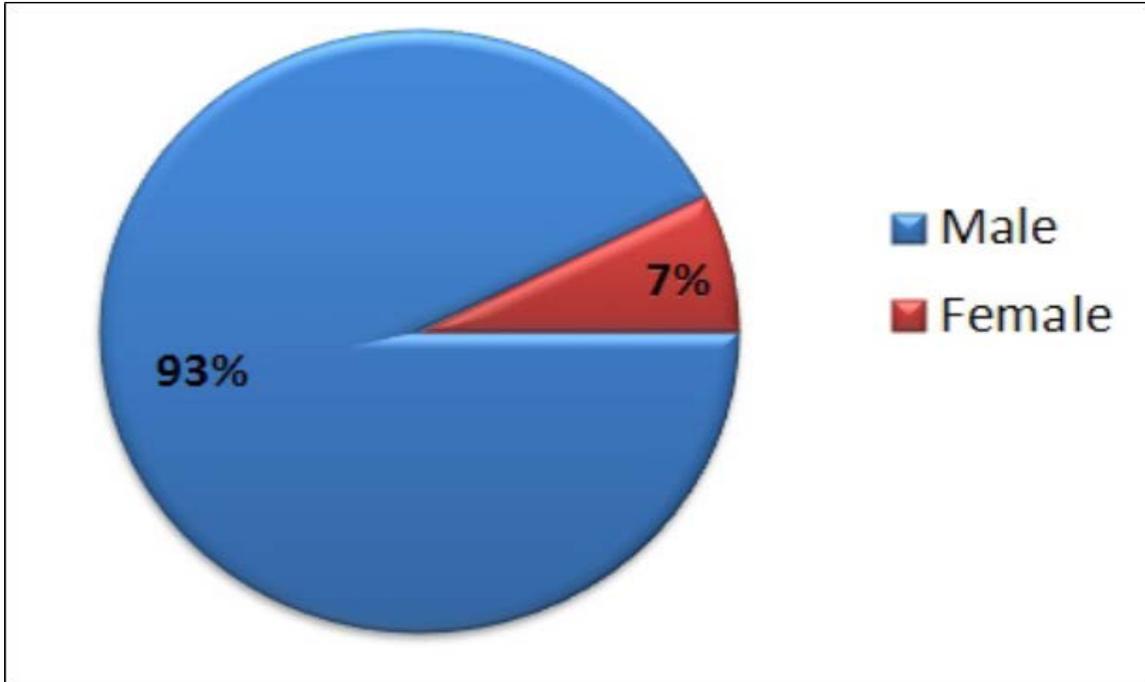
Figure 25. Percentage of male and female gang members in NC (GCC, 2011).
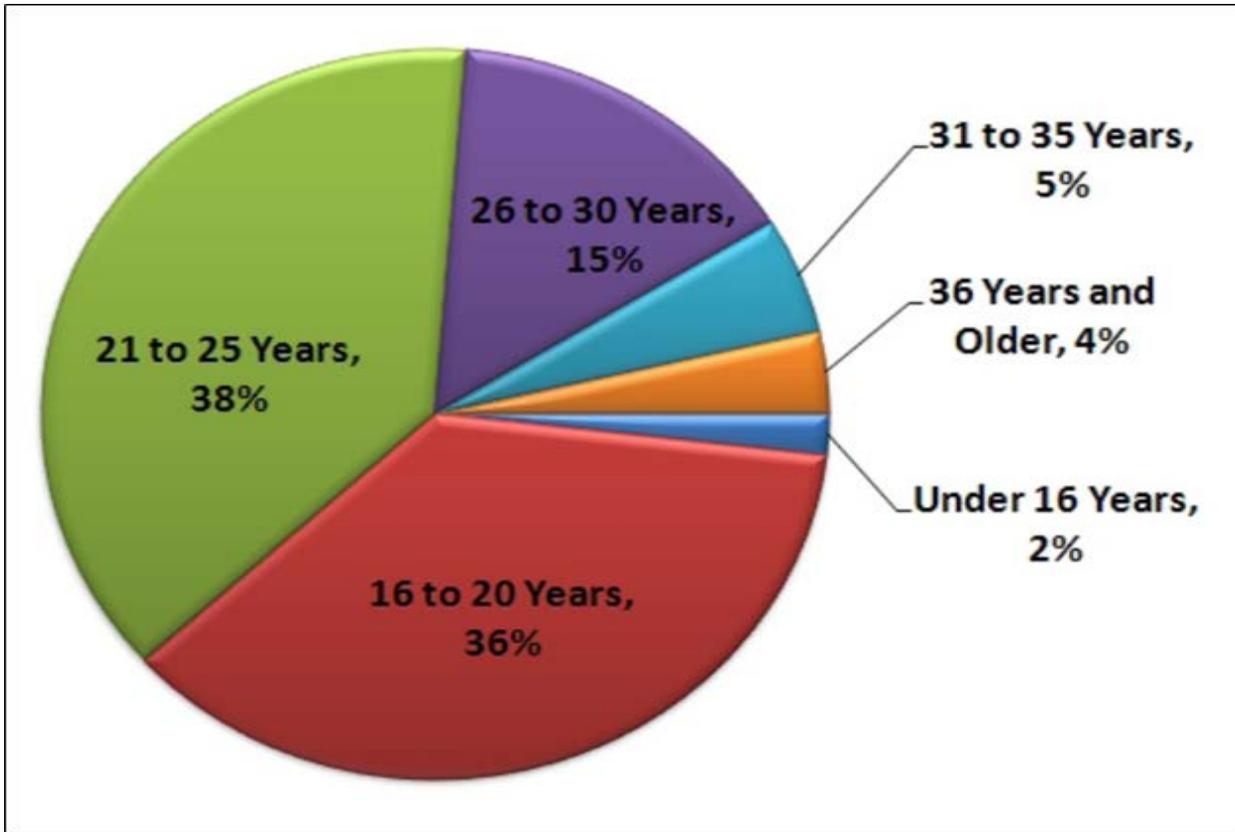
Figure 26. Percentage of ages of gang members in NC (GCC, 2011).
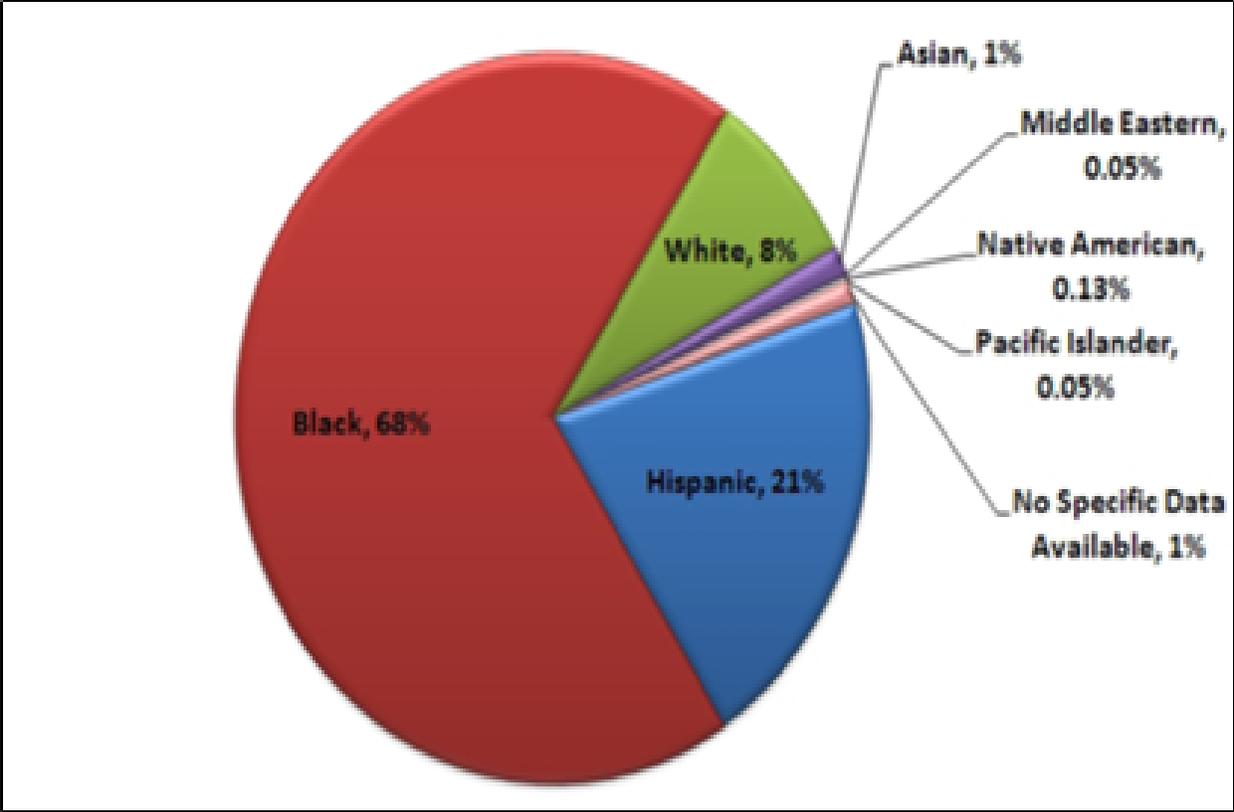
Figure 27. Percentage of ethnic people who make up the total number of NC gang members (GCC, 2011).

system or do not have investigators trained to recognize and document these types of individuals. This is not due to a lack of available gang training, N.C.GangNET training or access to N.C. GangNET. All of these have been made available to law enforcement via funding from the GCC. Given these caveats, the gang data for the state as of the end of December 2010 is provided in Figure 24 (GCC, 2011).

North Carolina officials thought that as more agencies were created and people were educated on gangs, the activity would begin leveling off and would hopefully decline in the future; however, the state acknowledged that their findings thus far were more than likely an understatement (GCC, 2011). Educational leaders are one of the many groups who need to familiarize themselves with gang activity in order to combat and reduce the number of juveniles getting involved.

Cooper, Fusarelli, and Randall (2004) pointed out that when viewing policy through multiple lenses, it is important to understand who participates in the process, the dynamics of the process, and the ways in which the institutions interact with each other as well as various interest groups, the media, and the policy communities (p. 7). Scott Mooneyham (2008), a North Carolina political journalist, answered many of these questions regarding the enactment of the *North Carolina Street Gang Suppression Act* in his article, *How Bad Laws Are Made* (2008). Mooneyham (2008) stated the following: a gubernatorial election, the slaying of a popular student leader, oodles of law enforcement officers and mayors crowding into the building.

The soon-to-be law at issue would get tough on criminal gangs. It would make it a felony for anyone to be a member of a "criminal street gang" while participating in "a pattern of criminal street gang activity." Being an organizer or recruiter of such a gang would be a higher grade felony. The law defines a "criminal street gang" as any ongoing group or association of

three or more people which has as one of "its primary activities the commission of one or more felonies."

With such remarkable language and circular definitions, college fraternities should hope that North Carolina lawmakers never make hazing a felony. And thinking back to that advice from mamas everywhere, perhaps all of us have more reason than ever to consider with whom we associate (Mooneyham, 2008).

The bill was proposed during an election year involving Charlotte Mayor and Republican gubernatorial candidate Pat McCrory at the time Lt. Gov. Beverly Perdue, his Democratic opponent in the fall (Mooneyham, 2008). This was initially an unfunded mandate with an estimated one-time prison construction costs — to house an additional 370 prisoners a year — at $26 million with ongoing operational costs to watch over those prisoners would be rising to $11 million (Mooneyham, 2008). Obviously, those participating in the process, the dynamics of the process, and the ways in which the institutions interact with each other as well as various interest groups, the media, and the policy communities certainly had a huge impact on the way this would play out, and eventually shape communities, society, and schools. Mooneyham (2008) describes this very well:

> "Of course, no politician wants to be accused of being weak on crime. And the slaying of UNC-Chapel Hill's student body president, Eve Carson, only created more impetus for this kind of legislation. Carson's slaying certainly showed deficiencies in the criminal justice system. But considering what's been learned regarding the two people accused of the crime, wouldn't the money be better spent beefing up a broken probation system? And shouldn't North Carolina's criminal laws focus on individual criminal acts, rather

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than beginning down the slippery slope of criminalizing associations?" (Mooneyham, 2008).

The *North Carolina Street Gang Suppression Act* is a direct result of the advocacy coalition framework (see Figure 28). One could informally define a gang as a group of people who come together for a common purpose. In this sense, the National Rifle Association, Sororities, Fraternities, the Democratic Party, and the Republican Party could all be considered gangs. The proponents of the North Carolina Street Gang Suppression act were most likely members of at least two of the organizations mentioned above. Therefore, the legislation would have to be carefully worded in order not to include those prestigious gangs. While, initially one would think this is discrimination based on racial lines, upon future thought, it is not. This is actually the advocacy coalition framework. Advocacy coalition theorists study the complex processes of discrimination based on social class and the passing of this legislation would play out through formation and change within interest groups that support or resist a policy or program (Cooper et al., p. 26). Any resistance to this law would be what was described above so the carefully wording of the law, using the term "Street Gang," would help to alleviate any resistance based on this. Key individuals from different arenas and institutions interacted, from coalitions and factions, fought among themselves, and attempted to hammer out a winning compromise in both the field and the legislature (Cooper, 2004, p. 26). The compromise would be the careful wording of the law and the notion that this law would help all through improving the safety of communities and schools. Safety is always a key policy issue that all can agree on. This agreement on a common key policy is the third component of the advocacy coalition framework (Cooper, 2004, p. 27). The advocates of the *North Carolina Street Gang Suppression Act* put safety at the forefront when promoting the passage of this law. However, while designing the

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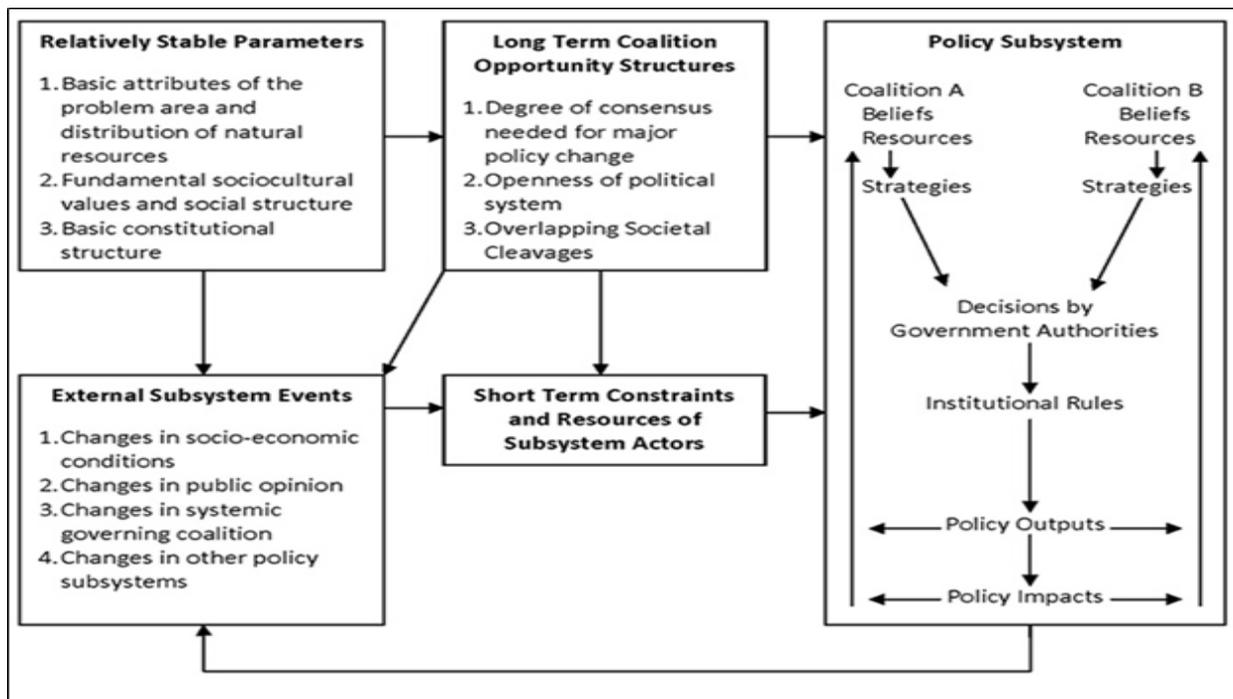
Figure 28. Advocacy Coalition Framework (Cooper, 2004).

policy to suppress gangs, one could ask the question if the policies of the gangs were actually studied to determine why they are effective in empowering youth?

Data Specific to the County in Southeastern North Carolina

On November 4, 2013, the County Sheriff's office announced that they had created a task force to meet bi-monthly to concentrate efforts in areas identified by residents and sheriff's deputies as high-crime areas, "According to [the captain] of the patrol division at The … County Sheriff's office, officers will meet monthly to determine which...County neighborhoods need the most attention. He said that so far, the office has targeted Cross Street in..., Riverton Road in ..., Blakely Road in ... and the general area of East ...." (Retrieved from

http://www.laurinburgexchange.com/news/news/2794570/Task-force-to-target-high-crime-locations). While gangs were not mentioned, the plan was to eliminate problems within communities that deal with drugs, traffic concerns, suspicious persons and domestic violence; much of what is involved in street gang areas

(Retrieved from http://www.laurinburgexchange.com/news/news/2794570/Task-force-to-target-high-crime-locations).

On September 12, 2013, shortly after one of the district's school board members had assumed responsibilities as Chief of Police, the Police Department announced the establishment of its first gang unit. The city council welcomed the creation of this unit (Retrieved from http://laurinburgexchange.com/news/home_top/2481280/City-police-team-to-reclaim-the-street) "According to [Chief of Police] the gang unit will be subject to special training, both in and outside the city limits. In its infancy, the Chief said the gang unit will be especially reliant on information provided by locals. 'We are going to go out to them and ask them what they know," the Chief said. "That's part of doing our homework to determine what we're dealing with.' Once

the gang unit is fully established, it will continue to rely on tips from locals. 'I think the community is very aware of the gang activity that is going on, and that they see it as an issue. So we are going to expect them to approach us whenever there is an issue,' he said. The Chief kept mum on details. 'We have several ways of attempting to address the gang situation … and that includes (outreach) and trying to make sure they never join gangs to begin with,' the Chief said. 'The gang unit will also work closely with drug enforcement, but I don't want to get too much into that.' The Chief said while prosecuting those involved in gang activity 'will also be a big part of what we do,' the gang unit will be part of a larger vision, the 'effort to restore the image of [the city]'" (Retrieved from http://laurinburgexchange.com/news/home_top/2481280/City-police-team-to-reclaim-the-street).

One does not have to look far to find an example of a minority male of low socioeconomic status who faced many of the challenges in the research and ultimately became a dropout. Furthermore, he went on to become the founder of one of the leading street gangs in the United States.

A Case Study of a Dropout

When students end up dropping out of school they turn to the streets for their learning and to meet their needs not met in the school setting. One insightful example of this is Stanley "Tookie" Williams. "Tookie" developed leadership skills not in the schoolhouse, but in a much more informal manner. He earned the "reputation as a quiet, tough guy who was also crazy" (Williams, 2004, p. 55). His opposition would fear him in his adolescent and teenage years due to his reputation. Although, he would earn the respect of them and his peers; "The moment I stepped to the forefront, it was a position I would not relinquish" (Williams, 2004, p. 60). As an adult, he still carried the same reputation, "They thought exactly what I wanted them to think:

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'Tookie is crazy,'" but he had also earned an intimidating size due to an interest in weightlifting, "At that time I sported a pair of twenty-two-inch arms and a chest over fifty-five inches" (Williams, 2004, p. 219). Tookie was a leader that was feared yet respected, which he referred to several times as "Machiavellian Skills" (Williams, 2004, p. 166). The combination of the crazy image is what caused others to fear him while his massive size is what earned him respect – Tookie believed that as a leader, it is better to be feared than loved. Due to discipline problems in school, he lacked a true formal education as described below:

> "Like most of my peers, I stumbled through life 'dis-educated,' a very different quality than being merely uneducated. My options and opportunities were restricted. For me there were no Rotary Clubs, yacht clubs, Explores Clubs, boys' academies, or any other privilege-bound associations. I was afforded equal opportunities on society's underbelly among street thugs, ex-cons, pimps, gamblers, con men, thieves, prostitutes, and other hustler types. Here, the prevailing motifs were violence and the daily battle to survive. Might was right, always" (Williams, 2004, p. 15).

Throughout his life up to incarceration, Tookie had two main weaknesses. The first was the lack of a formal education and the second was an addiction to drugs during his twenties. Great leaders recognize their weaknesses and improve them; Tookie did so while in prison. While in prison, Tookie began to educate himself, study vocabulary and history, and develop a sense of critical reasoning which helped him to reach his defining moment in his life that he called, "redemption" (Williams, 2004, p. 301). Tookie believed that he could redeem all of the terrible things that he had done which led to his incarceration and at this point, Tookie began to lead for the good, renounce gangs, promote peace, and write children's books; he knew that street gangs were targeting children and he wanted to reach out to these children and educate

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them before they were too deep into the street gang life. Throughout his life, his strength was his self-confidence. This strength brought him followers no matter what. Upon renouncing gangs, Tookie stated, "As a result I was able to stand among men from any walk of life, and be confident of who I now define myself to be" (Williams, 2004, p. 293). In addition to this strength was his ability to plan, "Slowly, a strategy began to take shape in my head, a strategy that would form the core of my life for the next few years" (Williams, 2004, p. 55), and his intuition to see ahead and seek out other leaders to bring into his organization and life or as he stated, "become part of my circle" (Williams, 2004, p. 76).

This scenario is all too familiar in the public school system. This is a real life example of a non-traditional learner that is not being reached. Sadly, Stanley Tookie Williams did not turn his life around until he was incarcerated for life and this will be the case for many non-traditional learners if they are not reached during their developmental years, provide an education culture and climate that supports them, and tap their leadership potential before it is too late or it is focused in the direction of negative leadership.

There are too many educational studies devoted to how to stop street gang affiliation because the focus is on the policies in place to end gang involvement rather than focusing on the reality. The reality is that in order to stop street gang affiliation, one must move children out of their environment or decimate their proven leadership skills that have allowed them to earn rank within the gang. Moving a child from their environment is impossible and attempting to decimate leadership skills only creates more rebellion and misbehavior. Furthermore, the following questions should be asked, "Why are students joining gangs?" and "Are their structures within gangs that could be incorporated into schools that would provide students the same things that they seek in a gang?" Educational leaders must seek the answers to these

questions and find ways to empower students, even the gang leaders, and teach them how to use their leadership abilities in a positive manner.

The students of today are much different from those in the past, just as the skills needed to be successful today are far different from the skills needed in the past. If we are not meeting the needs of the students, then they are sure to become lost just as Stanley did. In *The Resilience Revolution*, Larry K. Brendtro and Scott J. Larson (2006) stated that, "the core pathology of modern society lies in the loss of a sense of shared community (p. 131). This is the attraction of the gang for many youth who are not positively bonded to caring adults." The lack of responsible role models who truly care about children is a major societal issue. Brendtro et al. (2002) defined it as "Learned Irresponsibility" that is characterized by learned helplessness, the defiant rebellion against authority, lacking a sense of responsibility, and negative peer subcultures, all of which are learned from irresponsible role models (p. 25).

Conclusion

Research on academic structures that successfully serve non-traditional students demonstrates that there are many factors that affect the results of these programs. Since a significant portion of the student population that end up participating in these programs are at-risk students, external factors that influence their behaviors need to be addressed by school staff. External influences include factors such as community dynamics, poverty, and gang influences. Current research also indicates that the school leadership, culture, use of suspensions, and classroom management greatly influence the school environment and ultimately the educational success of students. Also supported by research is that systemic change can occur if certain changes do occur, with the ultimate goal being increased numbers of students graduating from high school and becoming productive members of communities and society. Many programs

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and school districts are experimenting with novice programs. This topic would greatly benefit from further research, such as a longitudinal study on the effectiveness of many of these new programs.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to identify an appropriate structure to successfully serve all alternative students in an effort to increase the graduation rate and academic proficiency of the students at an alternative high school in rural southeastern North Carolina and how virtual learning and seat time impacts this structure. The research design that was utilized for this study was program evaluation. The design of program evaluation is to determine the level of success or failure of programs and to make decisions in regards to such programs (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010). According to Lodico et al. (2010), findings in program evaluation are often used for short-term as well as long-term decision-making purposes, these educational programs can be changed or improved based upon the findings of this research. Furthermore, programs could possibly be eliminated if the results are not positive. The validity of this program evaluation is the degree to which evidence and theory support the explanation of test scores (North Carolina Department of Instruction Technical Manual, 2008). The validity yields a confirmation on how well a test achieves its function. Regarding End of Grade (EOG) tests, evidence of validity is provided through content relevance and relationship of test scores to other external variables. The written items on the EOG are reviewed by at least two content area teachers. Furthermore, additional data, to include dropout, graduation, and discipline data are provided by North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, which is reviewed by departmental leads to ensure the validity of the information provided. Lastly, the questions on the survey are aligned with the above-mentioned data to ensure validity.

There is limited research on alternative schools. Researchers have primarily focused on the characteristics of alternative schools and the programs provided to at-risk students. Most of

the existing studies have used quasi-experimental designs. According to Lagana et al. (2011), few researchers have focused on the perceptions of students enrolled in alternative schools through the use of qualitative research methodology. Furthermore, there is limited research on the effects of alternative schools on student success as it relates to student performance.

This chapter describes the history of the county studied, the state of the alternative school, the North Carolina accountability data, the research design, the population, the procedures, and the instrumentation.

History of the County

The county being researched is located in southeastern North Carolina east of Interstate 95 and has a very unique history in the fact that from colonization to post-reconstruction, three district populations were established and well represented throughout the county: Native American, African-American and Caucasian. Upon the decision of Brown v. Board of Education, schools remained segregated in this county; it was not until approximately fifteen years following this decision, voluntary desegregation began which would involve desegregating schools for Native Americans, African-Americans, and Caucasians. The first integrated class would graduate from the main high school in 1970 (J.W. Locklear, personal communication, December 30, 2013).

The alternative learning school that was being studied began in one of the vacated segregated schools; this school mainly housed students with special needs until later court decisions would transition these students into their least restrictive environment (L.D. Bowen, personal communication, December 1, 2013). In 2011, the alternative learning school was moved to its present location. Previously, this site had been one of the black high schools

during segregation, next a middle school, and then an elementary school before finally reaching its current purpose (A. Cottone, personal communication, January 6, 2014).

The issues throughout the county, and society as a whole, are reflected within the school system and create greater challenges than existed as recently as fifteen years ago (L.D. Bowen, personal communication, December 1, 2013). The "at-risk" population has grown and just as with post-reconstruction, three races still remain to be served (L.D. Bowen, personal communication, December 1, 2013). The need to study and address the needs of at-risk students, especially how their needs can be met by the school district's alternative learning school is delayed but has been identified as a necessity by the school district (L.D. Bowen, personal communication, December 1, 2013).

The State of the Alternative Learning School

First, there is a negative connotation associated with the alternative school in southeastern North Carolina, the alternative school that serves the county's middle and high school students. The community's opinion of this school is that it is where students are sent to drop-out; this opinion holds true to a certain extent when assessing the graduation rate comparisons of the alternative school with the only high school in the county. Furthermore, the fact that it is a separate alternative school, adds to the stereotype that exists. One could reason that transforming the alternative school into an alternative learning program, essentially a school within a school of the only high school, could have substantially positive effects on the culture and climate of the school and the greater community. This change could benefit the county by potentially keeping students in school and ultimately increasing the graduation rate.

Secondly, the discipline data for students enrolled in the school district, especially the discipline data of minority students, has a direct impact on placement of students at the

alternative school, the dropout rate, and the graduation rate. There has been a major population

shift in the county during the past ten years, subsequently causing a substantial increase in the

minority population; however, there has not been a change in the philosophy of the school

system in terms of professional development on how to facilitate instruction for diverse

populations or use of effective discipline models. Many of these students are involved in gang

activity, however the county is still in denial about this, which is evident because the county is

not a member of the *North Carolina Gang Net Database*. Professional development on how to

work with gang populations and how to keep such students in school (increasing the graduation

rate and decreasing the dropout rate) needs to occur as well.

