

PROCEDURES AND SERVICES NEEDED TO FACILITATE A SUCCESSFUL
TRANSITION FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES ENROLLED IN
GEORGIA'S CROSSROADS ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION
PROGRAMS

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VITA

P. Paulette Grant Bragg, daughter of Irene Lennon Grant and Stewart Thomas Grant, was born in Cleveland, Ohio. She graduated from John Adams High School. She attended Bowling Green State University in Bowling Green, Ohio and graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in Speech and Hearing Therapy. After graduation, she was a speech therapist for the Cleveland Public School System. She later attended Cleveland State University to receive additional certification in Elementary Education and in Special Education – Specific Learning Disabilities and Emotional Behavioral Disorders. In the area of general education, she taught first and second grades in the Catholic Diocese of Cleveland School System and third and sixth grades in the Cleveland Public School System. In the area of special education, she taught students with Specific Learning Disabilities and Emotional Behavioral Disorders in the Cleveland Public School System.

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

PROCEDURES AND SERVICES NEEDED TO FACILITATE A SUCCESSFUL
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The National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) reported that there were 10,900 public alternative schools and programs in the United States of which 12 percent of the student population were students receiving special education services. According to the NASDSE, the educational polices in most states define alternative education as programs designed for students who are not progressing in, or adjusting adequately to, the programs in traditional schools. The types of students who are admitted to alternative programs are those who have been suspended or expelled, those at risk of failure, those who have behavior problems, and those who have been academically unsuccessful (Ahearn, 2004, p. 2).

Alternative education programs (AEPs) have existed for several decades. Research conducted by Dugger and Dugger (1998), Katsiyannis and Williams (1998), Kochhar-Bryant and Lacey (2005), Lange and Lehr (1999), Lange and Sletten (2002), Lehr (2005), Powell (2003), Raywid (1994), Rutherford and Quinn (1999), and Young (1990) suggests that AEPs may be the most viable educational option for students with disabilities who are at risk of school failure in a traditional school setting. However, Ahearn (2004) and Lange and Sletten (2002) noted that there is limited research documenting the effects of alternative education programs on students with disabilities.

The purpose of this research was to identify procedures and services that would enable students with specific learning disabilities and students with emotional behavioral disorders enrolled in Georgia's AEPs to successfully transition to their traditional school and complete high school. A mixed-methodology research design was used in this study. The participants for this study included principals of Georgia's alternative education programs and Georgia Department of Education administrators. From the study, six key findings emerged as procedures or services needed or not needed to facilitate a successful transition: student involvement in governance, mentoring programs, childcare programs, rite of passage programs, a sense of belonging, and family outreach strategies. This research also identified educational strategies that may improve the academic progress, discipline, instruction, and graduation rate for students with disabilities.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Introduction and Overview

The National Association of State Directors of Special Education has reported that the numbers of alternative education programs are increasing throughout the United States. Alternative education is not a new concept in public education. Young (1990) noted that in the history of American education alternatives in public education began in the Colonial Period of our nation's history. Young (1990) revealed that during this period the most popular education alternative option was to receive instruction at home. Lange and Sletten (2002) remind us that contemporary alternative education was initiated in the late 1950s and early 1960s. During this era, the public education system was criticized for being calculated only for the success of a few.

Today, alternative education programs, according to the research of Ahearn (2004), are inclined to provide an education to students who are considered at risk for school failure within the traditional education system. Ahearn (2004) reported that alternative education programs have existed for several decades. Yet, few research findings can confirm their efficiency. Moreover, even less studies that indicates the experiences of students with disabilities attending these educational settings. Lehr (2004) decided:

Understanding the roll of alternative schools in providing educational opportunities for youth with disabilities has become increasingly important over the past few years. Significant numbers of youth with disabilities are not completing school and the extent to which alternative education may offer an option that engages students, provides a more successful school experience, and improves the likelihood of graduation has been largely unexamined. (p.1)

This study was designed to identify procedures and services that would enable students with disabilities enrolled in Georgia's alterative education programs to successfully transition to their traditional school and complete high school. Procedures are defined as federal and state laws, state rules and regulations, local school policies, and methods of operations. Services are defined as the state curriculum, instructional programs, instructional strategies, and student support services. The Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) defines successful transition as the student having continued achievement in the traditional school. In order to identify these procedures and services, this chapter examined specific facets of the investigation's purpose such as the legal aspects of special education, historical and contemporary aspects of alternative education, the issue of disproportionality in special education, the research problem, studies that address the problem, and the research methods.

Legal Perspective of Special Education

Thurlow, Sinclair, and Johnson (2002) point out that the dropout rate for students with disabilities is almost twice that of their non-disabled peers. Their literature also alludes to the fact that thirty-six percent of students with specific learning disabilities

(SLD) and 59% of students with emotional behavioral disorders (EBD) drop out of school. Prior to the enactment of Public Law 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, students with disabilities were excluded from the public school system. Today, over thirty years later, educators are seeking procedures and services that will maintain the inclusion of students with disabilities in the public education system. Alternative Education Programs (AEPs) are considered by many (Ahearn, 2004; Dugger & Dugger, 1998; Katsiyannis & Williams, 1998; Lehr, 2005) as a feasible option to address this issue.

Historically, the education of students with disabilities has been regulated by four major pieces of federal legislation: the Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (EAHCA), the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997 (IDEA-1997), the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA-2004), and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). The enactment of EAHCA paved the way for students with disabilities to receive a meaningful public education. EAHCA ensured students with disabilities would have a right to nondiscriminatory testing, evaluation and placement procedures along with parental involvement in their education. The law further ensured that students with disabilities had a right to be educated in the least restrictive environment and that their education would be free and appropriate. However, the focal point of the EAHCA was the mandate that an Individualized Education Program (IEP) be developed for all students with disabilities.

A major focus of EAHCA initially was to guarantee that students with disabilities had access to public education. However, by 1997 the major focus in special education

was improving the achievement of disabled students in public education. This was the impetus of the reauthorization of IDEA–1997 and, again, the core was the IEP.

With the enactment of IDEA–1997, there were significant revisions to the IEP. These revisions included specifying the following goals and plans in the IEP: annual measurable goals, functional behavioral assessments, and behavioral intervention plans for students with behavior problems. In the area of discipline, IDEA–1997 created an interim alternative education setting. An interim alternative setting allows for students with disabilities serving long-term suspension or expulsion for serious violations of a school’s conduct code to continue their education in the general curriculum and receive the services described in their IEP. Placement into an interim alternative setting is determined by the IEP team.

IDEA–1997 strengthened the involvement of students with disabilities participation in statewide and district-wide assessments. Their participation was intensified by stipulating that special education students be provided appropriate testing accommodations. The law also mandated that states develop alternate assessments for those students who could not participate in the general education curriculum.

Since the initial enactment of EAHCA and the enactment of IDEA–1997, the underpinning of federal legislation has been a focus on the right for special education students to receive a free appropriate public education. The purpose of IDEA-2004 was to ensure that states provided a free appropriate public education, which emphasized a special education program that would prepare students with disabilities for postsecondary education, employment, and independent living.

In the development of IDEA–2004, Congress, based on approximately 30 years of research, determined that students with disabilities would be educated more effectively by: (a) having states provide disabled students education in the regular classroom environment to the maximum extent possible, (b) having states establish policies and procedures to prevent disproportionate representation by race and ethnicity of students needing special education services, (c) requiring states to establish performance goals and indicators that attend to graduation rates and dropout rates, (d) providing transition services that would successfully encourage post secondary education or employment, (e) having states support preservice preparation so that special education personnel have the knowledge and skills needed to improve the academic achievement of disabled students, and (f) requiring states to establish policies that will recruit, hire, train and retrain highly qualified teachers who are knowledgeable in content and skills needed to educate students with disabilities. Congress also reported that students with disabilities could be educated more efficaciously if IDEA–2004 was coordinated with other state and federal school improvement efforts, particularly school improvement efforts identified in NCLB.

The purpose of NCLB (2001) is to assure all children have a chance of receiving a quality education by acquiring proficiency on state curriculum standards and assessments. Another purpose of the NCLB (2001) is to close the achievement gaps between high and low performing students, between minority and nonminority students, and between advantaged and disadvantage students. In addition, under the provisions of this federal mandate, states must produce annual report cards that inform parents of the state and individual schools' adequate yearly progress (AYP). States and schools must publicly report the AYP of students by four categories of disaggregated data:

economically disadvantaged, major racial and ethnic groups, students with limited English proficiency, and student with disabilities. The NCLB further mandates that for schools that do not demonstrate AYP; they must provide supplemental services and or abide by corrective actions.

As a result, of NCLB and other school improvement efforts, each state has identified tests at the elementary, middle, and high school levels that assess what the state has determined students should know and be able to do. In conjunction with NCLB and other school improvement efforts, passing a high school graduation test is a requirement to graduate from high school with a regular diploma. According to data from Georgia's AYP State Summary Report Card for 2005–2006 students with disabilities have been among the weakest of the four categories of performing students on these tests and AYP.

In 1996, of the students who did not complete high school, 36% were SLD students and 59% were EBD students. Research conducted by Thurlow et al. (2002) indicates that students who drop out of school generally experience unemployment, underemployment, and incarceration. According to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, in 1995 the arrest rate for EBD students was 73% while the rate was 62% for SLD students. Thurlow et al. considered four interventions important when motivating students to stay in school: opportunities for success in academics, a supportive learning environment, effectively communicating how important education is to potential accomplishments, and dealing with personal problems of students. These four interventions engulf the philosophy of alternative education.

Historical Perspective of Alternative Education Programs

Conventionally, AEPs were intended to educate youth who were at risk of dropping out or had dropped out of school. Alternative schools have existed since the beginning of American education, according to research conducted by Young (1990); however, Lange and Sletten (2002) remind us that alternative education, as it is known in the contemporary sense, has its origins in the civil rights movement. The research of Lange and Sletten (2002) also denoted that in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the public education system was criticized for being racially prejudiced and entirely designed for the success of a few. Consistent with their research, as a result, a movement of community alternative schools maintained outside the public education system designed to offer equal and meaningful education to disadvantaged minority students emerged. From this emergence was the creation of Freedom Schools.

The 1990s brought “increased public attention to school violence, dropout rates, and behavior problems in public schools” (Ahearn, 2004, p. 2). Raywid (1994) characterized alternative schools into three types: Type I — schools of choice (magnet schools based on themes with novel programs), Type II — last chance schools (last step before expulsion), and Type III — schools with a remedial focus on academic or social emotional issues. Lange and Sletten (2002) proposed a Type IV alternative school. Type IV merges school choice, remediation, and innovation to create a second chance program that provides an additional opportunity for success within the school system after a student has experienced difficulty.

Current Statues of Alternative Education and Special Education in Georgia

This decade has seen a variety of definitions of alternative programs throughout the United States. Literature reviewed by Lange and Sletten (2002) proposed that states often have a group of services known as alternatives. As indicated by their research, home schools, correctional institutions, charter schools, magnet schools, private programs, and specific programs in public schools can all be categorized as alternative programs in some states.

The research of Lange and Sletten (2002) also suggested that even though the types of alternative schools may differ, there appeared to be a fundamental focal point that guided the state's alternative programming and cited states such as Minnesota, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, and South Carolina as examples. Minnesota's central focus is to assist students at risk of not graduating from their regular high school. New York's alternative programs enroll students with behavioral difficulties, academic difficulties, high performing students, and students who may be pregnant or parenting. North Carolina's alternative programs are designed to address the needs of students having discipline or behavior problems, attendance issues, and academic difficulties in the regular educational setting. Ohio's alternative programs are for students who are having academic difficulty or who have dropped out of their assigned public schools. South Carolina's programs are for students who are sentenced as a last chance before expulsion.

In 2002, a survey of alternative education legislation and policy was conducted by Lehr, Moreau, Lange, and Lanners. The survey was distributed to state contacts knowledgeable about alternative education. The survey results revealed three issues classified as the most important special education issues facing alternative schools in the

next few years. The three issues were: (a) availability, quality, and licensure of staff to work with students with disabilities in alternative schools, (b) provision and quality of services in place for students with disabilities, and (c) ensuring procedures and services are in place to facilitate success for students transitioning into and out of alternative and traditional settings.

Establishing procedures and services to facilitate success for students with disabilities transitioning from Georgia's alternative education setting to Georgia's traditional school settings is the primary responsibility of the GaDOE. The GaDOE has delegated this responsibility to four programs within its organizational structure GaDOE (2005): Special Education Services and Support Program, Title I, School Improvement, and Alternative Education and Magnet Schools.

These four offices must work collaboratively to guarantee that IDEA—2004 is implemented, that NCLB is put into practice, that school improvement initiatives addressing the issue of decreasing the state's high school drop out rate are made use of, and that Georgia's alternative education programs (AEPs) are operating under state rules, policies, and procedures. The collaborative effort of these four offices should establish a framework for success for students with disabilities transitioning from Georgia's AEPs to traditional educational settings.

On December 3, 2004, IDEA—2004 was signed into law. Most of the provisions in the law were effective as of July 1, 2005. Georgia, as well as other states, was required to implement the federal law prior to federal regulations being finalized. The Special Education Services and Supports program of the GaDOE (2005) issued a document titled *IDEA 2004 Guidance* that identified and explained specific requirements of the law.

The *IDEA 2004 Guidance* document provided direction to school systems when planning special education programs for the 2005–2006 school year. Some of the requirements specified in the *IDEA 2004 Guidance* included individualized education programs, discipline, over-identification and disproportionality, and personnel qualifications. These areas have profound implications for students with disabilities and, as a result, affect the development of procedures and services needed to educate special education students enrolled in Georgia’s AEPs.

IDEA–2004 mandates that the Individualized Education Program (IEP) must contain a statement of the child’s present level of academic and functional performance. The federal law does not define functional performance. The state’s guidance provided schools with examples of nonacademic needs that could be categorized as functional skills and discussed terms of functional performance such as communication, independent living skills, technology skills, interpersonal skills, decision-making, problem solving skills, and motor skills. This section of IDEA–2004 also requires that documentation of applicable accommodations needed to measure performance on state and district wide assessments be included in the IEP. The state’s guidance specifically stated that all IEPs must identify needed accommodations for all state assessments and local system assessments.

IDEA–2004 also regulates the right of each disabled student to a free appropriate public education. One aspect of a free appropriate public education includes discipline procedures for students with disabilities. The law explained that a student with a disability who has been removed from his current placement (educational setting) for more than 10 days shall have a functional behavioral assessment conducted if one is not

currently in place and continue to receive educational services, behavioral interventions, and modifications to address the behavior violation so that it does not reoccur. The state provided additional assistance to local school systems for implementation of this discipline procedure by stating that a student under this provision of the law must have an updated or completed functional behavioral assessment and a behavioral intervention plan that is developed or revised to address the behavior that caused the removal.

This section of IDEA–2004 also discussed the process involved in a Manifestation Determination. A Manifestation Determination is defined as a meeting of the IEP team to determine if the violation of the code of student conduct by a student with a disability was directly related to the student’s disability or if the conduct was a direct result of the school system’s failure to implement the IEP.

IDEA–2004 allows school officials the right to place a student with a disability in an interim alternative educational setting for a maximum of 45 days regardless as to whether the behavior was a manifestation of the student’s disability or if the student inflicted serious bodily injury upon another person at school, at a school function or on school property. This federal statute does not define serious bodily injury. The state’s guidance document informs school systems that serious bodily injury is defined in US code, section 1365, or Title 28. According to Title 28, serious bodily injury must involve (a) a substantial risk of death, (b) extreme pain, (c) protracted and obvious disfigurement or (d) loss or impairment of the function of a bodily member, organ, or mental faculty. The state’s directive also reminds school systems that the IEP team is ultimately responsible for determining the new education placement for the student.

The Personnel Qualifications Policy of IDEA–2004 mandated that states require school systems to recruit, hire, train, and retain highly qualified personnel to provide special education and related services to students with disabilities. The guidance document informed school systems that they should document activities conducted to recruit, hire, train, and retain highly qualified personnel as defined by the Georgia Professional Standards Commission. The Georgia Professional Standards Commission is the state agency that is responsible for establishing teaching standards as well as certifying teachers. Lastly, under this section of IDEA–2004, local school systems were advised to assist existing personnel in becoming highly qualified as stipulated in NCLB.

IDEA–2004 created new requirements that advise systems on how to address the issue of disproportionality. Under the provisions of IDEA 2004, states must guarantee that school systems have policies and procedures that prevent the inappropriate disproportionate representation or over identification of students by race and ethnicity of students with disabilities. Also under these new requirements, states must analyze data and determine if significant disproportionality is occurring in the state or in local school systems. Salend, Duhaney, Montgomery (2002) define disproportionate representation as the presence of students from a specific group in an educational program being higher or lower than one would expect based on their representation in the general population of students. Disproportionality includes both the overrepresentation and underrepresentation of students in terms of educational classification and placement and access to programs, services, resources, curriculum, and instruction and classroom management techniques (p. 1). In Georgia’s AEPs, 60% of the students are African Americans.

The Issue of Disproportionality

In order to understand disproportionality one must first view the role that race plays in American society. The role that race has in American society may best be examined by discussing two theories. These theories are Critical Race Theory and Internal Colony Theory.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is the school of thought, which holds that race lies at the very nexus of American Life. It is an academic discipline that challenges its readers, whether proponents or dissenters, to consider the relationship that exists between race, the justice system, and society. (Wikipedia, 2006, p. 1)

The historical origins of CRT as indicated by Wikipedia (2006) are rooted in the research of Bell and Freeman conducted in the mid 1970s. Their research is grounded in the theory that the advancements made by the civil right laws passed in the 1960s were rapidly being distorted in the 1970s.

Bell, as stated by Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), examined the events leading up to the United States Constitution's development and concluded that there exists a tension between property rights and human rights. This tension was greatly exacerbated by the presence of Africans as slaves in America. The slave status of most African Americans resulted in their being objectified as property. A government constructed to protect the rights of the property owners lacked the incentive to secure human rights for the African American. According to Bell, the notion of individual rights, independent to property rights, was completely alien to the thought process of these men of property and as a result, despite twenty years of civil rights gains, most Blacks remain disadvantaged because of their race.

In 1995, Ladson-Billings and Tate explored the implications of CRT not in terms of race and America's justice system, but in terms of race and the nation's public education system. Ladson-Billings and Tate reasoned that,

Whiteness continues to be constructed as the absence of the contaminating influence of blackness such that African American and Latino students continue to experience segregation through sorting practices such as tracking or through labels such as mild mental retardation (MR) and emotional disturbance (ED).

(Watts & Erelles, 2004, p. 275)

Studies conducted by the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative in 2001 found similar racial disparities in terms of discipline referrals, suspensions, and expulsions. The study revealed that the percentages of African American students who were disciplined were twice that of the general school population. The study also showed that Latino students, in a number of urban school districts, experienced a disproportionately high percentage of discipline referrals.

Reviewing the practice of labeling minority students in specific disability areas as cited by Ladson-Billings and Tate and the racial disparity cited in the study conducted by the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative resulting in assigning students discipline referrals, suspensions, and expulsions augments the discussion of CRT. In addition, these racial issues allow for the discussion of a complementary theory to CRT known as the internal colony theory studied by Watts and Erelles (2004) which also has significant impact on public education.

According to Watts and Erelles (2004), the theory of internal colony is one that "describes oppressed people (people of color and disabled people belonging to the

working class and/or the underclass) in U.S. society as living in internal colonies where colonized people are forced to interact with oppressive institutions within the colony” (p. 276–277). In the context of public education, certain urban schools may be viewed as oppressive institutions within the colony. These schools are characterized by a predominate enrollment of African American and Latino students. The schools are generally located in areas associated with high unemployment, high underemployment, lack of capital investment in the community, and feelings of helplessness and hopelessness.

Therefore, in American public education it is theorized that students of color are colonized in special education classes (for students with mental retardation and emotional disturbance) and alternative education programs. It can also be hypothesized that this colonization of minority students in these specific special education classes and alternative education programs has created a disproportionate representation.

Again, disproportionate representation occurs when a specific race of students’ existence in an educational program or setting is higher or lower than one would expect based on their representation in the general student population. Data from the U.S. Department of Education in Annual Reports to Congress on the Implementation of The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act from 1987 to 2002 showed African American students as overrepresented in the categories of mental retardation (MR) and emotional disturbance (ED).

The Council for Exceptional Children and the National Alliance of Black School Educators (2002) has identified possible reasons as to why African American students may be overrepresented in special education: (a) the failure of the education system to

educate students of different backgrounds, (b) unfair practices associated with the special education referral and placement process, (c) mistreatment of tests, (d) the absence of effective instruction in general education programs, and (e) inadequate resources and less well skilled and qualified teachers making learning more difficult.

The Council for Exceptional Students and the National Alliance of Black School Educators (2002) also alluded to somber consequences that result from over-representation of African American students in special education: (a) students are deprived of access to the general education curriculum, (b) students are provided educational services that do not meet their needs, and (c) students are wrongly labeled.

The reasons as to why African American students may be disproportionately represented in special education and the grave consequences that result from being disproportionately represented are distressing. The reasons and consequences are more distressing when one compares longitudinal changes in incidence rates for MR and ED. Review of data from the U.S. Department of Education recognized that between 1987 and 2002, while MR rates decreased by three percent. Yet, African American student rates of MR increased by seven percent. Their risk ratio (risk for racial/ethnic group to have a disability/category or placed in a particular educational setting compared to the risk for all other students) to be identified as MR increased by 38%. In the special education category of ED incidence rates during 1987 and 2002 increased by 83% and the risk ratio for African American students to be identified as ED increased by 41%.

The U.S. Department of Education provided states and school districts guidance through a technical assistance document in calculating disproportionate representation. One procedure for calculating disproportionate representation is Risk. Risk is the

statistical measure that compares students from a racial/ethnic subgroup to all students from the racial /ethnic group. Risk is made up of five categories: Risk Index, Risk Ratio, Weighted Risk Ratio, Risk Gap, and Alternate Risk Ratio.

The U.S. Department of Education in the document titled *Methods for Assessing Racial /Ethnic Disproportionality in Special Education: A Technical Assistance Guide* defined each category. Risk Index contrasts students with disabilities from a racial/ethnic subgroup to all students in the racial/ethnic subgroup. The Risk Index also compares students with disabilities from a racial/ethnic subgroup in an educational setting to all students with disabilities.

Risk Ratio is described as the risk for a racial/ethnic group to have a disability/category compared to the risk for all other students. Risk Ratio also notes the risk for a racial/ethnic group to be placed in a particular educational setting compared to the risk for all other students. Weighted Risk Ratio is used when comparing districts across state or schools across the district to control for variability in demographic distributions. Risk Gap demonstrates the difference between risk ratios among students from different racial/ethnic groups. Alternate Risk Ratio is used when there are less than 10 students in the racial/ethnic group of interest.

Addressing the Issue of Disproportionality

The problem of disproportionate representation of African American students or of any minority students in special education may not improve, according to Gamm (2007), until school systems are able to put into practice district and school wide changes

that address reading and behavior challenges presented by students through early screening and intervention within the general education program.

This may have been the basis for Congress mandating as part of IDEA 2004 the consequence that a district that has a significant disproportionate enrollment of a racial/ethnic group of students in receipt of special education services must reserve 15% of its IDEA funds to provide comprehensive coordinated early intervening services. Coordinated early intervening services are intended for students who have not been recognized as needing special education or related services, but are intended for those who require additional academic and behavioral support to be successful in general education.