Finally, these data are clear for many districts across the state; they are increasing

graduation rates and reducing dropout rates through the use of virtual learning, which directly

correlates with seat time. They are also achieving this through reduced credit diplomas and this

has a direct correlation to seat time. Therefore, an extensive virtual plan, a reduced elective plan,

and appropriate counseling practices for students must be constructed and implemented in order

for the data to improve.

The county in southeastern North Carolina used the guidelines established by the North

Carolina Department of Public Instruction and established specific board policies as it related to

alternative education (Policy Code: 3470/4305 Alternative Learning Programs/Schools, 2013).

The purpose of the board is to provide a safe and orderly environment at each school using a

Behavioral Management Plan, Parental Involvement Plan, and Conflict Resolution Plan.

The alternative learning school has been implemented as an additional option for students

that continue to have challenges with behavior management and/or academics in the regular

education setting. The following have been identified by the school district as purposes of an alternative education setting:

1. To intervene and address problems that prevent a student from achieving success in the regular educational setting,

2. To reduce the risk that a student will drop out of school by providing resources to help the student resolve issues affecting his or her performance at school,

3. To return a student, if and when it is practicable, to the regular educational setting with the skills necessary to succeed in that environment, and

4. To preserve a safe and orderly learning environment in the regular educational setting.

5. Students are typically referred to schools based on their attendance area. Based on law, the board may decide to assign a student to a school outside of their district in an effort for a student to attend a theme/specialized school or for any other reason that the board deems necessary.

Students attending an alternative school may be referred to school via voluntary or involuntary basis. The following in the transfer process for students:

1. Responsibilities of Personnel at Referring School: In addition to any other procedures required by this policy, prior to referring a student to an alternative learning program or school, the principal of the referring school must:

   a. document the procedures that were used to identify the student being at risk of academic failure or as being disruptive or disorderly,

   b. provide the reasons for referring the student to an alternative learning program or school, and

c. provide to the alternative learning program or school all relevant student records, including anecdotal information.

2. Responsibilities of School Personnel at the Alternative learning Program or School. If a student who is subject to G.S. 14-208.18 is assigned to an alternative school, the student must be supervised by school personnel at all times.

3. Voluntary Referral: this type of referral is encouraged whenever possible and parent/guardian should be a part of this process. Once the transfer is approved the sending and receiving principal must arrange the transfer process. The sending principal must notify superintendent or designee of this transfer.

4. Involuntary Referral

a. the student presents a clear threat to the safety of other students or personnel,

b. the student presents a significant disruption to the educational environment in the regular educational setting,

c. the student is at risk of dropping out or not meeting standards for promotion, and resources in addition to or different from those available in the regular educational setting are needed to address the issue,

d. the student has been charged with a felony or a crime that allegedly endangered the safety of others, and it is reasonably foreseeable that the educational environment in the regular educational setting will be significantly disrupted if the student remains, or

e. if the Code of Student Conduct provides for a transfer as a consequence of the student's behavior.

Before an involuntary transfer is extended, the referring school must document all academic,

social and/or behavioral problems a student is having within the school. Once those areas have been identified, then action steps or consequences must be enforced to correct behavior and/or academic performance within the regular education setting. Once the principal identifies that the steps and/or actions that have been put in place does not correct academic/behavior needs of the student, then the principal must recommend to the superintendent that the student be transferred to the alternative school. The principal must provide the following to support request for alternative placement: (1) an explanation of the student's behavior or academic performance that is at issue; (2) documentation or a summary of the documentation of the efforts to assist the student in the student's regular educational setting, if applicable; and (3) documentation of the circumstances that support an involuntary transfer (Policy Code: 3470/4305 Alternative Learning Programs/Schools, 2013).

Research Question

The purpose of this study is to identify an appropriate structure to successfully serve all alternative students in an effort to increase the graduation rate and academic proficiency of the students at an alternative high school in rural southeastern North Carolina and how virtual learning and seat time impacts this structure. The following research question was investigated: To what extent, if any, did virtual learning opportunities and seat time requirements impact student performance?

Overview of Study

The basis of this three-step approach to this study was to examine the impact of a high school (9-12) alternative educational setting on student performance.

Step one consisted of collecting data (achievement, discipline, graduation rate, dropout rate and suspension) that pertains to the state of the alternative learning school in the rural part of

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southeastern North Carolina. Step two will addressed the research question established in this study. Finally, step three addressed the perception of the alternative school and how it impacts student performance.

The research design method used for this problem of practice is descriptive statistics (see Figure 29). No variables were manipulated. No treatment was applied to the subject. Any differences in the variable had already occurred prior to research being conducted.

Population and Sample

The data was collected from students of an alternative school in southeastern North Carolina during the 2013-2014 school year. The participants of this study included sixty-seven students assigned to alternative placement in the district's alternative program. The alternative school in this district has the following grade level breakdown: ninth grade- ten students, tenth grade-twelve students, eleventh grade- twenty students and twelfth grade- twenty- five students who were enrolled during the 2013-2014 school year. The students who are eligible to attend the alternative school fall into the following categories: school of choice, alternative placement because of discipline, and students that are suspended for more than five days. This arrangement of students has caused the administration and district to explore and research methods for restructuring this environment. The age of the students range from 12-21. The alternative school serves middle and high school students in the same setting.

The alternative campus is located in the rural Southeastern North Carolina and is approximately fifteen miles from the district office. The staff consists of the following: principal, assistant principal, twelve teachers, school resource officer, guidance counselor, social worker, computer assistant, and an administrative assistant. The number of students at the alternative campus varies throughout the year due to circumstances and/or situation that may

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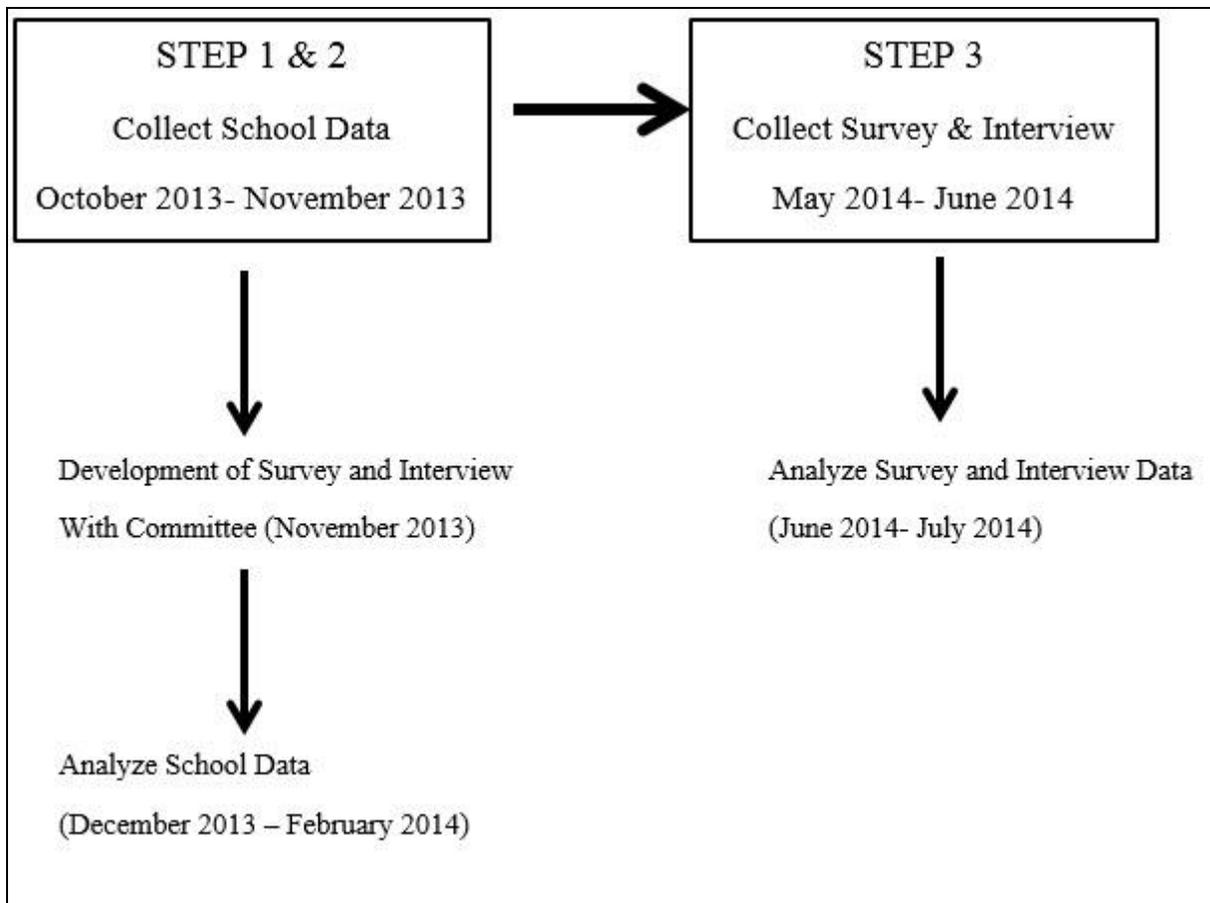
Figure 29. Descriptive statistics flow chart.

arise within the district. The students at the alternative school are taught in a traditional setting that presently is ineffective. The school dropout rate is high and the graduation rate is low and no improvement is likely to occur unless changes are made to the current educational structure.

Adult and student surveys were used to identify the effectiveness of the alternative school and provide support in answering the research question, by providing information on the perceptions of the alternative program from the perspective of students, parents, administrators and identified community members. These perceptions were not only identified through the use of surveys, but also determined through open-ended structured questions and data.

Instrumentation

This research was conducted using surveys (parent, student, faculty, and staff). Prior to providing surveys to the participants, the surveys were reviewed by three administrators for clarity and understanding of questions. After receiving the feedback from the administrators, the survey questions on the parent, student, and faculty and staff surveys were adjusted accordingly for better understanding. The parent survey comprised 83 questions consisting of the following: Likert scale questions with 5 response choices (1-strongly disagree, 2-disagree, 3-neutral, 4-agree, 5-strongly disagree), list type questions that allowed respondents to select items that applied to them, and open-ended completion statements. The student survey comprised 101 questions consisting of the following: Likert scale questions with 5 response choices (1-strongly disagree, 2-disagree, 3-neutral, 4-agree, 5-strongly disagree), list type questions that allowed respondents to select items that applied to them, and open-ended completion statements. Students that were under the age of 18, and had a desire to participate, received parental permission prior to completing the survey. The faculty survey comprised 99 questions consisting of the following: Likert scale questions with 5 response choices (1-strongly disagree, 2-disagree,

3-neutral, 4-agree, 5-strongly disagree), list type questions that allowed respondents to select items that applied to them, and open-ended completion statements. Parents/guardians, students, and faculty/staff members completed their surveys on their personal computer, as well as school computers through Google. Participants were provided a paper copy of the survey if they did not have access to a computer. Surveys were completed by faculty/staff, students, and parents during Spring semester of 2014.

Findings from the surveys were used to examine the impact on alternative education regarding student performance. Furthermore, the findings allowed the researcher to address the following research question:

To what extent, if any, did virtual learning opportunities and seat time requirements impact student performance?

The administrators at the alternative school provided class rosters, handbooks, rules and procedures, policies, orientation material for students and parents, discipline, student performance data, and faculty/staff schedules.

Procedures

Permission was obtained from the Assistant Superintendent of the school district for the survey to be administered to the students, parents, faculty, staff and administrators at the alternative school. The principal and assistant principal were contacted to discuss the purpose of the survey. The researcher gave surveys to the participants along with a cover letter explaining the procedures for completing the survey. In order to ensure that an individual would not be identified by name in any subsequent reports, strict anonymity was expressed. The survey instruments were collected during follow-up visits to the school or if they are mailed to the office. To ensure collection of all surveys, the researchers made follow-up calls and sent various

emails. A general coding system was conducted and the information from each survey

instrument was transformed into a code and entered into the computer using Google Drive.

Descriptive statistics, including frequencies tables, matrices, and graphs were constructed using

Google Drive (with T-tests, if results are significant) and composite variables were performed on

the survey results. All data was presented exactly as answered by the participants. There were

no grammatical corrections made by the researcher.

Analysis of Study

The analysis of the study was based on the following research question:

To what extent, if any, did virtual learning opportunities and seat time requirements

impact student performance?

In order to answer the identified research question above, the researcher used a

quantitative approach. The surveys created for parents, faculty, and staff fulfilled the quantitative

aspect of this study. Descriptive statistics were utilized to summarize the data from the surveys.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to identify an appropriate educational structure to identify

and serve all alternative students in an effort to increase the graduation rate and academic

proficiency of the students at an alternative high school in rural southeastern North Carolina and

how virtual learning and seat time impacts this structure.

CHAPTER 4: TO WHAT EXTENT IF ANY, DID VIRTUAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES AND SEAT TIME REQUIREMENTS IMPACT STUDENT PERFORMANCE?

The purpose of this study is to identify an appropriate structure to successfully serve alternative students in an effort to increase the graduation rate and academic proficiency of the students at an alternative high school in rural southeastern North Carolina, and how virtual learning and seat time impacts this structure. Specifically, the following research question was investigated as a significant piece of the overall purpose. The findings were correlated with current research as it relates to an appropriate structure to successfully serve alternative students. The successful structure should include the following "Guiding Principles" (Retrieved from www.cisga.org/cisgawpress/wp.../07/Philosopy-and-principles.docx):

1. Teachers in this program will serve in the capacity of facilitator and students are accountable for their learning. Facilitators build on the knowledge of each individual student within the class. Building on the knowledge of each student allows the facilitator to prescribe specific interventions and/or strategies for each student. Once the interventions/strategies are identified it allows each student to receive a prescribed course with a specific plan to meet the needs of the student without delaying learning for other students within the classroom. Also, the facilitator poses questions which not only create specific protocols, but lay the foundation for the class and coursework and creates a classroom culture of high expectations and buy-in. Lastly, facilitation lends to instruction that is warranted and needed for 21st century students because it allows for cooperation, collaboration, and communication, which holds the students accountable to complete assignments and projects in a timely manner.

2. Students will master a set of knowledgeable skills that will prepare them for success in the future. These skills have always been important for students, but are vitally important in the 21st century as a result of our information-based economy. In an effort to ensure students are college and career ready, students need to think deeply about challenges, solve problems creatively, work in teams, communicate clearly, learn technology, and handle an enormous amount of information. Our ever-changing world and information-based economy require students to be flexible, to take initiative, lead when necessary, and produce something new and useful.

3. The culture of the program should be one of support, hope and empowerment. Students that are identified for the alternative program are considered at-risk students. Once these students are back in school we cannot put them in the same environment that confronted them in their comprehensive high school. If we decide not to change the culture in the alternative school for these students we are setting them up for failure, and failure is not an option. The culture of the program should contain the following components:

a. Re-energize: students experience burnout and lack motivation in regards to school. Providing support, hope, and encouragement allows each student to refocus on their passion and believe in themselves.

b. Re-flect: students may realize that their life away from school may not be what they want, but they will perform at school if school is satisfying and significant, and meaningful relationships are in place. Students want to find out how much you care about them individually. Once they find out that you care they will go above and beyond in regards to academics and life.

c. Re-fuel: students in an alternative setting have had a number of withdrawls (emotionally, physically, socially, and intellectually) made from them that have not given them an opportunity to be successful educationally. These students are now in need of deposits that will allow them to be successful. Investing in the whole child will allow each student to receive the deposits they need. The following are the tenants of a whole child: healthy, safe, engaged, challenged and supported. Each student is like a puzzle and we have to identify what piece of the puzzle is missing from a student's life.

d. Re-light: each student comes into school with a candle. It is our responsibility as educators to light their candle so they can see success and in turn become successful. The staff has to reach the students before they are able to teach the student.

4. Parental and community support are essential to the overall success of the program. As part of the educational process, our students have to be engaged in instruction if learning is going to take place. Engagement does not differ for the parents and community of the students involved in the classroom. Parent and community engagement in the learning process will ultimately lead to the highest achievement of students, because parents and community are part of the process and have a better understanding of the expectation that is placed on the student. In my opinion, the first way to engage parents and the community is to have an open door policy into the school. Allow parents and the community entry to the school to sit in on classes, to take part in activities in the class, as well as participate on committees within the

school building. This will lead to a school that is family-oriented and will allow buy-in from all stakeholders (i.e., child, parent, and community).

5. Learning will be based on competency-based outcomes. Personalized learning (credit by mastery) via virtual learning is the major advantage of using competency-based learning. Using this instructional method allows students to move through the curriculum at their own individualized pace and provides them the opportunity of achieving their goal of graduation much quicker. This is solely based on what the student knows and/or how the student can critically think as they move through the curriculum. Also, provides accountability for the student and offers flexibility in terms of a schedule that fits their needs. Some students may not be able to attend school physically every day because of risk factors such as: substance abuse, negative peer influence, and abuse and neglect. Credit by Mastery offers the flexibility to meet individual needs of the students personally and academically using technology.

The following research question was investigated:

To what extent, if any, did virtual learning opportunities and seat time requirements impact student performance?

Definition of Terms

Student performance is defined as the academic progress of a student. The following information will be included in this portion of Chapter Four: attendance, graduation rate, high school completion and dropout rate. The following terms, unless otherwise noted, are taken in part or in their entirety from *Dropout Prevention: Strategies for improving high school*

graduation rates (Center for Child and Family Policy Duke University , Retrieved from

http://www.familyimpactseminars.org/s_ncfis04report.pdf, 2013):

1. Age of compulsory attendance: Age until which minors are legally mandated to attend school. North Carolina and 26 other states require school attendance until age 16. Eight states require attendance until age 17, and 16 states require school attendance until 18.

2. Average daily attendance (ADA): Attendance is the presence of a student on days when school is in session. A student is counted as present only when he/she is actually at school, present at another activity sponsored by the school as part of the school's program, or personally supervised by a member of the staff. The total number of days of attendance for all students divided by the total number of school days in a given period gives the average daily attendance (ADA).

3. Cohort graduation rate (as currently defined in North Carolina): The percentage of ninth-graders who graduate from high school four years later. This rate does not account for students graduating in more than four years or those who drop out of school prior to grade nine. The federal rate (also referred to as the averaged freshman graduation rate) focuses on public high school students, as opposed to all high school students or the general population, and is designed to provide an estimate of on-time graduation from high school. Thus, it provides a measure of the extent to which public high schools are graduating students within the expected period of four years.

4. Completion rate (high school): The high school completion rate represents the proportion of 18- to 24-year-olds that have left high school and earned a high school diploma or the equivalent, including a General Education Development credential.

5. Drop out (verb): The event of leaving school before graduating. Transferring from a public school to a private school, for example, is not regarded as a dropout event.

6. Dropout (noun): An individual who is not in school and who is not a graduate. A person who drops out of school may later return and graduate, but is called a "dropout" at the time he/she left school. At the time the person returns to school, he/she is called a "stopout." Measures to describe these often complicated behaviors include the event dropout rate (or the closely related school persistence rate), the status dropout rate and the high school completion rate.

7. Dropout prevention programs: Interventions designed to increase high school completion rates. These interventions can include techniques such as the use of incentives, counseling or monitoring as the prevention/intervention of choice.

8. Dropout rate: The percentage of students who drop out of school in a given year (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

9. High school completion: An individual has completed high school if he/she has been awarded a high school diploma; in some states, an equivalent credential, such as the General Education Development (GED), counts.

10. High school diploma: A formal document regulated by each state certifying the successful completion of a prescribed secondary school program of studies. In some states or school districts, high school diplomas are differentiated by type, such as an academic diploma, a general diploma or a vocational diploma.

11. High school dropout rate: Event, status and cohort dropout rates each provide a different perspective on the student dropout population.

12. High school equivalency certificate: A formal document certifying that an individual

has met the state requirements for high school graduation equivalency by obtaining

satisfactory scores on an approved examination and meeting other performance

requirements (if any) set by a state education agency or other appropriate body.

Research and Demographics

This research was conducted using surveys (parent/guardian, student, and faculty). Prior

to providing surveys to the participants, the surveys were reviewed by an expert review panel for

construct validity. After receiving the feedback from the review panel, the survey questions on

the parent/guardian, student, and faculty surveys were revised based on the feedback from the

expert panel.

The parent/guardian survey consisted of 83 Likert scale questions with 5 response

choices (1-strongly agree, 2-disagree, 3-neutral, 4-agree, 5-strongly disagree), list type questions

that allowed respondents to select items that applied to them and open-ended completion

statements. Sixty-nine percent of (24 out of 35) parent/guardians responded to the survey, 12.5%

(3 out of 24) of parent/guardian respondents were male and 87.5% (21 out of 24) were female

(see Figure 30). The majority of parent/guardian respondents were African American at 67% (16

out of 24); 21% 95 out of 24) of parent/guardian respondents were white, and 12% (3 out of 24)

were Native American (see Figure 31).

The student survey consisted of 101 Likert scale questions with 5 response choices (1-

strongly disagree, 2-disagree, 3-neutral, 4-agree, 5-strongly agree), list type questions that

allowed respondents to select items that applied to them, and open-ended completion statements.

Students that were under the age of 18, and had a desire to participate, received written parental

permission prior to completing the survey. The investigator provided the parent a consent form

Select one of the following that best describes you:

Male	3
Female	21
	0
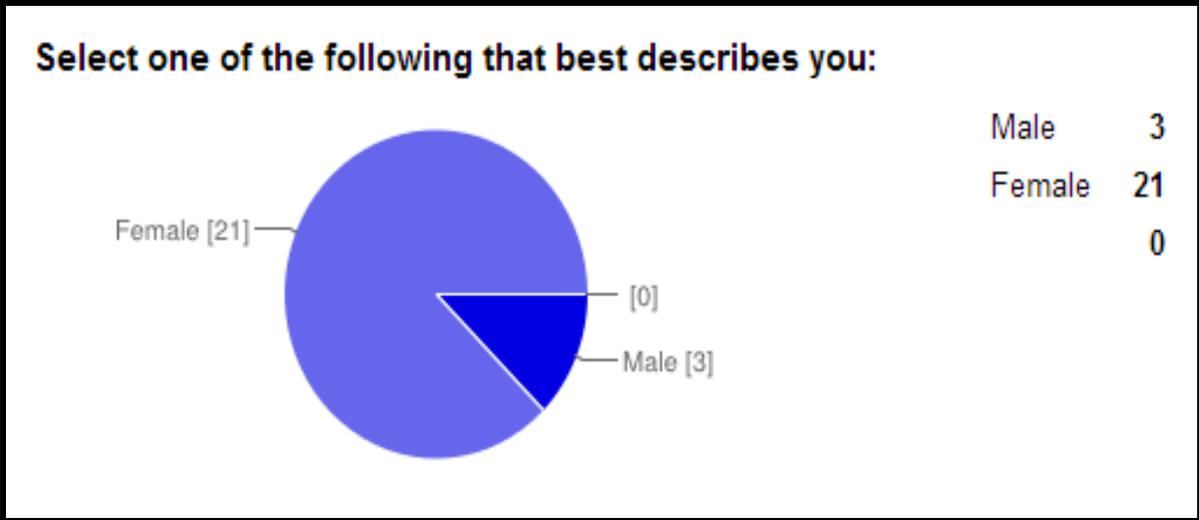
Female [21]
[0]
Male [3]

Note. Twelve and a half percent of parent/guardian respondents were male and 87.5% were female.

Figure 30. Gender of parent or guardian.

Select one of the following that best describes you:

African American	16
Asian	0
Native American	3
White	5
Multiple	0
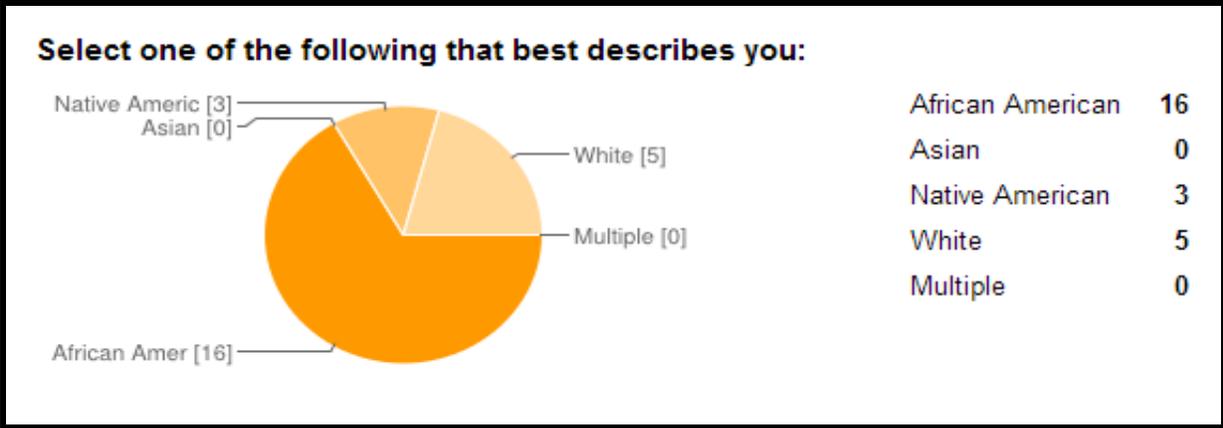
Note. Sixty-seven percent of parent/guardian respondents were African American, 21% were white, and 12% were Native American.

Figure 31. Ethnicity of parent or guardian.

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signed and returned prior to the minor subjects' completion of the survey. Sixty-four percent (43 out of 67) of students responded to the survey (see Figure 32). Forty-two percent (18 out of 43) of student respondents were female and 58% (25 out of 43) were male. Fifty-eight percent (25 out of 43) of student respondents were African American, 21% (9 out of 43) were Native American, and 16% (7 out of 43) were Caucasian. The grade range at the school was from 9th to 12th grade with the highest percentage of student respondents in grades 10 and 12 followed by grades 11 and 9. Lastly, the majority of student respondents were in the range of 15-18 years old. Thirty-three percent (14 out of 43) of student respondents were in the 10th grade, 30% (13 out of 43) were in the 12th grade, 23% (10 out of 43) were in the 11th grade, and 14% (6 out of 43) were in the 9th grade.

The faculty survey consisted of 99 Likert scale questions with 5 response choices (1-strongly disagree, 2-disagree, 3-neutral, 4-agree, 5-strongly disagree), list type questions that allowed respondents to select items that applied to them, and open-ended completion statements. Parents, students, and faculty members completed their surveys on their personal computers, as well as the school's computers through Google (a search engine on the computer research information and respond to surveys). Sixty-seven percent (14 out of 21) of faculty members responded to the survey. Sixty-four percent (9 out of 14) of faculty respondents are African American, 29% (94 out of 14) were white, and 7% (1 out of 14) were multiple races; 79% (11 out of 14) were female and 21% (3 out of 14) were male (see Figure 33).

As with many alternative schools, there is a negative connotation associated with the alternative school in southeastern, North Carolina that serves the county's middle and high school students based on the findings from surveys. The community's opinion of this school is that students are sent there to drop out. When asked if the school district cares about the school,

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Select one of the following that best describes you:

Male	25	58%
Female	18	42%
	0	0%

Select one of the following that best describes you:

African American	25	58%
Asian	0	0%
Native American	9	21%
White	7	16%
Multiple	2	5%

Select one of the following that best describes you:

9th Grade	6	14%
10th Grade	14	33%
11th Grade	10	23%
12th Grade	13	30%
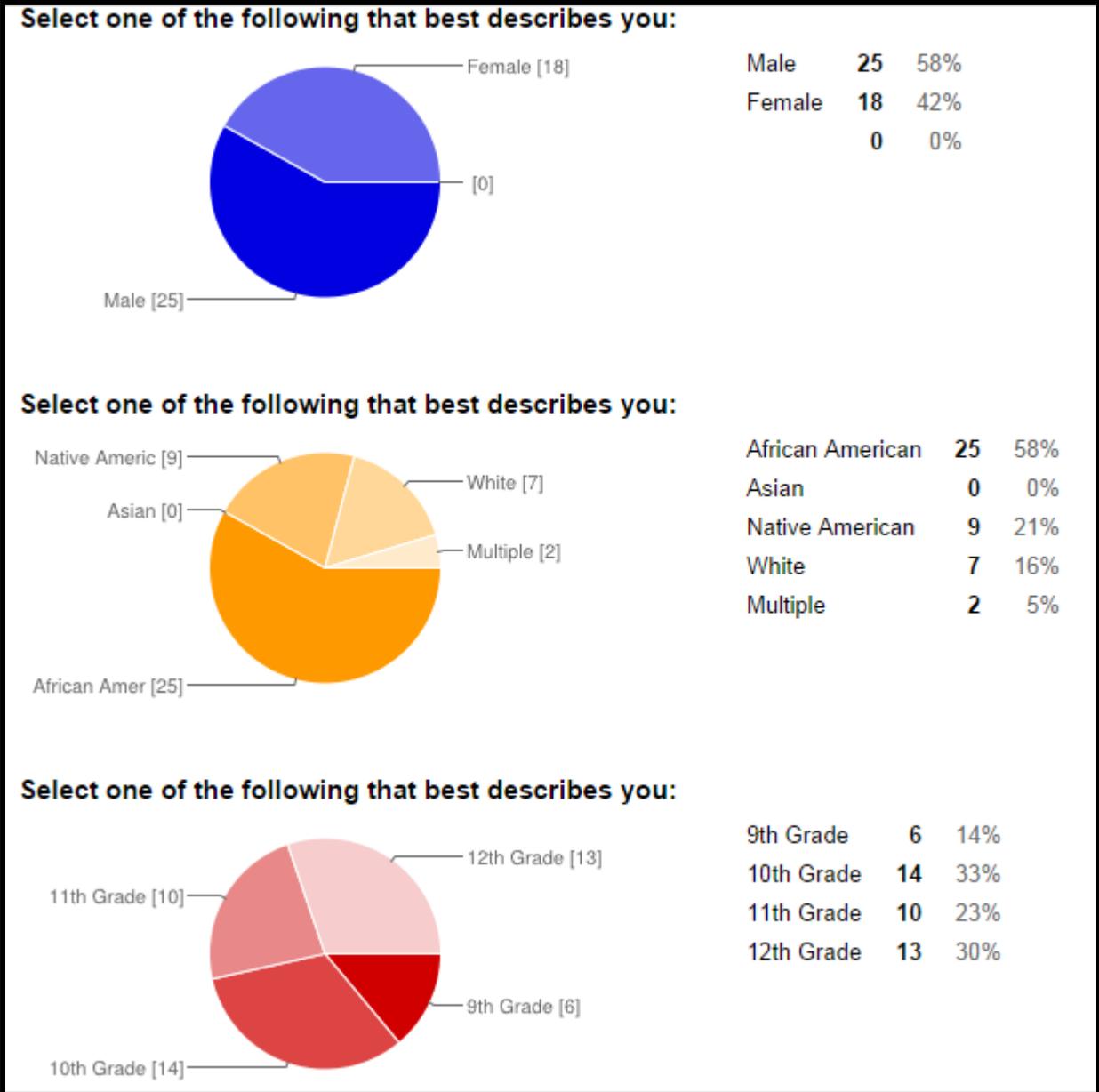
Note. Fifty-eight percent of student respondents indicate that they are male and 42% indicate that they are female -- 58% of student respondents indicate that they are African American, 21% indicate that they are Native American, 16% indicate that they are white, and 5% indicate that they are multi-racial -- 33% of student respondents are in the tenth grade, 30% are in the twelfth grade, 23% are in the eleventh grade, and 14% are in the ninth grade.

Figure 32. Student demographics.

Select one of the following that best describes you:

White [4]
Asian [0]
Native Americ [0]
Multiple [1]
African Ameri [9]

African American	9	64%
Asian	0	0%
Native American	0	0%
White	4	29%
Multiple	1	7%

Select one of the following that best describes you:

Female [11]
[0]
Male [3]

Male	3	21%
Female	11	79%
	0	0%
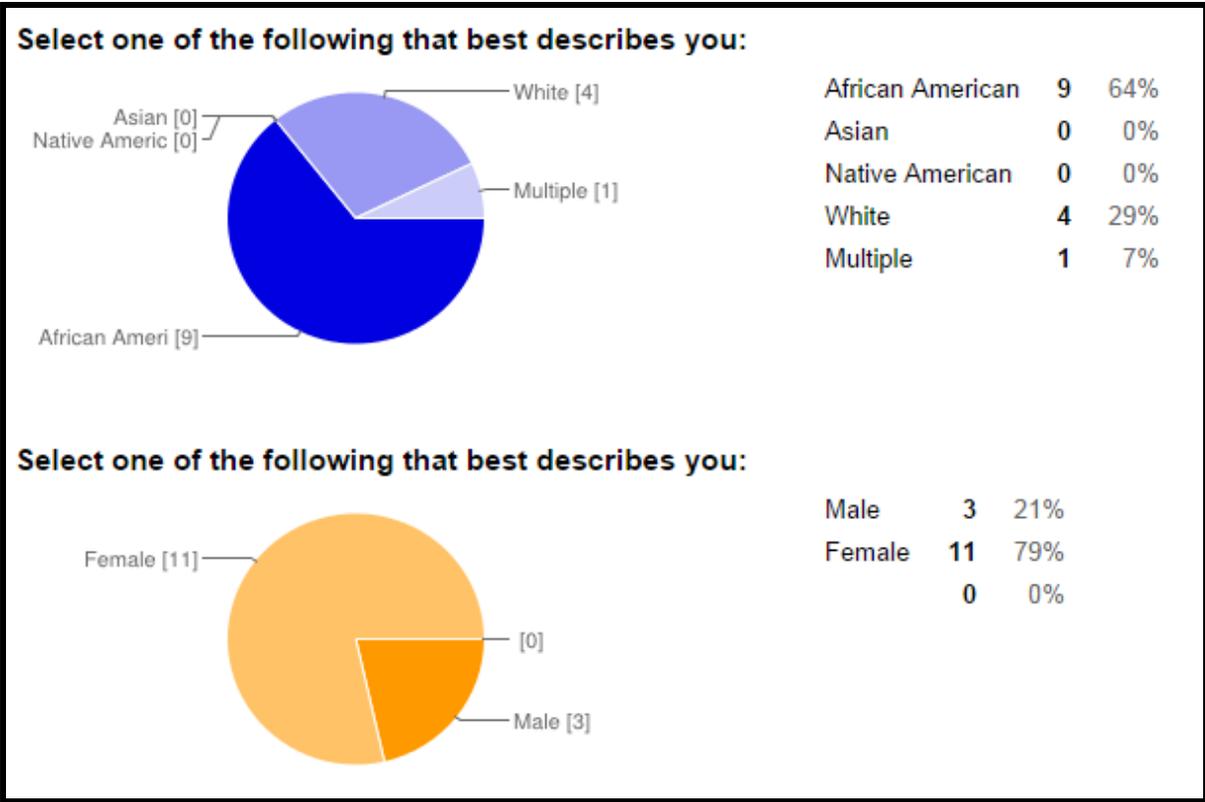
Note. Sixty-four percent of faculty respondents are African American, 29% are White, and 7% are multiple races; 79% are female and 21% are male.

Figure 33. Faculty demographics.

parent/guardian respondents were in the following categories: 12% (3 out of 24) "strongly disagree," 17% (4 out of 24) "disagree," 42%(10 out of 24) neutral, 29% (7 out of 24) "agree," and 0% (0 out of 24) "strongly agree" (see Figure 34).

When asked if the school is a "dumping ground" for bad students, parent/guardian respondents were in the following categories: 17% (4 out of 24) "strongly disagree," 12% (3 out of 24) "disagree," 38% (9 out of 24) neutral, 12% (3 out of 24) "agree," and 21% (5 out of 24) "strongly agree" (see Figure 35).

Fifty percent (12 out of 24) of parent/guardian respondents stated that they sometimes hear their child speak negatively about the school, 39% (9 out of 24) stated never, and 12% (3 out of 24) stated always (see Figure 36).

Forty-six percent (11 out of 24) of parent/guardian respondents stated that they sometimes hear negative comments about the school in the community, 42% (10 out of 24) stated that they never hear negative comments, and 12% (3 out of 24) stated that they always hear negative comments (see Figure 37).

Furthermore, the fact that it is a separate alternative school, adds to the stereotype that exists. When asked if the school should become a program and not a school, faculty respondents were in the following categories: 7% (1 out of 14) "strongly disagree," 7% (1 out of 14) "disagree," 29% (4 out of 14) neutral, 21% (3 out of 14) "agree," and 36% (5 out of 14) "strongly agree" (see Figure 38). North Carolina school districts may have alternative learning programs or alternative learning schools. The organizational structure of an alternative program can be as unique as its student population. Alternative Instructional Model (AIM), an alternative program in New York, allows students to remain connected to their home school, thus providing the opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities. Individualized instruction, continuous
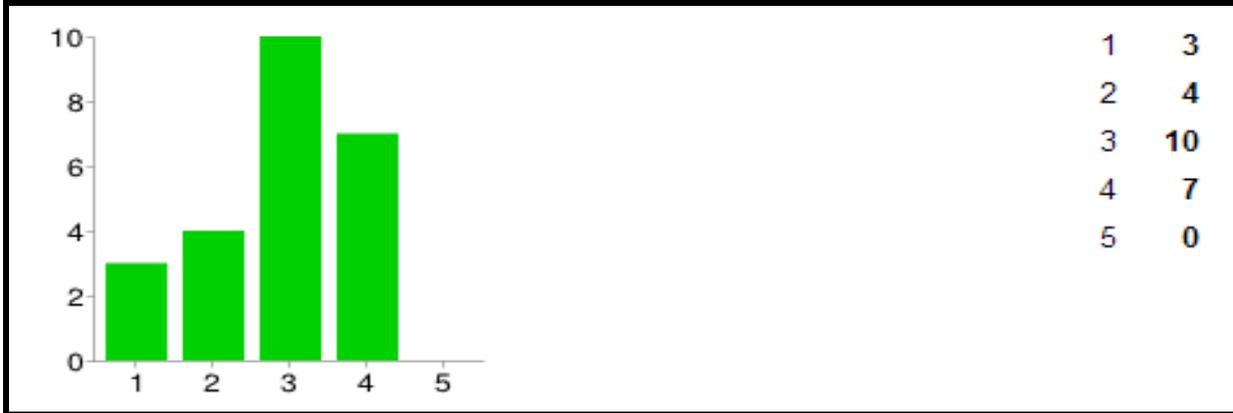
Note. When asked if the school district cares about the school, parent/guardian respondents were in the following categories: 12% "strongly disagree," 17% "agree," 42% neutral, 29% "agree," and 0% "strongly agree."

Figure 34. Parent/Guardian thoughts on whether the school district cares about the school.
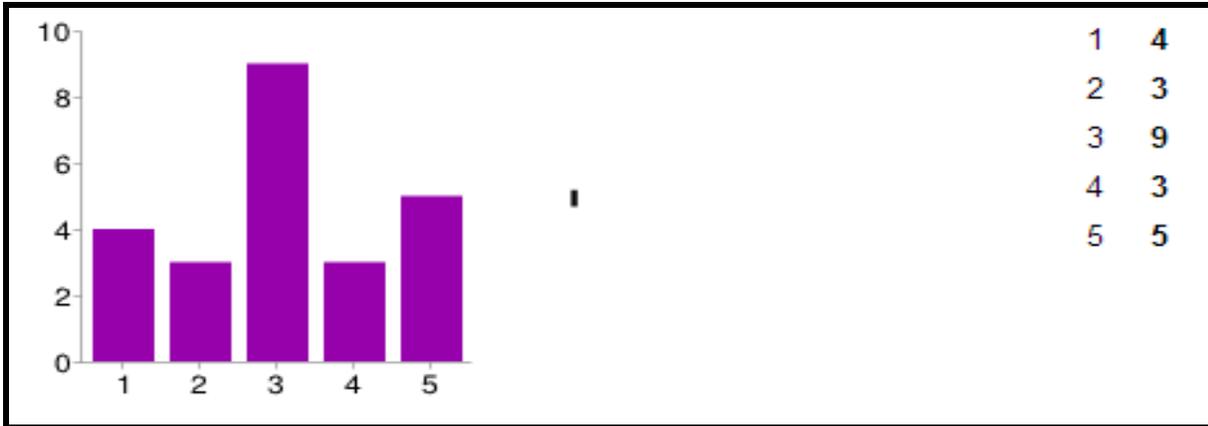
Note. When asked if the school is a "dumping ground" for bad students, parent/guardian respondents were in the following categories: 17% "strongly disagree," 12% "agree," 38% neutral, 12% "agree," and 21% "strongly agree."

Figure 35. Parent/Guardian thoughts on the Academy being a "dumping ground."
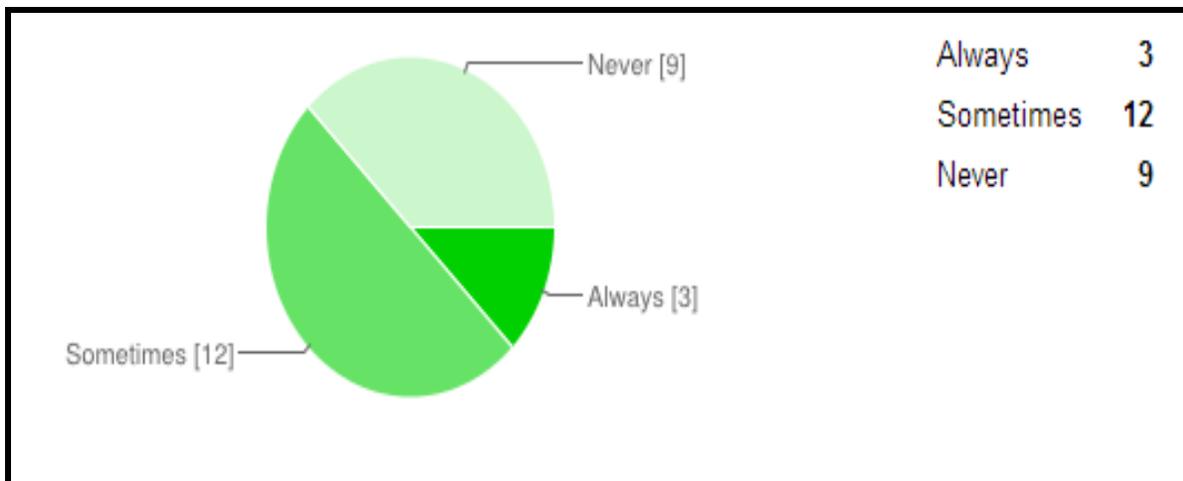
Note. Fifty percent of parent/guardian respondents stated that they sometimes hear their child speak negatively about the school, 39% stated never, and 12% stated always.

Figure 36. Parent/Guardian thoughts on children communicating negatively about the school.

Pie chart with legend:

Always	3
Sometimes	11
Never	10
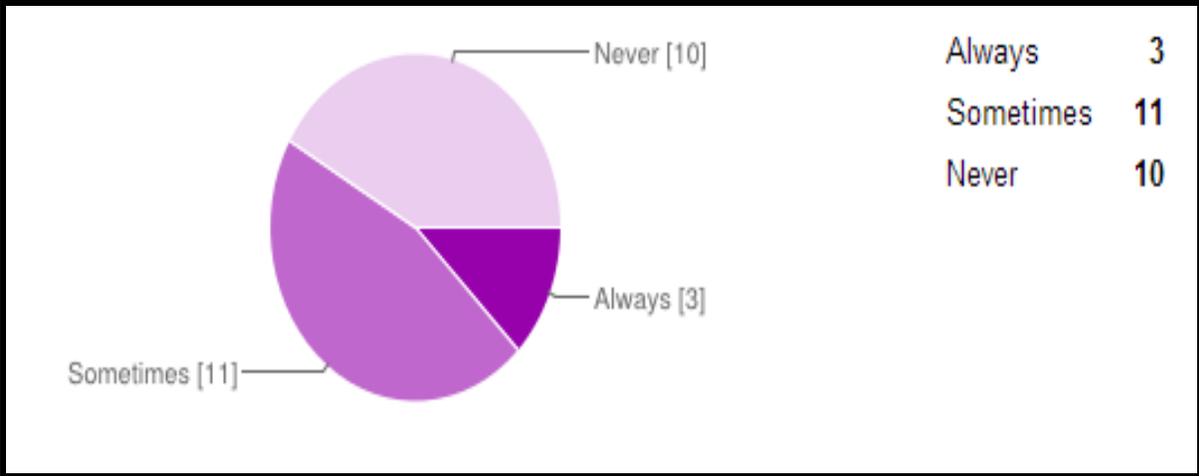
Note. Forty-six percent of parent/guardian respondents sometimes hear negative comments about the school in the community, 42% never hear comments, and 13% always hear comments.

Figure 37. Parent/Guardian thoughts on negative comments in community.
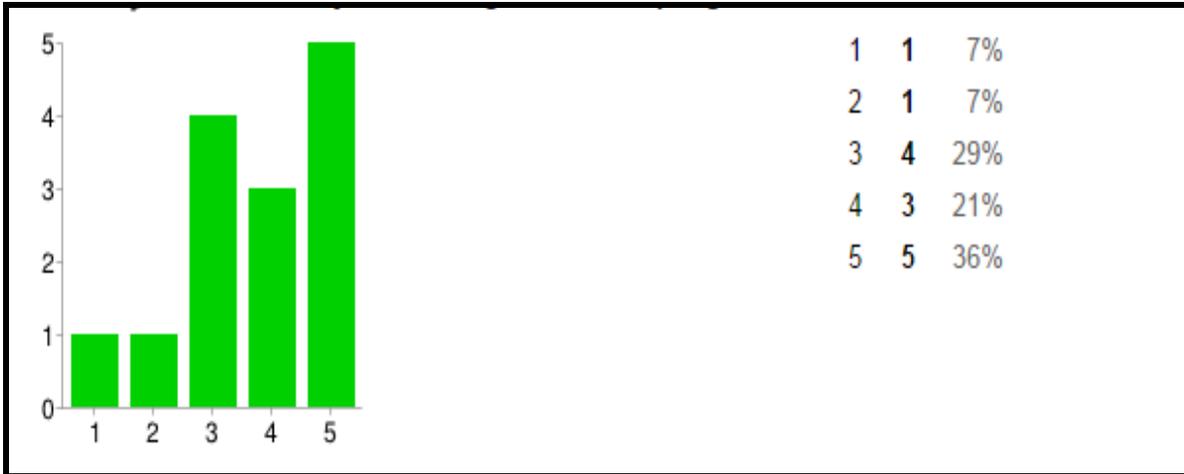
1	1	7%
2	1	7%
3	4	29%
4	3	21%
5	5	36%

Note. When asked if the school should become a program and not a school, faculty respondents were in the following categories: 7% "strongly disagree," 7% "disagree," 29% neutral, 21% "agree," and 36% "strongly agree."

Figure 38. Faculty response to the school becoming a program and not a school.

improvement, scheduling flexibility, community service projects, and an environment rich in student resources have each proven to be valuable elements of successful alternative learning programs to increase student success (Grobe, 2002).

The alternative learning school that was being studied began in one of the vacated segregated schools; this school mainly housed students with special needs until later court decisions would transition these students into their least restrictive environment which was transitioning students with special needs back into the traditional school setting with regular education students (L. D. Bowen, personal communication, December 1, 2013). In 2011, the alternative learning program was moved to its present location which had previously been one of the black high schools during segregation, next a middle school, and then an elementary school before finally reaching its current purpose (A. Cottone, personal communication, January 6, 2014).

Therefore, when conducting this research, the researcher determined to find out what the students, parents/guardians, faculty and staff thought about virtual learning and seat time requirement impact on student performance.

Virtual Learning

A review of literature found that the combination of technology along with accessibility to the Internet has revolutionized not only our society but our educational system. According to Van Beek (2011), in his article, *What is Virtual Learning*, he states that this is an emerging educational paradigm called "virtual learning." Virtual learning is a combination of the internet along with a technology tool and/or software, along with the internet to provide instruction to students. The advent of this new instructional technique limits the need for teachers and students to physically be in a classroom at all times.

Virtual learning comes in several forms (Van Beek, 2011):

- *Computer-Based:* Instruction is not provided by a teacher; instead, instruction is provided by software installed on a local computer or server. This software can frequently customize the material to suit the specific needs of each student.

- *Internet-Based:* This is similar to *computer-based* instruction, but in this case, the software that provides the instruction is delivered through the Web and stored on a remote server.

- *Remote Teacher Online:* Instruction is provided by a teacher, but that teacher is not physically present with the student. Instead, the teacher interacts with the student via the Internet, through such media as online video, online forums, e-mail and instant messaging.

- *Blended Learning:* This combines traditional face-to-face instruction, directed by a teacher, with *computer-based, Internet-based* or *remote teacher online* instruction. In effect, instruction comes from two sources: a traditional classroom teacher and at least one of the forms of virtual learning described above.

- *Facilitated Virtual Learning:* This is *computer-based*, *Internet-based* or *remote teacher online* instruction that is supplemented by a human "facilitator." This facilitator does not direct the student's instruction, but rather assists the student's learning process by providing tutoring or additional supervision. The facilitator may be present with the learner or communicating remotely via the Web or other forms of electronic communication.

It is estimated that the K-12 online education field is growing at a rate of 30% annually (Van Beek, 2011). Furthermore, research states that online classes have increased from 45,000

in 2000 to 320,000 in 2009 (Van Beek, 2011). Online learning has become increasingly popular in primary and secondary schooling in the United States over the last decade.

According to the State Board of Education for North Carolina, the North Carolina board policy provides an explanation of how students can receive course credit for virtual learning classes. For students to receive credit for virtual learning courses student's must meet the following criteria:

Kindergarten through twelfth grade (K-12) virtual learning course taken for credit toward a diploma must first be approved for credit by the North Carolina Virtual Public School (Retrieved from www.sbepolicy.dpi.state.nc.us) as follows:

1. Virtual learning courses offering instruction in courses included within the North Carolina Standard Course of Study must meet the Standard Course of Study competency goals and objectives. Virtual learning courses offered for Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB) credit must align with nationally validated standards for AP and IB, where available.

2. Virtual learning courses offering instruction in courses not included in the Standard Course of Study curriculum must have rigor, depth, and breadth comparable to courses included in the Standard Course of Study.

3. Enrollment in a virtual learning "for credit course" shall count toward satisfying local board requirements related to minimum instructional days, seat time policies, student attendance, and athletic and/or extracurricular obligations. Furthermore, Local Education Agency (LEAs) is instructed to be purposeful in establishing processes and procedures to enroll and manage such virtual learning students in an environment where they can be successful.

Technology and Virtual Learning

This section discusses the survey and open-ended questions in regards to asking parents/guardians, students and faculty about technology devices and to explain/define virtual learning (see Figures 39-44). Respondents were able to select a number of devices available in the home to complete assignments or facilitate instruction. The following are those devices: desktop computers, laptop, Ipad , and Ipod, and android tablet, and Chromebook, smart phone and other.

The following are example responses defining/explaining virtual learning. One student noted, "The best learning," while another wrote, "Exciting." Another student noted, "Helps you learn more." A faculty member noted, "Allowing students to take classes at their own pace," while another respondent wrote, "I feel that virtual learning is a good tool when blended, virtual learning blended with individualized one-on-one instruction, I feel is very productive. It has been for my students (see Figure 42-43)."

 Parents/guardians responded that the following devices are available for use at home: 29% (7 out of 24) desktop computer , 54% (13 out of 24) laptop computer, 21% (5 out of 24) IPad, 21% (5 out of 24) IPod, 83% (20 out of 24) smart phone and 8% (2 out of 24) other items. Overwhelmingly 83% of respondents found smartphone to be the number one technology device (parents/guardians could select multiple devices; therefore, the percentages are of the total population and will add up to more than 100%) (see Figure 39).

Students identified the following technology devices as the tools they felt the most confident in using to complete school assignments: 65% (28 out of 43) desktop computer, 63% (27 out of 43) laptop computer, 42% (18 out of 43) IPad, 33% (14 out of 43) IPod, 42% (18 out of 43) android tablet, 26 % (11 out of 43) Google chrome book, 65% (28 out of 43) Smartphone

Please select all of the technology devices that are available for your child to use at home.

Desk-top computer	7	29%
Lap-top computer	13	54%
iPad	5	21%
iPod	5	21%
Android Tablet	0	0%
Google Chromebook	0	0%
Smart phone	20	83%
Other	2	8%
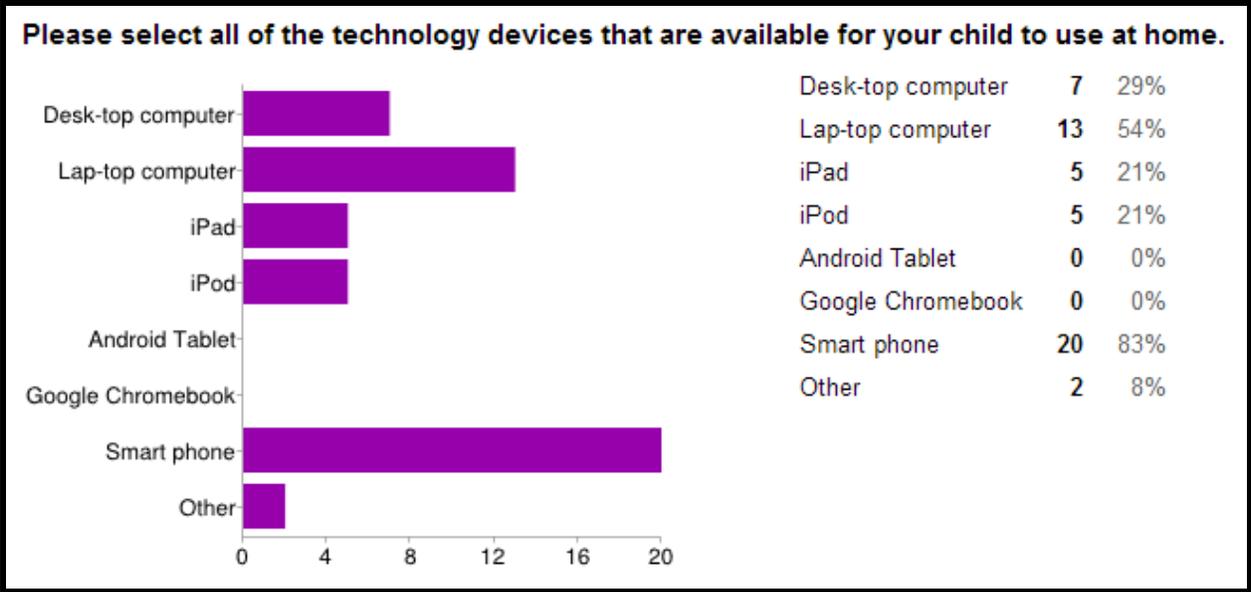
Note. Respondents could select multiple technology devices here, therefore, the percentages are of the total population and will add up to more than 100%-- The following are the devices that are available for use at home according to respondents: desktop (29%), laptop computer (54%), IPad (21%), IPod (21%), smart phone (83%) and other items (8%).