States are required by IDEA–2004 to monitor local school systems for probable disproportionate representation of racial/ethnic groups in special education and related services to the degree the representation is the result of improper identification. In order to provide additional technical assistance to states and local school districts, Gamm (2007) has developed a model for Analyzing Disproportionality in Special Education. Some of the areas identified and discussed in the model are: (a) areas of inquiry for general education instruction and intervention, (b) systemic data analysis, (c) student file review, and (d) a systemic practices rubric.

Areas of inquiry for general education instruction and intervention involve a three-step inquiry process. The first step of the process is to determine whether the school district or state has, policies and procedures developed that are based on scientific research. These policies and procedures should be used consistently throughout the system. The second step of the process involves determining if state or system documents

are aligned with the policies and procedures and that all documents are implemented with conformity. The third step is based on the extent that the policies and procedures are either not in place or are not aligned with scientific research. This phase of the inquiry should focus on the degree to which the student received and benefited from proper services and support.

The second area identified in the model for analyzing disproportionality is system-wide data analysis. System-wide data analysis is needed to demonstrate the extent to which there are students without disabilities who have low reading or mathematics performance on statewide assessments that are comparable to those with disabilities. The results from the system-wide data analysis demonstrate the extent to which the population might be significantly disproportionate by race/ethnicity.

The third area identified in the model was the student file review. The student file review determines if general education interventions are made available impartially by type, degree, and frequency across all racial and ethnic groups of students. The last area identified was the systemic practice rubric. A systemic practice rubric is a tool that summarizes information and analyzes the scope to which expected practices are put into operation with fidelity in schools and across the district.

A model for analyzing disproportionality in special education would allow for school districts or a state to monitor for possible disproportionate representation in special education and related services. Once a state or system has identified data representative of disproportionality or has identified policies, procedures, and practices that could be linked to inappropriate IDEA eligibility or placement decisions, the next step would be to design strategies for change. One strategy designed for changing

disproportionality in special education would be the implementation of Response to Intervention (RTI).

The International Reading Association (2008) noted, “RTI’s intent is to prevent the provision of unnecessary special education services. With RTI, low-performing students are offered intense individualized academic intervention. Student progress is monitored to see if response to this intervention yields adequate academic growth” (p. 1).

The National Association of State Directors of Special Education (2006) has outlined a RTI model. RTI is based on a three-tiered approach to intervention. In Tier One, classroom instruction using scientific research-based strategies is provided to targeted students who were identified using benchmark assessments. Tier Two is characterized by providing scientific research-based supplemental instruction to students in small, flexible homogenous groups. Tier Three involves an intervention team prescribing specific intensive interventions to students. The term scientific, research based interventions is addressed in IDEA–2004. Student progress monitoring is mandated by IDEA–2004 regulations.

Disproportionality — Georgia Perspective

IDEA–2004 requires states to have in effect policies and procedures to prevent the inappropriate identification or disproportionate representation by race and ethnicity of children with disabilities, including disproportionate representation with a particular impairment. The state of Georgia publically reported data on disproportionality in the Special Education Annual Report. For the 2005–2006 school year and the 2006–2007 school year, using a weighted risk ratio, Georgia had a disproportionate representation of

African Americans in the special education category of Intellectual Disabilities (ID). During the same period, using a weighted risk ratio, Georgia was at risk of disproportionate representation for African Americans in the special education category of EBD.

In the absence of specific federal guidelines for analyzing disproportionality, Georgia provided detailed guidance on the topic of disproportionality to local school systems in another memorandum from the State Superintendent issued on January 26, 2006. This memorandum mirrored federal regulations.

In this memorandum, school systems were informed that after a state review of a school system's data, if it was determined that disproportionality existed, that the state must (a) review and offer technical assistance in the revision of policies, practices and procedures that contributed to disproportionality, (b) require any school system identified as significantly disproportionate to reserve fifteen percent of Federal Title VI-B funds to provide comprehensive coordinated early intervening services to children not yet identified as children with disabilities, and (c) the state would require the local system to publicly report on the revision of policies, practices and procedures. The implementation of these practices may decrease the possibility of minority students being colonized in special education.

As stated by Watts and Erevelles (2004), schools can create internal colonies where persons of color and persons with disabilities are forced to interact in oppressive institutions such as alternative education programs. According to data from Georgia for the 2006 school year, the student enrollment for Georgia's alternative education program was 13,017 of which approximately 60% were African American students. In addition,

according to data from the GaDOE for the 2006 school year, approximately 20% of the students enrolled in the alternative education program were students with disabilities.

Efforts to Enhance the Status of Special Education in Georgia

As stated previously, Congress reported that students with disabilities could be educated more effectively if IDEA–2004 was coordinated with the school improvement efforts of NCLB. The Office of Title I Programs of the GaDOE is responsible for the implementation of NCLB in the state. This office provides to local school systems general information, policies, procedures, guidance, and technical assistance in regards to NCLB.

In July 2004, the Office of Title I Programs made available a guidance document titled *Communication AYP: A Guide for Discussing Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) under the No Child Left Behind Act*. The purpose of this document was to assist local school systems by explaining the significance of NCLB and AYP to all stakeholders such as teachers, parents, and the media. This document contains a brief overview of NCLB, basic questions and answers concerning AYP, and guidelines for school superintendents to use when communicating with the media, principals, school boards and other education partners. In addition, this guidance provides sample documents in the areas of a news release, parent letters on AYP, and an article for school/community publication. A final component of this guidance document is a section on developing a communication plan that provides assistance to school systems when planning their communication approach.

The Office of Title I Programs has also placed on their website informational fact sheets addressing basic information on consequences for schools and school systems for not making AYP. In collaboration with the Special Education Services and Support Program, the Office of Title I Programs developed an information sheet titled *No Child Left Behind & Students with Disabilities*. The information sheet discusses how the state is ensuring that students with disabilities will meet proficient levels of academic achievement by the federal target date of 2013–2014 and how students with disabilities in Georgia are to be provided public choice and supplemental services under NCLB.

The Office of Title I Programs has provided and continues to provide assistance to local school systems on how to implement the federal regulatory components of NCLB. However, the state summary data for AYP provided by the Governor’s Office of Student Achievement and the GaDOE reveals that in the 2005–2006 school year students with disabilities did not make AYP as defined in NCLB in the area of academic performance.

The state continues to provide technical assistance to schools and school systems in meeting the federal target of all students meeting proficient level of academic achievement by 2013–2014 as outlined in NCLB. The state provides this technical assistance primarily through the School Improvement Division. The major focus of the School Improvement Division is to implement a statewide system of support and process for improvement. This is done by providing schools and school systems resources to address the issue of student achievement and to provide thorough support for schools that are not making AYP.

For schools not making AYP, the School Improvement Division provides regional support teams, school improvement training, and leadership facilitators who serve as on site coaches to assist administrators. For all schools in Georgia, the School Improvement Division provides a variety of technical assistance activities some of which are professional learning programs, providing assistance in analyzing data, planning improvement priorities from the data, and providing guidelines for program evaluation.

Another area in which the School Improvement Division is providing technical assistance is in addressing the issue of dropouts in Georgia's public schools. In the 2005–2006 school year, 40.3% of the economically disadvantaged students dropped out of school and 64% of the Limited English Proficient students dropped out of school. In the same school year 68.9% of students with disabilities dropped out of school.

Two major initiatives to address this issue spearheaded by the GaDOE School Improvement Division are the GaDOE's *Graduation Counts! Readiness to Results in Grades 6–12* document (2006) and the implementation of Graduation Coaches for each middle and high school in Georgia (GaDOE 2006). Graduating all Georgia students and having all Georgia students ready for post-secondary education and/or the work force is the target goal of the initiative Graduation Counts (GaDOE 2006). The achievement of this goal is a shared responsibility of the school and the school district with guidance and technical assistance from the GaDOE. One primary objective of Graduation Counts is that high school leadership teams meet annually with community and business leaders to analyze graduation rates, post-secondary readiness, student achievement information, and community workforce needs.

To further assist in decreasing the dropout rate in Georgia, the Georgia General Assembly funds a Graduation Coach for each middle and high school in the state. The Graduation Coaches' responsibility is to assist in improving graduation rates for all population subgroups of the school. This is to be accomplished by analyzing the specific data for students, identifying possible obstructions to graduation, creating, and putting into practice individual intervention strategies, and along with students, developing a graduation and achievement plan.

The GaDOE and the Georgia General Assembly have supported local school systems in their implementation of IDEA–2004, NCLB, and in their efforts to decrease dropout rates. These efforts not only affect the quality of education received by students in traditional school settings, but also students in non-traditional educational settings such as Georgia's AEPs. These efforts would assist students with disabilities in facilitating a successful transition to a traditional school.

Georgia's CrossRoads Alternative Education Programs

In Georgia, alternative education began in 1970 as a program for dropouts. This program was known as the Atlanta Postal Street Academies. The federally funded program served students in three locations. The federal funding for the Atlanta Postal Street Academies AEPs ended in 1971. As a result, leaders in the community established the nonprofit organization EXODUS that consisted of four academies. In 1974, the Atlanta Public School System decided to assign current students at risk of dropping out of school to these academies to earn a high school diploma. That same year, EXODUS

established a pilot program designed to reach potential dropouts attending traditional high schools.

In 1994, Georgia's General Assembly established a state grant designed for the development of alternative programs in local school systems. This led to the creation of Georgia's CrossRoads AEPs. The CrossRoads AEPs served students who had been suspended or expelled from the traditional classroom due to persistent disruptive behavior.

In 2000, the Georgia General Assembly passed the A+ Education Reform Act (HB. 1187). The purpose of the A+ Education Reform Act was to establish state expectations for escalating scholastic accomplishment and to improve the quality of education in Georgia. Within this law were the rules and guidelines for instituting AEPs in school districts. With the passage of the A+ Education Reform Act, CrossRoads grants were abolished. New funds were established to generate Georgia's AEPs for students in grades six through twelve.

Georgia's AEPs's mission is to concentrate on academic success and behavior. The program has a dual purpose. The first purpose is to provide disruptive adjudicated youth an educational program separate from the regular classroom rather than suspend or expel such students from school. The second purpose is to provide students whom are eligible to remain in the regular classroom, but are likely to succeed in a nontraditional setting an education program that focuses on the critical academic knowledge and skills necessary for success in school.

The CrossRoads Alternative Education Model provides rigorous, individual educational and communal skills programs to enable students to succeed in the traditional

school program. According to the GaDOE, this model is most effective for middle and high school students who are adjudicated, returning from a Department of Juvenile Justice placement or who have been suspended or expelled from a traditional school.

According to GaDOE guidelines, AEPs may serve students who have been removed from schools due to violation of the schools code of conduct. The guidelines further stipulate that students with disabilities cannot be placed in AEPs without the advantage of procedural safeguards stipulated in IDEA–2004 and that alternative education teachers are highly qualified as defined in NCLB. The guidelines also state that program effectiveness is determined by the academic improvement of students being taught on grade level and on the decreased drop out rate of current and former AEP students.

Of the students enrolled in the CrossRoads AEPs Model for disruptive students in 2006, the total number was 13,017 of which 2,574 were student with disabilities. In terms of academic progress and graduation rates, the statewide results for students with disabilities enrolled in Georgia’s traditional schools and in the AEPs show that these students did not meet the states criteria of proficiency. According to the AYP State Summary Report for 2005–2006, students with disabilities did not meet the state’s criteria of meeting or exceeding proficiency in any of the academic areas. In the area of dropout prevention, the state’s target graduation was greater than or equal to 60% for each subgroup. Students with disabilities graduation rate for the 2005–2006 school year was 31.1%. When it comes to providing a quality education or an effective drop out prevention program for students with disabilities the state of Georgia may not be making adequate yearly progress.

Problem Statement

A review of the current performance of students with disabilities in academic performance showed that students with disabilities are not meeting academic standards. A review of the graduation rates reveal that the majority of students with disabilities do not graduate from high school. Approximately 20% of Georgia's students with disabilities are enrolled in AEPs. To strengthen the academic performance and increase the graduation rate for SLD and EBD students enrolled in Georgia's CrossRoads AEPs the procedures and services that can facilitate a successful return to a traditional school program and successful school completion for students with disabilities needs to be identified and implemented.

Studies Addressing these Problems

Studies addressing the issue of traditional school programs, AEPs, and school completion for students with disabilities tend to address these issues in four areas: procedures, educational services, transition, and dropout prevention. Procedures, for the purpose of this study, are defined as established or traditional methods of operation. Examples of procedures include state policies, legislation, and guidelines for AEPs. Studies conducted by Lehr, Lanners, and Lange (2003) and Lehr, Moreau, Lange and Lanners (2004) involved state policy and state legislation on AEPs from two sources: a web based search of all procedures from all 50 state departments of education websites and a survey completed by 39 states which asked questions regarding the states' procedures and policies concerning AEPs.

The Discussion of Key Findings and Associated Issues section of the study conducted by Lehr, Lanners and Lange (2003) summarized that 75% of the states surveyed addressed criteria for enrollment, the definition of an alternative education program, curriculum, and staffing in state policy or legislation. It was also noted from this study that 33% of the states surveyed had policies regarding the enrollment of students with disabilities. In the section of this study titled “Implications for Future Policy and Practice,” Lehr, Lanners and Lange suggested “there has been a renewed interest in alternative settings that focus on chronically disruptive, suspended, and expelled students” (p. 16).

The Implications for Future Policy and Practice of Lehr, Lanners et al. study identified three concerns. The three concerns were: (a) the issue of further investigation being necessary to establish the degree to which policy matches practice, (b) the concern of how to effectively address the objective of alternative education which is to meet the needs of disenfranchised students, and (c) the concern of the need to identify the best approaches for alternative education to take to facilitate positive outcomes for students who are not successful in the traditional school.

The concerns addressed in the Implications for Future Policy and Practice section and the topics summarized in the Discussion of Key Findings and Associated Issues section influenced this study. The influence of these two sections is reflected in the purpose of the study, conceptual framework of this research and the instrument development phase for this research. These two sections also influenced this study’s research questions.

The renewed interest in alternative education cited by Lehr, Lanners and Lange (2003) generated the purpose of the study, which involved investigating Georgia's policies and legislation that impact the education of special education students enrolled in alternative programs. The concern of alternatives addressing of needs of disenfranchised students is the foundation of the conceptual framework of this investigation. As noted in the following section, the conceptual framework for this study is grounded in Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological framework. The ecological framework views school reform in terms of attaining the needs of disenfranchised students. Addressing the concern identified by Lehr, Lanners et al. in matching policy to practice is mirrored in the survey and the interview protocols developed for this investigation.

Lastly, the issue of identifying the approaches alternative education is to take to facilitate positive outcomes for students is the basis for the research questions. The research questions were designed to identify policies, procedures, and services. The research questions were also designed to identify instructional programs and strategies to improve academic achievement for this student population.

Research conducted by Lehr et al. (2004) was intended to collect current information about alternative schools and programs across the nation. This was done by distributing a survey to personnel at state departments of education knowledgeable about alternative education. Survey questions asked about school characteristics, students served curriculum and instruction, and outcomes. Additionally, the survey asked respondents questions regarding students with disabilities.

Lehr et al. (2004) stated "the extent to which students with disabilities attend alternative schools and the services they receive are not well known" (p. 17). Lehr et al.

conceded that without this information it is difficult to discuss the extent to which students with disabilities are attending alternative schools on a national level and difficult to address questions about overrepresentation and exclusion from traditional school.

Data received from the survey did provide information on disability categories served in AEPs and identified the major special education issues alternative schools will face. The primary disabilities categories for students attending AEPs were EBD and SLD. The study (Lehr et al., 2004) acknowledged that survey respondents indicated two important special education issues alternative programs will face in the next two to three years: “(a) provisions and quality of services in place for students with disabilities and (b) ensuring procedures and services are in place to facilitate success for students transitioning into and out of alternative and traditional schools” (p. 19).

As previously mentioned, Lehr et al. (2004) concluded that due to the lack of information regarding students with disabilities in AEPs it is difficult to address disproportionality and the exclusion from the traditional school setting. Therefore, this study identified and discussed state level demographic data on students with disabilities attending AEPs in Georgia. This study also discussed disproportionality on the national level and state (Georgia) level.

The Lehr, Lanners and Lange (2003) and Lehr, Manners et al. (2004) studies investigated state policies and legislation impact on AEPs. Their studies suggested the necessity of additional research on procedures and services that would provide positive outcomes for students with disabilities in AEPs. The influence of their research is reflected in this study’s purpose, conceptual framework, research questions, and survey

design. The following topic identifies research that addresses educational services for students with disabilities.

Studies focusing on the concerns of educational services for students with disabilities tended to be centered on curriculum, instructional, and discipline strategies for special education students in traditional school programs. Services for the purpose of this study are defined as those strategies or programs that provide assistance and support. Research conducted by Byrnes (2004) identified strategies for providing students with disabilities access to the general curriculum.

Byrnes (2004) research examined the experiences of administrators of Massachusetts special education schools in aligning the state curriculum with state standards. Byrnes (2004) revealed that administrators identified finding time for curriculum alignment and finding assistance to do so were the major challenges. A recommendation from the study was to explore methods of that would expand students with disabilities' access to the general curriculum by conducting additional studies.

This study interviewed administrators from the GaDOE. This was inspired by the research conducted by Byrnes (2004) which identified the administrator's challenges of finding assistance in aligning state curriculum with state standards. The interview protocol for the GaDOE administrators asked questions involving the level of technical assistance provided by the state department in the areas of literacy and mathematics instruction. The protocol also asked a question concerning the level of technical assistance provided by the state to assist regular education teachers in implementing the classroom modifications written on the IEP in order for students with disabilities to be taught grade level curriculum.

The NCLB Act (2001) mandated that states apply the same academic standards to all students. This includes students with disabilities. Byrnes (2004) discussed special education administrators' experiences in aligning their curriculum with state standards to enable students with disabilities access to the general curriculum. The impact that state standards have on the level of instruction provided to students with disabilities in the areas of reading and mathematics was asked of the GaDOE administrators involved in this study. The level of instruction received by students with disabilities in the area of mathematics is discussed in the subsequent segment.

Calhoon and Fuchs (2003) and Maccinin and Hughes (2000) conducted studies which investigated research-based instructional strategies for high school level SLD students in the area of mathematics. Calhoon and Fuchs (2003) examined the effects of peer-assisted learning strategies (PALS) and curriculum based measurement (CBM) on the mathematics performance of secondary students with disabilities. CBM are used to monitor regularly students' progress on curriculum goals.

The findings of the research of Calhoon and Fuchs (2003) indicated that PALS/CBM increased the computational skills of the participants. The study suggests that PALS/CBM is a math program that both high school students with SLD and their teachers are willing to use, and believed helped to increase mathematics performance. Calhoon and Fuchs (2003) recommend since basic mathematic skills competence escapes a significant portion of high school SLD students, it is important to find a math curriculum that helps improve math skills for these students. Calhoon and Fuchs (2003) also propose the need to identify effective instructional techniques for students with math disabilities at the high school level is critical. These researchers stated, "research has

shown that students with disabilities leave high school with mathematics proficiency levels that are 6 to 7 years lower than those of their peers” (p. 244).

Maccini and Hughes (2000) investigated the effects of an instructional strategy for teaching algebra to SLD students. The instructional strategy involved the use of a teaching sequence on the representation and solution of problem-solving skills to enhance students’ performance. The results of the study of Maccini and Hughes (2000) show that students with SLD, who participated in the study, were taught to represent and solve for the solution to word problems involving integer numbers, to generalize those skills to more difficult problems, and to maintain the effects over time. Maccini and Hughes (2000) advised that future studies should provide an assessment of instructional techniques to decide the most effective methodology to teaching algebra to students with SLD. Furthermore, research is needed for students with SLD and other topical areas in algebra.

The findings of the studies conducted by Calhoon and Fuchs (2003), Maccini, and Hughes (2000) inspired two interview questions asked of alternative education program administrators. The first question sought information regarding instructional mathematics strategies that correlate with improved achievement. The second question requested information about math instructional programs effective in improving academic performance.

Calhoon and Fuchs (2003) and Maccini and Hughes (2004) reviewed strategies to enhance mathematics skills for students with disabilities. Their investigations recommended further examinations in the areas of identifying mathematics curriculum and instructional techniques that may improve mathematics skills of high school students

with disabilities. The studies of Calhoon and Fuchs (2003), Maccini, and Hughes (2004) had an effect on the study's overall purpose of identifying helpful services in the area of mathematics instruction for students with disabilities in AEPs. Additional studies that addressed interventions on overall academic performance of students with emotional and behavior disorders is the next topic of discussion.

Ryan, Reid, and Epstein (2004) investigated the effectiveness of peer-mediated interventions on academic performance of students with EBD. Daly, Garbacz, Olson, Persampieri, and Ni (2006) explored improving reading fluency by influencing EBD middle school students' choice of instructional procedures. Ryan et al. (2004) findings showed that peer-mediated interventions consistently produced effective academic and interpersonal benefits for EBD students.

Ryan, Reid, and Epstein (2004) suggested that there are several peer-mediated interventions shown to be effective methods of instruction for students with EBD. Their investigation indicated these interventions have resulted in large academic gains across subject areas including math, reading, spelling, and history. Ryan, Reid and Epstein ascertained that the findings emphasized the importance of teachers becoming more knowledgeable and skilled in the use of these peer-mediated strategies for students with EBD.

The results of Daly et al. (2006) indicated that students increased their oral reading fluency rates when choice of instructional antecedents and delivery of those antecedents were combined with reinforcement contingencies for improving rate of responding. Those choices also led to greater opportunities to respond for the students. According to Daly et al., this is a major finding in light of the Sutherland and Wehby

(2001) study, which denoted that EBD students generally receive fewer opportunities to respond. However, Daly et al implied the significance of these results are whether behavior specialists are willing to examine instructional and motivational situations that can be used to improve not only the academic responding of EBD students, but also their adaptive choices. Daly et al. noted this investigation might provide practical information about student preference for different treatments when increases in compliance with instructional interventions are wanted.

The research conducted by Ryan, Reid and Epstein (2004) and Daly et al. (2006) influenced this study. Similar to the influence from studies conducted by Calhoon and Fuchs (2003), Maccini, and Hughes (2004) these studies inspired research and interview questions addressing the issue of instructional strategies and instructional programs that improve academic achievement for students with disabilities.

Students with EBD are a target population of this investigation. Ryan, Reid and Epstein (2004) and Daly et al. (2006) studies identified educational approaches to improve the academic performance of students in this disability category. Improving the academic performance for SLD students, another targeted population of the study, is focus for discussion in the next section.

Researchers Kim, Vaughn, Klingner, Woodruff, Reutebuch, and Kouzekanani (2006) studied the effects of Computer-Assisted Collaborative Strategic Reading in the area of comprehension with middle school students with disabilities. This study also investigated the opinion of students and teachers regarding the effectiveness of the Computer-Assisted Collaborative Strategic Reading (CACSR) program. The results discovered a statistical significance between intervention and comparison groups' reading

comprehension ability. Kim et al. identified as implications for future research the need for an investigation of participants' specific reading problems in relation to their improvements due to the CACSR intervention.

The ability to decode words rapidly and accurately is important for readers to focus on constructing meaning from text therefore, reading comprehension difficulty often relates to deficits in decoding skills. Some students have difficulty reading text even when they possess adequate decoding skills — a pattern often observed in older students and adults with reading difficulties. (p. 247)

In addition, to better understand the contribution of technology to the improvement reading comprehension, Kim et al. (2006) recommended future research comparing the effects of the three conditions on the comprehension of students with SLD. The three conditions were defined as collaborative strategic reading (CSR), CACSR, and a comparison condition.