Figure 39. Parent/guardian technology devices available at home.
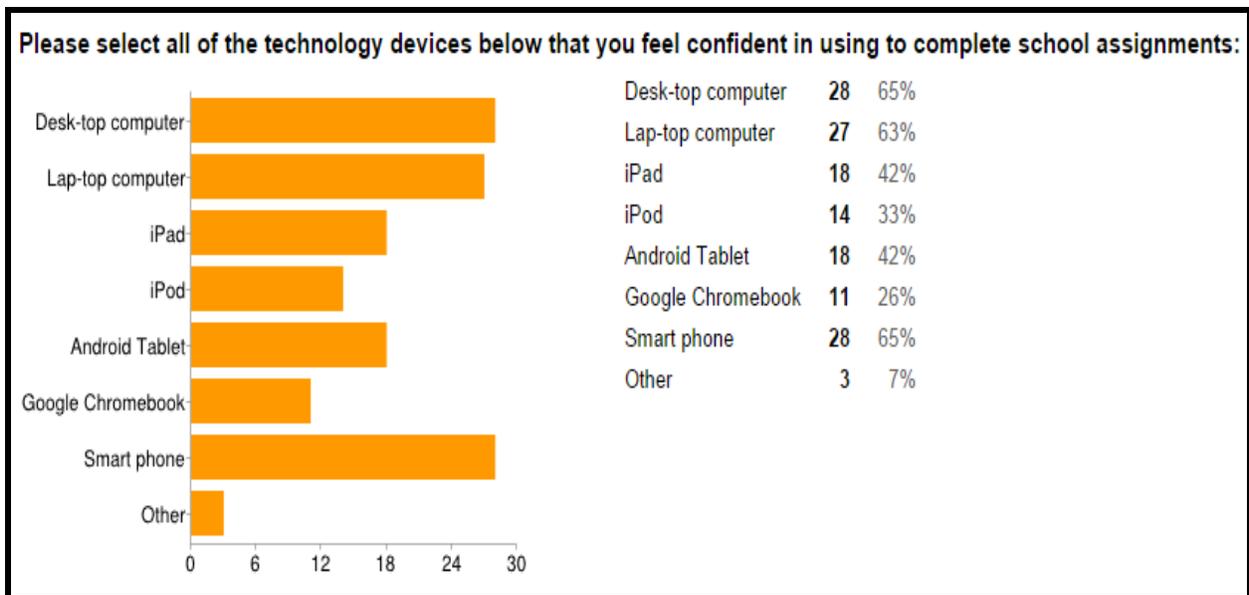
Please select all of the technology devices below that you feel confident in using to complete school assignments:

Device	Count	Percent
Desk-top computer	28	65%
Lap-top computer	27	63%
iPad	18	42%
iPod	14	33%
Android Tablet	18	42%
Google Chromebook	11	26%
Smart phone	28	65%
Other	3	7%

Note. Respondents could select multiple technology devices here, therefore, the percentages are of the total population and will add up to more than 100%-- The respondents identified the following technology devices as the devices that they feel most confident in using to complete school assignments: desktop computer (65%), Laptop computer (63%), IPad (42%), IPod (33%), android tablet (42%), Google chrome book (26%), Smartphone (65%) and other items (7%).

Figure 40. Student technology devices they feel confident using to complete school assignments.
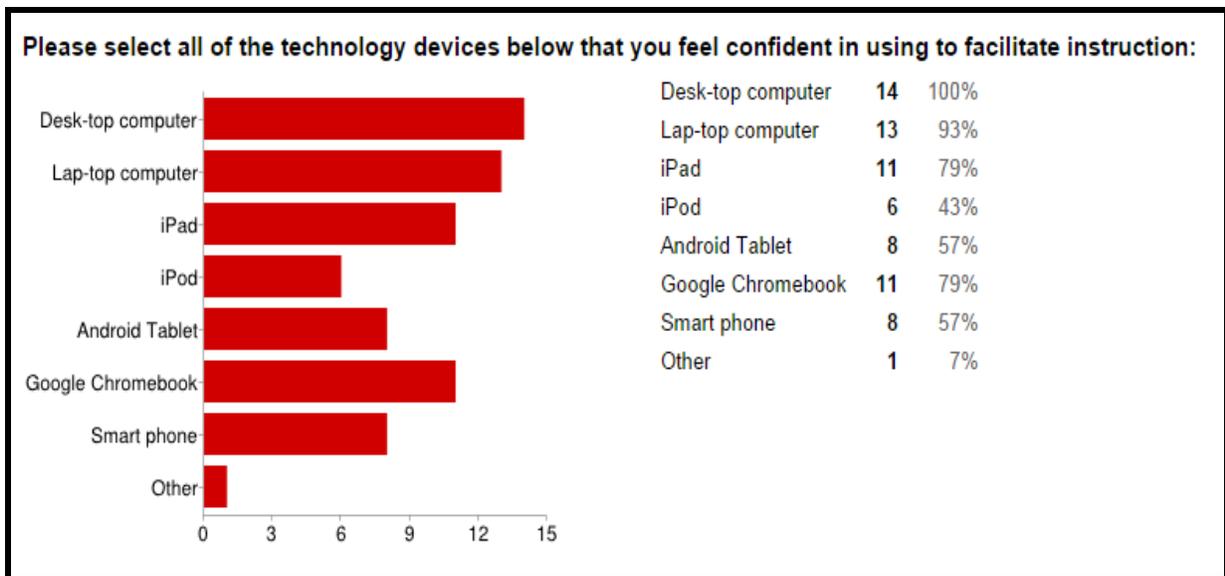
Please select all of the technology devices below that you feel confident in using to facilitate instruction:

Device	Count	Percent
Desk-top computer	14	100%
Lap-top computer	13	93%
iPad	11	79%
iPod	6	43%
Android Tablet	8	57%
Google Chromebook	11	79%
Smart phone	8	57%
Other	1	7%

 Note. Respondents could select multiple technology devices here, therefore, the percentages are of the total population and will add up to more than 100%-- Desktop computer (100%), laptop computer (93%), IPad (79%), IPod (43%), android tablet (57%), Google chrome book (79%), smart phone (57%) and other items (7%).

Figure 41. Faculty technology devices they feel confident using to facilitate instruction.

| Virtual learning is: |
| --- |
| N/a Working for some of our students and not for others. Learning through the use of technology. Allowing students to take classes at their own pace. I feel that virtual learning is a good tool when blended. Virtual learning many times can be difficult to base on students prior knowledge and understanding and their ability to read for comprehension. Virtual learning blended with individualized one on one instruction, I feel is very productive. It has been for my students. A positive way to learn with great benefits for students. The utilization of technology to help simulate an instructional environment that might otherwise be unattainable for the given student. And advantage for students who can work independently. Accessing content via computers. An excellent alternative to traditional means and flexible to serve at risk students. Classroom with technological advantage to learning from a global perspective. When technology tools are used to drive learning in the classroom. Utilizing technology to provide instruction. Good but frustrating for the students that can't read. |

Figure 42. Faculty responses to defining virtual learning.

Virtual learning:
- Good but it hurts people eyes.   - Using computers by going online and working.   (Blank)   - Hands on.   - Too hard. It didn't help me at all.   - Crazy   - Fun   - Sometimes better than using a book.   - Great   - Okay   - I don't know.   - Easy   - Good   - Doing my work on computer.   - None   - Always I learn good.   - A helpful way to learn.   - The best learning.   - Exciting   - Everything   - Awesome!   - Whatever it is.   - No okay   - Complicated   - Learning by yourself. Like Plato Web.   - Not working for me.   - Wack   - Good and faster.   - Boring hard   - Aggravating   - Helps you to learn more.   - A very good program, but it should be teaching/virtual learning because some stuff I do not understand when I read it.   - What the Academy teachers.   - Corny but fun.

Figure 43. Student responses to defining virtual learning.

This section discusses survey and open-ended questions in regards to asking parents/guardians, students and faculty about Plato Virtual Learning (see Figure 45-54). Plato Learning, a virtual learning platform allows students to work at home or school. **Virtual learning is:**

- Major problem
- Okay
- I have no idea what that is.
- I don't know.
- Have no idea.
- Learning online.
- No answer
- I don't know what that is.
- Computer programs
- Helping my child.
- learning on computer.
- Major problem according to my child.
- No comment
- No answer
- Okay, need more teachers time because of his inability to focus.
- Don't know what that is.
- On the computer.

Figure 44. Parent/Guardian thoughts on virtual learning.

and 7% (3 out of 43) other items. Smartphones and desktop computers were identified as the most accessible devices at 65% (students could select multiple devices; therefore, the percentages are of the total population and will add up to more than 100%) (see Figure 40). As per the research of Freeley and Hanzelka (2009), "We keep our focus on each student and find the item of interest or hook for his or her learning to take off."

The faculty identified the following technology devices as those they feel most confident in using to facilitate instruction: 100% (14 out of 14) desktop computer, 93% (13 out of 14) laptop computer, 79% (11 out of 14) IPad, 43% (6 out of 14) IPod, 57% (8 out of 72) android tablet, 79% (11 out of 14) Google chrome book, 57% (8 out of 14) smart phone and 7% (1 out of 14) other items . Overwhelmingly, 100% of the respondents found desktop computers to be the number one technology device faculty feel most confident in using to facilitate instruction (faculty could select multiple devices; therefore, the percentages are of the total population and will add up to more than 100%)(see Figure 41). As per the research of Berrett (2012), the new vision of high school puts students at the center of their learning. Everything we need to know regarding how to get each student excited about his/her education is in each student's head and is available free for the asking.

Thirty-six percent (5 out of 14) of the faculty respondents were able to describe virtual learning. Faculty noted learning through use of technology, utilization of technology to help stimulate an instructional environment and access content via computer (see Figure 42).

Nine percent (3 out of 34) of the student respondents were able to define virtual learning (see Figure 43). Students evinced 32% (11 out of 34) positive responses in regards to virtual learning. The following positive responses were among those identified by the respondents: exciting, good, faster, awesome, and fun.

Twenty-four percent (4 out of 17) of the parent/guardian respondents indicated that they had positive thoughts about virtual learning. Parent/guardians' noted learning online and learning on the computer (see Figure 44).

Plato Virtual Learning

When asked if parent/guardian received information about Plato Learning, faculty respondents were in the following categories: 21% (5 out of 24) "strongly disagree," 16% (4 out of 24) "disagree," 42% neutral, 13% (3 out of 24) "agree," and 8% (2 out of 24) "strongly agree" (see Figure 45). As per research of Cavanaugh (2012), courses were created in Michigan that allowed students to stay at home and take courses. These classes were structured for students with mobility issues or athletes who travel a lot.

When asked if parent/guardian understands how to help their child with Plato Learning, parent/guardian respondents were in the following categories: 20% (5 out of 24) "strongly disagree," 38% (9 out of 24) "disagree," 25% (6 out of 24) neutral, 13% (3 out of 24) "agree," and 4% (1 out of 24) "strongly agree" (see Figure 46). Parent/guardian should have an understanding of how to help their child with Plato Learning, as per research of Hagel (2011), "I think this is harder than going to class every day with a teacher because the student has to be self-motivated."

When asked if Plato Learning is helpful, parent/guardian respondents were in the following categories: 17% (4 out of 24) "strongly disagree," 4% (1 out of 24) "disagree," 42% (10 out of 24) neutral, 37% (9 out of 24) "agree," and 0% (0 out of 24) "strongly agree" (Figure 47). As per research of Cavanaugh (2012), according to the information provided by Mrs. Fardell, educational technology manager for the State Department in Michigan, students involved in this virtual initiative are doing some form of blended learning, combining a

I have been provided with information about PLATO Learning.

1	5	21%
2	4	16%
3	10	42%
4	3	13%
5	2	8%
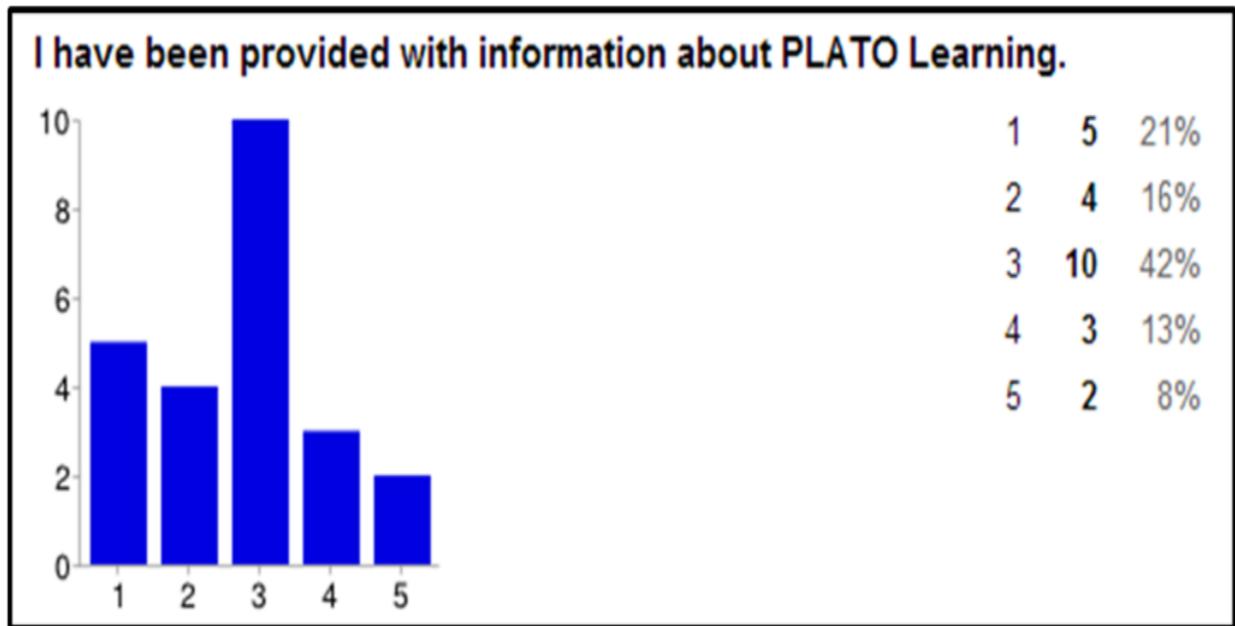
 Note. Thirty-seven percent responded at a one or two on Likert scale of "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree", 42% responded at a three on the Likert scale of "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" and 21% responded at a four or five on the Likert scale of "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree".

Figure 45. Faculty thoughts about parents/guardians receiving information about Plato

Learning.

I understand how to help my child with PLATO Learning.

1	5	20%
2	9	38%
3	6	25%
4	3	13%
5	1	4%
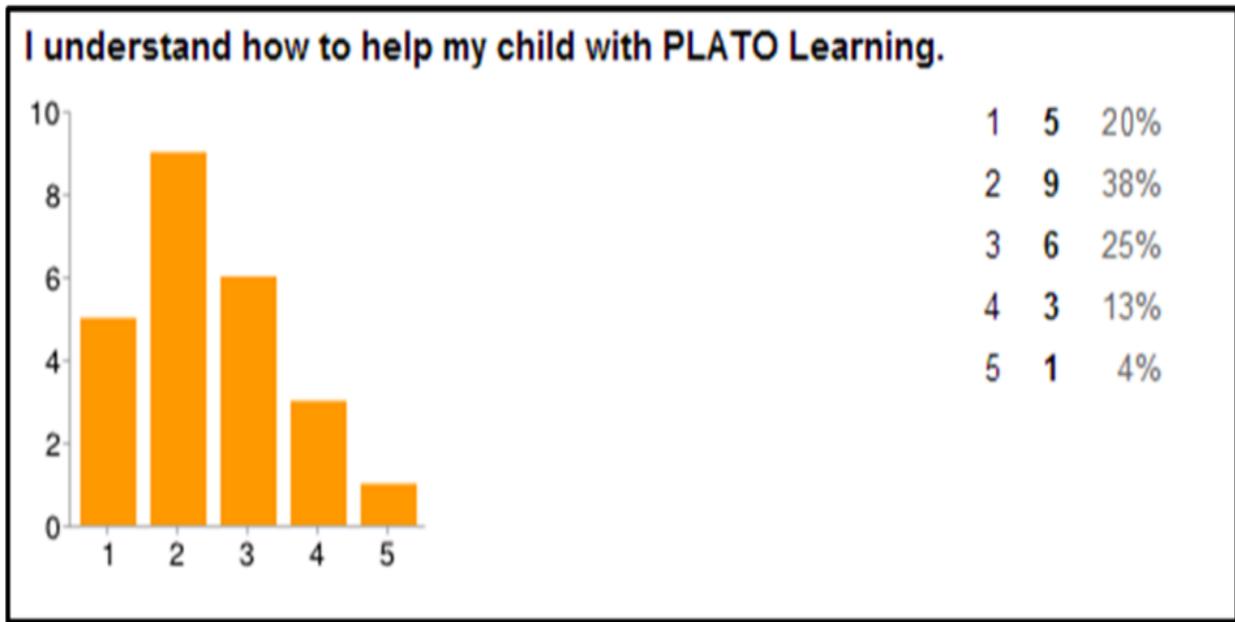
Note. Fifty-eight percent of the parent/guardian responded at a one or two on Likert scale of "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree", 25% responded at a three on the Likert scale of "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree", and 17% responded at a four or five on the Likert scale of "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree".

Figure 46. Parent/Guardian understand how to help child with Plato Learning.

I believe that PLATO Learning is helpful.

1	4	17%
2	1	4%
3	10	42%
4	9	37%
5	0	0%
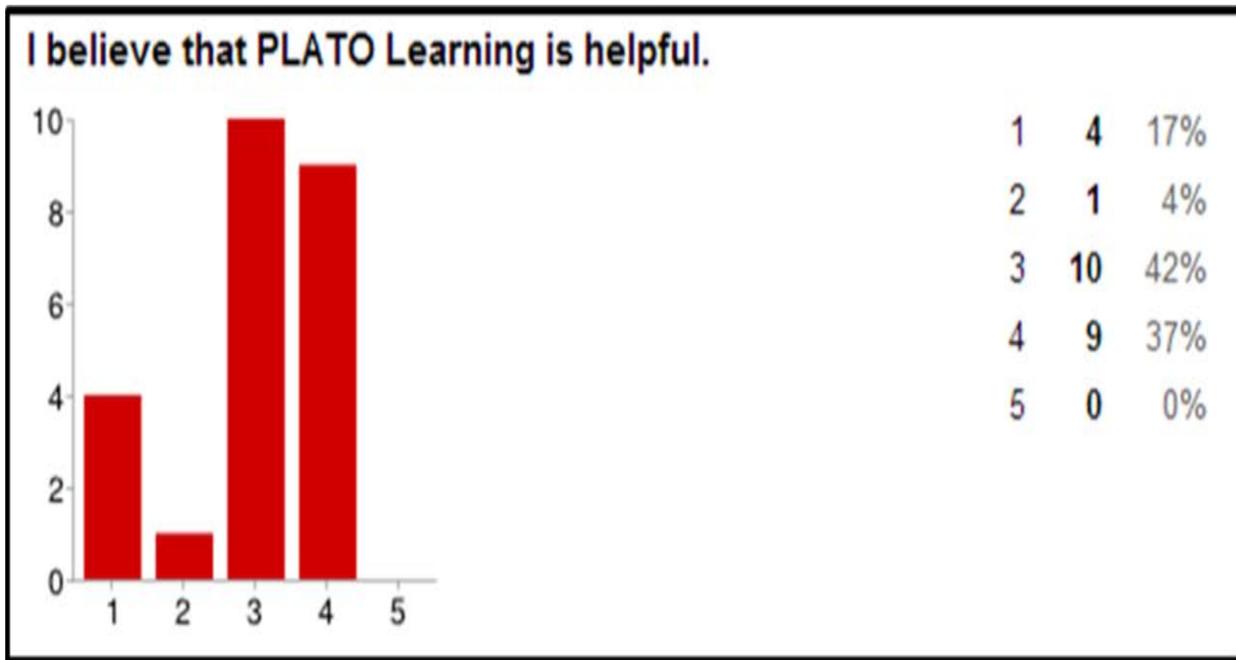
Note. Twenty-one percent of the faculty responded at a one or two on Likert scale of "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree", 42% responded at a three on the Likert scale of "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" and 37% responded at a four or five on the Likert scale of "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree".

Figure 47. Parent/Guardian belief that Plato Learning is helpful.

traditional approach with a virtual approach. This method is allowing educators and administrators in Michigan to lure dropouts back into the school system.

When asked if Plato Learning is helpful, faculty respondents were in the following categories: 0% (0 out of 11) "strongly disagree," 7% (1 out of 11) "disagree," 29% (4 out of 11) neutral, 50% (7 out of 11) "agree," and 14% (2 out of 11) "strongly agree" (Figure 48). As per research of Cavanaugh (2012), the combination of the traditional approach with the virtual approach provides an opportunity for the drop out or at-risk youth to become reacquainted with the educational process and to acquire course credits more effectively and quickly.

When asked about student confidence in taking and passing classes with North Carolina Virtual Public School, student respondents were in the following categories: 12% (5 out of 43) "strongly disagree," 12% (5 out of 43) "disagree," 29% (13 out of 43) neutral, 14% (6 out of 43) "agree," and 33% (14 out of 43) "strongly agree" (Figure 49). As per research of Adams (2012), the virtual approach equips dropouts to come back to school without the stigma that students would normally feel.

When asked about faculty confidence in facilitating classes through North Carolina Virtual Public School, faculty respondents were in the following categories: 14% (2 out of 16) "strongly disagree," 0% (0 out of 16) "disagree," 29% (4 out of 16) neutral, 36% (5 out of 16) "agree," and 21% (3 out of 16) "strongly agree" (see Figure 50). As per the research of Tomassini (2012), Widening Advancements for Youth (WAY) is based out of Belleville, Michigan, and is a nonprofit organization that provides instruction through online lessons and mentoring based on the needs of each individual student. This program started accepting students in September of 2012 and presently has approximately 160 students enrolled with continuous growth.

I believe that PLATO Learning is helpful.

|		
1	0	0%
2	1	7%
3	4	29%
4	7	50%
5	2	14%
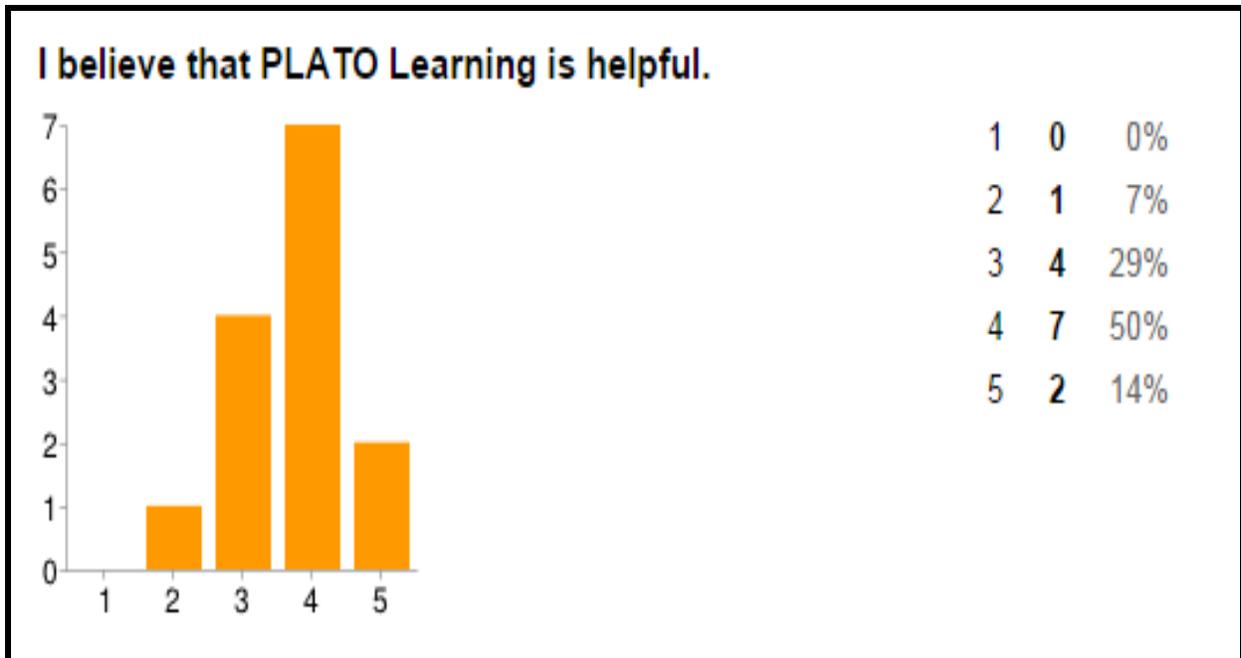
Note. Seven percent of the faculty responded at a one or two on Likert scale of "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree", 29% responded at a three on the Likert scale of "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" and 64% responded at a four or five on the Likert scale of "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree".

Figure 48. Faculty response to the belief that Plato Learning is helpful.
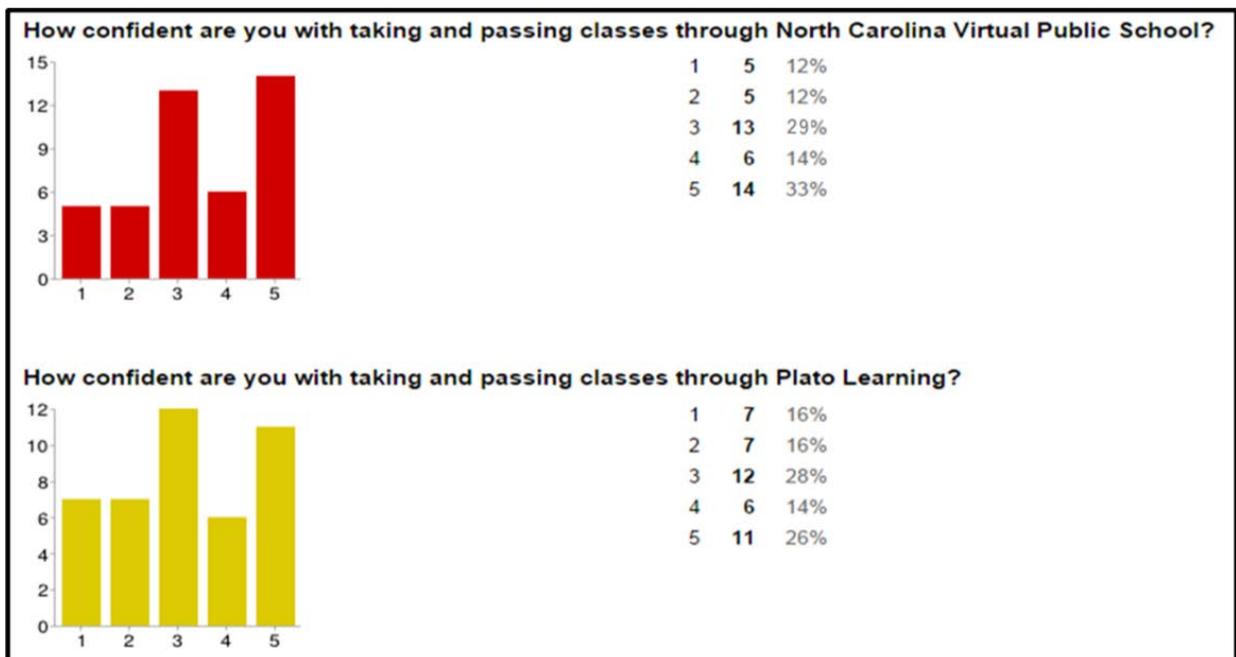
Note. Twenty-four percent of students responded at a one or two on Likert scale of "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree", in regards to their confidence in taking and passing classes with North Carolina Virtual Public School. Twenty-nine percent responded at a three on the Likert scale of "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" and 47% responded at a four or five on the Likert scale of "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". Thirty-two percent of the students responded at a one or two on Likert scale of "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" in regards to their confidence in taking and passing classes through Plato Learning . Twenty-eight percent responded at a three on the Likert scale of "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" and 40% responded at a four or five on the Likert scale of "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree".

Figure 49. Students confidence with virtual learning.

When asked about faculty confidence in facilitating class through Plato Learning, faculty respondents were in the following categories: 14% (2 out of 14) "strongly disagree," 0% (0 out of 14) "disagree," 21% (3 out of 14) neutral, 44% (6 out of 14) "agree," and 21% (3 out of 14) "strongly agree" (see Figure 50).

When asked about student understanding with Plato Learning, students respondents were in the following categories: 7% (3 out of 43) "strongly disagree," 5% (2 out of 43) "disagree," 32% (14 out of 43) neutral, 12% (5 out of 43) "agree," and 44% (19 out of 43) "strongly agree" (see Figure 51). Also, when asked if Plato Learning is helpful, student respondents were in the following categories: 14% (6 out of 43) "strongly disagree," 14% (6 out of 43) "disagree," 40% (17 out of 43) neutral, 7% (3 out of 43) "agree," and 25% (11 out of 43) "strongly agree"(see Figure 51). As per the research of Freely and Hanzelka (2009), New Hampshire schools created helpful programs that focused on virtual learning (personalized), student engagement and alternate approaches to student assessment.