The implications for future research identified by Kim et al. generated survey statements for AEPs building principals. The first statement was: There is a need for students with disabilities to use technology consistently in their learning settings. The second statement was: There is a need for CrossRoads Alternative Education Programs to provide hands on project-based learning activities for students with disabilities in order for them to be actively engaged in the learning process.

Kim et al. (2006) employed the CACSR program to increase reading comprehension skills for special education students. Kim et al suggested the use of technology to improve reading comprehension. This research created the need to address the issue of how technology is incorporated in the instruction of students with disabilities

in alternative education. Strategies for improving student behavior as reviewed by research conducted by Safran and Oswald (2003) and Oswald, Safran and Johanson (2005) are the following studies to be discussed.

Effective strategies for classroom management as a tool for improving the education of students were presented in studies conducted by Safran and Oswald (2003) and Oswald, Safran and Johanson (2005). These studies discussed the impact of the discipline strategy of positive behavioral support (PBS) on making schools safe and productive learning environments. Safran and Oswald (2003) examined the use of school-based PBS that included databased decision-making and team collaboration. Their findings indicate that PBS offers a positive, data driven and collaborative alternative to punitive discipline approaches.

Safran and Oswald's (2003) findings provided the foundation for three recommendations for schools considering implementing PBS. The first recommendation was to develop and conduct a needs assessment survey to identify how, where, or with whom PBS is required. The second recommendation advised schools to engage in a discussion of organizational commitment prior to implementing PBS. The final recommendation stressed the use of technology to collect, analyze and report discipline related information.

Oswald, Safran and Johanson (2005) examination's purpose was to determine whether PBS could improve middle school students' challenging hallway behavior. The results after a five-week intervention phase demonstrated improvement in their behavior. Oswald, Safran and Johanson's findings suggest that "there remains a future PBS agenda including the role administrative support and the behavioral support team's decision-

making process, maintenance of behavior change, and strategies that can facilitate generalization to other settings” (p. 276).

Studies by Safran and Oswald (2003) and Oswald, Safran and Johanson (2005) influenced questions that created this study’s interview protocols. Eight questions were developed.

1. Does your school have a school-wide discipline program currently being implemented?
2. If so, please describe the program, how it is implemented, and how you would evaluate the program’s effectiveness?
3. Does your program integrate PBS in the school-wide discipline program?
4. If so, what PBS is used?
5. How would you evaluate the effectiveness of using PBS in the school-wide discipline program?
6. If your school does not have a school-wide discipline program is PBS used in individual classrooms?
7. How is the PBS used and how would you evaluate its effectiveness?
8. Does the state have any initiatives that will assist in reducing the number of school discipline referrals for students with disabilities?

Safran and Oswald (2003) and Oswald, Safran and Johanson (2005) emphasized the importance of a safe learning environment. Equally important as providing a safe learning environment for students in Georgia’s AEPs is providing an environment that will allow students to transition to their home school and graduate from high school.

Benz, Lindstrom, and Yovanoff (2000) performed two studies in the area of improving graduation and employment for students with disabilities. The first study examined factors that are linked with students graduating with a high school diploma, finding employment, or advancing to post secondary education. The second study examined the study participants' perceptions of the program and staff personalities deemed beneficial in helping the participants achieve education and transition goals.

Benz, Lindstrom, and Yovanoff (2000), from their research findings and discussion, outlined four specific proposals for secondary and transition practices and policies.

1. Focus secondary and transition services concurrently on the two goals of school completion and post school preparation.
2. Promote curricular relevance and student self-determination through student-centered planning and individual services.
3. Expanded the use of collaborative service delivery programs as a mechanism for delivering transition services.
4. Extended secondary school reform efforts to include career development, applied learning in the community and transition planning as a central part of the regular education curriculum for all students. (p. 527)

The research of Benz, Lindstrom, and Yovanoff (2000) was integral in designing the survey for this study. As a result, seven response statements on the survey in the areas of instruction and transition services correlate with the research of Benz, Lindstrom, and Yovanoff. The seven response statements were:

1. There is a need for students with disabilities in the CrossRoads Alternative Education Program to be involved in an established mentoring program.
2. There is a need for the CrossRoads Alternative Education Program to have vocational training and internships for students with disabilities.
3. There is a need for the CrossRoads Alternative Education Program to conduct functional assessments for students with disabilities.
4. There is a need for academic awards recognition programs for students with disabilities enrolled in the CrossRoads Alternative Education Program.
5. There is a need for adequate instructional materials and supplies to educate students with disabilities on grade level.
6. There is a need for a multidisciplinary team to develop procedures and services to ensure continued support to students with disabilities when the students transition into and from the CrossRoads Alternative Education Program.
7. There is a need for the IEP team to meet periodically (more than once a year) to determine if services are being provided as documented on the student's IEP.

Similar to studies conducted by Benz et al., which focused on improving graduation rates, studies have addressed the area of dropout prevention for students with disabilities. A study to investigate the effectiveness of the Check and Connect Model of student engagement to promote school completion among urban high school students with emotional or behavioral disabilities was performed by Sinclair, Christenson, and Thurlow (2005). The reported effects of the implementing the Check and Connect Model

included lower rates of dropout and mobility, higher rates of attendance and enrollment status in school, and an increase in the number of comprehensive transitional plans. This research (Sinclair, Christenson & Thurlow, 2005) resulted in the following implication for research and practice.

Additional intervention studies and other causal research designs focused on school completion are warranted, particularly interventions that systematically target resources to disengaged youth and that reflect the complexity of schools and communities that struggle to engage youth. A significant factor that must be considered is the effectiveness of intervention in the context of high stakes educational policies, such as state graduation requirements and the No Child Left Behind Act. (p. 479)

This implication influenced the design of four questions asked of GaDOE administrators. These questions addressed the aspects of NCLB and IDEA that support or hinder students with disabilities successful transition to a traditional school. The GaDOE administrators were also asked what state rules hindered or supported the transition of students with disabilities enrolled in AEPs.

Lehr, Hansen, and Sinclair (2003) conducted reviews of forty-five studies addressing dropout or school completion. The researchers coded the studies according to research design, participants, interventions, and outcomes in order to portray the range of programs and approaches discussed in the literature. Lehr, Hansen, and Sinclair (2003) examined the degree to which these forty-five studies reflected current perceptions of dropouts and the degree to which the studies incorporated rigorous methodology.

Lehr, Hansen, and Sinclair (2003) made recommendations based on the findings of the investigation to “raise the bar with regards to the quantity and quality of future intervention research targeting school completion” (p. 10). They suggested the following: (a) establish practices that will correctly identify students who are at risk of dropping out and identify the systems that place those students at risk, (b) target students for intervention who are at risk of being a dropout within high probability groups such as students with learning or emotional behavioral disabilities, and (c) conduct analyses to determine which interventions are most efficient, with specific populations, and in specific environments.

This study incorporated the recommendations of Lehr, Hansen, and Sinclair (2003). The focus of this study is on LD and EBD students who are in Georgia’s CrossRoads AEPs. This correlated with the recommendation of targeting students at risk of dropping out in high probability groups and in a specific environment. This investigation discussed in the literature review dropout prevention interventions for students with disabilities. The investigation’s survey was designed to address the issue of dropout prevention. Survey respondents were asked a variety of questions concerning the need to implement specific dropout prevention strategies in AEPs.

Studies conducted by Sinclair, Christenson and Thurlow (2005) and Lehr, Hansen, and Sinclair (2003) identified dropout prevention strategies for students with disabilities. The major suggestions of these investigations indicated the need for additional research in this area. The studies of Sinclair, Christenson and Thurlow (2005) and Lehr, Hansen, and Sinclair (2003) enabled this research to further investigate this area.

This section, titled “Studies Addressing These Problems”, reviewed studies that addressed the problems faced by administrators, teachers, and students with disabilities enrolled in AEPs. This section also reviewed the suggestions for future research and practice and how these studies influenced this investigation. The following section will discuss the deficiencies in the studies.

Deficiencies in the Studies

There are several deficiencies in the studies reviewed. Only a few studies address issues (Lange & Lehr, 2000; Lehr, 2003) of students with disabilities in AEPs. In the review of studies addressing the issue of dropout prevention conducted by Lehr, Hansen, and Sinclair (2003), it was noted that of the forty-five studies reviewed, disabled students were the targeted population in only three of the studies. Of these three studies, two reviewed the same dropout prevention program, Check and Connect. In the studies examining the issue of transition for students with disabilities, transition was discussed in terms of postsecondary education or employment but not in the area of leaving an AEP and returning to traditional schools.

Another deficiency of the studies reviewed was that a conceptual framework for understanding educational reform, such as Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological framework, for AEPs and/or students with disabilities in AEPs that would enhance academic achievement and in turn increase the graduation rates of the students, was not explicitly stated. According to Reed (2008), “Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological framework for understanding school reform reminds us that if we are to reach and specifically address the needs of the underserved, under-resourced programming must

consider the mirco systems, meso-systems, exo systems and macro systems” (p. 7). Micro systems are defined as interpersonal relations. Meso systems are characterized by relationships among two or more settings such as the child’s home, school, or neighborhood. In essence, any setting that promotes the child’s development. The exo systems are defined as settings that significantly affect the child but do not directly include the child. The macro systems consider social and cultural issues.

Currently, there appears to be a very limited number of studies addressing the issues surrounding students with disabilities attending AEPs. In addition, a limited amount of studies that address the issue of identifying procedures and services needed to facilitate a successful transition to a traditional school. Studies that focus graduation rates for students with disabilities in Georgia’s CrossRoads AEPs are also inadequate in number. Although a stated purpose of AEPs is to assist students attending these types of programs with the development of skills and attitudes that will allow them to successfully transition back in to traditional schools, few studies have been conducted on best practices associated with this purpose.

Conceptual Framework

The purpose of this research is to examine Georgia’s policies, legislation, and guidelines that influence the education of students with disabilities in the state’s CrossRoads AEPs. Georgia’s AEPs are designed to address the complex needs of students attending in order to teach them the personal, social, and academic skills necessary for a successful transition back to a traditional educational setting. AEPs are intended to rehabilitate disruptive students by attending to their academic and behavioral

needs as well as to implement dropout prevention strategies. The research conducted by Dugger and Dugger (1998), Katsiyannis and Williams (1998), Kochhar-Bryant and Lacey (2005), Lange and Lehr (1999), Lange and Sletten (2002), Lehr (2005), Powell (2003), Raywid (1994), Rutherford and Quinn (1999), and Young (1990) suggests that AEPs are the most viable educational option to address the needs of these students based on the identified characteristics of AEPs .

Research conducted by Young (1990), Dugger and Dugger (1998), Lange and Sletten (2002), Lehr and Lange (2003), and Lehr, Moreau, Lange, and Lanners (2004) have identified the characteristics of successful alternative education programs. The most common characteristics cited in the research are: (a) flexibility in structure, (b) responsiveness to a perceived educational need within the community (c) student-centered philosophy, (d) low student enrollment, (e) personalized relationship between students and staff, (f) high expectations from teachers, (g) students attend school half a day and work at a paid or volunteer job the other half, and (h) goal setting is part of the academic curriculum. The intent of this investigation is to examine the consistencies between what is cited in the literature and to examine what is actually occurring in Georgia's AEPs.

In order to gain insight into what, in reality, is taking place in these programs, this investigation asked state department administrators questions regarding what mandated policies and procedures are in place to ensure effective transition and high school completion. This investigation also asked alternative program building administrators their perceptions of the implementation of these mandated policies, procedures, and services in terms of how these policies and procedures are being implemented. The

investigation also sought administrators perceptions of what policies, procedures, and services should be in place to ensure students' effective transition to their traditional high school and high school completion.

This inquiry used two lenses to probe the aforementioned issues. The lenses were the study's research questions and Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory.

These lenses were the foundation creating the conceptual framework for this study.

The research questions for this study focused on what policies, procedures and services are in place and are needed to facilitate a successful transition for students with disabilities enrolled in Georgia's CrossRoads AEPs to their traditional school. The research questions also focused on what instructional programs and strategies may correlate with improved academic performance of students with disabilities enrolled in Georgia CrossRoads AEPs.

The second lens used to probe the issues of the implementation of mandated procedures, polices, services and to identify what is needed to improve the academic achievement of students with disabilities was Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979). The four systems of Bronfenbrenner's theory include micro systems, meso systems, exo systems, and macro systems. In this study, they are used as tools of analysis, providing conceptually based lenses to examine AEPs practices and reforms as perceived by the AEPs building administrators and administrators of the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE). According to Boemmel and Briscoe (2001) "the parents, teachers, and anyone in a close relationship for a substantial amount of time with the child are in the micro systems" (p. 1). In terms of this inquiry, the micro systems lens

viewed the perceptions AEPs principals held regarding services provided such as student governance and mentoring.

The meso systems of this study centered on the lens that focused on the insights of AEPs administrators on the relationships in terms of services of family outreach and providing students with a sense of belonging. The exo systems lens of this research is examined by the discussion of the perceptions of GaDOE administrators and Georgia AEP administrators in terms of policies, program guidelines and procedures that are mandated and implemented. Cultural issues that affect the educational environment are screened using a macro systems lens. Issues such as the overrepresentation of minority students in Georgia's AEPs, dropout rate for students with disabilities, the issue of providing a celebration/rites of passage when students exit the AEP, the issue of providing childcare in AEPs, and the pervasive belief that alternative students are the "throw aways" in our educational system are put into focus using this lens. These issues are investigated in this research in terms of the opinions of GaDOE administrators and AEPs administrators.

Another major focal point of this research is to identify the programs and interventions needed to decrease the dropout rate for students with disabilities enrolled in Georgia CrossRoads AEPs. The programs and interventions identified are designed to improve the academic and behavioral needs of disruptive students. Research-based literature conducted by Jerald (2006), Lehr (2004), and Thurlow, Sinclair, and Johnson (2002) suggested that AEPs are a feasible education choice for students with disabilities at risk for dropping out of school.

Summary of Study

In order to gain insight into the effectiveness of AEPs in improving academics, behavior, and the transition rate for these students, the study used a conceptual framework that is based on specific research questions and four systems of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory. The research questions focused on instructional programs, instructional strategies, services, and procedures needed to improve the academic performance of students with disabilities in AEPs.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory centers around four systems that involve interpersonal relations, interrelations among home, school and community, educational policies, and social cultural variables in addressing issues of education reform.

The research examines perceptions about the strategies for accessing the general curriculum, enhancing instruction, improving behavior, and strategies to increase the high school completion rate for this population. This intense examination enabled this research to identify the procedures and services needed to facilitate a successful transition to a traditional school program and school completion for students with disabilities enrolled in Georgia CrossRoads Alternative Education Programs (AEPs).

The Purpose Statement

The purpose of this research was to identify procedures and services that would enable students with disabilities enrolled in Georgia's AEPs to successfully transition to their traditional school and complete high school. Procedures are defined as federal and state laws, state rules and regulations, local school policies, and methods of operations. Services are defined as the state curriculum, instructional programs, instructional

strategies, and student support services. Therefore, the research examined strategies for accessing the general curriculum, enhancing instruction, improving behavior, increasing the high school completion rate for this population. This intense examination enabled this research to identify the procedures and services needed to facilitate a successful transition to a traditional school program and school completion for students with disabilities enrolled in a Georgia CrossRoads AEPs. The GaDOE defines successful transition as the student having continued achievement in the traditional school program.

Brief Overview of Research Methods

The basic purpose of this study was to examine Georgia's policies, legislation, and guidelines that impact the education of SLD and EBD students in the state's CrossRoads AEPs. The study incorporated a mixed method technique known as Sequential Explanatory Design by Creswell (2003). This technique involved the collection and analysis of quantitative data followed by a collection and analysis of qualitative data. The Sequential Explanatory Design (Creswell (2003) is displayed in Figure 1 of Chapter Three. The research applied a mixed methods approach that encompassed four stages to allow for profound insights into the perceptions of administrators on policies and practices mandated and implemented in Georgia's AEPs.

Stage one of the mixed methods approach allowed for the collection and analysis of quantitative demographic information on students currently enrolled in Georgia's AEPs. The demographic information consisted of data based on the gender and race of the students. In Stage Two an analysis of the data collected from administrators who responded to the study's survey instrument was performed. Stage Three involved the

collections of qualitative data from GaDOE administrators during interviews that addressed questions concerning policies and procedures that positively or negatively affect the education of students with disabilities enrolled in Georgia's AEPs.

Stage Four engaged in the collection and examination of qualitative data from interviews with AEPs principals. The questions for the principal interviews asked in Stage Four were garnered from three sources. The sources were: (a) the survey instrument, (b) the study's research questions, and (c) additional questions on the topics of instruction and dropout prevention. The integration of quantitative and qualitative data allow for a better understanding of the issues surrounding successful transition for students with disabilities. The framework of the four stages of data collection and analysis of data are depicted in Figure 2 in Chapter Three.

Research Questions

1. What policies and procedures are in place to facilitate a successful transition for students with disabilities enrolled in Georgia's CrossRoads AEPs to their traditional school?
2. What services are needed to facilitate a successful transition for students with disabilities enrolled in Georgia's CrossRoads AEPs to their traditional school?
3. What instructional programs may be effective in improving the academic performance of students with disabilities enrolled in a Georgia CrossRoads AEPs?
4. What instructional strategies may correlate with improved achievement levels of students with disabilities enrolled in Georgia Cross Roads AEPs?

Significance of the Study

The research identified effective educational strategies that may:

1. Improve the academic progress of students with disabilities in AEPs.
2. Improve the discipline of students with disabilities in AEPs.
3. Improve the instruction of students with disabilities in AEPs.
4. Decrease the dropout rate of students with disabilities in AEPs.
5. Increase the number of students with disabilities that complete high school with a regular high school diploma in AEPs.

The Importance of the Study for the Audience

The scarcity of studies conducted on students with disabilities in Georgia's CrossRoads AEPs are unfortunate considering the number of students with disabilities enrolled in the program and the low incidence rate of high school completion for students with disabilities. This research may identify for teachers and administrators the educational programs and strategies that may improve academic progress, instruction, discipline, and the high school completion rate for students with disabilities. The implementation of these educational programs and strategies may increase the number of students with disabilities who successfully transition to a traditional school from Georgia's CrossRoads AEPs and complete high school.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

As discussed in the previous chapter, the conceptual framework of the study consisted of two lenses. One of the lenses was Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) which consists of the four systems. Bronfenbrenner's four systems include micro systems, meso systems, exo systems, and macro systems. The macro systems are in which cultural issues that affect the educational environment are examined. One such cultural issue is the pervasive belief in the educational system that some students are "throw aways". This cultural issue was very prevalent in public education in terms of students with disabilities being excluded from public schools prior to 1975 with the ratification of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act.

Despite compulsory attendance laws enacted by each state by 1918, the exclusion of children with disabilities was supported in our nation's courts. Yell, Rodgers, and Lodge (1998) cited court cases as evidence of the exclusion of students with disabilities after 1918. The Cuyahoga County (Ohio) Court of Appeals, in 1934, ruled that the state's compulsory attendance law permitted the state to exclude individual students. The Supreme Court in Illinois, in 1958, supported legislation that enabled school officials the right to deny children that were deemed mentally deficient an education.

The majority of states however, by the early 1970s, had laws that did require schools to educate students with disabilities. Nevertheless, as cited by Yell, Rodgers and Lodge (1998), Congress, in 1975, enacted P.L. 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) mandating the education of students with disabilities. This law noted the significant involvement of the federal government in requiring a free appropriate public education for students with disabilities.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act–2004 (IDEA–2004) further addressed the issue of providing a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to students with disabilities who have been suspended or expelled. IDEA–2004, Placement in Alternative Educational Setting, states:

If school personnel seek to order a change of placement that would exceed 10 school days and the behavior that gave rise to the violation of the school code is determined not to be a manifestation of the child’s disability, the relevant disciplinary procedures applicable to children without disabilities may be applied to the child in the same manner and for the same duration in which the procedures would be applied to children with disabilities. A child with a disability who is removed from the child’s current placement shall continue to receive educational services. (Section 615)

As a result, today, students with disabilities who violate the school conduct code can be excluded from their traditional schools. However, unlike state laws prior to 1975, these students must receive an education. According to Lehr, Moreau, Lanners, and Lange (2004), 12% of students with disabilities who have been excluded from a traditional school are receiving their education in an alternative education program (AEP). The

focus of this study was to determine what procedures and services are needed to cease their exclusion from the traditional school and to facilitate their inclusion/return to the traditional school and, ultimately, graduating with a regular diploma.

The review of literature has been organized into 10 sections, each of which is then related back to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems model. The first section outlined the characteristics of alternative education programs (AEPs). This section, along with the section in which outcomes for students enrolled in AEPs are discussed, reflects the meso systems by focusing on the relationship between the child's home, school, or community.

Sections that review state department officials' perceptions of alternative programs are reflective of the exo systems. Exo systems are defined as settings that significantly affect the child but do not directly include the child. Subsequent sections that examine best practices for implementing special education procedures in an alternative education program (AEP), key issues of Georgia's AEPs, and best practices for implementing instructional services for special education students focus on interpersonal relationships. Bronfenbrenner identifies interpersonal relationships as micro systems.

The final section addresses the cultural and social issues surrounding the large percentage of students with disabilities who are high school dropouts. Cultural and social issues, according to Bronfenbrenner, are viewed through the lens of the macro systems. The chapter ends with a brief summary of the research.

Definition and Characteristics of Alternative Education Programs

At their best, according to Barr (1981), alternative schools have functioned as an exciting laboratory where unique and often daring experiments are conducted and evaluated. At their worst, alternative schools represent some of the most unfortunate tendencies toward social tracking, political manipulation, and educational hucksterism. While these issues remain in perpetual conversation surrounding alternatives, the use of alternatives to help those most disenfranchised from the school system has also garnered support. (Lange & Sletten, 2002, p. 9)

The Common Core of Data, the primary data base on public elementary and secondary education, defines an alternative education school as a “public school that addresses needs of students that typically cannot be met in a regular school, provides nontraditional education, serves as an adjunct to a regular school or falls outside the categories of regular, special education, or vocational education” (Lehr & Lange, 2003, p. 1). Lange and Sletten (2002) acknowledged “alternative school” and “alternative program” are used interchangeably throughout the literature when discussing alternative education. For the purpose of this study, the term Alternative Education Programs (AEPs) was used.

Lange and Sletten (2002) identified four categories of AEPs. AEPs are categorized based program characteristics. Since 1994 alternative schools have been characterized into types: Type I — schools of choice, such as magnet schools with innovative programs to attract students, Type II — last chance schools (last step before expulsion), and Type III — schools with a remedial focus on academic or social

emotional issues. A Type IV school merges school of choice, remediation, and innovation to create a program that provides an additional opportunity for success within the school system after a student has experienced difficulty in the traditional educational system.

Current research conducted by Lehr et al. (2003), Lehr, Moreau, Lange and Lanners (2004), Lehr and Sletten (2002), and Lehr and Lange (2003) cited that AEPs tend to serve students who are at-risk for school failure within the traditional educational system. Kleiner, Porch, and Farris (2002) identified reasons fifty percent of all school districts cited for transferring at-risk students from a regular school: possession, distribution, or use of alcohol or drugs, physical attacks or fights, chronic truancy, possession or use of a weapon other than a firearm, continual academic failure, disruptive verbal behavior, and possession or use of a firearm.

Alternative programs have existed in American Public Education in the contemporary sense for over 40 years. However, a small number of studies have documented the characteristics of AEPs. To address this issue, the U.S. Department of Education funded the University of Minnesota's Alternative Schools Research Project. This project is a study designed to examine alternative schools nationwide. The general characteristics of AEPs cited by researchers Lange and Sletten (2002), Lehr and Lange (2003), and Lehr, Moreau et al. (2004) who were involved in the Alternative Schools Project are small size, one-to-one interaction between teachers and students, a supportive environment, flexibility in structure, and acknowledgement of the importance of student decision-making.

The characteristics of AEPs are also cited in studies conducted by researchers outside of the University of Minnesota's Alternative Schools Research Project. Young (1990) stated that AEPs were unlike traditional schools by seven characteristics.

1. A greater responsiveness to a perceived educational need within the community
2. A more focused instructional program
3. A shared sense of purpose
4. A more student-centered philosophy
5. A noncompetitive environment
6. A greater autonomy
7. A smaller school and a more personalized relationship between students and staff.

Dugger and Dugger (1998) describe the 17 most important characteristics of an alternative high school program. Some of the characteristics noted were: teachers maintaining high expectations, the school location was purposely selected to be away from the other high schools, and the curriculum is highly individualized. Other identified characteristics were: students attend school half a day and work at a paid or volunteer job the other half, enrollment is limited to 100 students, goal setting is part of the academic curriculum, and the alternative program is highly structured and extremely flexible.

The research mentioned in this section is significant. The studies provide an operational definition for AEPs and for the term "at-risk student". By identifying the characteristics and types of AEPs, these studies provide a lens to focus on appropriate procedures and services for students enrolled in AEPs. These studies also provide a

foundation on which to build further investigations on specific procedures and services implemented in AEPs and the relationships between those procedures and services and increased academic achievement, an increased rate of returning to a traditional school, and increased graduation rates for students with disabilities attending AEPs.

AEPs by definition are public schools that address the needs of at-risk students. AEPs are characterized as small in size, flexible structure, supported environment, student centered philosophy and having goal setting as part of the academic curriculum. The next section discusses the outcomes of students enrolled in AEPs.

Outcomes for Students in Alternative Education Programs

Notwithstanding the limitations in the research on AEPs, general conclusions can be made on the outcomes for students enrolled in this educational setting based on research conducted in four areas: (1) school flexibility (such as expanded hours beyond the school day) and enrollment choice, (2) academic achievement, (3) students' sense of belonging, satisfaction and changes in self-esteem, and (4) dropout prevention. In a study conducted by Gold and Mann (1984), which addressed the effects of alternative programs on at-risk students in Michigan, students reported flexibility was a major distinction between their experience in the alternative settings and the traditional settings. The research by Gold and Mann (1984) concluded that students became increasingly comfortable and confident in the alternative educational setting. Their study also cited that the students' academic performance improved in the alternative settings.

In the area of enrollment by choice, Lange and Lehr (1999) examined the results for students who enrolled in Minnesota's AEPs by choice. Minnesota's second-chance

option allows students who are at risk of not completing school a choice to attend any traditional high school or one of the state's alternative programs. Students can choose this choice option if they meet one or more of the following criteria: (a) one or more years behind academically, (b) pregnant or a custodial parent, (c) assessed as chemically dependent, (d) expelled by the school district, and (e) experiencing a life event that interferes with learning (sexually abused, homeless). It is noted by Lange and Lehr (1999) that nearly all students enrolled in AEPs are enrolled by choice as opposed to being assigned to the program because of behavior or other issues.

From the study conducted by Lange and Lehr (1999), of the outcomes for students enrolled in Minnesota's program, it was revealed that those students who remained in the programs for an academic year had positive results. The positive results noted were in the areas of academic achievement and attendance. Specifically, in the area of academic achievement, positive results were made in reading, mathematics and writing. In the area of attendance, positive results were also made in reduction in truancy and reduction of suspensions. However, no change was noted in the areas of classroom participation, engagement in high-risk behaviors (use of drugs or alcohol, sex with no protection), and personal and social adjustment (social skills, cooperative group skills and empathetic behaviors).

"Students' sense of belonging, satisfaction and self-esteem are frequently examined together in alternative school studies because of the similarity among the characteristics and their importance for the success of students who are alienated from the educational system" (Lange & Sletten, 2002, p. 17). Strathe and Hash (1979) found that

junior high students enrolled in an AEP showed a significant change in self-esteem. The study did not find similar results for the high school students enrolled in the AEP.

Smith, Gregory, and Pugh (1981) researched the effects of AEPs on self-esteem and satisfaction by investigating students in seven alternative programs and six conventional schools. Both students and teachers of the alternative programs reported higher levels of self-esteem and satisfaction than their counterparts in the traditional schools did. Nichols and Steffy (1997) found that students who completed the alternative education program in short term alternative schools in the Midwest, by use of a self-report questionnaire, showed a significant increase in self-regulation, school self-esteem, and peer self-esteem. Student participants in a study by May and Copeland (1998) found that the top reasons students gave for their attendance at the alternative school was academic engagement and positive relationships in the program.

Studies examining reduced dropout rates for students enrolled in AEPs have indicated diverse results. Dynarski and Wood (1997) conducted a study funded by the U.S. Department of Labor to examine the outcomes for students enrolled in three alternative high school programs designed to facilitate the students in receiving a high school diploma. After two years, one of the sites had successfully increased attendance, achievement, and credits earned. Students at the second site did not show the gains of those students at the first site. These students' standardized test scores showed significantly less mastery in reading and math than scores for the students not admitted to the program. Data from the third site only revealed a moderate change in dropout rates for students attending the alternative program.

The Dynarski and Gleason (1998) study, which was funded by the U.S. Department of Education, investigated 21 either dropout prevention programs of which 9 were schools within schools or alternative programs. At the middle school level, the alternative schools and schools within schools were successful for dropout prevention and academic progress. These programs did not impact attendance or scores on the school system achievement tests.

In a more recent study conducted by Lehr et al. (2004), survey questions were developed to collect data with regards to outcomes for students attending AEPs. Survey respondents were asked to indicate the degree that four “outcome” scenarios occurred for students attending AEPs in their states. The scenarios and percentages from the 25 states that responded were: (a) many of almost all of the students return to a traditional education setting after attending the alternative program — 64%, (b) many or almost all students graduate from alternative schools — 43%, (c) any or almost all students attend, exit, and return to alternative programs more than once — 16%, and (d) many or almost all students drop out of alternative schools — 0%.

The outcomes of students in AEPs were summarized based on research conducted in four areas. The areas were schools’ flexibility (in hours of operation) and enrollment choice, a student’s sense of belonging, satisfaction, and changes in self-esteem, academic achievement, and dropout prevention. Studies revealed that 64% of students enrolled in AEPs returned to a traditional school program and 43% graduated from AEPs.

The findings discussed are important in the broad scope of school reform for students enrolled in AEPs. The findings are important because they provide a snapshot of how effective AEPs are in the terms of academic achievement, students’ personal

development, and dropout prevention. Based on the findings, in terms of identifying effective procedures, AEPs' flexibility in school hours and enrollment choice may need to be considered. The findings indicated that academic achievement was noted in the areas of reading, writing, and mathematics. This conclusion garners support for additional research in what kinds of instructional strategies and programs would provide and sustain, in this area of accountability, these academic gains.

The results also stated that there was no positive change for students involved in the studies in high-risk behaviors, personal and social adjustments, and for high school students there was no evidence of positive change in having a sense of belonging. These findings support the need for an investigation of services that may be needed to address student's engagement in high-risk behaviors, their poor personal and social adjustment skills and services needed to increase students' sense of belonging.

The study conducted by Lehr, Moreau, Lange and Lanners (2004) revealed that 43% of the students graduated from AEPs. This finding, along with the statistics on the dropout rate for specific learning disabilities (SLD) students (36%) and the dropout rate (59%) for students with emotional behavioral disorders (EBD) revealed by Thurlow, Sinclair, and Johnson (2002), supports the need to further explore AEPs as an option for special education students who are at-risk of not graduating.

Perceptions from State Departments of Education Alternative Education Program
Administrators on Alternative Education Programs

AEP Policies and Procedures

There has been an increased emphasis on alternative education spurred by the national concerns about violence, vandalism, disruption, substance abuse, school failure and dropout rates in schools. The research conducted in this study focused on procedures and policies implemented in AEPs. Katsiyannis and Williams (1998) investigated state legislation and policies regarding AEPs. Katsiyannis and Williams (1998) noted that:

Current general and special education reform initiatives seek to address the increasing challenging and diverse needs of students with disabilities and students who are at risk for school failure due to various factors. As these initiatives become more comprehensive in nature, a more unified approach to providing alternative education options is emerging. Therefore, determining the current statuses of alternative education programs is an important component of planning collaborative service delivery for all students, but especially those with special needs. (p. 276)

Their survey was mailed to 50 state coordinators of alternative education and the District of Columbia. The results of the survey were presented under the selected subheadings of: students served legislation and policy, technical assistance, strengths, and barriers. The respondents (50%), when identifying the students served in the AEP, used descriptors such as expelled, suspended, pregnant, homeless, migrant, delinquent, disruptive, dangerous to self and others, in need of remedial education, dropouts, truant,

unmotivated, academically deficient, student with behavior problems, and differing learning styles and needs.

Twenty-two states (57.9%) reported to have legislation regarding alternative education. Katsiyannis and Williams (1998) noted similarities among state's AEP legislation. Their examination of legislation revealed that across all states, two components were evident: a state definition and a criterion of student eligibility. States also shared the following components in the state legislation: establishment of grant programs, program models, statement of responsibilities of the local educational agency and the state educational agency for alternative programs. States also shared a mandate that each locality establish alternative education programs, the establishment of a placement review committee to consider appropriate placement for disruptive students seeking readmission, and a no pass-no drive provision.

In terms of state policy associated with AEPs, twenty-five states (65.8%) that responded had developed state policies and procedures. The policies and procedures mirror broad limits to determine student eligibility for the program. It was also revealed that entrance and exit criteria were established by local school systems rather than state departments of education.

According to data from the survey, technical assistance is provided by thirty states (78.9%) to local school systems. It was reported that, in terms of procedures, technical assistance was provided in the areas of developing and implementing AEPs. Various forms of technical assistance were described, however, the most frequent forms of support were: consultants from state departments of education or colleges and

universities, in-service training, on-site visits, and resource manuals that facilitate networking and collaboration among school systems.

Survey respondents alluded to strengths and barriers. Katsiyannis and Williams (1998) stated “the major strength cited by 73.7% states was that AEPs were locally initiated and could be flexible enough, even with state regulations, to respond to local needs (p. 280). An additional strength was the increased opportunity for students to complete school. Inadequate funding was the major barrier reported by states (95%). Also cited as a barrier, was the lack of understanding of the public regarding the nature and objectives of alternative education.

Lehr, Moreau, Lange and Lanners (2004) designed a survey to collect up to date information about alternative programs across the nation. The survey was distributed to key personnel at state departments of education who were considered well informed about alternative education. The survey questions were developed from information received from interviews with state directors of special education and state directors of alternative education. Surveys were obtained from 39 states yielding a 78% response rate.

The survey results identified three key issues of AEPs, which were funding, staffing, and accountability. Sixty-one percent reported concerns about continued funding or inadequate funding to maintain levels of appropriate service and programs. The quality and quantity of staff was a concern for 44% of survey respondents. Their concerns centered on recruiting well-trained staff, teacher certification issues, and professional learning. Accountability and the standards-based reform movement were key issues for 28% of the survey respondents. The respondents were apprehensive about implementing state standards and the accountability system, meeting academic state standards, and

appropriate measures to document success. Additional issues identified were serving elementary students, traditional vs. innovative programs, curriculum, increased growth, facilities, and transition/re-entry.

Survey respondents were also asked to identify the three critical special education issues AEPs would face in the next three years. Their responses generated three main themes. The first theme involved staffing. This issue centered on the availability, quality, and licensure of staff to teach special education students enrolled in AEPs. The second critical issue focused on the provision of services and the quality of those services for disabled students. The third significant special education issue was “ensuring procedures and services are in place to facilitate success for students transitioning into and out of alternative and traditional schools” (Lehr, Moreau, Lange & Lanners, 2004, p. 19).

The studies conducted by Katsiyannis and Williams (1998) and Lehr, Moreau, Lange and Lanners (2004) provided an analysis of current issues facing AEPs with emphasis on special education students from a national perspective. Their studies revealed a wide range of operational guidelines of AEPs as perceived by state department alternative education administrators. The studies also acknowledged, on a national level, the operational issues of funding, staffing, and accountability as areas of concern for AEPs. A major issue recognized by Lehr, Moreau et al. that correlates directly with this study was the issue of facilitating success for students with disabilities transitioning out of AEPs.

This segment reviewed state policies of AEPs based on the findings of research conducted by Katsiyannis and Williams (1998) as well as the procedural issues based on the perceptions of state special education directors and AEPs directors based on research

conducted by Lehr, Moreau, Lange and Lanners (2004). One of the major concerns of state special education directors identified from this research was having procedures and services in place to facilitate transition in and out of AEPs. The succeeding section will provide additional information regarding insights of state directors of special education on AEPs.

Perceptions from State Directors of Special Education on AEPs

Lehr and Lange (2003) determined that even though state directors of special education are not directly involved with alternative education programs, their leadership requires knowledge of education programs and options that are accessible in their states. As a result, Lehr and Lange (2003) interviewed state directors of special education to obtain their perceptions of alternative programs in their state and issues concerning special education students. Telephone interviews were conducted with administrators from 48 states and the District of Columbia. The response rate was 96%. Three significant interview questions were: (a) What are the major issues for alternative schools in your state? (b) What are major issues for state education agencies in relation to alternative schools?, and (c) What are major issues for students with disabilities in relation to alternative schools?

Major Issues for Alternative Programs

The perceptions of state directors of special education in reference to the major issues for AEPs in their state mirrored those major issues identified by state alternative education administrators. The state directors of special education identified funding, staffing, and accountability as the major issues for AEPs which was similar to the issues

recognized by the state alternative education administrators. Funding was identified as a major issue as it was suggested that the allocation of funds was not sufficient to provide quality facilities and instructional resources.

The need for teachers to obtain dual certification in a subject area and special education was a major concern regarding staffing in AEPs. This is due to the fact that since AEPs tend to have small student enrollments, few teachers are employed. Consequently, it is necessary for teachers to be certified in several subject areas and special education.

Equally important in the discussion of staffing, is the concern of lack of adequate training for staff of AEPs. Regular education teachers as well as special education teachers need adequate training in working with students who have considerable academic and behavioral needs. A counterpart to this discussion is the concern of the shortage of qualified teachers in special education and regular education.

Accountability was the third key issue for AEPs. The perception of state special education directors on this issue was that there is a need for clearly documented measures of effectiveness and student success. State directors of special education noted that AEPs should be accountable for the progress and outcomes for the students enrolled in their programs.

Major Issues for State Education Agencies

State directors of special education were asked their insight as to the major issues of state departments of education in relation to AEPs. Lehr and Lange (2003) felt this was an essential component of their research “because officials within state agencies are often given the responsibility of oversight” (p. 6). The perception of state directors of the major

issues for state departments of education in relation to AEPs focused on three areas. Those areas were monitoring and compliance, legislation and policies, and technical assistance and growth.

The most frequently reported major issue was a need for increased monitoring and compliance from state departments. According to the survey, increased monitoring was needed to determine quality of instructional programs, student enrollment, demographic information, and student progress and outcomes. It was also stated that there was a need for monitoring the compliance of special education due process procedures.

Lehr and Lange (2003) reported legislation and policies as the second major issue for state departments of education. The underlining concern of this issue indicated by respondents was their state's limited existing or inconsistent policies regarding AEPs. Legislation was described as being very limited and state policies may not include a statewide definition, information on enrollment or exit criteria, disciplinary approaches, or inclusion of students with special needs. This issue causes persons not directly involved with alternative programs to have difficulty understanding the purpose and operation of alternative education. These findings by Lehr and Lange (2003) on legislation and policies are different from the results reported by Katsiyannis and Williams (1998) which stated that states (57.9%) reported legislation that included state definitions and state eligibility criteria.

The third major issue for state education agencies in relation to AEPs noted by state directors was the increased demand for technical assistance. State directors noted that providing technical assistance to staff in AEPs has become extremely difficult. The difficulty lies in the growing necessity for support in implementing federal mandates.

Changes in IDEA 1997 that school districts must put into practice in order to be compliant with these federal regulations have resulted in a greater need for technical assistance. Lehr and Lange (2003) noted that one-fourth of respondents reported that the disciplinary requirements of IDEA–1997 had an impact on the need for AEPs to request technical assistance from state departments. The IDEA–1997 disciplinary requirements of “keeping students with disabilities who are expelled or suspended in school, increased awareness of positive behavioral supports, and the use of alternative programs as interim alternative education settings” (p. 8) to help to keep students with disabilities from dropping out of school must be implemented. To effectively execute these federal mandates technical assistance should be provided.

Changes in Title I have also contributed to the increase in the demand for technical assistance for AEPs. The changes in Title I addressed in the federal law No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) address issues centering on standards based curriculum and school accountability for student achievement. This has resulted, according to the state directors of special education interviewed, in increased efforts to align the AEPs’ instruction with state curriculum standards and increased efforts to improve statewide test scores. In order to accomplish this goal technical assistance is needed.

Major Issues for Students with Disabilities in Relation to AEPs

In the area of major issues for students with disabilities in relation to AEPs, state directors’ perceptions generated three themes. The themes centered on: (a) the number of students served and disability category, (b) enrollment issues, and (c) service delivery.

Lehr and Lange (2003) noted that these themes were mentioned by at least 20% of the respondents.

State directors of special education perceived that the primary disabilities of the special education students attending AEPs were students with emotional behavioral disorders (EBD) and students with specific learning disabilities (SLD). Yet, survey respondents cited that there is limited data on students served in AEPs. Respondents also indicated that it was their belief that students with Tourette's syndrome, autism, mental health problems, and conduct disorders were now attending AEPs.

The second theme generated from the issue of students with disabilities in relation to AEPs was that of student enrollment. The theme of enrollment issues generated three topics. Those topics were: (a) students being pushed out of traditional schools, (b) Individual Education Program (IEP) being modified or terminated upon entering an AEP, and (c) adversarial relationship between AEP educators and educators of students with disabilities.

The perception that either students with disabilities may be pushed out of traditional schools and into an AEP as an understated or an explicit approach was a topic addressed under enrollment issues. It was suggested, during the interviews, that a scenario that occurs regularly was that rather than placing students in a more restrictive environment or a more expensive educational setting, alternative programs are offered as another option. State directors held the perception that middle and high school administrators may urge students to try the AEP first.

The implementation of the IEP was the second topic included in the theme of student enrollment. The interview results revealed that, once a student enrolls in an AEP,

the IEP might be revised to indicate a reduced level of service delivery. If the IEP is rewritten, it may not be appropriately implemented. This could result in the student shedding the special education label, according to the perception of state special education directors, by student choice, parent choice, or through termination of the IEP.

State directors acknowledged that many factors affect the degree to which the IEP is implemented. Respondents indicated that educators felt that student needs could be met through existing alternative programs as opposed to special education programs given the smaller student-teacher ratio. The interviews also noted some barriers to appropriately implementing the IEP. These barriers included the availability of certified special education teachers and paraprofessionals and program size. As stated previously, most AEPs have small student enrollments, which tend to limit flexibility in terms of scheduling and resources.

Lehr and Lange (2003) noted that in less than 20% of the cases, respondents mentioned the existence of an adversarial relationship between alternative school educators and special educators, which was the third topic in the theme of enrollment issues. Some AEP instructors think that students with disabilities should not be enrolled in AEPs. This school of thought is held by some alternative education educators because it is their belief that special education students already have funding and a set of supports in place. While nondisabled students who are at risk depend on the enrollment allotments available through the AEP to address their needs.

The third theme that surfaced from the telephone interviews of state special education directors was service delivery. According to Lehr and Lange (2003), about one-quarter of the respondents perceived that alternative schools could be excellent

options for educating students with disabilities. It was perceived that the characteristics of AEPs such as smaller setting, attention that is more individual, individualized work pace, focus on career planning or vocational education, provision of work-study experiences, provision of counseling, and flexible scheduling could facilitate a successful school experience.

However, nearly half of the respondents raised concerns regarding the provision and quality of service provided within AEPs for disabled students. Apprehension was expressed about the qualifications of special education staff and availability of certified special education staff in AEPs. Anxiety was also articulated about whether or not students with disabilities had access to the depth of curriculum and subject areas available in the traditional public school settings.

The documentation of perspectives of state directors of special education by Lehr and Lange (2003) on an AEP as an education option for students with disabilities added to the body of literature in the field of special education students receiving a free appropriate public education in an alternative education setting. The study of Lehr and Lange (2003) recognized the apprehension of state special education directors in meeting accountability standards due to the lack of certified special education staff. As a result, students may not have appropriate access to the general curriculum. This provided an avenue for further research on teacher quality in special education, teacher quality in AEPs for students with disabilities, how students with disabilities are accessing the general curriculum, and the depth to which students with disabilities enrolled in AEPs are accessing the general curriculum in relation to those students attending traditional

schools. Investigations of these topics would be essential when considering if AEPs are education options for students with disabilities.

The responses from three significant interview questions from a survey conducted by Lehr and Lange (2003) on the perceptions of state directors of special education on AEPs were examined in this section of the literature review. The three questions were: (a) What are the major issues for alternative schools in your state? (b) What are major issues for state education agencies in relation to alternative schools? and (c) What are major issues for students with disabilities in relation to alternative schools? From these three questions the foremost topics identified that impacted the education of students with disabilities enrolled in AEPs were issues of legislation, policies, the perceptions that students with disabilities may be pushed out of traditional schools, and service delivery. Research on how to provide specific services to special education students enrolled in AEPs is reviewed in the next section.

Practices for Effective Special Education Program in AEPs

Kleiner, Porch and Farris (2005) conducted a national survey titled “The 2001 District Survey of Alternative Schools and Programs”. The National Center for Education Statistics stated that this was the first national study of public alternative schools and programs for students at risk of educational failure. This survey revealed that there were 10,900 public alternative schools and programs in the United States for the 2000-2001 school year. The survey also cited that 612,900 or 1.3% of all public school students in the United States was enrolled in AEPs. The results of the survey further indicated that approximately 12 percent of all students in the alternative schools and programs for at-

risk students were receiving special education services and had Individualized Education Programs. It is evident that students with disabilities are attending AEPs. Therefore, it is imperative that best practices for effective special education be examined.

Rutherford and Quinn (1999) outlined six essential components for effective special education programs in an alternative education setting. The six components are identified as: (a) functional assessment procedures, (b) functional curriculum, (c) effective and efficient instruction, (d) transition program and procedures, (e) comprehensive systems, and (f) appropriate staff, resources, and procedural protections.

Functional assessment procedures are identified by Rutherford and Quinn (1999) as educational procedures designed to identify a student's skill deficit or deficits that interfere with their educational achievement and social and emotional adjustment. Functional assessments are continuous assessments that are based on students' needs in relation to the general education curriculum. Therefore, functional assessments should be adapted to the purpose of the assessment, the specific needs of the student, and the school system's general education curriculum.

The procedures for a functional assessment should consist of curriculum-based evaluations and measurement protocol to monitor student performance and improvement. As a result, functional assessment procedures can be matched to the learning outcomes in a student's general education curriculum and individualized education program (IEP).

A functional curriculum, the second essential component for effective special education in an AEP, allows the educational program to meet a special education student's individual academic, vocational, social, and behavioral needs. In addition to focusing on the student's academic needs, the student's IEP would address functional

job-related, daily-living, and social skills. The development of fundamental vocation skills tied to social, and life-skills training are an essential component of a student's IEP. Effective AEPs assist students in obtaining part-time employment and access to job training in the community.