When asked about the level of understanding the faculty has with using Plato Learning, the faculty respondents were in the following categories: 7% (1 out of 14) "strongly disagree," 21% (3 out of 14) "disagree," 37% (5 out of 14) neutral, 21% (3 out of 14) "agree," 14 % (2 out of 14) "strongly agree" (see Figure 52). As per the research of Nagel (2011), the onset of online and blended learning provides an outlet for students to have access to quality courses and an excellent education at any location.

When asked about the teachers at the school being studied understands how to use Plato Learning, student respondents were in the following categories: 5% (2 out of 43) "strongly disagree," 2% (1 out of 43) "disagree," 32% (14 out of 43) neutral, 21% (9 out of 43) "agree," 40% (17 out of 43) "strongly agree" (see Figure 53). As per the research of

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How confident are you with facilitating classes through North Carolina Virtual Public School?

1	2	14%
2	0	0%
3	4	29%
4	5	36%
5	3	21%

How confident are you with facilitating classes through Plato Learning?

1	2	14%
2	0	0%
3	3	21%
4	6	44%
5	3	21%
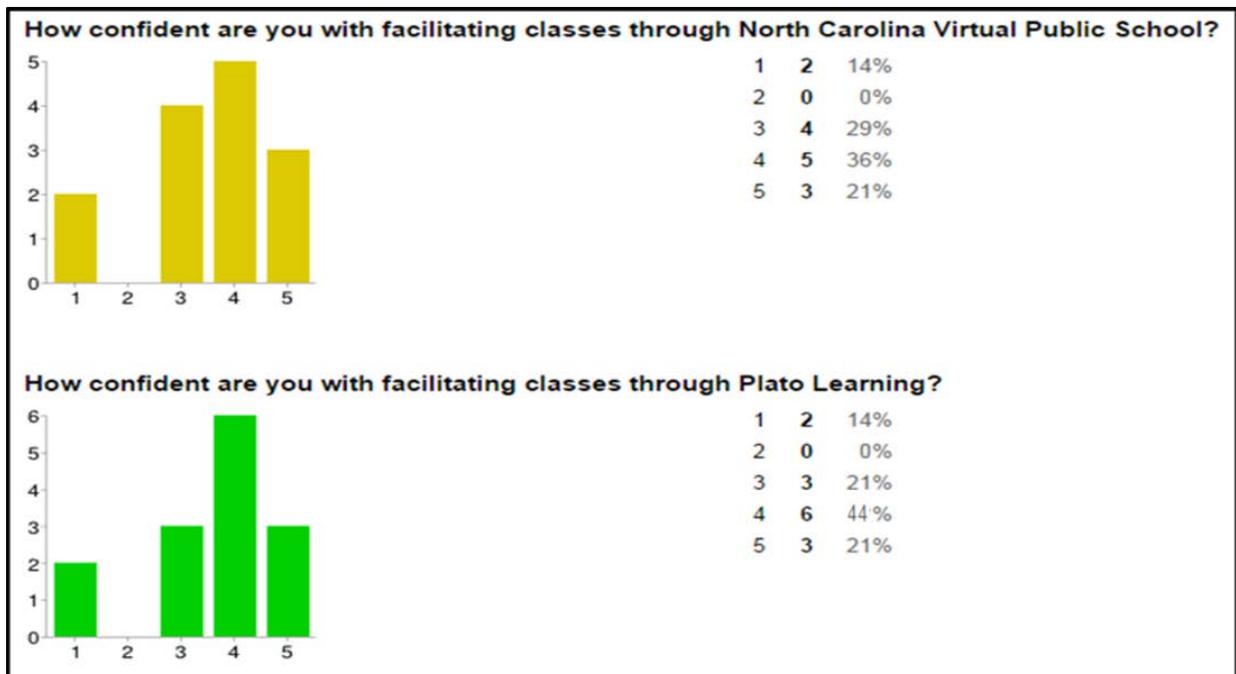
Note. Fourteen percent of faculty responded at a one or two on likert scale of "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" in regards to their confidence in facilitating through with North Carolina Virtual Public School. Twenty-nine percent responded at a three on the Likert scale of "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" and 57% responded at a four or five on the Likert scale of "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". Fourteen percent of the students responded at a one or two on likert scale of "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" in regards to their confidence in facilitating classes through Plato Learning. Twenty-one percent responded at a three on the Likert scale of "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" and 65% responded at a four or five on the Likert scale of "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree".

Figure 50. Faculty confidence in facilitating through NCVPS and Plato Learning.

I understand how to use PLATO Learning.

1	3	7%
2	2	5%
3	14	32%
4	5	12%
5	19	44%

I believe that PLATO Learning is helpful.

1	6	14%
2	6	14%
3	17	40%
4	3	7%
5	11	25%
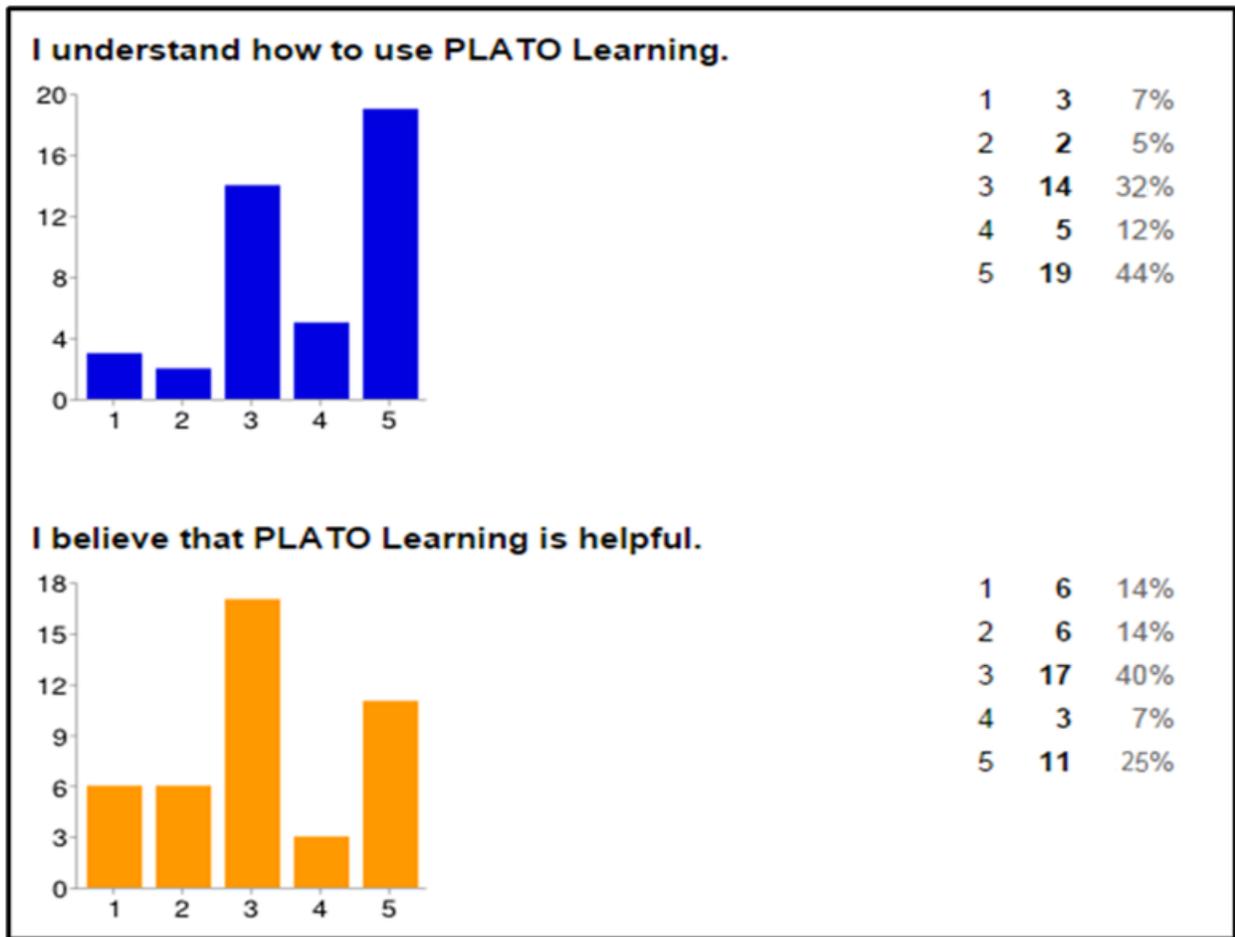
Note. Twelve percent of the students responded at a one or two on Likert scale of "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" in regards to students understanding how to use Plato Learning. Thirty-two percent responded at a three on the Likert scale of "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" and 56% responded at a four or five on the Likert scale of "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". Twenty-eight percent of the students responded at a one or two on Likert scale of "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" in regards to student belief that Plato Learning is helpful. Forty percent responded at a three on the Likert scale of "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" and 32% responded at a four or five on the Likert scale of "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree".

Figure 51. Students confidence with Plato Learning and belief it is helpful.
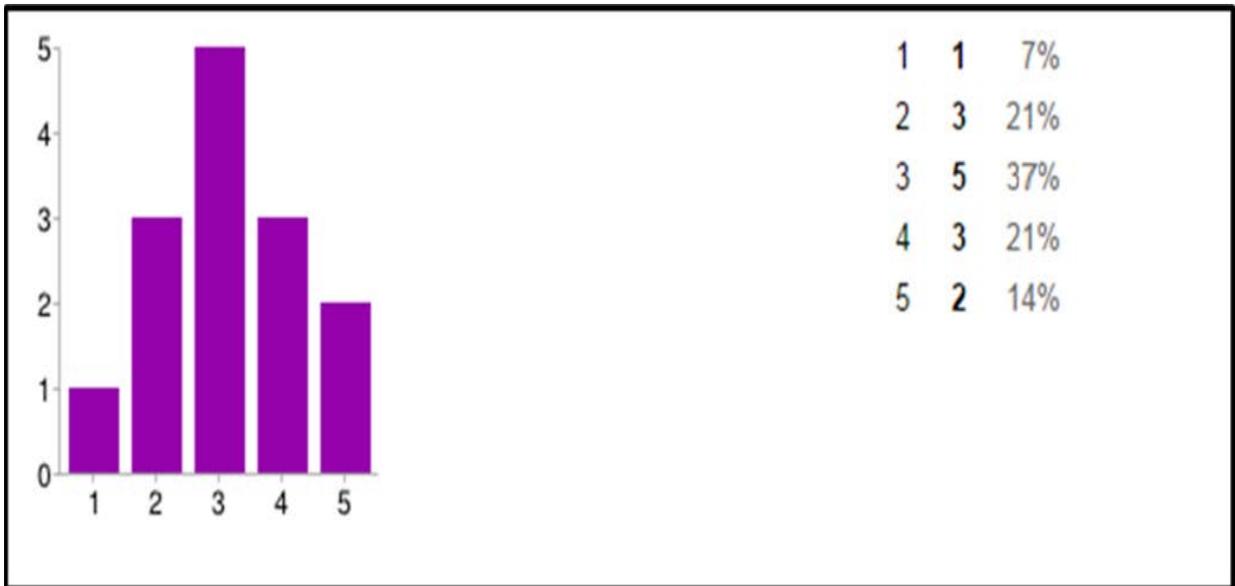
1	1	7%
2	3	21%
3	5	37%
4	3	21%
5	2	14%

Note. Twenty-nine percent of the faculty responded at a one or two on Likert scale of "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree", 37% responded at a three on the Likert scale of "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" and 35% responded at a four or five on the Likert scale of "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree".

Figure 52. Faculty level of understanding with Plato.

All teachers at my school understand how to use PLATO Learning.

1	2	5%
2	1	2%
3	14	32%
4	9	21%
5	17	40%
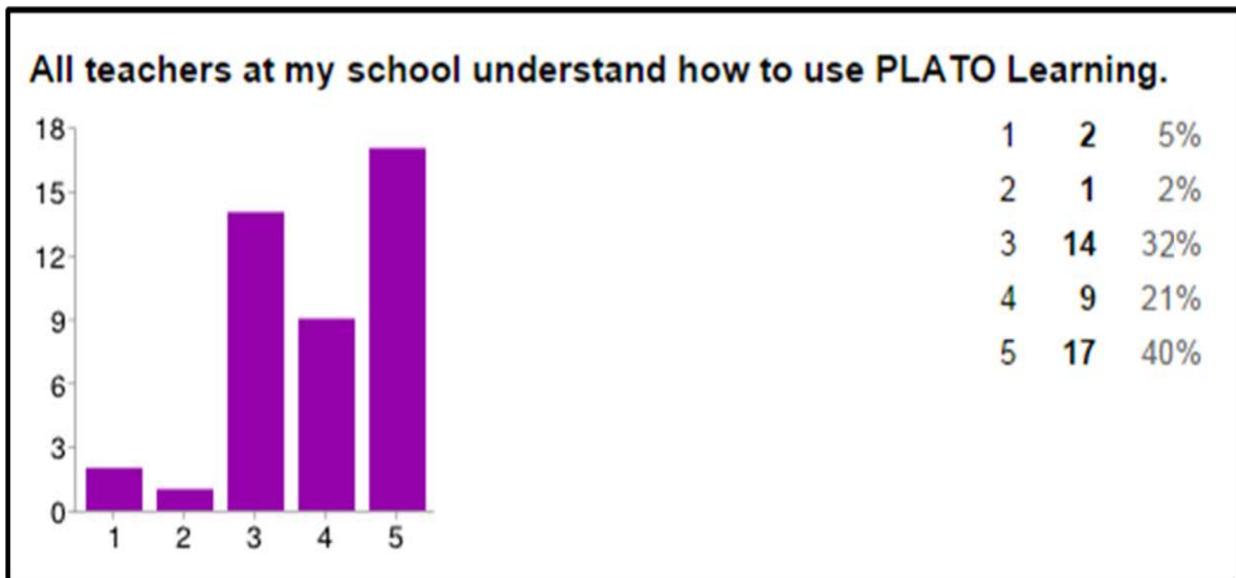
Note. Seven percent of students responded at a one or two on likert scale of "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree", 32% responded at a three on the Likert scale of "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" and 61% responded at a four or five on the Likert scale of "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree".

Figure 53. Students confidence that all teachers at the school understands how to use Plato.

www.collegeparents.org, virtual learning (personalized) has created a focus for teachers and educators to examine teaching and learning within the context of the subject and classroom.

When asked about the faculty understanding of how to use Plato Learning, the faculty respondents were in the following categories: 7% (1 out of 14) "strongly disagree," 21% (3 out of 14) "disagree," 37% (5 out of 14) neutral, 21% (3 out of 14) "agree," and 14% (2 out of 14) "strongly agree"(see Figure 54). In *Transforming Education Through Technology*, Susan Patrick, President and CEO of iNACOL, the International Association for K-12 Online learning states, "Next generation learning models that allow students to move at their own pace, at any time, any place with personalized learning delivered by teachers using high quality digital curriculum are being developed and holds tremendous promise for improving student learning and performance" (Nagel, 2011).

Seat Time

To truly understand seat time, the evolution of credit hour needs to be defined. The credit hour is also referred to as the Carnegie Unit. According to this framework, a student must be seated in a classroom for a specific amount of time to receive credit . This model is true for all students regardless of prior knowledge, skills or experiences as a means of credit accrual in the United States (Pate, 2013).

The Carnegie Unit is a system developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century that awarded academic credit on the amount of time students spent in direct contact with a teacher. The standard for the Carnegie unit is 120 hours of contact time with an instructor—i.e., one hour of instruction a day, 5 days a week for 24 weeks or 7, 200 of instructional time over the course of an academic year (edglossary.org, 2013). The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching created the unit in 1906. Since schools have used it as a basis for a
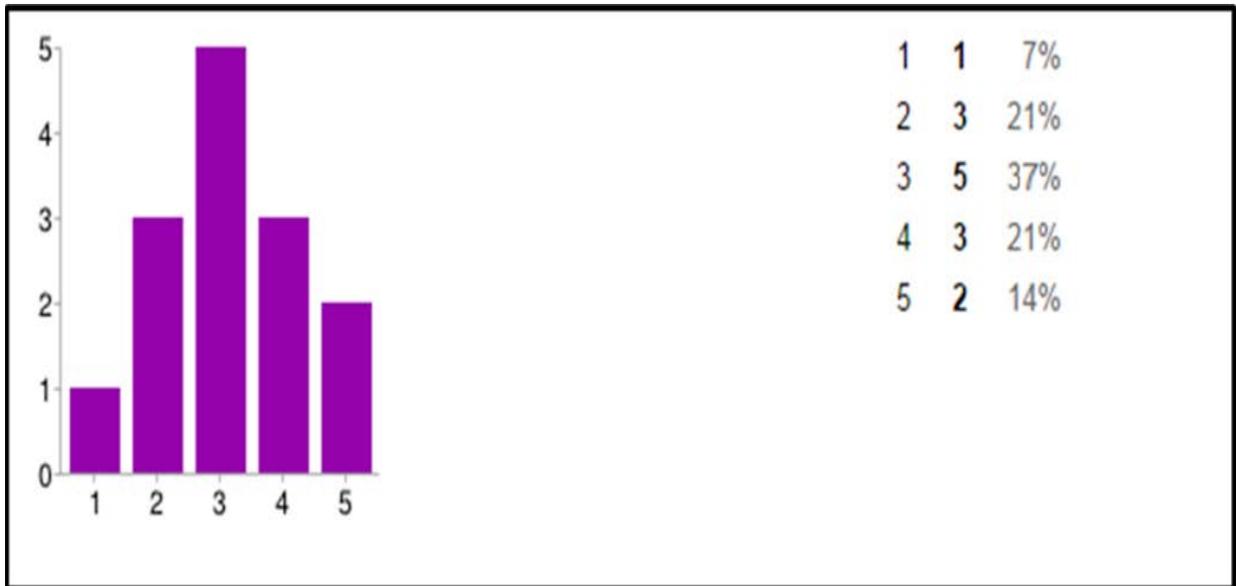
Note. Twenty-nine percent of the faculty responded at a one or two on Likert scale of "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree", 37% responded at a three on the Likert scale of "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" and 35% responded at a four or five on the Likert scale of "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree".

Figure 54. Faculty level of understanding with Plato.

time-based awarding high school credit for coursework (Berrett, 2012). According to Elena

Silva, a senior associate for research and policy for Carnegie, the use of the unit happened by

default and a time-based measurement has endured as the metric largely because its meaning can

be universally understood (Berrett, 2012). Ms. Silva feels now that "we're at a point where we

could do better" (Berrett, 2012). Paul Fain, in the article entitled *More Cracks in the Credit

Hour*, states that the credit hour is grossly embedded as a measuring stick for academic quality

(Fain, 2012). Furthermore, Fain believes the Carnegie Unit is behind the time and not the most

appropriate way to measure student learning. There are a number of critics, according to Fain,

who believe "seat time" has created a disconnect in progress to new approaches like online

programs that are self-paced and competency based—where students earn credits for what they

know, as opposed to how much time they spend on course material (Fain, 2012).

According to a recent report from the New America Foundation and Education Sector the

credit hour's challenges are connected to the challenges students face in their unsuccessful

attempt to transfer credits between institutions (Fain, 2012). The report goes on to recognize that

the Carnegie Foundation did not intend for their institution to be a barometer for learning, but

only a means for professor pension plans (Fain, 20102).

Based on research by Adams(2012), the Carnegie Unit is defined as one hour of faculty-

student contact per week and two hours of outside work over a 15-week semester. Thomas

Toch, a researcher at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, uses the

following example to describe this concept: A total of 120 hours in one subject, meeting four or

five times a week for 40 to 60 minutes, for 36 to 40 weeks each year earns the student one "unit"

of high school credit (Adams, 2012). When designed it was primarily to determine whether or

not faculty members had the opportunity to receive a pension plan (Adams, 2012). Much of the

academic enterprise employs this unit as its foundation, including student and faculty workloads, schedules, financial aid, and degree requirements (Adams, 2012).

According to the North Carolina State Board of Education for North Carolina, in reference to the "Course for Credit", the policy states the following (sbepolicy.dpi.state.nc.us):

1. Must consist of 150 clock hours of instruction in a traditional schedule; or

2. Must consist of a minimum of 135 clock hours of instruction in a block schedule; developed curriculum guides, or Advanced Placement syllabi in which high school students are enrolled; and

3. Must be directed by a teacher

   a. English I, II, III, IV

   b. Algebra I, Algebra II, Geometry, and higher level mathematics course

   c. Biology, Earth/Environmental Science, and a physical science course that

   d. is used to fulfill the third science requirement

   e. Civics and Economics, US History, World History

   f. First year of a World Language

   g. Second year of the same World Language

Furthermore, the policy states that courses taken for high school graduation at community colleges, public/private colleges are exempt from the 135 or 150 instructional hours with the exception of the following (sbepolicy.dpi.state.nc.us):

1. One credit of Health/Physical Education

Lastly, the policy grants an explanation of how students can receive course credit for e-learning classes. Exploring these alternatives to students technically being in school, but still meeting the "hours" mandated to meet the identified standards while simultaneously meeting the

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differentiated needs of students, perhaps assisting in them staying in school until they graduate (Retrieved from sbepolicy.dpi.state.nc.us).

Attendance

This section discusses the survey responses dealing with attendance (see Figures 55-57). One hundred percent (24 out of 24) of the parents/guardians responded to this question. Fifty percent (12 out of 24) of the parents responded that their child failed a class because of attendance; whereas 50% (12 out of 24) of the respondents noted that their child did not fail a class because of attendance.

Forty-nine percent (21 out of 43) of the students responded that they did fail a class due to attendance and 51% (22 out of 43) did not fail a class because of attendance. Thirty-six percent (5 out of 14) of faculty respondents noted that they failed students due to attendance. Twenty-one percent (3 out of 14) of faculty respondents did not fail students due to attendance. The remaining 43% (6 out of 14), responded with N/A. One student noted, "Seat time does not allow you to catch up as quick," while another respondent wrote, "Seat time want let me get credits," another student noted "Helps students get done faster."

The parents responded at 50% (12 out of 24) that my child failed a class due to attendance (see Figure 55). The remaining 50% (12 out of 24) responded that their child did not fail a class due to attendance. As per research of www.ncga.state.nc.us, seat time has much to do with attendance. The responsibility to ensure that students are in school resides with parents and guardians.

My child has failed a class due to attendance.

No [12]

Yes [12]

| Yes | 12 | 50% |
| No | 12 | 50% |
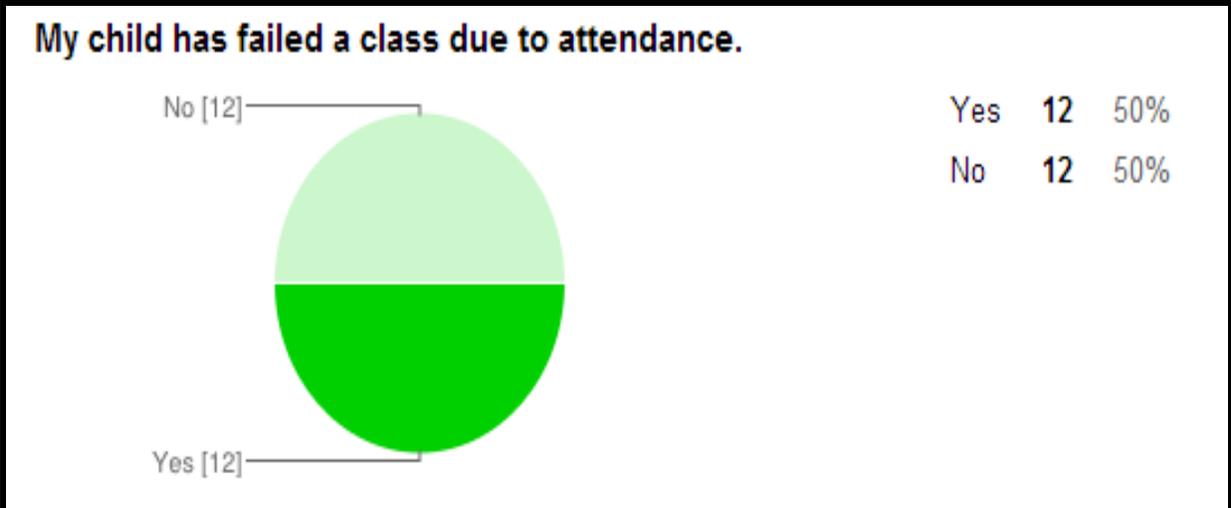
Note. Fifty percent of parents responded that my child failed a class due to attendance, whereas; 50% responded that my child did not fail a class due to attendance.

Figure 55. Parent/guardian child failed a class due to attendance.

I have failed a class due to attendance.

No [22]

Yes	**21**	49%
No	**22**	51%

Yes [21]
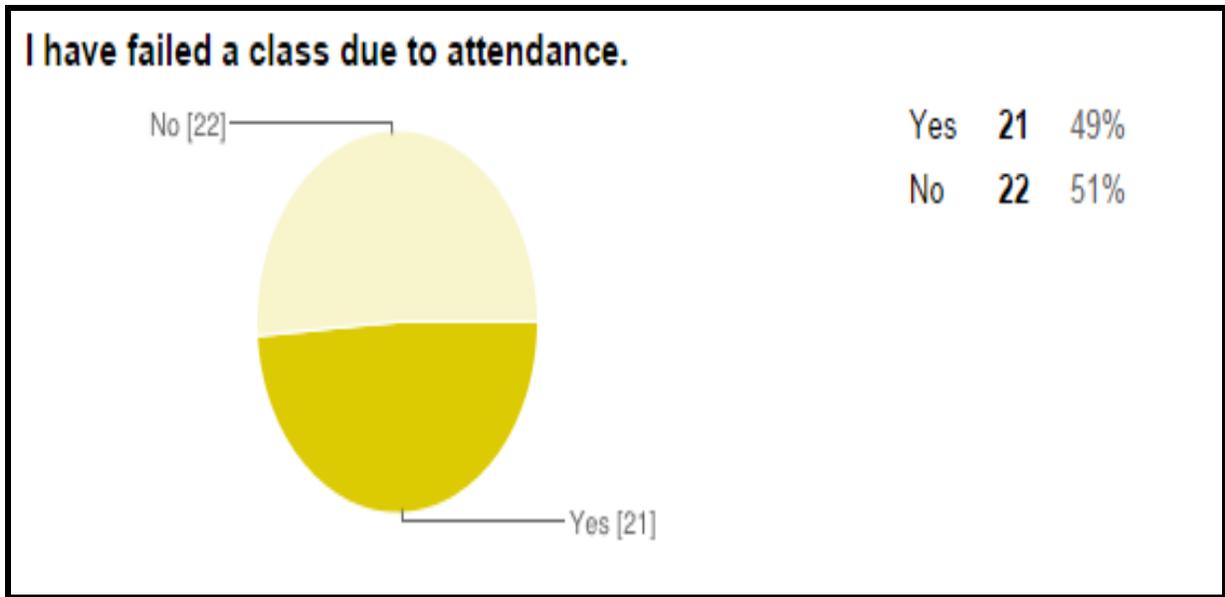
Note. Forty-nine percent of students responded that I have failed a class due to attendance, whereas; 51% did not fail a class due to attendance.

Figure 56. Student failed class due to attendance.

I have failed students in a class due to attendance.