An additional element of a functional curriculum is that the student's IEP be revised to include goals that directly relate to the behaviors that warranted the placement in the alternative setting. The revisions may include modeling, role-playing, and performance feedback to promote a variety of prosocial skills. The prosocial skills generally included asking for help, expressing or responding to a complaint, preparing for a stressful conversation, responding to one's own or other's anger, and dealing with group pressure.

Effective and efficient functional instruction is the third essential component. Functional instruction encompasses the use of positive and direct instructional strategies.

Direct instructional strategies consists of high levels of student engagement within academically focused, teacher-directed classrooms using sequenced materials... where goals are clear to students, time allocated for instruction is sufficient and continuous, content coverage is extensive, student performance is monitored, questions are at a low cognitive level and produce many correct responses, and feedback to students is immediate and academically oriented. (Rutherford & Quinn, 1999, p. 80)

Effective and efficient functional instruction is characterized by five elements. First, instruction is delivered that addresses the objectives in the student's IEP and the standards in the general curriculum. Second, teachers must monitor the student's progress

in terms of both the student's IEP objectives and curriculum standards using functional assessment procedures. Thirdly, effective and efficient instruction occurs when instructional strategies are aligned with functional assessments and the general curriculum.

Applied behavioral analysis is the fourth element of effective and efficient instruction. Applied behavioral analysis is a method of changing student behavior that is systemic and uses performance-based methods. The performance-based methods involve observable, measurable, and definable behaviors. The performance-based methods also entail evaluating the effects of direct instructional strategies on the future occurrence of the identified behaviors.

Behavioral interventions, the fifth element, are a by-product of applied behavioral analysis. Behavioral interventions are grounded in Bandura's (1969) social learning theory. These interventions emphasize the utilization of observable behaviors as dependent measures. Behavioral interventions are strategies that include a range of procedures that can increase positive behaviors and decrease negative behaviors.

Employing transition programs and procedures is the fourth component of effective special education in alternative education settings. Effective transition programs and procedures begin when the student's traditional school IEP team members and the staff of the alternative education program coordinate the transfer of the student into the alternative education program. If the student is placed in the AEP for disciplinary reasons, a functional behavioral assessment and a behavior intervention plan must be in place for the behavior or behaviors resulting in the student's removal from the traditional setting.

Effective transition program and procedures are designed to assist students' transition out of the AEP. Transition out of alternative schools can also be inadequate because students often exit AEPs on short notice not knowing how their special education needs will be met in the next educational environment. For successful transition, the traditional public school, the alternative school, and other community-based program staff, if applicable, must be involved in and share the responsibility for the transition of students exiting the AEP. To ensure successful transition out of the alternative education program, IEPs for students with disabilities should include functional transition plans and purposeful transition objectives. The alternative program staff can effectively contribute to a successful transition process by providing complete and accurate information concerning the aptitude and strengths of their students and by guaranteeing that there is follow-up and continuous support for students in the traditional school setting.

The fifth component of effective special education in an alternative educational program is the implementation of comprehensive systems. Comprehensive systems are developed to establish a procedure to balance "the competing priorities of an alternative program that is to provide education and treatment, as well as containment and supervision, for students who have been placed in the alternative setting for disciplinary reasons" (Rutherford & Quinn, 1999, p. 81). The basis for developing successful comprehensive systems is to make sure that all staff responsible for students maintain effective communication and work cooperatively.

Working cooperatively involves a system of coordinated and comprehensive linkages among the public school, the alternative school, and the student's family. Social service agencies and the courts may be a part of the system of coordinated and

comprehensive systems. Often the competing preferences of various agencies create disjointed services for disabled youth. These agencies must be linked by providing a system of “wraparound” programming. Wraparound is a procedure for developing behavior plans connecting the student, the alternative school staff, families, public school personnel, and staff of various social service agencies.

Appropriate staff and procedural protections are the sixth essential component needed to ensure effective special education in alternative educational settings.

Appropriate staff involves a significant proportion of the educational staff having special education certification, and support staff being provided extensive training in how to serve students with disabilities. Procedural protections such as parental notification of evaluation and parental involvement in the review and revision of IEPs are necessary to make certain that effective special education occur in AEPs.

Rutherford and Quinn (1999) outlined six essential components for effective special education programs in an alternative education setting. An effective special education program that is embedded in an alternative education setting is the gateway for students with disabilities to increase their level of academic success, transition to their traditional school and graduate with a regular high school diploma. The literature stated that these components generate effective programming for special education students yet, there was no empirical data to substantiate this information. The literature would have been enhanced if it were based on a study involving the implementation of these six essential components in a special education program for students in an alternative education setting. The study would have been more beneficial if the implementation phase was for a minimum of two academic years. Also, implementing the six essential

components in more than one alternative education program simultaneously would have added rigor to the study.

The six essential components of effective special education in AEPs were outlined in this segment. The six components emphasized efficient procedures and services such as effective instruction, appropriate staff, and an effective transition program that the research noted should be evident in AEPs. The following section discusses Georgia's AEP.

The State of Georgia—CrossRoads AEP

According to the Alternative Education Subcommittee Report (2006), Georgia's CrossRoads AEPs were initiated in 1994 as a state grant funded program. The CrossRoads AEPs purpose was to serve students who had been removed from the regular classroom due to persistent disturbance while providing students with the services they need to succeed academically. In 2000, the Georgia General Assembly passed the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000. With the passage of this legislation, the CrossRoads grants were replaced by state funding which created a "new" state alternative AEP for students in grades 6–12. The rationale of the "new" AEP was to "set state expectations for increasing academic achievement for improving the quality of education in Georgia schools. Included in the code were rules and guidelines for establishing alternative education programs within local school districts" (p. 2).

The Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) AEP Program Guidelines (2003) in Section V— Student Eligibility states that AEPs may serve students in grades kindergarten through twelve. This section of the guidelines further stipulates that students

with disabilities cannot be placed in an AEP without the advantage of procedural safeguards stipulated by federal law. The Personnel Qualifications (Section XI) of the AEP Guidelines (2003) states that alternative education teachers, “teaching core academic courses, must meet the requirements for highly qualified under NCLB” (p. 5).

Current program effectiveness is determined by the academic improvement of students being taught on grade level and on the decreased dropout rate of current and former AEP students. According to the GaDOE document titled “Alternative Education Program Self-Assessment Instrument General Information” (2004). However, in 2001, the Alternative Education Program Advisory Panel was formed. This panel was composed of twenty members. The function of the panel was to institute Alternative Program Standards and Indicators for measuring the achievement of individual alternative programs towards program effectiveness. The Alternative Education Program’s Standards and Indicators developed by the panel were based on the following set of principles: national standards for AEPs, programs and practices for AEPs that are scientifically based, and input from Georgia alternative education leaders, students, and parents, traditional education leaders and community representatives. The Alternative Program Standards and Indicators are the basis for the GaDOE Alternative Education Program Self-Assessment Instrument.

The Alternative Program Standards and Indicators, which were developed in 2004, are reflected in the GaDOE Alternative Education Program Self-Assessment Instrument (2005). The effectiveness of a school system’s AEP is determined by an analysis of the self- assessment instrument. The results of the analysis, according to the “GaDOE Alternative Education Program Self-Assessment Instrument General

Information” (2004), should serve as the basis for determining program effectiveness, establishing improvement goals, and allocating resources necessary to enhance program effectiveness.

The GaDOE Alternative Education Program Guidelines (2003) has identified program elements that school systems must and should establish in their alternative education program.

1. Separate disruptive students from non –disruptive students who are assigned to the program
2. Provide for students’ educational and behavioral needs
3. Include objectives of the state curriculum
4. Provide instruction that will enable students to return to a regular or career education program as quickly as possible
5. Focus on language arts, mathematics, science, social studies
6. Provide supervision and counseling to enable students to make academic progress toward grade level while attending the program
7. Be provided with the same instructional materials, resources, and textbooks as supplied to the regular school program
8. Provide each special education student with the services and modifications as indicated in the Individual Education Program (IEP)
9. Customize intervention programs and support services to meet the needs of individual students assigned to the program.

10. Develop a comprehensive transition plan for each student returning to the regular school program. The plan should detail support services to be provided upon the student's return to the home school. (p. 4)

The GaDOE has program guidelines that outline the operational procedures of AEPs in the state. The GaDOE has also developed a voluntary self-assessment instrument to evaluate an individual AEP's effectiveness. However, a significant flaw in the GaDOE operational procedural guidelines and assessment procedures is that there is no identified level of program monitoring by the GaDOE.

There was no documentation of a systemic statewide procedure for monitoring compliance of AEPs in the state. There was not documentation of a GaDOE compliance-monitoring guide for AEPs. The self-assessment instrument is done on a volunteer basis. Consequently, there is no requirement to complete the instrument or to submit the data from the instrument to the GaDOE. Research on developing and applying compliance monitoring procedures may be a necessary facet in program effectiveness and in improving educational outcomes for the students.

This portion of the literature review talked about the development of Georgia's CrossRoads AEP. Also discussed were Georgia's AEP implementation procedures and the state's AEP program self-assessment instrument. Within the state's AEP procedures specific requirements for providing the services of instruction, counseling, and IEP implementation are identified. Also identified is the requirement for a comprehensive transition plan for each student returning to the regular school program. In the next section of this research, data on students with disabilities in Georgia and data on students with disabilities enrolled in the state's AEP is analyzed.

Students with Disabilities in Georgia

In order to provide a complete understanding of students with disabilities in Georgia and students with disabilities enrolled in Georgia's CrossRoads AEPs, this study examined student data in three phases. The phases were: (a) the demographics of all students enrolled in public schools grades K–12, (b) the demographics of students with disabilities enrolled in all of the public schools grades 6–12, (c) the demographics of students with disabilities identified as EBD and SLD enrolled in the public schools grades 6–12. This population was targeted due to findings from research by Lehr, Moreau, Lange, and Lanners (2004) which concluded that special education students enrolled in AEP were mostly “labeled” with these two disability categories.

The Demographics of Students with Disabilities Enrolled in Georgia's CrossRoads Alternative Education Program

In the 2006–2007 school year, Georgia's public school enrollment was 1,589,839. The data provided by the “State of Georgia 2006–2007 Report Card” reports the percentages of enrollment in terms of students by race/ethnicity. The student enrollment percentages for the 2006–2007 school year were: Asian 3%, Black 38%, Hispanic 9% Native American/Alaskan Native 0% (According to the “Georgia Report Card 2006–07 Overview” information is not reported on student groups with fewer than 10 students for reasons of confidentiality and statistical reliability), White 47%, and Multiracial 3%.

Students with disabilities comprised approximately 12% of the total student population in Georgia. A review of the demographics of students with disabilities in Georgia for the 2006–2007 school year reveals the following: 195,778 students were

students with disabilities of which 95,153 were students enrolled in grades 6–12 or 49%. Of those students with disabilities in grades 6–12, the enrollment figures by race/ethnicity were White 45,406, Black 41,373, Hispanic 5,457, Asian/Pacific Islander 909, Multi-Racial 1,867, and American Indian Alaskan 141.

Of students in grades, 6–12 with EBD the total enrollment was 15,304. The enrollment by race/ethnicity was White 7,220, Black 7,315, Hispanic 347, Asian/Pacific Islander 59, Multi- Racial 34, and American and Indian/Alaskan 34. Students in grades 6–12 with SLD by race and ethnicity were White 18,393, Black 14,595, Hispanic 3,200, Asian/Pacific Islander 346, Multi –Racial 734, and American Indian/Alaskan 55. The total enrollment for students with Specific Learning Disabilities was 37,323.

Students enrolled in Georgia’s CrossRoads AEPs are in grades 6–12. The student demographics for these students for the 2006 school year were White 4,487, Black 7,666, Hispanic 564, Asian 62, Multi-Racial 226, and Native American 12. The total student enrollment for CrossRoads AEPs in the 2006 school year was 13,017.

A summary of the data outlined in this section revealed concerns of disproportionality in the area of special education. Black students, according to the data provided by the GaDOE in 2006–2007, comprised 38% of the student population enrolled in all public schools grades K–12. A review of the demographics of students with disabilities showed that for students enrolled in grades 6–12 in the same school year, students with disabilities comprised 43% of this segment of the population. Black students identified as EBD for this same grade level and school year were 48% of the EBD population and for Black students identified as SLD they comprised 39% of the SLD population. The issue of disproportionality has been identified as a key issue for

Georgia's special education program. This issue will be addressed in the section titled "Key issues for Georgia's Special Education Program" of this study.

Key Issues for Georgia's Alternative Education Programs

Funding and Staffing Issues

Research conducted by Lehr, Moreau et al. (2004) and Lehr and Lange (2003) identified issues of funding and staffing as key issues of concern for state departments of education and AEPs nationally. In 2006, the GaDOE established the Alternative Education Subcommittee to make recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness of Georgia's CrossRoads Alternative Education Program. One of the recommendations of the committee was to reduce the maximum teacher/student ratio from 1:18 to 1:10. This would, as indicated by the committee, require additional funding. This recommendation of Georgia's Alternative Education Subcommittee reaffirmed the national concerns cited in the literature of AEPs.

Procedures for Transition

A major focal point of this study is to determine procedures that would facilitate the successful return of students with disabilities enrolled in Georgia's AEPs to their home school. Another major concern reflected by the research of Lehr, Lanners et al. (2003) was that procedures with regard to exit from the alternative program, transition plan, and follow up were unclear or inadequate. The Georgia state rule for AEPs is "silent" (does not address) on issues involving exit criteria, criteria for transition planning, and follow up for students both disabled and non-disabled. Therefore, local school systems are not required to develop and implement procedures to do so. Transition

services are mentioned in the “GaDOE Alternative Education Program Self-Assessment Instrument “(2005). Yet, as stated previously, the GaDOE does not require that this instrument be completed nor is it required that this instrument and supporting data be submitted to the department. The development of a transition plan is mentioned in the program guidelines but the program guidelines do not articulate a set of criteria for school systems to follow.

Key Issues for Georgia’s Special Education Program

Special Education Students’ Academic Achievement

Previously discussed were issues that need to be addressed that impact the education of all students. This section discusses specific concerns that influence the education of students with disabilities. These concerns are academic achievement, lack of qualified teachers, disproportionality, and compliance with IDEA.

According to Georgia’s annual yearly progress (AYP) State Summary Report for 2005–2006, students with disabilities in middle grades (6–8) had high percentages of not meeting the state academic standards in the content areas of mathematics and science. In sixth grade 72% and 68%, seventh grade 53% and 69%, and eighth grade 60% and 53% respectively did not meet the state academic standard in these content areas. Students with disabilities in grade eight who were administered the Middle Grades Writing Assessment had the highest percentage (46%) of not meeting the state academic standard as compared to the other subgroups which were male, female, students without disabilities, limited English proficient, economically disadvantaged, not economically disadvantaged, and migrant. Students with disabilities in high school taking End of

Course Tests (which comprises 15% of a student's course grade) had high percentages of not meeting the state academic standards in the areas of ninth grade literature and composition (74%), biology (73%) and economics/business/free enterprise (74%) as compared to the other subgroups. Students with disabilities in the 11th grade taking the Georgia High School Writing Test had the highest percentage (39%) of not meeting the state academic standard as compared to the other subgroups. The other subgroups for the End of Course Tests and the Georgia High School Graduation Tests were male, female, students without disabilities, limited English proficient, economically disadvantaged, not economically disadvantaged, and migrant. Students with disabilities in the 11th grade taking the Georgia High School Graduation test had the highest percentages of not meeting the state academic standards in the areas of mathematics (43%), social studies (52%), and science (66%) as compared to the subgroups.

Although ensuring academic achievement for students enrolled in Georgia's CrossRoads AEPs was not specifically mentioned as a recommendation by the state's Alternative Education Subcommittee, the GaDOE Program Guidelines (2003) for AEPs states that program effectiveness is based on the amount of academic progress made by students attending an AEP. The Program Guidelines (2003) further state that academic progress requires the utilization of entry and exit achievement data as the basis of supporting academic progress and thus program effectiveness. Therefore, because of the state program guidelines for determining program effectiveness, ensuring academic achievement for students with disabilities enrolled in Georgia's CrossRoads AEPs may need to be an issue identified by the GaDOE.

Qualified Special Education Teachers

The national survey conducted by Lehr, Moreau, Lange and Lanners (2004) revealed that state directors of special education were concerned about the lack of qualified staff servicing special education students. This concern should resonate as a concern for administrators in Georgia's CrossRoads AEPs. The state rule for AEPs (160-4-8.12) is "silent" on the issue of certification for teachers in alternative schools. The program guidelines do, however, state those AEP teachers in academic content courses must meet the requirements for highly qualified teachers under the NCLB.

The Georgia Professional Standards Commission (GAPSC) is the state agency that regulates certification and the criteria for highly qualified teachers. The GAPSC published the document titled "The Georgia Implementation Guidelines of The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 Title II, Part A" (2007). This document outlines Georgia's criteria for highly qualified teachers. The document states:

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and the reauthorization of IDEA legislation in 2004 require special education teachers to be 'highly qualified'. Teachers who teach in alternative schools and who are the 'teacher of record' for any of the core academic subjects must meet the requirements of 'highly qualified'. (p. 18)

The GAPSC, in the document "Frequently Asked Questions — Special Education Highly Qualified" (2005), described the "teacher of record" as the teacher who is responsible for teaching of academic content subjects. The GAPSC stipulates that the core academic subjects must be taught by a teacher who is highly qualified to teach that content area at the corresponding grade level. According to the GAPSC, special

education students may be taught by a general education or special education teacher who is certified to teach the subject and grade level.

The GAPSC also published “The Georgia Educator Workforce 2006”. This is a report of the supply and demand of teachers in Georgia’s public schools. The Georgia Educator Workforce 2006 reports critical shortage fields in the state. Critical shortage fields are based on subject areas in which school systems post 5% vacancies the preceding year. Special education fields that were identified as critical shortages fields for grades P-12 were: (a) Behavior Disorders, (b) Hearing Impaired (c) Interrelated Special Education, (d) Specific Learning Disabilities, (e) Mental Retardation, (f) Orthopedically Impaired, and (g) Visually Impaired. For AEPs, the fields of Behavior Disorders and Learning Disabilities should be of major concern.

“The Georgia Educator Workforce 2006” also noted that on a yearly basis the GAPSC follows shortage areas based on the number of non-regular certificates issued to school systems. Non-regular certificates are normally issued by the GAPSC at the request of the employing school system in order to fill vacancies. Non-regular certificates, according to GAPSC rule 505-2-.02 Classification: Category, Title, Type, Field, Level (2005), are issued to those who do not meet all certificate requirements for the field, who have not completed pedagogy requirements or must obtain a higher degree level.

The GAPSC reports that for FY06 the state issued 12,008 non-regular certificates for all teaching fields. In the field of special education, 5,748 (47.9%) non-regular certificates were issued. This was the highest number of non-regular certificates issued in the state in terms of teaching fields.

In order to address this issue, Georgia has implemented an alternative teacher certification program. Additional research may be needed to examine college and university education programs' methods of recruitment of students for their special education programs. Additional research could also examine strategies for college and university education programs to recruit teachers for secondary special education. This, in lieu of NCLB, would require dual certification in an academic content area and in special education.

Disproportionality in Special Education

Overrepresentation of students with disabilities attending AEPs was another issue for state directors of special education and other state department personnel according to the national survey conducted by Lehr, Moreau et al. (2004). Georgia publicly reports data on "Risk of Disproportionality by Disability Type" and "Risk of Disproportionality by Educational Placement" for students with disabilities. This is reported in the GaDOE Exceptional Students Annual Report (2006) which is an online report.

Georgia has identified the issue of overrepresentation (disproportionality) as a performance goal for students with disabilities and has defined interventions to address this issue.

In accordance with IDEA 2004, the GaDOE has identified approximately 90 school districts, roughly 50% of the districts in the state, as being significantly disproportionate due to inappropriate policies, practices, and procedures. Districts outlined their responsibility to spend 15% of IDEA VI-B funds on Early Intervening Services to assist struggling students to catch up to their peers and ultimately decrease the need for a disability label. In addition, GaDOE Division

for Exceptional Students (Special Education Services and Supports) developed a tool for analyzing policies, practices, and procedures and required districts to use that tool. (GaDOE State Performance Plan, 2007, p.5)

Compliance with IDEA–2004

The final issue for state directors of special education, according to the research by Lehr, Moreau, Lange and Lanners (2004) and Lehr and Lange (2003), was lack of compliance of IDEA–2004 requirements. The Georgia Annual Performance Report (2007) provides information on the state’s progress or lack of progress in meeting the performance goals identified by the state. The State Performance Plan (2007) evaluates the state’s efforts to implement the requirements of Part B of IDEA.

The U.S. Department of Education, to determine state’s implementation of the regulations for Part B of IDEA, reviews each state’s Annual Performance Report and State Performance Plan. After review of these credentials, the U.S. Department of Education determines each state’s level of compliance with IDEA according to four determination categories: Meets Requirements, Needs Assistance, Needs Interventions, and Needs Substantial Interventions. In June 2007, the U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs determined that Georgia’s level of compliance with IDEA was in the needs assistance category.

The U.S. Department of Education cited Georgia as not meeting the following performance indicators based on the target goals devised by the state:

1. Percent of youth with IEPs dropping out of high school compared to the percent of all youth in the state dropping out of high school

2. Participation and performance of children with disabilities on statewide assessments
3. Rates of suspension and expulsion
4. Percent of children with IEPs age 6 through 21 served in public or private separate schools (does not include AEPs), residential placements, or homebound or hospital placements
5. Percent of districts with disproportionate representation of racial and ethnic groups in specific disability categories that is the result of inappropriate identification

The performance goals listed above with the exception of number four, (students served in public or private separate schools, residential placements, or homebound or hospital placements) significantly impact students with disabilities enrolled in an AEP.

This section has reviewed literature focused on policies and procedures that impact regular and special education students enrolled in AEPs. These policies and procedures have an influence on making it possible for special education students to return to their base school. In the next section, literature is reviewed that focuses on services that may enable a successful transition for students with disabilities to a traditional school.

Instructional Services

Instructional Strategies and Programs

A focus of this study is to identify services that would enable students with disabilities enrolled in Georgia's AEPs to successfully transition to their traditional

school. Successful transition is defined as the student having continued achievement in the traditional school program and exiting with a regular diploma. The next sections of this chapter review various investigations that address issues that impact students with disabilities including the topics of: (a) accessing the general curriculum, (b) mathematics instructional strategies, (c) reading instructional strategies, (d) instructional strategies to improve academic achievement for EBD students, (e) behavior management strategies, and (f) dropout prevention strategies and programs.

Accessing the General Curriculum

Byrnes (2004) study examined the experiences and challenges administrators of state special education schools faced as they began aligning their curriculum to state standards. This alignment of instruction with state curriculum standards was a direct result of the mandate from NCLB. NCLB mandates that students with disabilities must be educated and tested on the general curriculum.

The students enrolled in the state special education schools involved in the study were primarily EBD and LD. The findings exposed five specific challenges of aligning state standards with instruction for these students. The specific challenges were: (a) matching students' needs to the state curriculum, (b) finding time to assemble staff to accomplish curriculum alignment, (c) locating relevant teaching materials, (d) finding funds for alignment and teaching materials (e) collaborating with school districts. A significant finding of this study was the global challenge of meeting the federal mandate of NCLB that students with disabilities must be taught and assessed on the general curriculum.