NA [6]

No [3]

Yes [5]

Yes	5	36%
No	3	21%
NA	6	43%
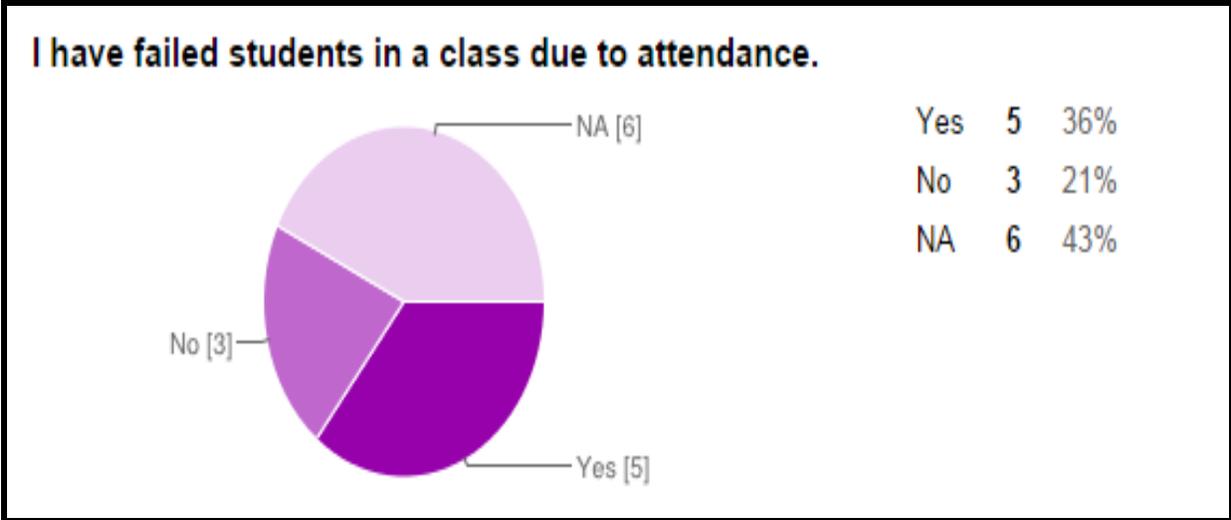
Note. Thirty-six percent of faculty stated that they have failed students due to attendance. Twenty-one percent of the faculty has not failed students due to attendance and 43% of faculty said this question did not apply to them.

Figure 57. Faculty failed student because of attendance.

Students responded at 49% (21 out of 43) that I have failed a class due to attendance, whereas; 51% (22 out of 43) did not fail a class due to attendance (see Figure 56). As per research of www.ncga.state.nc.us, students must be in attendance on a regular basis in order for effective teaching and learning to take place.

The faculty responded at 36% (5 out of 14) that they have failed students due to attendance. Twenty-one percent (3 out of 14) of the faculty has not failed students due to attendance. Forty-three percent (6 out of 14) of faculty said this question did not apply to them (see Figure 57). As per research of www.ncga.state.nc.us, to ensure regular attendance by students falls on the schools in the accuracy of record keeping on student attendance based on Compulsory Attendance Law of North Carolina.

Seat time discussed earlier has much to do with attendance, especially in North Carolina (Retrieved from www.ncga.state.nc.us). The Compulsory Attendance law requires that every child between the ages of seven and sixteen years old attend school on a regular basis. This requirement is the responsibility of every parent and/or guardian (Retrieved from www.ncga.state.nc.us):

1. No person shall encourage, entire or counsel any child of compulsory school age to be unlawfully absent from school. The parent and/or guardian, or custodian, of a child shall notify the school of the reason for each known absence of the child, in accordance with local school board policy.

2. The principal, superintendent, or designee of the principal or superintendent shall have the right to excuse a child temporarily from attendance on account of sickness or other unavoidable cause that does not constitute unlawful absence as defined by the state Board of Education. The term "school" as used in this section includes all

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public schools and any nonpublic schools which have teachers and curricula that are approved by the State Board of Education.

3. All nonpublic schools receiving and instructing children of compulsory school age shall be required to make, maintain, and render attendance records of those children and maintain the minimum curriculum standards required of public schools. If a nonpublic school refuses or neglects to make, maintain, and render required attendance records, attendance at that school shall not be accepted in lieu of attendance at the public school of the district to which the child shall be assigned. Instruction in a nonpublic school shall not be regarded as meeting the requirements of the law unless the courses of instruction run concurrently with the term of the public school in the district and extend for at least as long a term.

4. After ten accumulated unexcused absences in a school year, the principal or the principal's designee shall review any report or investigation prepared under G.S. 115C-381 and shall confer with the student and the student's parent, guardian, or custodian, if possible, to determine whether the parent, guardian, or custodian has received notification pursuant to this section and made a good faith effort to comply with the law. If the principal or the principal's designee determines that the parent, guardian, or custodian has not made a good faith effort to comply with the law, the principal shall notify the district attorney and the director of social services of the county where the child resides. If the principal or the principal's designee determines that the parent, guardian, or custodian has made a good faith effort to comply with the law, the principal may file a complaint with the juvenile court counselor pursuant to Chapter 7B of the General Statutes that the child is habitually absent from school

without a valid excuse. Upon receiving notification by the principal or the principal's designee, the director of social services shall determine whether to undertake an investigation under GS 7B-302.

The county in southeastern North Carolina addresses this in two board policies: School Calendar and time for learning, and Attendance (NCSBA Legal/Policy Services policy.microscribepub.com--school district in Southeast, NC, Board of Education Policy Manual, 2013).

Students must be in attendance on a regular basis in order for effective teaching and learning to take place. North Carolina requires students from ages 7-16 attend school regularly. The responsibility to ensure that students are in school resides with parents and guardians. The other responsibility to ensure regular attendance by students falls on the schools in the accuracy of record keeping on student attendance based on Compulsory Attendance Law of North Carolina.

Excused Absences are permitted when a student misses a day of school due to the following reasons:

1. personal illness or injury that makes the student physically unable to attend school,

2. isolation ordered by the State Board of Health,

3. death in the immediate family,

4. medical or dental appointment,

5. participation under subpoena as a witness in a court proceeding,

6. a minimum of two days each academic year for observance of an event required or suggested by the religion of the student or student's parent(s),

7. participation in a valid educational opportunity, such as travel or service as a

legislative or Governor's page, with prior approval from the principal,

8. pregnancy and related conditions or parenting, when medically necessary, or

9. visitation with the student's parent or legal guardian, at the discretion of the superintendent or designee, if the parent or legal guardian (a) is an active duty member of the uniformed services as defined by policy 4050, Children of Military Families; and (b) has been called to duty for, is on leave from, or has immediately returned from deployment to a combat zone or combat support posting.

Excessive absences are not permitted because school attendance is an essential part of teaching and learning. If a student is absent from school five or more days within a semester, the principal or designated committee will determine if the student's grade will be decreased or not (NCSBA Legal/Policy Service policy.microscribepub.com---school district in Southeast, NC, Board of Education Policy Manual, 2013). The following recommendations may be taken into account (NCSBA Legal/Policy Service policy.microscribepub.com---school district in Southeast, NC, Board of Education Policy Manual, 2013):

1. the student will not receive a passing grade for the semester,

2. the student's grade will be reduced,

3. the student will receive the grade otherwise earned, or

4. the student will be given additional time to complete the missed work before a determination of the appropriate grade is made.

5. According to this policy, students with excused absences due to documented chronic health problems are exempt (NCSBA Legal/Policy Service policy.microscribepub.com---school district in Southeast, NC, Board of Education Policy Manual, 2013).

Credit by Mastery

Credit by mastery is also referred to as competency-based learning and personalized learning, which differs from the traditional approach of accumulating credit for course by seat time (Retrieved from www.ed.gov). The following are identified strategies for credit by mastery: online and blended learning, dual enrollment, early college high schools, project-based and community-based learning and credit recovery (Retrieved from www.ed.gov). This concept offers the flexibility to allow the student to move through course content as soon as the concept is mastered by the student. Credit by mastery learning ultimately works for all skills but shows the most versatility with concrete skill and adjusts in a positive manner to online learning (Retrieved from www.ed.gov).

Students that are part of the credit by mastery program are given the opportunity to move through a series of sections that include reading selections, quizzes, classwork, project s and test. Once a student completes each section within the course and demonstrate mastery within the section they are allowed to advance to the next module. This concept of moving through sections at your own pace allows for students to advance through curriculum efficiently because either they already know the material or they have the motivation to work as hard as possible because they have a desire to graduate. Finally, credit by mastery provides an outlet for students to work longer on material that is difficult because they were able to progress through the other material quickly due to prior knowledge and/or motivation.

As stated earlier, the "course for credit" requirement, initially implemented and created by Carnegie, focuses on seat time that is necessary for a student to be in class to receive credit for a course. Amy Laitinen, deputy director for higher education at the New American Foundation states that whereas, "credit for mastery" is solely based on a student's command of

course material at a level that demonstrates a deep understanding of the content standards and application of knowledge. Laitinen, goes on to state that, "If the founder is saying, 'There's something wrong with the unit itself,' it adds a lot of weight and gravitas to the question: What is it that we're actually measuring?" (Berrett, 2012). Laitinen also believes that the credit unit is at the root of what plagues higher education and she shares her sentiments in a report entitled "Cracking the Credit Hour" (Berrett, 2012). Another staunch advocate of the change from course for credit is Pamela Tate, president of the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning. Mrs. Tate applauded the announcement by Carnegie to reassess the course for credit, calling it "long overdue" (Berrett, 2012).

The new vision of high school is schooling that puts students at the center of their learning. Everything we need to know regarding how to get each student excited about his/her education is in each student's head and is available, free for the asking. Creating an environment where students feel acceptance and empowerment, motivating them to stay in school and learn, instead of turning to the streets for their education. Education's job must be to develop skilled professionals who know how to ask the right questions and know what to do with the answers.

An additional option for students to obtain "course for credit" is Credit by Demonstrated Mastery. North Carolina is currently in the process of implementing a Credit by Demonstrated Mastery (CDM) policy change. According to the North Carolina State Board of Education (2013), beginning in the fall of 2014, students will have the option of using CDM for earning high school credits. The rationale identified for this policy change was stated as follows, "Every student deserves a high-quality education, and the Credit by Demonstrated Mastery Policy ensures that every student has the opportunity for the most rigorous and appropriate course of study based on academic progress and need" (SBE-GCS-M-001, Section 13, p. 8). According to

the NC State Board of Education, North Carolina will be joining nineteen other states which

have a similar policy in place to include: Texas, New York, Tennessee, Oregon, Alabama, Iowa,

Missouri, Ohio, Idaho, Utah, Oklahoma, Wisconsin, and Michigan (SBE-GCS-M-001, Section

13, pp. 8-9).

Elizabeth Utrup, a spokesperson for the US Department of Education, noted that at the

federal level, districts and states are encouraged to be creative and to implement practices that

they feel will be effective for the students they serve (Cavanagh, 2012). She further states that

the U.S. Department of Education believes the implementation of those practices will allow

districts and states to have more flexibility, which will allow for more productivity. Based on the

belief of the US Department of Education, various states have implemented policies that take

them away from focusing on seat time as the only means of awarding course credits. There are a

number of states that now allow credits based on proficiency and/or mastery, according to the

U.S. Department of Education (Adams, 2012):

1. Since 2003, Oregon has allowed districts and schools to use proficiency-based

   approaches for awarding credit to students. From 2004 to 2006, the state piloted the

   policy in several school districts. In 2009, state policy was expanded to require that

   all in-class work be tied explicitly to demonstrated proficiency or mastery of

   academic standards.

2. Oklahoma requires schools to allow students, upon request, to earn credits toward

   graduation in core academic subjects based on demonstrations of mastery through

   tests. Students are required to score grades of 90% or higher on those tests to receive

   credit, according to state officials.

3. In 1987, Maryland incorporated an outcome-based system in Frederick County

involving 30,000 students and 46 schools based on five essential learner behaviors. The essential learner behaviors are as follows: effective communication, problem solving and critical thinking, social cooperation and self-discipline, responsible citizenship in community and environment, and a lifestyle that values wellness and aesthetics.

4. In 2007, Michigan created a policy to grant waivers from seat time requirements to districts on a case by case basis. More than 200 schools have requested some sort of waiver over the past year, and about 5,500 students are currently making use of the flexibility, most of them through a blended-learning approach, combining in-person and online instruction.

Presently, Genesee County, located in Michigan, has implemented the "Seat Time Waiver" into their school system (Cavanagh, 2012). The idea initially started as an experiment, but now it is being adopted statewide. The program began with 1,300 students in the county who applied to become a part of the Genesee Intermediate School District (GISD) Seat Time Waiver Program. The course allows students to stay at home and take courses, according to Genesee Intermediate School District Superintendent Lisa Hagel. Mrs. Hagel states that "the program appeals to students who have health or mobility issues or athletes who travel a lot" (Retrieved from abclocal.go.com). According to Hagel (2011), "I think this is harder than going to class every day with a teacher because the student has to be self-motivated." Kassondra Noyce, a student in the program agrees that the course work is much more difficult than she thought it would be and that one has to be dedicated in order to be successful in the courses (Retrieved from abclocal.go.com).

Gary Miron, a professor at the University of Kalamazoo, believes the seat time initiative

is a monumental step in educational reform in order to increase student achievement throughout the United States (Cavanagh, 2012). Mr. Miron recognized not only a shift in traditional education in regards to seat time, but also believes it is a shift from "regulatory accountability" of schools, toward more "performance-based or market accountability". He believes that the latter accountability model affords supporters of non-traditional schools an opportunity to provide results that can be judged, as well as offering more attractive options for the parents involved with these students.

Since the beginning of 2012, over 200 schools have requested a waiver in the state of Michigan and approximately 5,500 students are taking advantage of this waiver according to Barbara Fardell, educational technology manager for the State Department in Michigan (Cavanagh, 2012). According to the information provided by Mrs. Fardell, the students involved in this initiative are doing some form of blended learning, combining a traditional approach with a virtual approach. This method is allowing educators and administrators in Michigan to lure dropouts back into the school system. The combination of the traditional approach with the virtual approach provides an opportunity for the drop out or at-risk youth to become reacquainted with the educational process and to acquire course credits more effectively and quickly. This approach also equips dropouts to come back to school without the stigma that students would normally feel, according to Mrs. Fardell (Adams, 2012).

Oakland Schools located on the outskirts of Detroit, has implemented a program that impacts 17 school districts through the Widening Advancements for Youth initiative (Tomassini, 2012). This agency has taken full advantage of the flexibility that the seat time waiver provides for its students. Widening Advancements for Youth (WAY) is based out of Belleville, Michigan, and is a nonprofit organization that provides instruction through online lessons and

mentoring based on the needs of each individual student. This program started accepting

students in September of 2012 and presently has approximately 160 students enrolled with

continuous growth. WAY offers instruction to all of its students through online and person-to-

person sessions, both of which are in laboratories, and students are expected to attend these

sessions to seek support if needed. Michael Yocum, who serves in the capacity of executive

director of learning services for Oakland, states that students work on projects in various subjects

in order to receive course credit. The staff determines whether the projects completed by the

students meet the competencies established by the districts. If so, the students are awarded

course credit for the subject area in which credits are lacking (Tomassini, 2012).

Virtual Learning and Seat Time

This section discusses the survey questions and open-ended questions in regards to asking

parents/guardians, students and faculty about the virtual learning and seat time impact on student

performance (see Figures 58-62).

The following are example responses in regards to the belief that virtual learning and seat

time impact student performance. One parent noted, "My grandson loves it," while another

respondent wrote, "Helps them stay focused." Student responses varied, one student noted, "It

helps people who are behind catch up and possibly catch up and graduate," while another

respondent wrote, "Good because they can work at their own time to help them move forward if

they want." One faculty member noted, "Seat time is too difficult for most students, often

negatively impacts students' motivation to complete task successfully in a timely manner," while

another respondent wrote, "Virtual learning allows students to work at their own pace while

mastering the skills and concepts of the content." Other faculty members noted, "Positive impact

student performance by addressing concerns of individual students and their unique needs" (see

1	1	4%
2	0	0%
3	19	79%
4	4	17%
5	0	0%
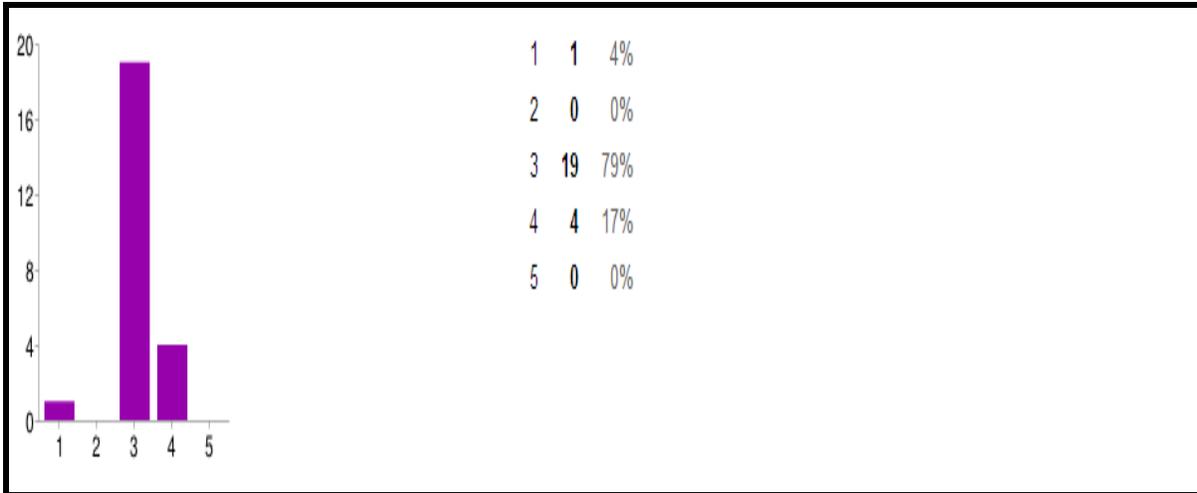
Note. Four percent of the parent/guardian responded at a one or two on Likert scale of "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree", 79% responded at a three on the Likert scale of "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" and 17% responded at a four or five on the Likert scale of "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree".

Figure 58. Parent/Guardian belief that virtual learning and seat time impact student performance.

1	1	2%
2	4	9%
3	17	40%
4	9	21%
5	12	28%
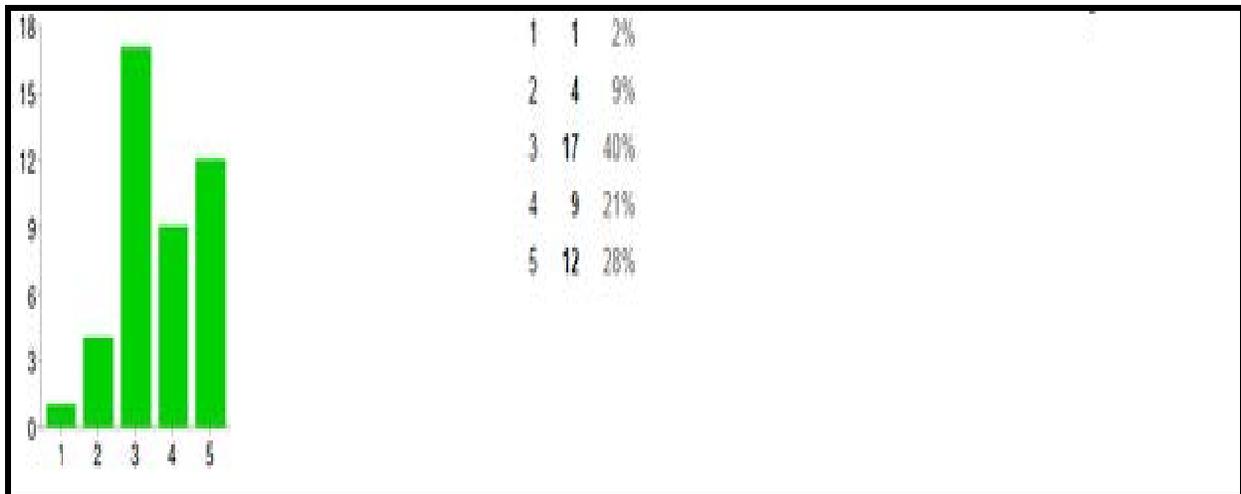
Note. Eleven percent of the students responded at a one or two on Likert scale of "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree", 40% responded at a three on the Likert scale of "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" and 49% responded at a four or five on the Likert scale of "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree".

Figure 59. Students response to perception of virtual learning and seat time impacting student

performance.

1	0	0%
2	2	14%
3	8	58%
4	2	14%
5	2	14%
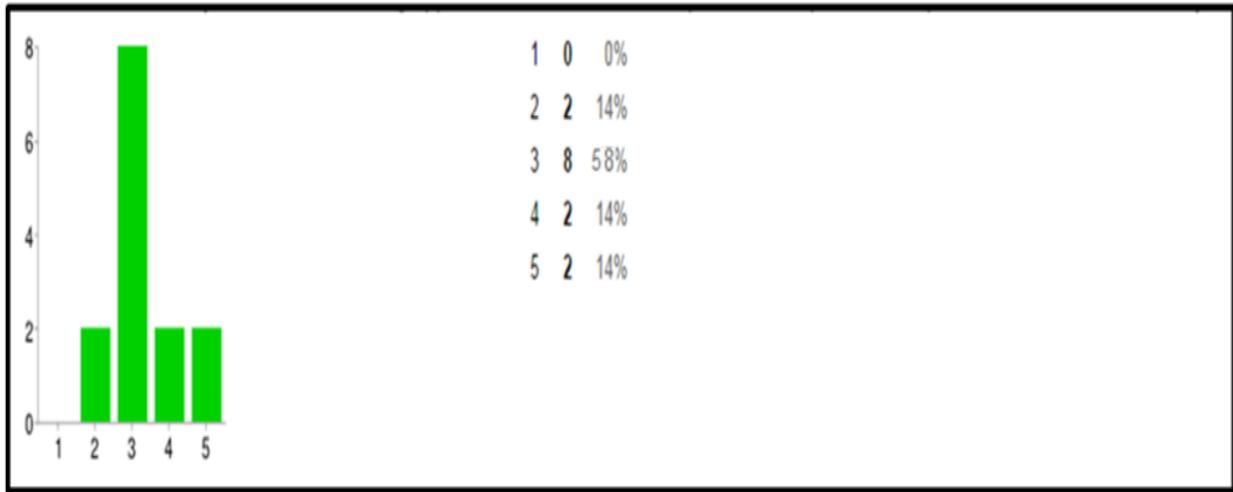
Note. Fourteen percent of the faculty responded at a one or two on Likert scale of "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree", 58% responded at a three on the Likert scale of "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" and 28% responded at a four or five on the Likert scale of "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree".

Figure 60. Faculty belief on virtual learning and seat time requirements impacting student achievement.

How does virtual learning opportunities and seat time requirements at the Alternative School impact student performance?

- It doesn't impact student performance.
- (Blank)
- Virtual seems like your teaching yourself and seat time you have more teacher help.
- IDK
- Stops from taking classes.
- Bad! It's so boring!
- I don't know.
- Makes students impatient.
- Not able to catch up as quick.
- Good
- I think a positive impact.
- It depends on if you are a hands on learner.
- To none whatsoever.
- It helps people who are behind catch up and possible graduate.
- What is virtual learning?
- Helps to get in our right grades.
- Help me catch up with classes. Positive.
- Not good need to finish school.
- Good because they can work at their own time to help them move forward if they want.
- Negative
- It's good it is just a lot harder.
- I don't know
- I feel like you would get tired of looking at a computer for six hours.
- Bad
- Helps students get done faster.
- It's okay.
- It seems like it will help students performance.
- It doesn't to be honest.
- Want let me get credits.
- Need to take more classes.

Figure 61. Student responses to the question, "How does virtual learning opportunities and seat time requirements at the Alternative School impact student performance?"

How does virtual learning opportunities and seat time requirements at the Alternative School impact student performance?

- I like the 90 minute blocks better than the 3 hour blocks.
- I think it has a positive impact.
- Seat time is too difficult for most students, often negatively impacts students motivation to complete tasks successfully in a timely manner.
- Students are able to progress at their own pace.
- Positive impact student performance by addressing concerns of individual students and their unique needs.
- Virtual opportunities are fine but sometimes these students new real-life active engagement through hands-on instruction.
- Virtual learning allows students to work at their own pace while mastering the skills and concepts of the content.
- It allows for greater opportunities for students to achieve the minimum requirements.
- For the ones that can adjust it has a great impact but for the ones that can't adjust no so great of an impact.
- Students should have more flexible schedules.
- Students become bored.
- It allows each student to work independently and at their own pace.
- Some students can't stay in their seat for long time period.
- Helps the students know the opportunities and issues they need to deal with to succeed.

Figure 62. Faculty responses as to how virtual learning and seat time requirements impact student performance.

Figure 61-62). When asked if virtual learning and seat time impact student performance, parent/guardian respondents were in the following categories: 4% (1 out of 24) "strongly-disagree," 0% (0 out of 24) "disagree," 79% (19 out of 24) neutral, 17% (4 out of 24) "agree," 0% (0 out of 24) "strongly agree" (see Figure 58). As per the research of Berrett (2012), since 1906 schools have used the Carnegie Unit to award high school credit for coursework. So, instead of the basis of measurement on a mastery of skills and an individualization of the needs of students, credit for graduation is determined by Carnegie Units based upon contact hours or "seat time." Seat time is still the measurement that is used by many states as the determining factor of whether students receive credit for a course or not and leading to enough credits to graduate.

When asked if virtual learning and seat time impact student performance, student respondents were in the following categories: 2% (1 out of 43) "strongly disagree," 9% (4 out of 43) "disagree," 40% (17 out of 43) neutral, 21% (9 out of 43) "agree," 28% (12 out of 43) "strongly agree" (see Figure 59). As per the research of Berrett (2012), other forces including technology, improved measurement methods, and new insights into how students learn, have also influenced Carnegie's decision to reconsider the credit hour, said Ms. Silva, allowing students to learn at their own pace. Silva also proposes that a change in the credit hour is also likely to affect and further connect learning on the primary and secondary levels with what happens in postsecondary education.

When asked if virtual learning and seat time impact student performance, faculty respondents were in the following categories: 0% (0 out of 14) "strongly disagree," 14% (2 out of 14) "disagree," 58% (8 out of 14) neutral, 14% (2 out of 14) "agree," 14% (2 out of 14) "strongly agree" (see Figure 60). As per the research of sbepolicy.dpi.state.nc.us, virtual learning

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courses offering instruction in courses not included in the Standard Course of Study curriculum must have rigor, depth, and breadth comparable to courses included in the Standard Course of Study.

Forty-seven percent (14 out of 30) of student responses identified that virtual learning and seat time has an impact on student performance. Thirteen percent (4 out of 30) of students responded that they did not know if virtual learning and seat time has an impact on student performance (see Figure 59). Students noted a positive impact with virtual learning and seat time in that it helps catch up with class and it helps student's performance.

Sixty-four percent (9 out of 14) of faculty responses identified that virtual learning and seat time has an impact on student performance. Faculty noted that virtual learning and seat time impact student performance by allowing students to work independently and at their own pace (see Figure 60).

Summary of Findings

The following summary of findings addresses the research question, specifically to virtual learning and seat time of the alternative school being studied. The findings support virtual learning is positive for students. The following are example responses defining/explaining virtual learning. One student noted, "The best learning," while another wrote, "Exciting." Another student noted, "Helps you learn more." A faculty member noted, "Allowing students to take classes at their own pace," while another respondent wrote, "I feel that virtual learning is a good tool when blended, virtual learning blended with individualized one-on-one instruction, I feel is very productive. It has been for my students (see Figure 42-43)." Allowing students to use virtual learning for instructional purpose lends itself to support the fact that 21st century students enjoy working with technology to complete various task to include school assignments.

Students identified the following technology devices as the tools they felt the most confident in using to complete school assignments: 65% (28 out of 43) desktop computer, 63% (27 out of 43) laptop computer, 42% (18 out of 43) iPad, 33% (14 out of 43) iPod, 42% (18 out of 43) android tablet, 26 % (11 out of 43) Google chrome book, 65% (28 out of 43) Smartphone and 7% (3 out of 43) other items. Smartphones and desktop computers were identified as the most accessible devices at 65% (students could select multiple devices; therefore, the percentages are of the total population and will add up to more than 100%) (see Figure 40).

Also, the findings support seat time has an impact on student performance due to attendance. Fifty percent (12 out of 24) of the respondents noted that their child did not fail a class because of attendance. The remaining 50% (12 out of 24) responded that their child failed a due to attendance (see Figure 55).

Forty-nine percent (21 out of 43) of students responded that they did fail a class due to attendance and 51% (22 out of 43) did not fail a class because of attendance (see Figure 56). Thirty-six percent (5 out of 14) of faculty respondents noted that they failed students due to attendance and 21% (3 out of 14) faculty respondents did not fail students due to attendance (see Figure 57).