That overall challenge is rooted in the fact that before students with disabilities are able to “master this curriculum foundation, their teachers must gain access and expertise. Special education teachers have gained skills and knowledge different from those acquired by general education teachers” (Byrnes, 2004, p. 111). Byrnes identified conditions that must occur in order for students with disabilities to be educated on the general curriculum. First, educators must expect that all disabled students will benefit from being taught and assessed on the general curriculum. Secondly, teachers must have a wide selection of instructional materials to be able to teach effectively students with disabilities who have a variety of learning styles the general curriculum. Thirdly, special educators must have knowledge of the content standards. Standards are generally articulated and defined in the state curriculum.

Byrnes (2004) identified the conditions that must occur for special education students to be effectively educated in the general curriculum. Yet, the study did not specify student outcomes as a result, of aligning classroom instruction to the state standards. Data on student academic achievement on statewide assessments by disability category would have added thoroughness to this investigation.

Nolet and McLaughlin (2000) in their text *Assessing the General Curriculum Including Students with Disabilities in Standards-Based Reform* discussed the relationship between the IEP and enabling students with disabilities to have access to the general curriculum. The IEP is the education plan that is designed for every student identified as having a disability who receives special education and related services. It is developed based on the unique needs of the student. It was observed that IDEA–97 (and IDEA–2004) emphasized making the IEP a meaningful instructional and planning tool,

which focuses on students' participation in general education standards and curriculum. A major component of the IEP involves providing students with disabilities appropriate accommodations.

According to Nolet and McLaughlin (2000), an accommodation typically is defined as:

A service or support that is provided to help a student to fully access the subject matter and instruction as well as to validly demonstrate what he or she knows. An accommodation does not change the content of instruction nor the performance expectations. Accommodations should not interfere with or markedly change the standards specified for students. That means that a student is expected to learn to a defined level of mastery all of the information that typical students will learn.

(p. 71)

The text also acknowledged a major challenge to special education teachers was deciding which accommodations would best allow the student to be engaged in the general curriculum so that they would demonstrate academic achievement. Decisions about which accommodation would allow access to the general curriculum necessitates teachers having an understanding of the important outcomes of the lesson and an understanding that the accommodation does not change the major learning outcomes expected of the lesson.

Nolet and McLaughlin (2000) identified three categories of accommodations: (a) alternative acquisition modes, (b) content enhancements, and (c) alternative response modes. The examination of these categories of accommodations included defining the categories and providing specific examples. Alternative acquisition strategies enhance,

circumvent, or offset for a motor, sensory, or information-processing deficit.

Accommodations in this category may include sign language interpreters, Braille materials, voice-output computers, and tape-recorded books. Content enhancement techniques help students identify, organize, comprehend, and remember information. Some accommodations in this category are advanced organizers, visual displays, study guides, mnemonic devices, and peer-mediated instruction. The last category, alternative response modes strategies, provides students with alternative methods to express their ideas, which are a vital piece of the learning and assessment processes. Accommodations of this nature could include a scribe to record student responses or untimed response condition for students who need additional time to complete an assignment.

Nolet and McLaughlin (2000) placed emphasis on teachers providing students with appropriate accommodations as the key to access the curriculum. Their research stresses that, for special education students, the IEP is the gateway to demonstrate their mastery of the general curriculum by using appropriate accommodations. Additional research needs to examine which accommodations provide positive outcomes for students. Additional research needs to address specific educational concerns. Does additional time increase academic achievement? Is this an effective instructional strategy for students with disabilities to access the general curriculum? Additional research is also needed to examine if particular accommodations are more beneficial as instructional strategies for SLD students as opposed to EBD students in accessing the general curriculum and improving academic achievement.

The IEP and its relationship to students with disabilities increasing their participation in standard-based reform are also discussed by Walsh and Conner (2004).

“A key element in ensuring that students with disabilities are successfully included in a reformed general education environment is a strengthened IEP process well aligned with the more rigorous general education outcomes” (p. 103). Their research involved a Mid Atlantic region school district that put into operation a comprehensive staff development program that emphasized aligning the IEP process with rigorous general education outcomes to enable students with disabilities in accessing the general curriculum.

Walsh and Conner (2004), to assist principals in ensuring IEP implementation in their schools, developed revisions to the school district’s teacher observation and rating instrument. The revised teacher observation and rating instrument included specific expectations (implementing IEP goals, objectives and the use of accommodations) for the teachers being observed that were based in the school system’s special education guidelines. The instrument also provided administrative “look fors”. The instrument was designed to indicate the degree to which IEPs were being implemented could be assessed for both accountability and professional learning purposes.

The process of incorporating IEP goals, objectives, and accommodations in the teacher evaluation was to make certain that IEP team decisions made to provide disabled students with access to the general curriculum were routinely implemented in the classroom. The significance of this study was that it recognized the critical role of the principal in including students with disabilities in standards-based reform. As a result, this process was made available to principals to serve as a tool that could assist them in supporting the legal right of special education students to have access to the general curriculum. Replicating this study in a variety of educational settings such as state special education schools and AEPs as well in a variety of regional locations would increase the

knowledge of how to strengthen the IEP process to enable academic success for students with disabilities.

Accessing Georgia's General Curriculum

The legal right for all students with disabilities to have access to the general curriculum is referenced in federal laws. The NCLB references this legal right by mandating that states apply the same academic standards to all schools and to all children. IDEA–2004 noted that research demonstrated that the education of students with disabilities is most effective by making certain of their access to the general education curriculum in the regular classroom.

The general curriculum in Georgia is known as Georgia Performance Standards (GPS). GPS is the curriculum document that contains all the standards that students are expected to learn. The development of the GPS was based on research conducted by Wiggins, Grant, and McTighe (2004) and Marzano (2003). Marzano emphasized five action steps to implement a guaranteed and viable curriculum.

1. Identify and communicate the content considered essential for all students.
2. Ensure that the essential content can be addressed in the amount of time available for instruction.
3. Sequence and organize the essential content in such a way that students have ample opportunities to learn it.
4. Ensure that teachers address the essential content.
5. Protect the instructional time that is available. (p. 25)

Georgia has a prescribed program, outlined by Calligan, Line, Shearer and Mitchell (2005), as to how the standards' significant components are to be identified and

evaluated. This prescribed program referred to as unpacking the standards, was intended to assist regular education and special education teachers with their understanding of the curriculum standards. This prescribed program was also developed to assist teachers as in planning for instruction and assessments.

The prescribed Georgia program of unpacking the standards is a four-step process. The first step is to identify the Big Ideas within the standards. The Big Idea is defined as the “core concepts, principles, theories, and processes that should serve as the focal point of the curricula, instruction, and assessment” (p. 8). The second step is to generate Enduring Understandings from the Big Ideas. Enduring Understandings provide meaning and importance to the facts (Big Ideas). Enduring Understandings are written using the stem “Students will understand that”.

The third step is to rephrase Enduring Understandings into Essential Questions. Essential Questions are open-ended and are intended to guide student inquiry and assist students as they are focusing on the instruction. The fourth and final step before planning instruction and assessment is to Identify Desired Knowledge and Skills.

Calligan, Line, Shearer and Mitchell (2005) noted that knowledge is “getting students to construct meaning, organize information, and (selectively) store information. Skills allow students to demonstrate their ability to do something” (p. 14). This four-step process was designed for teachers to teach effectively the GPS to all students, as a result, allowing students with disabilities access to the general curriculum. Unpacking the GPS to enable teachers to gain knowledge of the content prior to planning instruction and assessment is vital for students to have access to the general curriculum.

The GaDOE has provided technical assistance to teachers and administrators in unpacking the GPS. An important concern is that the entire process of unpacking the standards is based on a variety of assumptions. The assumptions are that teachers understand the content of the core academic course they are assigned to teach, that teachers understand and have basic pedagogy skills, and that teachers both regular education and special education are aware of appropriate accommodations that will enable special education students (and regular education students) to demonstrate educational success.

Teachers' understanding of the content of core academic courses (mathematics, reading, science, and social studies) was a major challenge identified by Bryne (2004) in order for students with disabilities to access the general curriculum. Nolet and Laughlin (2000) identified accommodations that enable students to access the curriculum. Walsh and Conner (2004) developed an instrument to assist administrators in ensuring that the IEP was aligned to accessing the curriculum and Calligan et al. (2005) outlined a program to assist Georgia teachers in planning instruction and assessing students in the GPS. The literature in this section identified instructional strategies and an instructional program to enhance the academic progress of students with disabilities.

This study focused on teachers' understanding of instructional strategies in two core academic courses. The courses were mathematics and reading. The following section of this chapter will review literature that focused on math instructional strategies.

Mathematical Instructional Strategies

Calhoon and Fuchs (2003) noted that special education classes at the secondary education level a minimum devote a third of available instructional time to remediating

mathematics deficiencies. Yet, even with this substantial amount of instructional time being used to address mathematics remediation, students with disabilities continue to demonstrate limited academic progress in learning mathematics skills and mathematics application. Examples of the mathematics problems experienced by special education students cited in the research are: (a) their ability to perform addition facts are equivalent to third graders without disabilities, (b) their growth patterns in this academic area demonstrate growth only 1 year for every 2 or more years in school, and (c) students with disabilities display difficulties with word problems.

Calhoon and Fuchs (2003) stated that these mathematics deficiencies, which begin in elementary school, persist through the secondary levels. Their research suggested that the traditional mathematics curriculum taught in special education classrooms and in inclusive classrooms have resulted in secondary special education students performing poorly. Their research reported four specific mathematics interventions that are viewed as critical components for teaching this subject to secondary students with disabilities: “(a) using small, interactive group instruction, (b) using directed questioning and responses, (c) breaking tasks down into component parts and fading prompts and cues, and (d) using extended practice with feedback” (p. 236).

Curriculum-based measurement (CBM) is a method of tracking and enhancing the academic achievement of students with disabilities. CBM requires teachers to monitor routinely students’ progress toward annual curricular goals. Calhoon and Fuchs (2003) conducted a study designed to investigate the effectiveness of PALS/CBM in high school special education mathematics classes. Three teachers from three high schools in a southeastern urban school system participated. A total of 10 self-contained mathematics

resource classes were involved in the study. Student participants included 92 ninth through 12th graders with special education eligibilities of (SLD), behavior disorder (BD), and mental retardation (MR).

Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS) incorporates the four critical components of teaching mathematics to secondary special education students. PALS is viewed as an intervention to increase mathematics performance of secondary students with disabilities. PALS were developed as a supplement to the existing math curriculum. PALS generally is employed two to three times per week to provide extra individualized practice on deficit skills. As part of PALS, students in the same class are paired according to skill level to allow individualized practice on deficit math skills.

Calhoon and Fuchs (2003) reported that the findings revealed that the PALS/CBM intervention did promote computational skills for the student participants. However, the findings showed that PALS/CBM did not promote the development of concepts/applications skills. The findings also revealed that PALS/CBM intervention did not promote positive outcomes on a standardized state graduation test.

The significance of the study is that it acknowledged an instructional strategy that may provide sustained improvement in computational skills for students with disabilities. The study also designates a need for further investigation in the area of instructional strategies or programs that may yield positive outcomes in the mathematical skills of concepts/applications. It would appear that increased skills in computation, concepts, and applications might lead to positive outcomes on high-stakes graduation tests.

Maccini and Hughes (2000) also reviewed research and conducted a study that involved mathematics instructional strategies for secondary students with disabilities. The

research involved strategies for Algebra instruction. Algebra is “considered the gatekeeper to educational and occupational opportunities;[as] most secondary schools now require all students take higher level mathematics to graduate” (p. 10).

Students with learning disabilities according to this study have demonstrated poor algebra performance. This is due to their limited ability in the areas of basic skills and terminology, problem representation, problem solution, and self-monitoring. These are the skills necessary to be successful in algebra.

After reviewing various studies on SLD students’ mathematics performance and interventions, Maccini and Hughes (2000) conducted a study on problem representation, solution, and general problem-solving skills for teaching algebra to high school students with SLD. The purpose of the study was to investigate the effects of an instructional strategy known as Search, Translate, Answer, Review (STAR) and using the concrete, semi-concrete, and abstract (C-S-A) continuum to improve skills needed to be successful in solving algebraic equations. The STAR strategy consisted of six procedural elements: (a) provide graphic organizer, (b) describe and model, (c) conduct guided practice, (d) conduct independent practice, (e) give posttest, and (f) provide feedback. The participants were six high school SLD students.

The results of the study indicated that all participants learned to represent and solve addition word problems involving integer numbers. The results of the study also revealed that five participants learned to solve subtraction, multiplication, and division word problems involving integer numbers. It was noted that the sixth participant had excessive absences and therefore was unable to master all of the objectives.

Maccini and Hughes (2000) stated that the findings of the research suggests that students with SLD can be taught to represent and solve for the solution to word problems involving integer numbers using concrete manipulatives and pictorial displays. Maccini and Hughes (2000) further stated that the findings suggest that students can be taught to generalize those skills to more difficult problems of this kind and the effects can be maintained over time.

The noteworthiness of this study is that it provided information regarding the challenges students with disabilities most address when enrolling in advance mathematics classes such as algebra. The study also identified an effective mathematic instructional strategy to enable students to be successful in algebra. Unfortunately, the study had only six participants. This should be generalized to a larger sample.

The previously reviewed examination in this section conducted by Calhoon and Fuchs (2003) examined the effects of PALS and CBM on the mathematics performance of secondary students with learning disabilities in mathematics. According to the researchers, the educational implication is that the PALS/CBM is a strategy that helps increase mathematics performance for high school special education students. Maccini and Hughes (2000) investigated the effects of a problem solving strategy for introductory algebra. The educational implication suggested from this study was that students with SLD could be taught to represent word problems using manipulatives and pictorial displays. The next section will discuss literature that reviewed and conducted studies on reading strategies for special education students.

Reading Instructional Programs and Strategies

Accountability is determined by how well the public school and school system are teaching students what they should know and be able to do. A key accountability requirement in NCLB is adequate yearly progress (AYP). State departments of education define AYP goals for schools in the state. The school's AYP measure includes the performance of all students. Data are disaggregated to reflect the impact of each subgroup on the AYP. The subgroups that are defined in NCLB are: (a) economically disadvantaged students, (b) students from major racial and ethnic groups, (c) students with disabilities, and (d) students with limited English proficiency. The lack of progress of a small number of students may prevent an entire school from achieving the defined AYP goals and be forced to face various consequences.

Comprehensive school reform (CSR) according to a study conducted by Shippen, Houchins, Calhoun, Furlow, and Sartor (2006) is one method that some low performing schools have chosen to assist them in making AYP. Models of CSR are based on the idea that there is a single systematic method of instruction to improve the achievement for all students. Shippen et al. (2006) pointed out that "the mandate for accountability has driven school administrators in the lowest performing schools to adopt CSR models even though the effectiveness of these models are still in question" (p. 322).

Shippen et al. (2006) reported on a meta-analysis (2003) of successful CSR programs. The top three CSR models of the 29 reviewed that demonstrated effectiveness with urban and low-performing schools were Success for All (SFA), Direct Instruction (DI), and High Schools That Work. SFA and DI were targeted for the study conducted by Shippen et al. The purpose of the study was to compare the reading growth of urban

middle school students with mild disabilities receiving instruction in these two different CSR programs.

The SFA model is based on a constructivist approach to learning, with student-directed learning as the primary instructional approach. SFA has a prescribed curriculum based on homogeneous grouping in the areas of reading, writing, and language arts. The main components of SFA are (a) one-to-one tutoring, (b) a family support team, (c) cooperative learning, (d) an onsite facilitator, and (e) a building advisory team.

The DI program is based on the behavioral approach to learning. DI involves fast-paced, scripted, well-sequenced, rule-based, and highly focused lessons. Students are usually instructed in small groups and given several opportunities to respond in unison and individually with instant feedback using a detailed correction system.

The participants were 44 middle school students with learning disabilities, behavior disorders, mild intellectual disabilities, speech and language disorders, other health impairments, and orthopedic impairments. The students attended two middle schools in the same large southeastern inner-city school system.

The results of the study indicated no significant achievement in reading for either CSR program. The students did not show marked progress in reading on the standardized measure used in the study, which was the Woodcock Reading Mastery Tests-Revised. The students also did not show progress in reading on the school district's curriculum-based measures. The results point out a need for additional research in the area of reading programs that will result in achievement for students with disabilities.

Research conducted by Kim, Vaughn, Klingner, Woodruff, Reutebuch, and Kouzekanani (2006) also focused on reading deficiencies at the middle school level. The

research cited that the most troublesome problem confronted by secondary teachers currently is the fact that students come to school without the essential knowledge, skills and temperament to read and comprehend the material. In addition, students with SLD generally have not developed metacognition, the awareness of one's own learning or thinking, nor have most SLD students mastered the ability to competently apply comprehension strategies.

Kim et al. (2006) conducted a study that was designed to investigate the effects of Computer-Assisted Collaborative Strategic Reading (CACSR) on the comprehension of middle school students with SLD and to study the opinion of participating students and teachers regarding the efficacy of CACSR. The primary component of CACSR is Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR). CSR is an instructional strategy in which students learn pre-reading, during reading, and post-reading techniques to assist in the development of reading comprehension skills.

A critical factor connected to this study was the acknowledgment of Kim et al. (2006) that there is limited research that examines CSR effectiveness with SLD students. However, it was recognized that CSR has two instructional components that are linked with improved reading comprehension for SLD students: (a) the use of small, interactive groups and (b) the teaching of specific formats for students to generate questions about what they read.

The secondary component of CACSR is computer-assisted instruction (CAI). Kim et al. (2006) alleged that CAI has the possibility to offer students with SLD self-paced, individualized instruction that provides immediate feedback and numerous opportunities for practice. They also noted that studies using CAI as a provider of teaching reading

strategies such as the main ideas or definitions, have demonstrated significant improvements in reading comprehension. As a result, Kim et al. (2006) surmised that effective CAI reading programs should provide helpful reading comprehension instruction. The participants involved in the study conducted by Kim et al. (2006) were two urban middle school reading/language arts teachers and 34 students of which 24 students were SLD.

The findings revealed academic achievement for students with disabilities. The results of the study revealed that the participants significantly improved their reading comprehension as measured by the Passage Comprehension subtest of the Woodcock Reading Mastery Test-Revised. The results also revealed that students improved in their abilities in writing the main ideas of and asking questions about particular passages they read.

The qualitative data of the study also revealed that students had positive perceptions of the CACSR intervention and thought that their reading had enhanced. The teachers had similar positive perceptions of CACSR. They stated that some, if not all, students had improved in their reading comprehension and vocabulary. The teachers also stated that they wanted to continue to use the CACSR program.

An interesting feature of this study was the inclusion of qualitative data on the perceptions of students and teachers on the use of CACSR. This is an important consideration for systems interested in funding and implementing this method of instruction. Of equal importance is the CACSR technique demonstrated positive academic gains. Again, the study conducted by Kim et al. (2006) explored improving

reading comprehension through computer-assisted collaborative strategic reading. It was concluded that CACSR is a possible approach to teaching reading comprehension.

In this section, it was reported that Shippen et al. (2006) compared the effects of SFA and DI reading programs for students with mild disabilities. The results of the study did not indicate significant academic achievement for either program. It was observed that the findings have problematic education implications given the present atmosphere of accountability. It was also discussed in this section that Kim et al. (2006) conducted a study that was designed to investigate the effects of computer-assisted collaborative strategic reading (CACSR). Their study's results showed academic achievement for students with disabilities. The next section will discuss instructional strategies to enhance academic achievement for emotional and behavior disorders (EBD) students.

Instructional Strategies for EBD Students

Ryan, Reid, and Epstein (2004) stated, "EBD students perform 1.2 to 2 grade levels behind their peers while in elementary school, and this discrepancy worsens with age. By the time these students reach high school, they are performing almost 3.5 grade levels below their peers" (p. 330). Strategies that may address this problem are peer-mediated interventions.

Peer-mediated interventions have demonstrated effectiveness in the areas of academics and behavior. Peer-mediated interventions provide an educational setting where individualization, response supervision, error correction, and reinforcement are likely to occur. Peer-mediated interventions include a variety of techniques. Some of the techniques are cross-age tutoring, peer tutoring, class-wide peer tutoring, cooperative learning, class wide student tutoring teams, and peer-assisted learning strategies.

As a result, the study examined research that had been conducted with EBD students using peer-mediated interventions to increase academic achievement. Articles were included in the study if they met the following criteria: published in a peer review journal, quasi-experimental or experimental research, included manipulation of an independent variable, and included at least one academic measure as a dependent variable. The findings of the review concluded that peer tutoring, cross-age tutoring, class-wide peer tutoring, and peer-assisted learning strategies were proven effective methods of instruction for this student population. These peer-mediated interventions demonstrated academic gains in math, reading, spelling, and history.

Ryan et al. (2004) examined research that focused on the peer-mediated interventions to improve academic outcomes for EBD students, which is significant since, according to Ryan et al. (2004), the majority of studies regarding EBD students focus on interventions to improve social behavior. This has resulted in a limited number of studies (14) focusing on peer-mediated interventions associated with EBD students' improved academic achievement. The limited amount of studies focusing on this area may have hindered the results of this research to be generalized to the EBD student population.

Daly, Garvacz, Olson, Persamperi, and Ni (2006) concurred with Ryan et al. that in the past, in terms of research, little attention had been paid to the academic needs of EBD students. However, Daly et al. (2006) acknowledged a study conducted by Sutherland and Wesby (2001) which concluded that the academic performance of EBD students improves with increased opportunities to respond. Unfortunately, according to Daly et al., "the reality is that (BD) students generally have very few opportunities to

respond in the classroom. Instead when presented with instructional tasks, BD students often display behaviors that compete with appropriate academic responses which reduce their opportunities to respond” (p. 15).

Choice has been used as a clinical intervention to increase the students’ adaptive behaviors such as being engaged in academics and decreasing the students’ maladaptive behaviors such as displaying disruptive behaviors. Daly et al. disclosed the fact that their investigation did not find any studies that examined the effects of choice on reading proficiency, even though reading impacts all of the other academics. The purpose of their study was to investigate the effects of student choice making on oral reading fluency using a multiple–probe across tasks (passages) design.

The participants were two seventh grade EBD students. Students could choose whether they would be instructed, how much time they would spend receiving instruction, and what types of instructional antecedents (modeling, practice, and error correction and performance feedback) would be delivered. When students met the performance goals, they would choose a reward. The results of this study indicated that both students increased (modestly) their oral reading fluency rates when choice was used with antecedent instruction procedures and tangible or edible rewards. The study also revealed that the choices made by the students afforded them greater opportunities to respond. However, the study was conducted with two participants. The study needs to be replicated with a larger sample population.

The education implication of the study conducted by Daly et al. may show that the clinical intervention of student choice in receiving reading instruction may yield academic benefit for the student and may provide useful information about students’

preferences for different strategies. Ryan et al. investigated peer-mediation interventions on the academic performance of EBD students. The implication for practitioners is various peer-mediated interventions have been shown to be effective for instructing EBD students. The following section will examine research that concentrated on behavior management strategies.

Behavior Management Strategies

Safran and Oswald (2003) remarked the increase in aggressive and delinquent behaviors in schools throughout this nation that has reached significant proportions. As a result, parents, students, and lawmakers expect educators to respond more efficiently by incorporating more “get tough” policies. It was acknowledged in their study that these “get tough” traditional disciplinary practices might increase the incidence rate of the behaviors that educators are trying to eliminate. An alternative is the use of positive behavior supports (PBS).

PBS are intended to be proactive. They are designed to prevent problem behavior by changing a situation before problems rise and at the same time teach appropriate alternatives to managing behaviors. Generally, school-based PBS are directed at four different levels identified as: (a) school wide or universal supports (a school wide violence prevention program), (b) non-classrooms or specific school settings (hallways or cafeteria), (c) classroom or group supports (fourth grade class or basketball team), and (d) individual student supports (those with chronic problems requiring intensive individualized interventions).