Quantitative research designs were used to gain insight into academic structures that serve non-traditional students. The intent of the research was to define key elements that need to occur to increase academic performance and graduation rates. Quantitative research included descriptive statistics and compilation of the data collected from the survey results. Students, parents, faculty, staff, and administrators participated in the study.

The analysis of data throughout this chapter, illustrated that virtual learning and seat time impacts student performance. With the advent of virtual learning, parents, teachers and students

now have the chance to take part in an evolving instructional tool that provides engaging and rigorous curriculum. This new delivery system offers to make instruction easier for struggling students to catch up, exceptional students to race ahead, and students facing geographic and scheduling barriers to take the courses they need to graduate.

Credit by mastery is also referred to as competency-based learning and personalized learning, which differs from the traditional approach of accumulating credit for course by seat time (Retrieved from www.ed.gov). The following are identified strategies for credit by mastery: online and blended learning, dual enrollment, early college high schools, project-based and community-based learning and credit recovery (Retrieved from www.ed.gov). This concept offers the flexibility to allow the student to move through course content as soon as the concept is mastered by the student. Credit by mastery learning ultimately works for all skills but shows the most versatility with concrete skill and adjusts in a positive manner to online learning (Retrieved from www.ed.gov).

Students are given the opportunity to move through a series of sections that include reading selections, quizzes, classwork, project s and test. Once a student completes each module within the course and demonstrate mastery within the section they are allowed to advance to the next section. This concept of moving through section at your own pace allows for students to advance through curriculum efficiently because either they already know the material or they have the motivation to work as hard as possible because they have a desire to graduate. Finally, credit by mastery provides an outlet for students to work longer on material that is difficult because they were able to progress through the other material quickly due to prior knowledge and/or motivation.

The nation is now focused on a way for colleges to make a college education more

affordable, according to the administration of President Obama (Retrieved from www.collegeparents.org). The U.S. Department of Education is presently in the process of identifying additional ways of acquiring education that go beyond seat-time, credit hour concept that our educational system has used for years (Retrieved from www.collegeparents.org). Universities and colleges are now restructuring courses, credits and degrees that go beyond the online world.

Personalized learning via virtual learning is the major advantage of using competency-based learning. Using this instructional method allows students to move through the curriculum at their own individualized pace and provides them the opportunity of achieving their goal of graduation much quicker. This is solely based on what you know and/or how can critically think as students move through curriculum.

Another advantage of this concept is it offers the possibility of skipping sections in a subject area. Students take a pre-assessment prior to working in the sections. The identifying educational unit determines what is proficient in regards to pass rate. If the student achieves this pass rate the student can bypass the particular section and advance to the next section. If the student does not reach the identified pass rate in a particular section, they still may be able to advance through the section quicker because they may have passed some objectives within the module but not the entire module (Retrieved from www.collegeparents.org). This prevents students from accumulating seat time on information that they have already mastered.

Competency-based (personalized learning) has created a focus for teachers and educators to examine teaching and learning within the context of the subject and classroom. Are students really learning collectively or individually? Are educators meeting the needs of each individual student?

According to Berrett, in an effort to address the dropout issue, researchers are reviewing how students are awarded high school credit for class work. The Carnegie Unit is a system created in the late 19th century and early twentieth century that formed the awarding academic credit on how much time students spent in direct contact with a teacher in the classroom. The standard for the Carnegie unit is 120 hours of contact time with an instructor—i.e., one hour of instruction a day, 5 days a week for 24 weeks or 7, 200 of instructional time over the course of an academic year (edglossary.org, 2013). The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching created the Carnegie unit in 1906. Since 1906, schools have used the Carnegie Unit to award high school credit for coursework (Berrett, 2012). So, instead of the basis of measurement on a mastery of skills and an individualization of the needs of students, credit for graduation is determined by Carnegie Units based upon contact hours or "seat time." Seat time is still the measurement that is used by many states as the determining factor of whether students receive credit for a course or not and leading to enough credits to graduate. Since the history of this concept is rooted in the Carnegie Units, the Carnegie Foundation is now trying to decide if it should continue using this model to solidify course credit or if it is now time for a change in the way of thinking in the educational system (Berrett, 2012). According to Elena Silva, a senior associate for research and policy for Carnegie, the use of the unit happened by default and a time-based measurement has endured as the metric largely because its meaning can be universally understood (Berrett, 2012). Mrs. Silva feels now that "we're at a point where we could do better" (Berrett, 2012).

Based on research by Adams, the Carnegie Unit is defined as one hour of faculty-student contact per week and two hours of outside work over a 15-week semester (Adams, 2012). Thomas Toch, a researcher at Carnegie, uses the following example to describe this concept: a

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total of 120 hours in one subject, meeting four or five times a week for 40 to 60 minutes, for 36

to 40 weeks each year earns the student one "unit" of high school credit (Adams, 2012). When

this unit was designed it was primarily implemented to determine whether or not faculty

members would have the opportunity to receive a pension plan (Adams, 2012). Much of the

academic enterprise employs this unit as its foundation, including student and faculty workloads,

schedules, financial aid, and degree requirements (Adams, 2012).

The purpose of this study is to identify an appropriate structure to successfully serve

alternative students in an effort to increase the graduation rate and academic proficiency of the

students at an alternative high school in rural southeastern North Carolina and how virtual

learning and seat time impacts this structure. Additionally, three strategies emerged as important

sub themes. Those three sub themes were as follows: integration of full use of smartphones in

virtual learning programs, better understanding by parents of Plato Learning and utilization of

technology functions in lieu of actual school attendance.

Students identified the following technology devices as the tools they felt the most

confident in using to complete school assignments: 65% (28 out of 43) desktop computer, 63%

(27 out of 43) laptop computer, 42% (18 out of 43) iPad, 33% (14 out of 43) iPod, 42% (18 out

of 43) android tablet, 26 % (11 out of 43) Google chrome book, 65% (28 out of 43) Smartphone

and 7% (3 out of 43) other items. Smartphones and desktop computers were identified as the

most accessible devices at 65% (students could select multiple devices; therefore, the

percentages are of the total population and will add up to more than 100%) (see Figure 40). As

per the research of Freeley and Hanzelka (2009), "We keep our focus on each student and find

the item of interest or hook for his or her learning to take off."

The present budget challenges facing this district in southeastern North Carolina calls for

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different avenues and/or venues to provide support and effective schooling for all students. One way to offset low funding is to incorporate a program that will allow students the opportunity to bring their own device to school. As a reflection of the data, the students are most comfortable with smartphones as compared to any other device and parents/guardians responded at 83% in regards to students having access to a smartphone (see Figure 39). The use of smartphones will free up resources in the district to procure equipment that will allow technology to enhance instruction. The implementation by teachers and students will enable innovation, help students, teachers and parents gain access to digital content. Furthermore, this mobile device enables, empowers and attracts learning in ways that transform the learning environment for students. The transformation that takes place in the classroom includes the following: increase in student motivation, constant access to unlimited knowledge and accessibility to various tools provided by mobile devices. The key is that students are engaged with instructional information in class as well as out as they have the opportunity to gather and retrieve information based on their time and ability. Engaging 21st century students allows for more in depth teaching as it enables facilitation of instruction to be more effective and reduce the amount of discipline that arises in the classroom. Lastly, this technological device enables teachers to focus on in-depth critical thinking and problem solving for classroom instruction.

Smartphones are more prevalent and affordable as compared to a desktop, laptop and tablet. Students are intrigued with mobile devices and are willing to utilize these devices to make education more engaging and more personable to meet their individual needs. Students can use this device to check grades, take notes, access online textbooks, communicate with teachers, work with others online, and submit assignments to update calendars. In my opinion, the key is that a student's content can be customized based on student interest, background and unique

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leaning styles which lead to holistic learning experiences for students through text, illustration, visual and audio recording.

The effective implementation of smartphones to facilitate instruction in the classroom will also benefit teachers. They allow teachers to have more impactful instruction because the content will be meaningful, relevant and engaging.

- Meaningful: the knowledge learned is relative to other information stored in the brain. When a fact is recalled, other facts are recalled at that time or shortly thereafter, leading to better problem solving.

- Relevant: promotes learning that's interest driven and peer supported. Teachers can ensure learning is purpose-driven by relating it to life outside the classroom or satisfaction in building their own competence (collaborating to solve challenging problems).

- Engaging: increasing student motivation by combining new learning with prior learning. Students become activated because they can identify and relate present learning with prior learning and can identify the relevance in the instruction. Students are then able to organize and understand the new information more easily; thus leading to active engagement throughout the lesson.

Also, the smartphone will lend to the development of collaboration, cooperation and communication which is quintessential to 21st century learners.

- Collaboration: working towards a common goal requires students to be responsible for their learning as well as others. Reaching the particular goal implies students have helped each other to understand and learn. It also encourages critical thinking,

increasing student interest in learning through debate, negotiation, and exchange of ideas.

- Cooperation: working together to accomplish the same goal which leads to better productivity, buy-in, and fewer misunderstandings by members of the group.

- Communication: the foundation in which careers are built and a crucial component of success. Effective communication requires bringing together different points of view and transmitting that information with clarity of purpose.

These skills have always been important for students, but are vitally important in the 21st century as a result of our information-based economy. In an effort to ensure students are college and career ready; students need to think deeply about challenges, solve problems creatively, work in teams, communicate clearly, learn technology, and handle an enormous amount of information. Our ever- changing world and information-based economy require students to be flexible, to take initiative, lead when necessary, and produce something new and useful.

A mobile device opens a door to offer education to students beyond the limits of the classroom and beyond the fix time period of the school day. Smartphones will provide the opportunity for students to retrieve content from home, speak with teachers and work with others online for instructional purposes.

The following data indicates the parents understanding of Plato Learning: 20% (5 out of 24) "strongly disagree," 38% (9 out of 24) "disagree," 25% (6 out of 24) neutral, 13% (3 out of 24) "agree," and 4% (1 out of 24) "strongly agree" (see Figure 46). Parent/guardian should have an understanding of how to help their child with Plato Learning, as per research of Hagel (2011), "I think this is harder than going to class every day with a teacher because the student has to be self-motivated."

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"The role of parents in the education of their children cannot be overestimated." As part of the educational process our students have to be engaged in instruction if learning is going to take place. Engagement does not differ for the parents of the students involved in the classroom. Parent engagement in the learning process will ultimately lead to the highest achievement of students, because parents are part of the process and have a better understanding of the expectation that is placed on the student. In my opinion, the first way to engage parents is to have an open door policy into the school. Allow parents entry to the school to sit in on classes, to take part in activities in the class as well as participating on committees within the school building. This will lead to a school that is family oriented and will allow buy-in from all stakeholders. Furthermore, the following will assist in making Plato more understandable and accepted by parents:

- Guarantee user-friendly language format when distributing information

- Do not reinvent the wheel: check for existing information and tools to distribute

- Have representative parents review online curriculum prior to purchase

- Produce Demo accounts for parents to explore the online tool

- Generate informational DVDs for non-reading parents and group sessions

- Create workshops, parent and community nights for tutorials on online curriculum

The parents responded at 50% (12 out of 24) that my child failed a class due to attendance (see Figure 55). The remaining 50% (12 out of 24) responded that their child did not fail a class due to attendance. As per research of www.ncga.state.nc.us, seat time has much to do with attendance. The responsibility to ensure that students are in school resides with parents and guardians.

Students responded at 49% (21 out of 43) that I have failed a class due to attendance,

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whereas; 51% (22 out of 43) did not fail a class due to attendance (see Figure 56). As per research of www.ncga.state.nc.us, students must be in attendance on a regular basis in order for effective teaching and learning to take place.

The faculty responded at 36% (5 out of 14) that they have failed students due to attendance. Twenty-one percent (3 out of 14) of the faculty has not failed students due to attendance. Forty-three percent (6 out of 14) of faculty said this question did not apply to them (see Figure 57). As per research of www.ncga.state.nc.us, to ensure regular attendance by students falls on the schools in the accuracy of record keeping on student attendance based on Compulsory Attendance Law of North Carolina.

Since 1906, schools have used the Carnegie Unit to award high school credit for coursework (Berrett, 2012). So, instead of the basis of measurement on a mastery of skills and an individualization of the needs of students, credit for graduation is determined by Carnegie Units based upon contact hours or "seat time." Seat time is still the measurement that is used by many states as the determining factor of whether students receive credit for a course or not and leading to enough credits to graduate. This policy has led to an increase in dropout rate and a decrease in high school graduation rate simply because it does not provide any flexibility for students who may have circumstances and/or situations that do not allow them to be in attendance at school on a daily basis. Some students are absent because they must take care of themselves and their families, homeless challenges, lack of social or emotional support, part-time/full-time jobs and become a parent . Rules pertaining to attendance punish these students for making mature decisions that have a great impact on their life because of circumstances due to socio-economic status. Many of these students endure an ongoing struggle to overcome the everyday poverty of their lives.

Synchronous learning allows for everyone to take part at the same time. With an increase in the dropout rate and a decrease in graduation rate many Local Education Agencies are implementing this type of learning to provide support to students who are having challenges in meeting school attendance requirement. The following are examples of synchronous learning: chat, live streaming, web conference tool such as Blackboard, Adobe Connect, WebEx, Skype, Google Hangout, etc.

In the district being studied, the technology platform for faculty, staff and student is Google. Google is a free platform that provides email, Google doc, Google spreadsheet and Google hangout free of charge. Google hangout, allows for teachers, students and parents to communicate through a web based platform to assure instruction can take place based on mastery. It will also assist students with special situations and circumstances an opportunity to meet the attendance requirement without always being physically in a seat within a school building. The implementation of this platform is based on the creation of student groups by the teacher. The teacher moves the student to an organizational unit that allows the teacher to share their desktop with the user.

Google Hangout is an instant messaging and video chat platform that allows users to hold conversations between two and four users. Participants may gain access through Gmail, Google+ websites or through mobile applications available for android and iOS. During interaction on hangout, conversations are saved through chat histories online, allowing for online synchronization. The program provides a marker to solidify how far each participant has read into the conversation. Pictures are also part of this program and can be shared during conversation, which are naturally uploaded into an exclusive Google+ album. Furthermore, participants in hangout can hold video chat with up to ten people at once.

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Allowing students to master skills at their own pace, virtual learning (credit by mastery) will help students accrue credits, use time more constructively and make students more accountable. The advent of virtual learning offers various routes to graduation, more effective use of technology, learning opportunities outside of the regular school day, identifies strategies to meet the needs of every student, teacher skill sets, and appropriate ways to incorporate skill sets for student success.

Conclusion

The following information addresses the research question, specifically, the effect virtual learning and seat time has on the alternative school being studied. The successful structure should include the following "Guiding Principles" (Retrieved from www.cisga.org/cisgawpress/wp.../07/Philosopy-and-principles.docx):

1. Teachers in this program will serve in the capacity of facilitator and students are accountable for their learning. Facilitation creates the opportunity for students to focus on coursework with limited interruption from the teacher as a lecturer. The teacher becomes a tutor that meets the needs of each individual student. Students are more engaged with the class because it meets their individual needs and it is technology based. Lastly, the personalization of the course through individual pacing guides (i.e. assignments, projects, and activities with a specified amount of time it should take to complete each) informs the student of what they need to do to complete the course.

2. Students will master a set of knowledgeable skills that will prepare them for success in the future. Learning these skills are available through virtual learning and is accessible without making it necessary for the student to physically be in the

classroom. Skill acquisition for 21st century students is much easier to facilitate through the use of technology because students are digital natives (persons brought up during digital era and are familiar with the Internet and computers).

3. The culture of the program should be one of support, hope and empowerment. The focus, first and foremost, should be on relationship and not content. Students don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. Also, the use of virtual learning offers a different instructional platform than what students were used to in their comprehensive high school. Students will be more apt to work in this environment because it is different. Doing the same thing with these students and expecting a different result is the definition of ignorance. With the change in culture we will re-energize, re-flect, re-fuel, and re-light each individual student and give them the encouragement to continue their matriculation through the educational process.

4. Parental and community support are essential to the overall success of the program. Access to material becomes easier for parents and community through virtual learning. Parents and community can also keep up with events and activities that are going on at the school and can still take part in events without physically being present. Virtual learning also engages parents and community in the process and expectation that is placed on student. It also indirectly allows parents and the community to practice their technological skills and receive feedback and advice from the teachers and administration. This ultimately increases the skill set of parents and community.

5. Learning will be based on competency-based outcomes. Students are able to receive credit for classes based on how motivated they are to complete the coursework. They do not have to wait on the teacher or another student to receive credit for their course. It is based solely on what they know and the pace they decide to take in order to complete course. Students have the potential to accrue as many credits as they would like based on their motivation and desire to graduate or catch up academically. For example, if a student finishes a course in two months, that student immediately receives that credit and can start on another course. There is no requirement for them to stay in a course for nine weeks, a semester, or a year. Lastly, if a student has a situation that prevents them from attending school on a regular basis and the seat time requirement is not an issue, the student still can complete the course and receive credit. For instance, if there is a student that has a child and has to work to support their family, virtual learning and no seat time requirement allows that student not only to support his/her family, but also allows them to fulfill their obligation academically.

Quantitative research designs were used to gain insight into seat time and virtual learning structures that serve alternative students. The intent of the research was to define key elements that need to occur to increase academic performance and graduation rates. Quantitative research included descriptive statistics and compilation of the data collected from the survey results. Students, parents/guardians, faculty, staff, and administrators participated in the study.

The analysis of data throughout this chapter illustrates that allowing students to master skills at their own pace (without seat time requirement and providing virtual learning (credit by mastery) will help students accrue credits, use time more constructively and make students more

accountable for their education. The advent of virtual learning offers: more effective use of technology, learning opportunities outside of regular school day, identification of strategies to meet the needs of every student and identification of teacher skill set and the most appropriate way to incorporate the skill set for student success.

Elizabeth Utrup, a spokesperson for the U.S. Department of Education, noted that at the federal level, districts and states are encouraged to be creative and to implement practices that they feel will be effective for the students they serve (Cavanagh, 2012). She further states that the U.S. Department of Education believes the implementation of those practices will allow districts and states to have more flexibility, which will allow for more productivity. Based on the belief of the U.S. Department of Education, various states have implemented policies that take them away from focusing on seat time as the only means of awarding course credits. There are a number of states that now allow credits based on proficiency and/or mastery, according to the U.S. Department of Education (Adams, 2012):

1. Since 2003, Oregon has allowed districts and schools to use proficiency-based approaches for awarding credit to students. From 2004 to 2006, the state piloted the policy in several school districts. In 2009, state policy was expanded to require that all in-class work be tied explicitly to demonstrated proficiency or mastery of academic standards.

2. Oklahoma requires schools to allow students, upon request, to earn credits toward graduation in core academic subjects based on demonstrations of mastery through tests. Students are required to score grades of 90% or higher on those tests to receive credit, according to state officials.

3. In 1987, Maryland incorporated an outcome-based system in Frederick County

involving 30,000 students and 46 schools based on five essential learner behaviors. The essential learner behaviors are as follows: effective communication, problem solving and critical thinking, social cooperation and self-discipline, responsible citizenship in community and environment, and a lifestyle that values wellness and aesthetics.

4. In 2007, Michigan created a policy to grant waivers from seat time requirements to districts on a case by case basis. More than 200 schools have requested some sort of waiver over the past year, and about 5,500 students are currently making use of the flexibility, most of them through a blended-learning approach, combining in-person and online instruction.

Also, the New Hampshire school board incorporated a new statewide initiative in 2005 entitled "Follow the Child", which required the school system to get away from seat time (Freeley & Hanzelka, 2009). The school system's goal was to accomplish this initiative within a three year period of time and to exert more of an effort geared toward competencies. The state legislature in New Hampshire felt like getting away from seat time would afford the schools greater flexibility. Based on the flexibility afforded by the new initiative, schools were able to create programs that focused on personalized learning, student engagement, and alternate approaches to student assessment (Freeley & Hanzelka, 2009).

In closing, the research given here assuredly answers that virtual learning and seat time impact student performance. Based on the research and data credit by mastery can provide support for students in obtaining course credits, which will improve the graduation rate and student performance. The following recommendations are provided by the researcher to help improve the organizational structure of the school.

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Recommendations

As with many other alternative schools, there is a negative connotation associated with the alternative school in southeastern, North Carolina that serves the county's middle and high school students. The community's opinion of this school is that students are sent there to drop out.

North Carolina school districts may have alternative learning programs or alternative learning schools. The organizational structure of an alternative program can be as unique as its student population. Alternative Instructional Model (AIM), an alternative program in New York, allows students to remain connected to their home school, thus providing the opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities. Individualized instruction, continuous improvement, scheduling flexibility, community service projects, and an environment rich in student resources have each proven to be valuable elements of successful alternative learning programs to increase student success (Grobe, 2002).

The alternative learning school that was being studied began in one of the vacated segregated schools; this school mainly housed students with special needs until later court decisions would transition these students into their least restrictive environment which was transitioning students with special needs back into the traditional school setting with regular education students (L. D. Bowen, personal communication, December 1, 2013). In 2011, the alternative learning program was moved to its present location which had previously been one of the black high schools during segregation, next a middle school, and then an elementary school before finally reaching its current purpose (A. Cottone, personal communication, January 6, 2014).

This negative connotation may be changed and or adjusted with the implementation of new strategies. As a practicing administrator, the following recommendations are provided:

- The school should be a "Program" located on a corridor of the only traditional high school in the district.   A designated assistant principal serves as facilitator of program. This transition   allows the students to become part of the structure at the main high school, the alternative school will not be looked upon as a "dumping ground", provides more resources for students, faculty and district. Furthermore, the change will open up more opportunities for the students in terms of courses and training that will be essential as they matriculate through the educational process.

- Core Values of the alternative program should be values that the administration, faculty, parents and student body uses as the foundation in which work is performed and conduct is exemplified. The values should represent the deeply held beliefs, highest priorities and what is truly important to the program. These values should not change from time to time, situation to situation or person to person, but should serve as the underpinning of our school culture.

- Guiding Principles:

  a. Teachers in this program will serve in the capacity of facilitators, and students are accountable for their learning.

  b. Students will master a set of knowledgeable skills that will prepare them for success in the future.

  c. The culture of program should be one of support, hope and empowerment.

  d. Parents and Community support are essential to overall success of program.

  e. Learning will be based on competency-based outcomes.

- The curriculum should be self-paced virtual online curriculum. Students will receive support from teachers. Blended learning based on credit by mastery will be instrumental in success of aligning the curriculum to meet the academic needs of the at-risk students. This type of learning combines a traditional approach to learning with a non-traditional approach. Ongoing Professional Development in the areas of Curriculum, Technology, Leadership, Culture/Climate and Monitoring and Assessment.

- Faculty and staff designated to teach at the alternative school should want to be at the school, should have a desire to evoke change in the students that attend the school, passionate about teaching the whole child (mental, physical, emotional and spiritual), have the ability to establish and maintain effective relationships based on open and honest communication and the teachers should be the best teachers that the district has to offer the students at the alternative school. If the teacher described above is now in the alternative school, then the district is adding more challenges and problems for the student, school and district.

- The next phase of this research would be to conduct a longitudinal study on the effectiveness of virtual alternative high school's that have improved overall student performance, increased graduation rate and decreased dropout rate. Input in regards to this next step would have to come from students, parents, faculty and school district. Data points to include are as follows: attendance, suspension, drop-out, graduation and assessment results.

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APPENDIX A: SEVEN STANDARDS OF ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION AND

ALIGNMENT WITH LEGISLATION

Created by NCDPI, aligns the seven standards with legislation adopted and approved in 1999.

#	Standard	Component	General Statute
1	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate Professional Development Curriculum & Instruction	*Establish the program's mission, goals, and expected outcomes*	115C12(24)
2	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate	*Identify the target population*	115C12(24)
3	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate	*Develop process for assigning and enrolling students into the alternative program*	115C12(24) 115C-105.48 (b) 115C-397.1
4	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate Professional Development Monitoring & Assessment	*Access to the documentation used to establish the need for the assignment*	115C12(24) 115C-105.48(b)
5	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate Professional Development Parent/Community Involvement	*Provide the steps in the appeals process to the parent*	115C12(24)
6	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate	*Identify the documents to be transferred to the alternative program;*	115C12(24)
7	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate	*Indicate how students are transported to the program*	115C12(24)
8	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate Curriculum & Instruction	*Describe the curricular, instructional day, and courses to be offered*	115C12(24)
9	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate Professional Development Parent/Community Involvement	*Ensure a safe, orderly, caring, and inviting environment*	115C12(24) 115C-105.48(b)
10	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate Professional Development Parent/Community Involvement	*Primarily provide choice in enrollment*	115C12(24)

11	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate Professional Development Parent/Community Involvement	*Provide for active parent/guardian participation in the assignment decision*	115C12(24) 115C-105.48 (3)(b)
12	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate	*Include least one representative to participate in the assignment decision for enrollment*	115C12(24)
13	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate Curriculum & Instruction Monitoring & Assessment	*Access to and utilize information from the referring entity that identifies previous interventions, strategies, or actions taken*	115C12(24) 115C-105.48 (b)
14	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate Monitoring & Assessment	*Access to student information data prior to the arrival of the student*	115C12(24)
15	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate Professional Development Curriculum & Instruction Monitoring & Assessment	*Implement effective preparation and plans to increase positive student outcomes*	115C12(24) 115C-105.48(b)
16	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate Professional Development Curriculum & Instruction Monitoring & Assessment	*Effective in-take procedures that address the preparation and plans for the student*	115C12(24)
17	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate Professional Development Curriculum & Instruction Monitoring & Assessment	*Effective transition procedures that address the preparation and plans for the student*	115C12(24)
18	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate Parent/Community Involvement	*Strongly encourage the participation of parents in the enrollment and transition phases*	115C12(24)
19	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate Professional Development	*Highly qualified and effective faculty and staff*	115C-47(32a) 115C-105.47(a)
20	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate	*Sufficient faculty and staff to carry-out the mission of the program*	115C-47(32a)
21	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate	*Small student to teacher ratio, 10:1 or smaller, but not more than 15:1*	ALP Policy & Procedures Document for Grades K-12

			Adopted September 2003
22	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate	*Minimal disparity in the percent of exceptional children in comparison to the district*	ALP Policy & Procedures Document for Grades K-12 Adopted September 2003
23	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate Professional Development	*Ensure that special education and related services for students with disabilities are provided according to the student's individualized education program*	IDEA 115C-113
24	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate	*Encouraged to have teacher assistants in classes with more than ten students*	115C12(24)
25	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate	*Encouraged to have teacher assistants assigned to all courses that have EOGs/EOCs, or other competency-based tests that are required by the State for promotion or graduation*	115C12(24)
26	Clear Mission Leadership Professional Development Curriculum & Instruction Monitoring & Assessment	*Use the North Carolina Standard Course of Study as the primary framework for instruction*	115C12(24)
27	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate Professional Development Curriculum & Instruction	*Flexibility in implementing strategies and methods that positively impact the delivery of curriculum and instruction, and student growth and development*	115C12(24)
28	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate Professional Development Curriculum & Instruction	*Supplement the curriculum and instruction with life skills, character education, conflict management, and career preparation*	115C12(24) 115C-105.48(b)
29	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate Professional Development Monitoring & Assessment	*Positive and effective whole school systems for student management*	115C12(24)
30	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate Professional Development Curriculum & Instruction	*Learning environments that promote high expectations and encourages learning*	115C12(24) 115C-47(32a)
31	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate Professional Development	*Access to continuous growth and development opportunities for faculty and staff*	115C12(24) 115C-47(32a)
32	Clear Mission	*Provide staff, parents, and students with*	115C12(24)

	Leadership Culture & Climate Parent/Community Involvement	*copies of the handbook that includes the policies, procedures, and standards of the school or program*	
33	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate Parent/Community Involvement	*Cultivate a collaborative and supportive relationship with referring agencies and encourage them to maintain a demonstrated investment in the success of the students and the program*	115C12(24)
34	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate Professional Development Parent/Community Involvement	*Cultivate a collaborative and supportive relationship with parents that enhance the success of the students and the program*	115C-105.48(3b)
35	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate Parent/Community Involvement	*Cultivate a collaborative and supportive relationship with the community that enhances the success of the students and the program*	115C12(24)
36	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate Monitoring & Assessment	*Evaluate their programs and procedures to ensure the on-going effectiveness of the program and success of the students*	115C12(24)
37	Clear Mission Leadership Culture & Climate Professional Development Parent/Community Involvement Curriculum & Instruction Monitoring & Assessment	*Evaluate the effectiveness of their programs based on: the mission and goals; school/program improvement plan; school/program safety/crisis plan; needs assessment; parent, student, staff surveys; assessment of student outcomes; assessment of program outcomes; and, ABC's Accountability Model for Alternative Schools*	115C12(24) 115C-47(32a)

APPENDIX B: NCDPI DROPOUT DEFINITION

NCDPI (http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/research/dropout/reports/dropoutmanual.pdf) definition of dropout for the purposes of data collection and reporting by local education agencies.