Advocates of PBS must determine whether school teams can successfully implement research-validated best practices. In order to begin addressing this concern,

Safran and Oswald (2003) conducted a literature review to examine the use of school-based PBS that included data based decision making and team collaboration. Teams are comprised of teachers, administrators, and/or special services personnel. Only articles that contained substantive quantitative data were included in the literature review. In addition, the search for literature to include in the review was limited to school-based investigations that incorporated the element of collaborative team decision making.

The results acknowledged that the investigations reviewed support the implementation of school-based PBS for a variety of reasons. Reasons for supporting the implementation of PBS included, in terms of the school wide PBS, data can be used from office referrals, records of tardies, attendance records, and direct observation to establish school wide priorities and preintervention baselines. These data can also be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention.

For specific school settings such as hallways, cafeteria, and transitions, using PBS has demonstrated positive changes in behavior. These positive changes in behavior have occurred by using strategies such as active supervision (interacting with students), precorrection (verbally prompting students about appropriate behavior), and group contingencies (group rewards). However, the review of the literature indicated that there is not a one size fits all model for all settings.

A limitation of this study was that Safran and Oswald (2003) were able to identify only one study (Nelson 1996) that specifically addressed whether universal supports also improve behavior of students with chronic difficulties. “The universal approach included establishing behavioral expectations for common areas, tasking routines into discrete behaviors, and then instructing appropriate routines. Results of the study indicated

improvements in targeted students' behavioral adjustment, enhanced academic performance, and school survival skills" (p. 368). The lack of studies addressing PBS for students with chronic behaviors is regrettable for students with disabilities attending AEPs. It is important however, for teachers and administrators to incorporate effective and appropriate PBS as part of the educational program of AEPs.

Oswald, Safran, and Johanson (2005) affirm that efficient management of disruptive behaviors in schools continues to be a critical national concern. Their research concurred that while school systems spend considerable resources on managing challenging behavior exhibited by individual students, less emphasis is placed on behavior problems in non-classroom settings. The purpose of the study conducted by these researchers was to determine whether a multifaceted PBS intervention program consisting of positive practice, pre-correction, verbal praise, reinforcement, correction of inappropriate behavior, active supervision, and discussion of behavior with students could improve student hallway behavior in a rural middle school.

The targeted setting for this study was hallway transition time prior to lunch for each grade (6th, 7th, and 8th). The targeted transition behaviors were: running, cursing, pushing, jumping, and screaming/loud voice. The study occurred in a rural middle school in southeastern Ohio. The student population was 950. The student population also consisted of 47.5% female students, 52.5% male students. It was also noted that 16.7% of the students received special education services. The results of the study after a five-week intervention phase demonstrated statistically significant differences between pre-intervention behavior and post-intervention behavior for the 950 students.

A limitation of the study may be the intervention phase. Information was not provided as to what portion of the school year the intervention occurred. There may be a difference in the results if the implementation occurred in the beginning of the school year or at the end of the school year. Another limitation to the study was no evidence of a plan to sustain the positive effects of the study.

This section examined studies conducted by Safran and Oswald (2003) and Oswald, Safran, and Johanson (2005). Safran and Oswald (2003) researched the use of school-based PBS that involved data based decision-making and team collaboration. The study's findings may assist educators in making knowledgeable decisions about how to develop PBS in their schools. The purpose of the study conducted by Oswald et al. (2005) was to determine if PBS intervention would improve middle school students' inappropriate hallway behavior. The results demonstrated that schools could create safer surroundings. The final section of this chapter addresses the dropout rate, risk factors for dropping out of high school, dropout prevention strategies, and dropout prevention programs.

Dropout Rate for Students with Disabilities

Lehr (2004) discussed that raising graduation rates for students attending school is a national priority. NCLB requires schools to report the percentage of students who graduate with a regular diploma in four years. Because of this federal mandate, schools have designed and implemented programs and strategies to keep students in school and facilitate successful completion.

Among those youth who are at increased risk of leaving school early are students with disabilities. Lehr (2004) cited that within this group, EBD and SLD students are most at risk of dropping out of school. Dropped out is defined as the total who were enrolled at some point in the reporting year, were not enrolled at the end of the reporting year, and did not exit through any of the other categories (e.g. moved, known to continue or moved, not known to continue). According to Lehr (2004), EBD students had the highest dropout rate (51%), followed by students with SLD (27%).

Risk Factors for Dropping Out of High School

In order to discuss appropriately the drop out problem in this country it is important to know something about the kinds of students who drop out of high school and their reasons for doing so. According to Jerald (2006), research has focused on three factors that put students at risk for dropping out of school: students' social background, students' educational experiences, and school characteristics. The first factor is students' social background. There are three primary conditions associated with this factor:

1. students who are poor, members of minority groups, male, and overage for their grade are more likely to drop out of high school
2. students who come from single parent families, students whose mother dropped out of high school, students whose parents provide little support for learning, and parents who do not know their friends' parents well
3. teenagers who take on adult responsibilities such as becoming parents and/or getting married.

Jerald (2006) acknowledged that studies have shown that while social background factors are important in identifying the characteristics of students who drop out of school, it is also important to focus on the role the students' educational experiences play in influencing the drop out problem. As a result, the second factor that puts students at risk for dropping out of high school is the students' educational experiences. Jerald (2006), states, "more sophisticated studies have helped verify and clarify the education-related factors that play a role in fueling dropout rates. Researchers have identified two important categories of educational risk factors: academic performance and educational engagement" (p. 5).

Academic performance, in terms of being a factor that puts students at risk of dropping out, is characterized by students who struggle in the classroom and fall behind academically. It is also characterized by students who have low grades, low test scores, F's in English and math, and are held back one or more times. All of these factors may reduce the chance of graduating.

Educational engagement in terms of being a factor that puts students at risk of dropping out is characterized by students who become disengaged from school and students who develop discipline problems. Also associated with educational engagement in terms of dropping out of school are high absenteeism or truancy rates, less participation in extracurricular activities and poor relationships with teachers and peers. Again, these factors diminish the opportunities to graduate.

The factors of academic performance and educational engagement may be of interest to policymakers and educators concerned with the drop out issue because they are practical and predictive. These factors describe what takes place inside the school as

opposed to in the home. Therefore, these factors can be beneficial in developing dropout prevention interventions.

The third factor that puts students at risk of dropping out of school is school level factors. Jerald (2006) stated, “school-level factors play a significant role in determining whether students will earn a diploma. Institutions matter as much as individuals, and attending a high school with certain characteristics can itself be a risk factor for dropping out” (p.6). Jerald (2006) further note that student risk factors being equal, high schools with smaller enrollments, good relationships among students and adults, more supportive teachers, and a curriculum that is rigorous show evidence of lower dropout rates. This correlates with the structure and characteristics of AEPs and gives credence to the theory that AEPs may be a viable option as an educational setting for at risk students with disabilities.

Dropout Prevention Strategies and Programs

Lehr (2004) reported findings from a review of 45 prevention and intervention studies addressing dropouts described in professional journals. Lehr (2004) was also reported that the results could be used to assist administrators and policy makers in choosing or designing interventions that will decrease the dropout rate for their school, school system, or state. The findings of the review categorized the interventions strategies into five types.

1. Personal/affective interventions — examples include regularly scheduled classroom-based discussion, individual counseling, and participation in lessons on interpersonal relations.

2. Academic interventions — Examples include provision of special academic courses, individualized methods of instruction and tutoring.
3. Family outreach strategies — Examples include increased feedback to parents or home visits.
4. Interventions addressing school structure — Examples include creating schools within schools and reducing class size.
5. Work-related interventions — Examples include vocational training and participation in volunteer or service programs. (p. 2)

The findings also revealed five intervention programs that demonstrated evidence of effectiveness. According to the literature review, studies that examined these programs used random assignment or comparison groups. The intervention programs had statistically significant findings for the treatment group.

1. Check and Connect – This model is designed to engage students in school and learning via a mentor/monitor who establishes a long-term relationship and maintains regular contacts with the student, family, and teachers.
2. Support Center for Adolescent Mothers – Key components of the model include establishing early contact with the mothers, involving families, implementing parenting education groups, and involving the community.
3. School Transitional Environment Project – This project involves students taking their academic classes with a cohort of students, classrooms are arranged in close proximity, and homeroom teachers act as counselors and the link between the school and the family.

4. Teen Outreach Program – Key elements include learning life skills, discussing social and emotion issues, and participating in volunteer service opportunities in the community.
5. Personal Growth Class – Semester long personal growth classes are designed to prevent drug abuse and school dropout among high school students identified as high risk for school failure. (p. 3)

Thurlow et al. (2002) stated that in the early 1990s, the Office of Special Education Programs of the U.S. Department of Education funded three projects designed to develop interventions to prevent SLD and EBD students from dropping out of school. The following five strategies were implemented by these projects.

1. Persistence, continuity and consistency – these were always provided in tandem, to show students that there was someone who was not going to give up on them or allow them to be distracted at school.
2. Monitoring – the occurrence of risk behaviors (e.g. skipped classes, tardiness, absenteeism, behavioral referrals, suspensions, poor academic performance) was consistently tracked, as were the effects of interventions in response to risk behaviors.
3. Relationships – a caring relationship between an adult connected to the school and the student was established.
4. Affiliation – a sense of belonging to school was encouraged through participation in school-related activities.

5. Problem-Solving Skills – skills students need for solving a variety of problems were taught and supported so students were able to survive in challenging school, home, and community environments. (p. 4)

Research conducted by Jerald (2006) identified risk factors for dropping out of high school. Studies conducted by Lehr (2004) and Thurlow et al. discussed a variety of dropout prevention programs and strategies, which focused on students with disabilities including SLD and EBD students. These programs and strategies centered on engaging students in school and learning. These interventions and programs are associated with the structure and characteristics of AEPs. As a result, the implementation of these programs and interventions should provide limited difficulties for AEPs.

Improving the Graduation Rate in Georgia

National dropout interventions and programs were reviewed in the previous section. This section will review Georgia's response to increasing the state's graduation rate. Cited in the state document *Graduation Counts! Readiness to Results in Grades 6–12* (2006), the state mean graduation rate for 2005 was reported as 69.4 percent. This percentage would indicate that approximately 30% of Georgia high school students left high school in 2005 without a diploma. The document further noted that the graduation rates for various student subgroups. Based on the 2005 data, the specific graduation rates by subgroups were: Black (61.9) and Hispanic (55.3), economically disadvantaged (60.1), students with disabilities (29.4) and Limited-English Proficiency students (37.7). It should be noted that students with disabilities had the lowest graduation rate of the aforementioned student groups.

As noted in the previous chapter, the state of Georgia has two major initiatives to address dropout prevention. The initiatives are known as Graduation Counts and state Graduation Coaches. These initiatives focus on improving the state's graduation rate. Graduation Counts, as noted in the state document *Graduation Counts! Readiness to Results in Grades 6–12* (2006) outlines Georgia's foundations and strategic actions for improving the graduation rates and academic success for all students in the state. The design features five phases: (a) adult culture, (b) data utilization, (c) rigor and relevance, (d) relationships, and (e) pyramids of academic intervention.

Adult culture involves leadership teams developing policies, practices, and procedures that support the principle that all children can be held to higher expectations. In this phase, the implementation of the school's improvement plan is monitored. In the data utilization phase the school's leadership team analyzes data and identifies achievement and graduation gaps between subgroups (ethnic groups, economically disadvantaged, limited English proficient, and students with disabilities) in order to plan strategic actions that drive continuous improvement. Teachers in the data utilization phase are able to articulate how the school-wide improvement goals are embedded into classroom practices.

The third phase of the Graduation Counts initiative is rigor and relevance. In this phase administrators frequently monitor standards-based instruction through classroom observations, review of student work, and analysis of instructional plans. Teachers employ and leaders monitor the use of effective practices of instruction and assessment with all students, while subgroups of students are guaranteed additional interventions and scaffolding. Relationships are the next phase. In this phase students in grades 6–12 have a

trained caring adult in the building who serves to provide both academic and career advisement to students and their families. Leaders in this phase design and facilitate a comprehension transition program for educators (vertical teaming) and students (transition strategies) to ensure success for all students at the next level. The final phase is Pyramids of Academic Intervention. The Pyramids of Academic Interventions are defined in the document *Graduation Counts! Readiness to Results in Grades 6–12* (2006) as: a school’s systemic and systematic response to struggling students who need additional support. The interventions are strategies that the Professional Learning Community employs as students begin to struggle. Use of an effective pyramid is school-wide, directive, and required of the staff. The strategies that are utilized increase in intensity over time (p. 47). This is the phase in which staff collaborate to develop, implement, and monitor formalized processes of intervention, so that no student “falls through the cracks”. Staff collaboratively creates systemic, timely, and directive actions that lead all students to their highest levels of learning.

Graduation Coaches, the second initiative to address dropout prevention, according to the GaDOE’s Curriculum and Instruction Services Newsletter (2006), designed to provide a positive impact on increasing graduation rates for each school and the state. The GaDOE, in its presentation titled “At Risk Students” (2006), has identified the six subgroups of the student population as the “many faces of a student at risk of dropping out of school” (p. 1). The “faces” are: (1) disengaged/bored, (2) academically unprepared, (3) high transition population, (4) students with disabilities, (5) English language learners, and (6) economically disadvantaged.

It is the responsibility of Graduation Coaches to improve graduation rates for all “faces” or population subgroups within the school. The specific duties of Georgia’s Graduation Coaches were acknowledged in the GaDOE Curriculum and Instructional Services’ Newsletter (2006). The responsibilities or duties of Graduation Coaches in the broadest sense can be categorized as a service to all students to prevent them from dropping out of school.

The duties and responsibilities of the Graduation Coaches can be divided into four subcategories: procedural, technical assistance, programs, and strategies. Procedural duties involve identifying high school students with the high probability of not graduating, and collaborating with feeder middle schools to identify middle school students with the high probability of not graduating. Additional procedural duties entail tracking the progress of individual and subgroup populations of students’ advancement toward graduation, and conducting an analysis that focuses on data for individual students and subgroups such as state standardized tests, attendance records, behavior records, grade retention records, records of credits earned, and records of parent conferences.

There are three basic technical assistance obligations, which Graduation Coaches must perform. The service-oriented responsibilities of the state’s Graduation Coaches allow the coaches to provide training to parents of students identified as being at risk of dropping out of school and to provide training to middle school and high school faculties on supports that are effective with youth at risk of not achieving graduation. Graduation Coaches are also allowed to work with teachers and principals to adapt the state curriculum and instruction to meet the needs of identified at risk students.

The program duties of the Graduation Coaches assist in relationship building with the identified students and teachers as well as the students and community members. These duties also engage in relationship building with the school and the community. The program duties are: (1) developing a local mentoring program with business partners and connecting individual students with mentors, (2) training middle and high school teachers on the components of an effective “teachers as advisors” program, (3) developing a partnership program with community businesses to support the objectives of the high school graduation initiative.

The final category of the duties of Graduation Coaches is put into operation strategies to increase graduation rates. There are three defined primary strategies. The first is to develop and implement individual interventions to increase the student’s chances of graduating. The second is to work with students to develop a graduation and achievement plan and the third primary duty is to conduct and analyze on-going formative and summative evaluation data on program effectiveness.

This section reviewed the literature discussing the issue of students not completing high school with emphasis on the low graduation rate for students with disabilities. Jerald (2006) identified the factors that place students at risk of dropping out of school. Research conducted by Lehr (2004) and Thurlow, Sinclair, and Johnson (2002) investigated dropout prevention strategies and programs. Also examined was Georgia’s graduation rate and state initiatives to improve the graduation rate.

Summary

This chapter focused on research that addressed educational policies and procedures, educational services, instructional programs, and instructional strategies that influence the education of students with disabilities enrolled in Georgia's CrossRoads AEP. The research also focused on topics that may assist in effectively returning these students to the traditional educational setting with the goal of high school completion. Policies and procedures for the purpose of this study were defined as federal education laws, GaDOE rules, program guidelines, and/ or initiatives that address academic achievement, academic performance, and dropout prevention which when implemented effectively, may facilitate a successful transition for students with disabilities enrolled in Georgia's AEPs. The research indicated that the major procedural issues involved funding, staffing, accountability, compliance and ensuring procedures and services are in place to successfully transition students out of alternative settings into a traditional educational setting.

Specific educational programs and specific educational initiatives are categorized as services that influence the education and facilitate transition for students enrolled in Georgia's AEPs. Historically, as noted by Lange and Sletten (2002), the framework of the AEP was an educational service "designed to respond to a group that appears not to be optimally served by the regular program and consequently have represented varying degrees of departure from standard school organization, programs, and environments" (p.4). In Georgia, the CrossRoads AEPs, by state rule 160-4-8-.12, are specifically designed as a service for students who have been adjudicated, suspended, or expelled from school for disruptive or violent behavior.

Educational initiatives such as Georgia's Graduation Counts and Graduation Coaches are additional technical assistance services that assist students with disabilities in completing high school. These two initiatives address the issue of increasing the graduation rate for the state. The service guidelines of these initiatives were discussed in this chapter.

Research that investigated instructional programs, which may be effective in improving the academic performance of students with disabilities and students with disabilities enrolled in AEPs, were also examined. Research conducted by Rutherford and Quinn (1999) outlined the best practices for providing an effective special education program in an AEP. Studies by Lehr (2004) identified various dropout prevention programs.

Literature on studies that focused on instructional strategies that may improve the achievement levels for students with disabilities in an AEP was examined in this chapter. Specifically, research based interventions that enable students with disabilities access to the general education curriculum, enhance their mathematics skills, reading skills, and behavior management skills were reviewed. Instructional strategies that allowed students access to the curriculum identified by research conducted by Brynes (2004) and Nolet and McLaughlin (2000) were analyzed. Mathematics strategies identified in studies by Calhoon and Fuchs (2003) and Maccini Hughes (2000) were assessed. Reading strategies from studies conducted by Shippen et al. (2006) and Kim et al. (2006) were evaluated. Studies presented by Safran and Oswald (2003) and Oswald, Safran, and Johanson (2005) were discussed in the context of behavior management skills.

Jerald (2006) discussed the factors that are associated with students who drop out of school. Studies by Lehr (2004) and Thurlow, Sinclair, and Johnson (2002) identified various dropout prevention programs and strategies. These dropout prevention programs and strategies focused on student learning and being active participants in their school. The dropout prevention programs and strategies were based on research involving students with disabilities and correlated with the characteristics of AEP.

This chapter reviewed literature that provided information to address four areas of concern. The four areas were: (1) What policies and procedures should be in place to facilitate a successful transition for students with disabilities enrolled in Georgia's CrossRoads AEP to their traditional school? (2) What are the services that should be in place to facilitate a successful transition for students with disabilities enrolled in Georgia's CrossRoads AEP to their traditional school? (3) What instructional programs may be effective in improving the academic performance of students with disabilities enrolled in Georgia's CrossRoads AEP? (4) What instructional strategies may correlate with improved achievement levels of students with disabilities enrolled in Georgia's CrossRoads AEP? Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) was the overarching premise that guided the inquiry and analysis for this study. The subsequent chapter will analyze the methods used in implementing the research design of the study.

III. METHODS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to identify the procedures and services needed to facilitate a successful transition for special education students with specific learning disabilities (SLD) and emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) enrolled in a Georgia CrossRoads Alternative Education Program (AEP). Procedures are defined as federal, and state laws, rules, regulations, local school system policies, and methods of operations. Services are defined as the state curriculum, instructional programs, instructional strategies, and student support services. In terms of transition, Georgia Department of Education's (GaDOE) Alternative Education Program Self-Assessment Instrument (2005) defines an effective AEP as one that "provides students with opportunities to maintain or accelerate their current progress towards graduation and provides, prior to a student's exit from a long-term AEP, transition services to ensure a successful return to the traditional home school" (p. 9). The GaDOE defines successful transition as the student having continued achievement in the traditional school program.

It is important for teachers and administrators to be knowledgeable of educational policies, procedures, programs, strategies, and supports that improve student success. The implementation of these educational policies, procedures, programs, and strategies may

increase the number of SLD and EBD students who successfully transition to a traditional school from Georgia’s CrossRoads AEP and complete high school.

Research Design

This study incorporated a mixed methods approach using a Sequential explanatory design by Creswell (2003). This is depicted in Figure 1. Sequential explanatory design implementation procedures involved the collection and analysis of quantitative data followed by a collection and analysis of qualitative data.

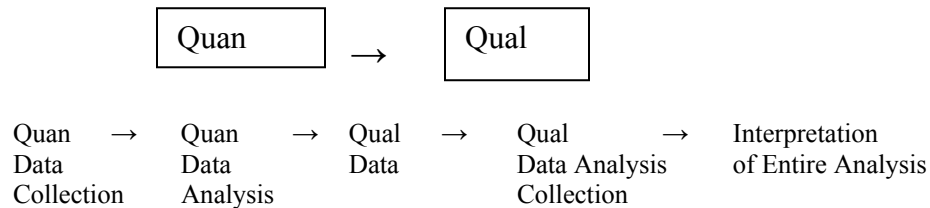


Figure 1. Sequential Explanatory Design (Creswell, 2003, p. 213).

Quantitative data was collected using a survey designed by the researcher. The survey was administered to AEP administrators and provided information regarding procedures and services that they viewed as necessary to facilitate a successful transition for students with disabilities.

Qualitative data was collected using semi-structured interviews with GaDOE administrators and AEP administrators (see Appendix F and Appendix H). Creswell (2003) defines semi-structured interviews as those that “use some prior questions that the inquirer wants to know” (p. 188). Semi-structured interviews with state department administrators addressed GaDOE policies and procedures concerning the transition back

to high school for students with disabilities. Semi-structured interviews with building administrators investigated questions emerging from summarized survey responses and addressed issues of instruction and dropout prevention. The integration of quantitative and qualitative data allowed for a deeper understanding of the issues surrounding successful transition to a traditional high school for students with disabilities.

Research Questions

The purpose of this investigation was to identify the procedures and services needed to facilitate an effective transition for students with SLD and EBD in Georgia's CrossRoads AEPs. This study examined federal and state procedures that impact the education of disabled and nondisabled students in Georgia's AEPs. Four research questions were developed to focus the study:

1. What policies and procedures are in place to facilitate a successful transition to their traditional school for students with disabilities enrolled in Georgia's CrossRoads Alternative Education Programs?
2. What services are needed to facilitate a successful transition for students with disabilities enrolled in Georgia's CrossRoads Alternative Education Programs to their traditional school?
3. What instructional programs may be effective for improving the academic performance of students with disabilities enrolled in a Georgia CrossRoads Alternative Education Program?

4. What instructional strategies may correlate with improved achievement levels of students with disabilities enrolled in a Georgia CrossRoads Alternative Education Program?

When answered, these research questions helped to identify effective procedures and services that may increase the rate of SLD and EBD students transitioning to their home school. The answers to the research questions also identified programs and strategies that may improve the academic and behavior progress of SLD and EBD students currently enrolled in CrossRoads AEPs in Georgia. The next section describes in detail CrossRoads AEPs as well as procedures for data collection and the characteristics of the participants.

Description of the Setting

GaDOE's Alternative Education Program is described as program made available in a setting other than a student's regular classroom. The program serves students who are entitled to remain in the regular classroom but are more likely to be successful in a nontraditional setting. The program also serves students who are excluded from the regular classroom because of disciplinary reasons.