Dropout Definition

Event rates measure the proportion of students who drop out in a single reporting year.

The method used in North Carolina to count dropouts is called an event count. It counts the number of dropouts during a school year, beginning on the first day of the academic year and ending on the last day of the subsequent summer vacation.

All school systems and schools in North Carolina are to use the following definition for a dropout. To ensure accuracy and consistency in reporting dropouts, dropout prevention coordinators should become thoroughly familiar with the definition and its interpretations based on state laws and policies.

Note: Throughout this manual, "current year" refers to the 2013-14 school year, and "reporting year" refers to the 2012-13 school year.

Definition
A "dropout" is an individual who
- was enrolled in school at some time during the reporting year;
- was not enrolled on day 20 of the current year;
- has not graduated from high school or completed a state or district approved educational program; and does not meet any of the following reporting exclusions:

The private school and home school exclusions apply to students transferring to schools registered with the NC Department of Non-Public Education. See page 4 for details on the home school exclusion.

1. transferred to another public school district, private school, home school or state/district approved educational program (not including programs at community colleges),
2. temporarily absent due to suspension or school approved illness, or
3. death.

APPENDIX C: NCDPI DROPOUT RATE CALCULATION

NCDPI (http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/research/dropout/reports/dropoutmanual.pdf) method for calculating the dropout rate.

Calculating the Dropout Rate

For its annual report the DPI calculates dropout rates for grades 1-13, 7-13, and 9-13.   The calculation for North Carolina's dropout rate has been greatly simplified.   The 9-13 rate is calculated as follows.

STEP 1: Include all cases of reported dropouts (grades 9-13) in the numerator.

STEP 2: To determine the denominator,
- include the twentieth day membership for the reporting (previous) year;
- add the number of reported dropouts (same as used in the numerator).

STEP 3: Calculate a rate by dividing the numerator by the denominator; round off to the nearest one hundredth for a grade 9-13 dropout rate.

$$\frac{\text{Total Number of Dropouts}}{\text{20th Day Membership (reporting yr.) + Total Number of Dropouts}}$$

Example
School System A documented 200 grade 9-13 dropouts for the reporting year 2012-13. The first month membership for the reporting year was 5,000 students in grades 9-13.

To compute the rate, state the fraction:
Numerator   = 200
Denominator = 5,000 + 200 = 5,200

Solve: Divide the Numerator by the Denominator:
200 / 5,200 = 3.846%, or rounded to nearest one hundredth, **3.85%**.

APPENDIX D: ARTICLE 8C LOCAL PLANS FOR ALTERNATIVE

SCHOOLS/ALTERNATIVE LEARNING PROGRAMS

Article 8C.Local Plans for Alternative Schools/Alternative Learning Programs and Maintaining Safe and Orderly Schools.

Article 8C.
Local Plans For Alternative Schools/Alternative Learning Programs and
Maintaining Safe and Orderly Schools.
§ 115C-105.45. Legislative findings.
The General Assembly finds that all schools should be safe, secure, and orderly. If students are to aim for academic excellence, it is imperative that there is a climate of respect in every school and that every school is free of disruption, drugs, violence, and weapons. All schools must have plans, policies, and procedures for dealing with disorderly and disruptive behavior.
All schools and school units must have effective measures for assisting students who are at risk of academic failure or of engaging in disruptive and disorderly behavior. (1997-443, s. 8.29(r)(1).)
§ 115C-105.46. State Board of Education responsibilities.
In order to implement this Article, the State Board of Education:
(1)   through (4) Repealed by Session Laws 2011-145, s. 7.13(y), effective July 1, 2011.
(5)   Shall adopt policies that define who is an at-risk student.   (1997-443, s. 8.29(r)(1); 1999-397, s. 2; 2000-140, s. 22; 2011-145, s. 7.13(y).)
§ 115C-105.47: Repealed by Session Laws 2011-145, s. 7.13(z), effective July 1, 2011.
§ 115C-105.47A.   Proposals to establish alternative learning programs or alternative schools.
(a)   Before establishing any alternative learning program or alternative school, the local board of education shall develop a proposal to implement the program or school that includes all of the following:
(1)   The educational and behavioral goals for students assigned to the program or school.
(2)   The policies and procedures for the operation of the program or school based on the State Board's standards adopted under G.S. 115C-12(24). The policies and procedures shall address the assignment of students to the program or school.
(3)   Identified strategies that will be used to improve student achievement and behavior.
(4)   Documentation that similar programs and schools in or out of the State, or both, have demonstrated success in improving the academic achievement and behavior of students assigned to them.
(5)   The estimated actual cost of operating the program or school. To the extent practicable, this shall include the cost of:
a.   Staffing the program or school with teachers who have at least four years' teaching experience and who have received an overall rating of at least above standard on a formal evaluation and are certified in the areas and grade levels being taught;

b.   Providing optimum learning environments, resources and materials, and high quality, ongoing professional development that will ensure students who are placed in the program or school are provided enhanced educational opportunities in order to achieve their full potential;

c.   Providing support personnel, including school counselors, psychiatrists, clinical psychologists, social workers, nurses, and other professionals to help students and their families work out complex issues and problems;

d.   Maintaining safe and orderly learning environments; and

e.   Providing transitional supports for students exiting the program or school and re-entering the referring school.

(6)   Documented support of school personnel and the community for the implementation of the program or school.

(b)   After the local board completes the proposal under subsection (a) of this section, the board shall submit the proposal to the State Board of Education for its review. The State Board shall review the proposal expeditiously and, if appropriate, may offer recommendations to modify the proposal. The local board shall consider any recommendations made by the State Board before implementing the alternative learning program or alternative school. (2005-446, s. 2.)

§ 115C-105.48. Placement of students in alternative schools/alternative learning programs.

(a)   Prior to referring a student to an alternative school or an alternative learning program, the referring school shall:

(1)   Document the procedures that were used to identify the student as being at risk of academic failure or as being disruptive or disorderly.

(2)   Provide the reasons for referring the student to an alternative school or an alternative learning program.

(3)   Provide to the alternative school or alternative learning program all relevant student records, including anecdotal information.

(b)   When a student is placed in an alternative school or an alternative learning program, the appropriate staff of the alternative school or alternative learning program shall meet to review the records forwarded by the referring school and to determine what support services and intervention strategies are recommended for the student. The parents shall be encouraged to provide input regarding the students' needs. (1999-397, s. 2.)

§§ 115C-105.49 through 115C-105.52. Reserved for future codification purposes.

APPENDIX E: BOARD POLICIES FOR DISTRICT IN SOUTHEASTERN NC

Detailed chart of discipline related policies for the county in rural North Carolina.

County Board Policies	Summary of Policies
Policy Code: 1510/4200/7270 School Safety Citation: NCSBA Legal/Policy Services policy.microscribepub.com--school district in Southeast, NC, Board of Education Policy Manual, 2013	Safe schools are necessary to evoke positive change academically and socially with ALL students. Schools will enforce and implement the necessary precautions to maintain safety within the school for learning to take place. Safety measures must be in place and honored throughout the school day to establish an effective school climate. Supervision of visitors, safety of school buildings and grounds, processes to address potential safety concerns and emergencies(school rules, training for staff and faculty, safety equipment, suspicious behavior, registered sex offenders and student behavior standards) are all measures that should be addressed in safe schools plan.

Policy Code: 1710/4021/7230 Prohibition Against Discrimination, Harassment and Bullying
 	
Citation: NCSBA Legal/Policy Services policy.microscribepub.com--school district in Southeast, NC, Board of Education Policy Manual, 2013
	The board does not recognize or allow discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, or age and will provide equal access to the Boy Scouts and other designated youth groups as required by law. Furthermore, the board does not permit any form of unlawful discrimination, harassment, or bullying in any of its educational or employment activities or programs.
	
	Prohibited Behaviors and Consequences:
	1. Discrimination: any act or failure to act that unreasonably and unfavorably differentiates treatment of others based solely on their membership in a socially distinct group or category, such as race, ethnicity, sex, pregnancy, religion, age or disability--intentional or unintentional
	  Harassment and Bullying: any pattern of gestures or written, electronic, or verbal communications, or any physical act or any threatening communication that:
	    a. places a student or school employee in actual and reasonable fear of harm to his or her person or damage to his or her property; or
	    b. creates or is certain to create a hostile environment by substantially interfering with or impairing a student's educational performance, opportunities, or benefits

	"Hostile environment" means that the victim subjectively views the conduct as harassment or bullying and that the conduct is objectively severe or pervasive enough that a reasonable person would agree that it is harassment or bullying. A hostile environment may be created through pervasive or persistent misbehavior or a single incident, if sufficiently severe. Harassment may include sexual or gender-based harassment that can happen between co-workers, fellow students, supervisors and subordinates, employees and students and between non-employees, including visitors, and employees or students. 2. Retaliation: not permitted for reporting or intending to report a violation against the established policy. If it is determined that retaliation has taken place the appropriate consequences will be put in place by superintendent.
Policy Code: 4300 Student Behavior Policies Citation: NCSBA Legal/Policy Services policy.microscribepub.com-- school district in Southeast, NC, Board of Education Policy Manual, 2013	Student Behavior policies are created to ensure a caring, safe and supportive environment within schools to provide opportunities for students to obtain and understand educational goals and objectives. Furthermore, the behavior policies establish an expectation of behavior, principles designed for these expectations and consequences for a undesired behavior. Students must comply with the Student Code of Conduct as it relates to minor and major behavioral challenges that occur within the school system. The code of conduct applies to the following situations/areas: while in any school building or on any school premises before, during or after school hours; while on any bus or other vehicles as part of any school activity; while waiting at any school bus stop; during any school-sponsored activity or extracurricular activity; when subject to the authority of school employees; and at any place or time when the students' behavior has or is reasonably expected to have a direct and immediate impact on the orderly and efficient operation of the schools or the safety of individuals in the school environment.
Policy Code: 4300B Student Code of Conduct Citation: NCSBA	In order to accomplish the task of providing academics to all student and improving student achievement the board has incorporated a Student Code of Conduct to ensure a safe and orderly environment in every school. The Code of Conduct serves as a guide for all stakeholders as a

Legal/Policy Services policy.microscribepub.com-- school district in Southeast, NC, Board of Education Policy Manual, 2013	standard of appropriate student behaviors and expectations during school and at all school related activities.
Policy Code: 4302 School Plan for Management of Student Behavior Citation: NCSBA Legal/Policy Services policy.microscribepub.com-- school district in Southeast, NC, Board of Education Policy Manual, 2013	School Plan for Management of Student Behavior must exist in all schools and it must contain effective strategies and policies to address behavioral issues that may arise. Local Education Agencies are encouraged to incorporate a program(s) that address positive behavior support and to continue to seek additional support measures to address and manage student behavior. Components of the Plan: 1. Process by which student behavior will be addressed, including any use of a disciplinary committee and the means by which students at risk of repeated disruptive or disorderly conduct are identified, assessed and assisted; 2. positive behavioral interventions and possible consequences that will be used; and 3. parental involvement strategies that address when parents or guardians will be notified or involved in issues related to their child's behavior. This plan should not address the use of corporal punishment, which is identified as intentional infliction of physical pain upon the body of a student as a disciplinary measure. The policy states that corporal punishment includes but is not limited to, spanking, paddling and slapping. The use of corporal punishment is not permitted or allowed in any district. The board expects other measures to be used in place of corporal punishment because the board believes other consequences are more appropriate and effective to address behavior expectations.

| Policy Code: 4315
Disruptive/Disrespectful
Behavior

Citation: NCSBA
Legal/Policy Services
policy.microscribepub.com--
school district in Southeast,
NC, Board of Education
Policy Manual, 2013 | A safe, orderly and inviting school environment is essential for teaching and learning to take place within each school. Teachers, staff and students play an integral part in the establishment and maintaining of a safe and inviting environment where free speech is enforced and may be limited based on time, place and manner in an effort to maintain an environment that allows for effective teaching and learning to take place.

Students are not permitted to disrupt or disrespect the learning environment, school activities to include extracurricular activities. The following provides an explanation of disruptive behavior:
 1. intentional verbal or physical acts that result or have the potential to result in blocking access to school functions or facilities or preventing the convening or continuation of school-related functions;
 2. appearance or clothing that (1) violates a reasonable dress code adopted and published by the school; (2) is substantially disruptive; (3) is provocative or obscene; or (4) endangers the health or safety of the student or others
 3. possessing or distributing literature or illustrations that significantly disrupt the educational process or that are obscene or unlawful;
 4. engaging in behavior that is immoral, indecent, lewd, disreputable or of any overly sexual nature in the school setting;
 5. failing to observe establish safety rules, standards and regulations, including on buses and in hallways; and
 6. interfering with the operation of school buses, including delaying the bus schedule, getting off at an unauthorized stop, and willfully trespassing upon a school bus.
 7. Students shall not use racial epithets or obscene or vulgar language or gestures or otherwise show marked disrespect to a student, teacher, or other school employee.
8. Students shall comply with school regulations and with directions of teachers, substitute teachers, student teachers, teacher aides, principals or other authorized school personnel during any period of time when they are properly under the authority of such school personnel.

Consequences: |

	K-5 Code of Student Conduct
	1st Offense: Warning/Parent Conference 2nd Offense: Up To 3 Days OSS 3rd Offense: Up To 10 Days OSS 6-12 Code of Student Conduct 1st Offense: Warning/Up to 3 Days 2nd Offense: Up To 5 Days OSS 3rd Offense: Up To 10 Days OSS/Possible ALA/LTS

Policy Code: 4320 Tobacco Products – Students Citation: NCSBA Legal/Policy Services policy.microscribepub.com--school district in Southeast, NC, Board of Education Policy Manual, 2013	In a continuing effort to support a safe, caring, inviting and clean schools for faculty, student, staff the board supports the state law that denies the sale of tobacco products to minors and the use of tobacco products by minors. This law extends to school buildings, campuses and any other area identified as school property. The policy defines the term "tobacco product" as any product that contains or that is made or derived from tobacco and is intended for human consumption, including electronic cigarettes and all lighted and smokeless tobacco products. K-5 Code of Student Conduct 1st Offense: Warning/Parent Conference/Tobacco Awareness 2nd Offense: Warning/Up to 1 Day ISS/OSS/Tobacco Awareness 3rd Offense: Up to 3 Days ISS/OSS 6-12 Code of Student Conduct 1st Offense: Warning/Parent Conference/Up to 1 Day ISS/Tobacco Awareness 2nd Offense: Warning/Up to 3 Days ISS/OSS/Tobacco Awareness 3rd Offense: Up to 5 Days ISS/OSS
Policy Code: 4325 Drugs and Alcohol Citation: NCSBA Legal/Policy Services policy.microscribepub.com--school district in Southeast, NC, Board of Education Policy Manual, 2013	Drugs and alcohol will not be prohibited on school premises at any time because it is a threat to the safety and order of school environment. It is the responsibility of the superintendent to ensure that this policy is implemented and applied consistently throughout Local Education Agencies. Prohibited Behavior identified by policy: 1. narcotic drugs; 2. hallucinogenic drugs; 3. amphetamines; 4. barbiturates; 5. marijuana or any other controlled substance; 6. synthetic stimulants, such as MDPV and mephedrone ("bath salts"), and synthetic cannabinoids ("Spice", "K2") 7. any alcoholic beverage, malt beverage, fortified or

	unfortified wine or other intoxicating liquor; or 8. any chemicals, substances or products procured or used with the intention of bringing about a state of exhilaration or euphoria or of otherwise altering the student's mood or behavior K-5 Code of Student Conduct 1st Offense: Up to 10 Days OSS 2nd Offense: Up to 10 Days OSS 3rd Offense: Up to 10 Days OSS 6-12 Code of Student Conduct 1st Offense: Up to 10 Days OSS 2nd Offense: Up to 10 Days OSS/LTS 3rd Offense: Up to 10 Days OSS/LTS
Policy Code: 4328 Gang-Related Activity Citation: NCSBA Legal/Policy Services policy.microscribepub.com--school district in Southeast, NC, Board of Education Policy Manual, 2013	As part of the safety initiative within the district, gang activity is not permitted or prohibited. Gang activity distracts and takes away from the mission and vision of the district to ensure that All students are academically successful. A gang is identified by board policy as any group or organization made up of three or more people in a formal or informal way that is involved in any type of criminal activity. This group is easily identified by colors, signs and/or gesture for affiliation purposes. The following activities have been identified as gang related activity: 1. soliciting others to become part of gang 2. committing, possessing, distributing, displaying or selling any clothes 3. tagging or defacing school property 4. requirement of payment for protection and/or insurance 5. inciting others to intimidate or to act with physical

	violence
	The gang-related activity policy is a non-discriminatory policy that follows the Code of Conduct based on the following consequences: K-5 1st Offense= Up to 10 Days of OSS 2nd Offense= Up to 10 Days of OSS 3rd Offense= Up to 10 Days of OSS 6-12 1st Offense= Up to 10 Days of OSS/LTS 2nd Offense= Up to 10 Days of OSS/LTS 3rd Offense= Up to 10 Days of OSS/LTS
Policy Code: 4341 Parental Involvement in Student Behavior Issues Citation: NCSBA Legal/Policy Services policy.microscribepub.com-- school district in Southeast, NC, Board of Education Policy Manual, 2013	Parental involvement is essential for appropriate teaching, learning and behavior to take place consistently and appropriately in school environment. School employees seek assistance and support from parents for all stakeholders to understand the expected behavior and the appropriate understanding of Code of Conduct in an effort to have a inviting and safe school culture. Faculty and Staff will implement effective strategies to support the Behavior Management Plan soliciting help and support from parents. Part of this process is to invite parents to conferences involving their students as it pertains to inappropriate conduct outlined in Student Code of Conduct, school standards and/or school rules.

	If administration decides to implement a short-term suspension, the principal shall: 1. notify the parent in accordance with policy 44351, Short-Term Suspension' 2. maintain documents and relevant information that he or she receives about the misbehavior for review with the parent, taking into account the rights of other students or staff that may be involved; 3. make reasonable efforts, if appropriate, to meet with the parent before or at the time the student returns to school after any suspension; and 4. make available a copy of this policy, the Code of Student Conduct, and all other applicable board policies, school standards and school rules.
Policy Code: 4351 Short-Term Suspension Citation: NCSBA Legal/Policy Services policy.microscribepub.com-- school district in Southeast, NC, Board of Education Policy Manual, 2013	A short term suspension is an out of school suspension for up to 10 days. The policy does not permit a short-term suspension to include: (1) the removal of a student from class by the classroom teacher, the principal or other authorized school personnel for the remainder of the subject period or for less than one-half of the school day or (2) the changing of a student's location to another room or place on the school premises. Any student given short-term suspension is not allowed to be on school premises or to attend any extracurricular activity without prior approval of the building principal. Pre-Suspension Rights of the Student 1. Student must be provided with an informal hearing with principal prior to receiving short-term suspension. Administration may hold the meeting after giving student oral or written information about charges. The student and parent are part of the hearing process and will hear all information to include statements in regards to the charges the student received. If a student poses a threat to the safety and order of school environment or disrupts the school environment the principal may impose short-term suspension prior to administration of hearing. Students Rights During Suspension 1. the opportunity to take textbooks home for the duration

	of the suspension 2. upon request, the right to receive all missed assignments and, to the extent practicable, the materials distributed to students in connection with such assignments; and 3. the opportunity to take any quarterly, semester or grading period examinations missed during the suspension period Parents should receive documentation that identifies reason for suspension and a description of charges in which suspension was imposed.
Policy Code: 4352 Removal of Student During the Day Citation: NCSBA Legal/Policy Services policy.microscribepub.com--school district in Southeast, NC, Board of Education Policy Manual 2013,	The principal has the authority to remove a student from school grounds that has been suspended under the following circumstances: 1. the parent has been notified and is able to make arrangements for the student to leave the school or agrees to the student's using public transportation or driving himself or herself home; 2. the parent has been notified and is available to receive student, and the principal is able to arrange for transportation from the school to home; or 3. the principal involves law enforcement in the removal of the student from school grounds because such action is necessary to provide a safe, orderly school environment If these conditions are not existent the suspension will begin the next school day.
Policy Code: 4353 Long-Term Suspension, 365-Day Suspension, Expulsion Citation: NCSBA Legal/Policy Services policy.microscribepub.com--school district in Southeast, NC, Board of Education Policy Manual, 2013	Long-term suspension, 365 Day suspension, and expulsion practices will be followed in correspondence with Policy 4353. These actions include the right to written notice of the suggested discipline and the right to recourse via a full hearing prior to imposing disciplinary action. A principal may suggest to the Superintendent the long-term suspension of any student who voluntarily takes part in conduct that violates a provision of the Student Code of Conduct that authorizes long-term suspension. Only the Superintendent or his/her designee has the authority to long-term suspend a student.

	Determination of Appropriate Consequences based on principal recommendation

	a. Culpability of Student- In assessing the culpability of the student for his or her behavior, the principal may consider criteria such as:
	
	    1. student's age;
	
	    2. the student's ability to form the intent to cause the harm that occurred or could have occurred; and
	
	    3. evidence of the student's intent when engaging in the conduct
	
	b. Dangerousness of the Student- In assessing the dangerousness of the student, the principal may consider criteria such as:
	
	    1. the student's disciplinary or criminal record relate to anti-social behavior or drugs and alcohol;
	
	    2. whether a weapon was involved in the incident and if a weapon was involved, whether the student had the ability to inflict serious injury or death with weapon;
	
	    3. evidence of the student's ability to cause the harm that was intended or that occurred; and
	
	    4. whether the student is subject to policy 4260, Student Sex Offenders
	
	c. Harm Caused by the Student-In assessing the severity of the harm caused by the student, the principal may consider criteria such as whether any of the following occurred;
	
	    1. someone was physically injured or killed;
	
	    2. someone was directly threatened or property was extorted through the use of a weapon
	
	    3. someone was directly harmed; either emotionally or psychologically;
	
	    4. educational property or others' personal property was damaged; or
	
	  5. students, school employees or parents were aware of the presence of a weapon or of dangerous behavior on the part of the perpetrator.
	
	After the principal makes recommendation in regards to long-term suspension, 365-day suspension or expulsion to the superintendent a parent/guardian should receive notification of this recommendation. The following items must be documented in this notice:
	
	1. the notice type, i.e., notice of long-term suspension
	
	2. a description of the incident and the student's conduct that led to the recommendation;

	3. the specific provision(s) of the Code of Student Conduct that the student allegedly violated; 4. the specific process by which the parent may request a hearing to contest the decision and the deadline for making the request; 5. the process by which the hearing will be held, including all due process rights to be accorded the student during the hearing; 6. notice of the right to retain an attorney to represent the student in the hearing process; 7. notice that an advocate, instead of an attorney, may accompany the student to assist in the presentation of the appeal; 8. notice that an advocate, instead of an attorney, may accompany the student to assist in the presentation of the appeal; 9. notice of the right to review and obtain copies of the student's educational records prior to the hearing; 10. a reference to policy 4345, Student Discipline Records, regarding the expungement of disciplinary records; and 11. the identity and phone number of a school employee whom the parent may call to obtain assistance in receiving a Spanish translation of the English language information included in the document.

APPENDIX F: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL LETTER

EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY
University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board Office
4N-70 Brody Medical Sciences Building· Mail Stop 682
600 Moye Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834
Office **252-744-2914** · Fax **252-744-2284** · **www.ecu.edu/irb**

Notification of Initial Approval: Expedited

From:	Social/Behavioral IRB
To:	Terrence McAllister
CC:	Bill Grobe
Date:	7/9/2014
Re:	UMCIRB 14-000997 Non-traditional learners: Effectively using seat time to meet the academic needs of non-traditional students.

I am pleased to inform you that your Expedited Application was approved. Approval of the study and any consent form(s) is for the period of 7/9/2014 to 7/8/2015. The research study is eligible for review under expedited category #6, 7. The Chairperson (or designee) deemed this study no more than minimal risk.

Changes to this approved research may not be initiated without UMCIRB review except when necessary to eliminate an apparent immediate hazard to the participant. All unanticipated problems involving risks to participants and others must be promptly reported to the UMCIRB. The investigator must submit a continuing review/closure application to the UMCIRB prior to the date of study expiration. The Investigator must adhere to all reporting requirements for this study.

Approved consent documents with the IRB approval date stamped on the document should be used to consent participants (consent documents with the IRB approval date stamp are found under the Documents tab in the study workspace).

The approval includes the following items:

Name	Description
Approval Letter to SCS Superintendent.pdf	Recruitment Documents/Scripts
Assent-Template-12-17-years-of-age 06.20.14 (Final).rtf	Consent Forms
Chp. 1-3 Dissertation Submission (May).docx	Study Protocol or Grant Application
Data Collection Sheets.docx	Data Collection Sheet
Interview Questions for Administration.docx	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
Interview Questions for Community Members.docx	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
Letter to Expert Panel for Surveys.pdf	Recruitment Documents/Scripts
Letter-to-Adult Participants (Final).rtf	Consent Forms
Letter-to-Parents and Students (Final).rtf	Consent Forms
Proposal Powerpoint.pptx	Study Protocol or Grant Application
Scotland Letter of Support.pdf	Recruitment Documents/Scripts
Shaw Academy Faculty Survey.htm	Surveys and Questionnaires
Shaw Academy Parent Guardian Survey.htm	Surveys and Questionnaires
Shaw Academy Student Survey.htm	Surveys and Questionnaires
Survey-Consent-Letter-Template-for-Expedited-Research (Final).rtf	Consent Forms
Update Letter to SCS Superintendent 12.04.13 (1).pdf	Recruitment Documents/Scripts
Update Letter to SCS Superintendent 12.04.13.pdf	Recruitment Documents/Scripts

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.

IRB00000705 East Carolina U IRB #1 (Biomedical) IORG0000418
IRB00003781 East Carolina U IRB #2 (Behavioral/SS) IORG0000418

APPENDIX G: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD TITLE CHANGE APPROVAL

EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY
University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board Office
4N-70 Brody Medical Sciences Building· Mail Stop 682
600 Moye Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834
Office **252-744-2914** · Fax **252-744-2284** · **www.ecu.edu/irb**

Notification of Amendment Approval

From: Social/Behavioral IRB

To: Terrence McAllister

CC:

Bill Grobe

Date: 4/15/2015

Re: Ame1_UMCIRB 14-000997
UMCIRB 14-000997
Non-traditional learners: Effectively using seat time to meet the academic needs of non-traditional students.

Your Amendment has been reviewed and approved using expedited review for the period of 4/15/2015 to7/8/2015 . It was the determination of the UMCIRB Chairperson (or designee) that this revision does not impact the overall risk/benefit ratio of the study and is appropriate for the population and procedures proposed.

Please note that any further changes to this approved research may not be initiated without UMCIRB review except when necessary to eliminate an apparent immediate hazard to the participant. All unanticipated problems involving risks to participants and others must be promptly reported to the UMCIRB. A continuing or final review must be submitted to the UMCIRB prior to the date of study expiration.The investigator must adhere to all reporting requirements for this study.

Approved consent documents with the IRB approval date stamped on the document should be used to consent participants (consent documents with the IRB approval date stamp are found under the Documents tab in the study workspace).

The approval includes the following items:

Document	Description
Thesis committee has recommended a change in study title	

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.