The GaDOE identified four models of AEPs: (1) Community-based Alternative Education Programs, (2) In-School Suspension Programs, (3) School-Community Guidance Centers, and (4) CrossRoads Alternative Education Programs. This study focuses on procedures and services that are needed to facilitate a successful transition for students with disabilities enrolled in CrossRoads AEPs. The CrossRoads AEP model provides education and behavioral supports for students, who have been removed from

the traditional school due to disruptive behavior, or are returning from enrollment in a Department of Juvenile Justice facility.

According to data from the GaDOE for the 2006 school year, the student enrollment for Georgia's CrossRoads AEPs was 13,017. The racial demographics of the student population of the CrossRoads AEPs in 2006 was Asian – 62 (0%); Black – 7,666 (60%); Hispanic – 564 (4%); Native American – 12 (0%); Multi-Racial – 226 (2%); White – 4,487 (34%). These data are depicted in Figure 2. The gender demographics of the student population of the CrossRoads AEPs in 2006 were Female – 3,615 (28%) and Males – 9,402 (72%). The gender demographics data are shown in Figure 2.

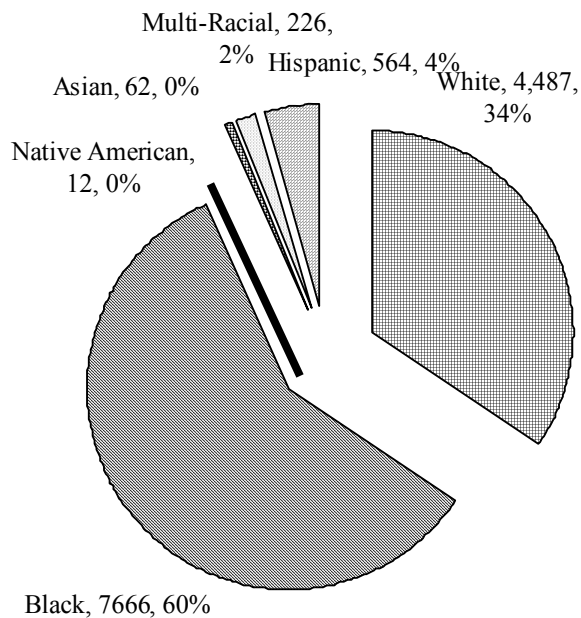


Figure 2. 2006 CrossRoads AEP Racial Demographics.

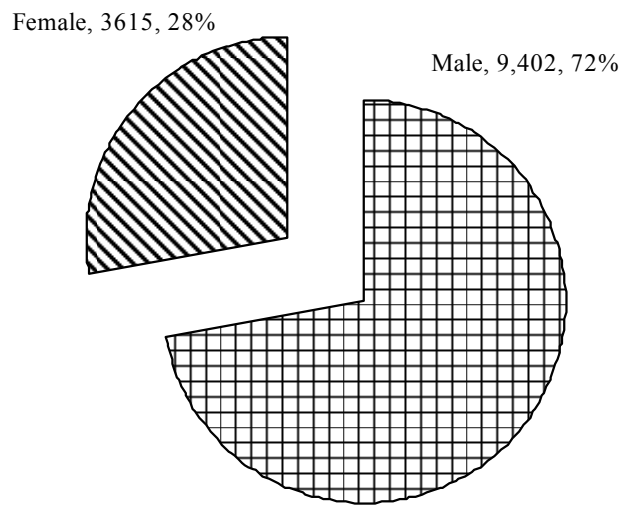


Figure 3. 2006 CrossRoads AEP Gender

Georgia’s CrossRoads AEPs must also provide instruction based on the state curriculum that will allow students to return to a regular education program (traditional school setting) expeditiously. The Georgia CrossRoads AEP must also provide counseling to facilitate students’ academic progress towards grade level standards as specified in the federal law No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB).

The number of students enrolled in the CrossRoads Alternative Education Program Model for disruptive students for the 2006 school year was 13,017, of which 2,574 were students with disabilities. Therefore, approximately 20% of the student populations in Georgia’s CrossRoads AEPs were students with disabilities. Because, the basis of this study is to identify procedures and services that would enable students with disabilities to successfully transition to their traditional school. The study looked at

identifying measures and supports that would assist in successful transition. The research employed a mixed methods approach comprised of four stages to allow deeper insight into effective practices.

Stage One consisted of the collection and analysis of quantitative (demographic) information on students (disabled and nondisabled) currently enrolled in Georgia's AEPs. In Stage Two, an analysis of data collected from 43 CrossRoads AEP building administrators who responded to the survey instrument titled "CrossRoads Alternative Education Program Assessment of Services for Students with Disabilities Survey" occurred. Stage Three involved the collection of qualitative data from GaDOE administrators during interviews that specifically addressed federal laws, state rules and regulations that may support or hinder the successful transition of students with disabilities to a traditional school. This information was collected by using The Interview Protocol for GaDOE Administrators instrument (see Appendix F).

Stage Four included the collection and examination of qualitative data from building administrators during interviews that addressed findings from the "CrossRoads Alternative Education Assessment of Services for Students with Disabilities Survey," the study's research questions, and additional questions to elaborate on the survey topics of instruction and dropout prevention. The instrument, The Interview Protocol for CrossRoads AEP administrators (see Appendix H), was used to collect this data. The framework of the four stages of collection and analysis of data are shown in Figure 4.

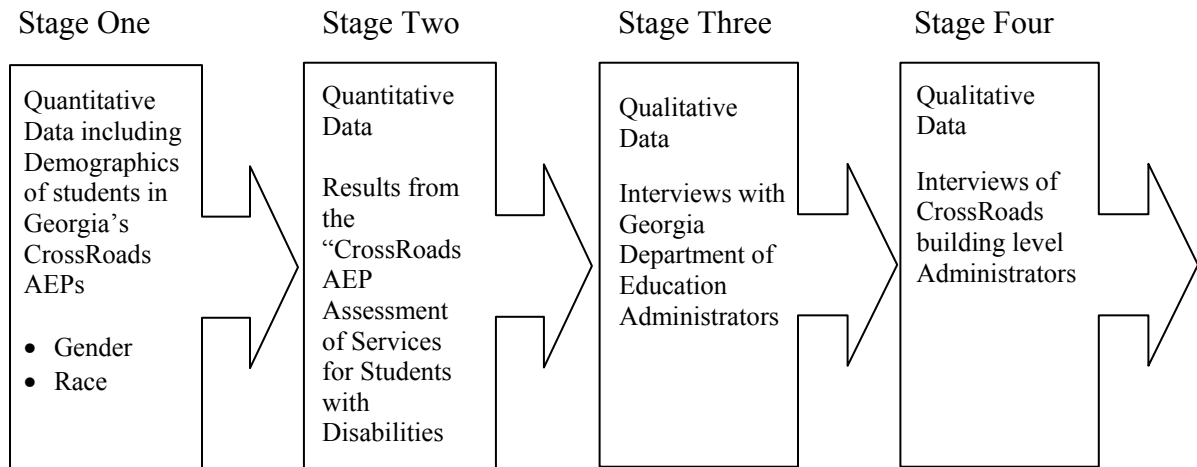


Figure 4. The Four Stages of the Collection of Data

Due to the highly political nature of the research topic, all participants requested that they not be audiotaped during their interviews. In order to accurately record data, the researcher recorded notes during the interviews, attempting to capture the actual words used when possible. Immediately following each interview, the researcher more completely recorded the intent of participants' statements. It is important to note that quotes used in this research may be paraphrased rather than the exact wording used by the participants.

Participants

Participants involved in the collection of quantitative data were 43 Georgia CrossRoads AEP building level administrators. One participant did not provide information concerning level of education. However, the survey reported that seven participants held masters degrees, 26 participants held educational specialist degrees, and

nine participants held doctorate degrees. Survey results indicated that the majority of the participants held educational specialist degrees.

Experience in administration ranged from one to 16 or more years. Ten participants had 1–5 years of administration experience and four participants had 6–10 years of administrative experience. In addition, five participants held 11–15 years of administrative experience and 24 participants were administrators for 16 or more years. Therefore, the majority of the survey participants were veteran administrators with 16 years or more of administration experience.

The schools were located in urban, suburban, and rural areas of Georgia. Six of the administrators' schools were located in urban areas, 29 of the schools were located in rural areas, and eight of the schools were located in suburban sites. According to survey respondents, the majority of the AEPs in Georgia are in rural areas.

The student enrollment of these schools ranged from 50 to 350 or more students. The data are as follows: Eighteen of the AEPs had an enrollment of 50 or less students. Thirteen of the schools had 51–100 students, three AEPs had student enrollments of 101–150 students, two programs had 151–200 students, and three programs had a student enrollment of 201–250 students.

No AEP, according to the survey, had student enrollments of 250–300 or 301–350. Four programs reported student enrollments as 350 or more students. Most of the survey respondents' AEPs were small consisting of 50 or fewer students. The demographics of the 43 Georgia CrossRoads AEP building level administrators is further explained and displayed in Chapter 4 in Table 1, Table 3, Table 4, and Table 5.

Participants involved in the collection of qualitative data were divided into two groups. The first group included three administrators from the GaDOE that represented three different offices in the state department. These state administrators were chosen due to their expertise in the areas of students with disabilities, the federal law No Child Left Behind (NCLB), and the Alternative Education Program in Georgia.

The second group of participants was comprised of six principals and two assistant principals in Georgia's CrossRoads AEPs. The group was diverse in terms of their AEP student enrollment, location, and years of administrative experience. This group was also diverse in terms of gender and race.

The description of the setting section of this research has been described in terms of six areas. Georgia's Alternative Education Program models, student demographics, the state definition of the CrossRoads Program, the CrossRoads instructional program, the stages of the mixed methods approach used in the study, and the distinctiveness of the participants. This design was used to enable the reader to gain insight into Georgia's AEPs, the students enrolled, and the policy makers involved. Elements that address insight into "ethical issues that may arise" are discussed in the subsequent section.

The Researcher's Role

The researcher's current position is Director of Federal Programs for a local school system. However, during the data collection period for this study, the researcher held the roles of special education high school language arts teacher at a CrossRoads Alternative Education Program in a Georgia local school system and as Secondary Special Education Coordinator for the same Georgia local school system. The position of

Secondary Special Education Coordinator for the school system involved supervising the special education programs in the school system's four middle schools, three high schools, and one CrossRoads Alternative Education Program. The position also involved the supervision of the system's Night Academy (program for students with disabilities who have been suspended or expelled from the traditional school setting or from the CrossRoads Alternative Education Program), a Georgia Network for Educational and Therapeutic Support (GNETS) facility, and one Charter School.

Previously, the researcher was employed with the GaDOE. During the researcher's tenure with the GaDOE, the following positions were held: State Director for Special Education, Education Administrator for Staff Development, Curriculum Coordinator for State Schools, and Assistant Director of Instruction for the Georgia School for the Deaf.

This study afforded the researcher an opportunity to analyze data collected from building level administrators, state department administrators, and to receive student information from the GaDOE for the purpose of examining Georgia's policies, legislation, and guidelines, that impact the education of students with disabilities, particularly SLD and EBD students in the state's AEPs from the perspective of Georgia education administrators. The researcher contemplated any bias that may influence the accurate analysis of the study. Having been previously employed with the GaDOE and in the researcher's role as Special Education Secondary Coordinator, the researcher established professional and personal relationships with a variety of GaDOE administrators and local school system employees. As a result, it was imperative to the

validity of this study that the researcher did not include any assumptions in the results of the study.

To eliminate bias, conversations from administrators about CrossRoads AEPs or commentary about students enrolled in CrossRoads AEPs were not used within the study except for the responses surfacing in the instruments used in the data collection and analysis process. The researcher was vigilant throughout the process of the study not to include the comments from daily conversations, discussions, or observations that have been made as a result, of current and previous positions.

Instead, during the interviews the open-ended questions were used to obtain the qualitative data. The researcher restated responses to ensure that the participants correct responses were documented. The researcher provided the participants a copy of the interview protocol so the participant would have a visual text of the interview questions. As described by Creswell (2003), the research used the strategy of member checking which is the process of “taking themes back to the participant and determining whether these participants feel that they are accurate” (p. 196), to validate the accuracy of the findings.

As stated, this research involved collecting data received from interviews and a survey developed by the researcher. The researcher also analyzed the quantitative and qualitative data received from building principals and assistant principals as well as state department administrators. The demographic data of the participants was analyzed by generating four tables (in Chapter 4) that examined the participants’ educational levels, years of administrative experience, the participants’ school location, and the enrollment of their school. Survey responses were analyzed by performing independent sample t-

tests based on years of administrative experience, school location, (type) and school size based on school enrollment.

Qualitative data received from the principals and the administrators from the state department was analyzed by developing four appendices. These appendices analyzed the themes generated from the interviews primarily in terms of procedures and services provide in Georgia's CrossRoads AEPs. Some of the themes were: Principals' Perceptions, Does the Mandate Accomplish its Purpose?; What is Effective? What is not Effective?; Frustrations, Projections, Stated Needs; and Administrators' Comments on Implementation of Program Guidelines.

The researcher was aware of the sensitive and political nature of some of the questions asked of the participants. Consequently, the researcher's role involved being made cognizant of three factors. The first factor was the level of discomfort that some participants felt in providing candid responses to specific questions regarding the implementation of the state's CrossRoads AEPs. The second factor was respecting the participants request not to be audio recorded. The third factor was ensuring participants' confidentiality throughout the research process.

The researcher collected data from two sources of information that were surveys and interviews. These data were collected and analyzed to review state procedures and services that influence the education of SLD and EBD students in AEPs. The development of the instruments used in collecting the data is discussed in the subsequent section titled Instrument Development.

Instrument Development

Quantitative Data

“A survey design provides a quantitative description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population by studying a sample of that population” (Creswell, 2003, p. 153). After reviewing several articles and studies on alternative education (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Benz, Lindstrom & Yovanoff, 2000; Lehr, Lanners, & Lange, 2003; Lehr, Moreau, Lange & Lanners, 2004; Lehr, Hansen & Sinclair, 2003; Morley, retrieved 2006; Powell, 2003; Raywid, 1994; Rutherford & Quinn, 1999; Thurlow, Sinclair & Johnson, 2002) and the GaDOE’s Self Assessment Instrument, a pilot survey instrument was developed entitled “CrossRoads Alternative Education Program Assessment of Services for Students with Disabilities Survey”. The purpose of the survey instrument was to collect information about the types of services available and procedures implemented in AEPs and their impact on students seeking to transition to a traditional school. The survey used a Likert-type scale.

In order to field test the survey, a panel of Georgia CrossRoads’ building administrators responded to the draft survey in a pilot test of the instrument. According to Creswell (2003), pilot testing helps determine content validity as well as improves the quality of the instrument. To establish internal consistency and reliability, participants completed the pilot instrument and provided additional comments focusing on four questions.

The four questions were (a) Are there survey statements that you feel should be added or deleted?, (b) Does the survey adequately identify the procedures and services needed for students with disabilities to return to a traditional school and complete high

school?, (c) Is the format easy to read?, and (d) Are the statements written in a clear and concise manner? The feedback from the pilot survey was used to revise and finalize the instrument.

The survey instrument was also designed to be a respondent friendly questionnaire. A respondent friendly questionnaire is defined by Dillman (2000) as having “questions that are clear and easy to comprehend, a question order that suggests high salience to the respondent, and a questionnaire layout that is in accordance with visual principles of design for comprehension and easy response” (p. 150).

Comments from the pilot survey were used to modify the quantitative instrument entitled “CrossRoads Alternative Education Program: Assessment of Services for Students with Disabilities Survey” (See Appendix B). This was the final version of the quantitative instrument and this version was distributed statewide to CrossRoads principals of alternative education programs. The development of the qualitative instruments is discussed in the next section.

Qualitative Data

A qualitative approach uses a variety of approaches that include narratives, phenomenologies, ethnographies, grounded theory studies, or case studies. The qualitative approach used in this study was grounded theory. In grounded theory, the researcher attempts to develop a general abstract theory of a practice or relationship, which is established or grounded in the opinions of the participants involved in the study. Patton (2002) acknowledged that the grounded theory approach is the most dominant model for qualitative research in the social sciences today.

This investigation researched the most effective methods of the process of educating and exiting students from AEPs by conducting interviews with principals, assistant principals, and GaDOE administrators. An interview is defined as a “specialized pattern of verbal interaction-initiated for a specific purpose and focused on some content area, with consequent elimination of extraneous material” (Pedhazur & Schmelkin, 1991, p. 132). The qualitative data consisted of participants’ responses to interviews conducted with both alternative program administrators and GaDOE administrators.

The interview protocol for the principals of AEPs was titled “Interview Questions for Principals of Alternative Education Programs”. This instrument was developed to provide data for analysis based on the study’s research questions, responses to statistically significant survey questions, and from the interview responses of GaDOE administrators. The interview protocol for school administrators consisted of 15 questions. To help check for validity, drafts of this interview protocol were reviewed by two Auburn University professors. Their input was incorporated in the final interview protocol.

The instrument used to conduct the interviews with the GaDOE Administrators was entitled “The Interview Protocol for Georgia Department of Education Administrators”. This instrument was developed by reviewing several federal and state documents such as (a) NCLB ACT, (b) IDEA 2004, (c) Georgia Department of Education State Rule 160-4-8-.12 (AEP), (d) Georgia’s 2005–2006 Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) Report, (e) Students With Disabilities Data Profile 2005, and (f) The CrossRoads Alternative Education Program Assessment of Services for Students with

Disabilities Survey. This information is displayed in Table 1. A copy of the instrument was sent to the GaDOE for review and input.

Table 1

Documents Examined for Development of the Interview Protocol for Georgia

Department of Education Administrators

Documents	Status
No Child Left Behind Act of 2001	Federal Law
Amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act	Federal Law
Rule 160-4-8-.12 – Alternative Education Programs	State Rule
Georgia 2005-2006 Annual Yearly Progress Report	State Report
Students with Disabilities Data Profile 2005	State Report
CrossRoads Alternative Education Program Assessment of Services for Students with Disabilities Survey	Researcher Developed

In the instrumentation development, phase three instruments were developed to collect data for this investigation. The instruments were (a) “The CrossRoads Alternative Education Program Assessment of Services for Students with Disabilities Survey”, (b) “The Interview Protocol for GaDOE Administrators”, and (c) “The Interview Protocol for CrossRoads AEP Building Administrators”. The design of each instrument is discussed in the next section of the study.

Instrumentation

This section provides a detailed description of the three instruments used in the research. The description of each of the instruments concentrated on two areas that were focus and format. The concentration of these two areas was done to provide a clear understanding as to how and why data was collected.

Survey Instrument

The “CrossRoads Alternative Education Program Assessment of Services for Students with Disabilities Survey” focused on obtaining demographic information on AEP administrators in Georgia, and identifying procedures and services that are needed in the AEP that would facilitate a successful transition to a traditional school and assist in school completion for students with disabilities. The survey format consisted of ten sections. The first section asked questions about the demographics of the participants. Participants indicated their educational level in terms of degrees they had obtained (Masters, Educational Specialist or Doctorate). They also noted number of years of administrative experience, school type (urban, rural or suburban), and their school size based on student enrollment.

Section two of the survey asked participants to respond to issues about student eligibility for the CrossRoads AEP, including questions regarding criteria for admissions, the school orientation program, and receipt of educational records. Section three consisted of questions surrounding human resource issues such as the interviewing process and availability of special education teachers. The fourth section of the survey was titled “Social Development”. This section focused on the level that students were engaged in the governance of the school. For example, as a group, did students work

together in the decision making process to develop rules for the school? Section five's questions focused on instruction and section six concentrated on community services. Section seven dealt specifically with transition services and section eight attended to matters of supports in place for students with disabilities. Questions in section nine addressed dropout prevention interventions and the final section of the survey, section ten, allowed for participants to provide additional comments. A copy of the survey is included in Appendix B.

The next subsection will discuss the second and third instruments used in this investigation. These two instruments were used to collect qualitative data. The focus and format of each instrument is discussed in detail.

Interview Protocols

“The Interview Protocol for GaDOE Administrators” consisted of 15 questions. The focus of the instrument questions centered around four areas of procedures and services that impact the successful transition of students with disabilities to a traditional school setting. The four areas were: (a) statewide initiatives, (b) state technical assistance, (c) federal laws and state rules, and (d) issues of achievement and disproportionality.

Questions about statewide initiatives were designed to address issues of achieving Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), dropout prevention, and reducing discipline referrals. State technical assistance questions centered on topics such as:

1. The technical assistance training offered to schools that focus on family outreach.

2. The technical assistance training offered to schools that focus on training guidance counselors and school social workers in addressing the needs of students with disabilities.
3. GaDOE's technical assistance with after school programs in literacy and mathematics.
4. GaDOE's technical assistance provided to local school system to assist in the implementation of student mentoring programs.
5. GaDOE's role in offering technical assistance in providing effective strategies to regular education teachers in implementing the classroom modifications of the Individualized Education Program (IEP).

Interview questions concerning federal and state legislation focused on the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the legislation in terms of facilitating a successful transition for students with disabilities. Lastly, issues of racial and socioeconomic achievement gaps in Georgia's CrossRoads AEPs were explored.

The interview protocol for the principals of alternative education programs was titled "Interview Questions for Principals of Alternative Education Programs". Interviews with principals of alternative education programs were planned to provide data for analysis based on the study's research questions, responses to selected survey questions, and from selected responses from GaDOE administrators' regarding instruction and dropout prevention. The interview protocol for school administrators consisted of three sections. Section A restated the investigation's four research questions. Section B asked six questions addressed on the "CrossRoads Alternative Education Program Assessment of Services for Students with Disabilities Survey". The six questions focused on student

governance, mentoring programs, providing childcare, rites of passage programs, family outreach, and establishing a sense of belonging to the AEP. In Section C five questions, which focused on the survey topics of instruction and dropout prevention, were asked.

Procedures

In the previous section, the format of the instruments used in the study was discussed. In this section, the process for the approval of the instruments, methods used to increase the response rate for the survey, and the interview process are discussed. The diversity of the AEP administrators is also described in this section.

Prior to collecting data, a “Research Protocol Review Form” was submitted to the Office of Human Subjects Research at Auburn University. Subsequent to the Institutional Review Board examination, approval was given to use human subjects in conducting this study (Appendix A).

“The CrossRoads Alternative Education Program Assessment of Services for Students with Disabilities Survey” (Appendix B) was sent to CrossRoads principals. Names and contact information were provided by the Georgia Department of Education.

Participants were mailed a survey accompanied by a cover letter (Appendix C). Dillman (2000) suggested that a one-page cover letter should include significant pieces of information such as what the letter is about and why the request is useful and important. The cover letter used in this study introduced the researcher as someone who had spoken during the business meeting of the spring conference of the Georgia Association for Alternative Education. It requested that they participate in a statewide research study designed to identify the procedures and services needed to facilitate a successful

transition for students with disabilities enrolled in a Georgia alternative education program to their traditional school. The cover letter also reminded the participants that “The CrossRoads Alternative Education Program Assessment of Services for Students with Disabilities Survey” was printed front, back, and should take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete.

Also included in the mailing was an information sheet (Appendix D). The information sheet outlined the reasonable benefits the participants would receive because of their involvement in the study by completing the survey. The information sheet also provided assurance statements that information obtained would remain confidential.

The survey was printed on gold paper so that it was easily distinguished from other documents that the participants would receive. A self-addressed stamped envelope was enclosed in the mailing for participants to return the survey. Surveys were mailed on May 1, 2006. By June 3, 2006, 43 surveys were received. The percentage of surveys returned for this study was 43%.

Face-to-face interviews were conducted with three administrators of the GaDOE during the months of February, March, and April 2007. An information sheet about the purposes of the study was provided to the participants prior to the interviews (Appendix E). The administrators from the GaDOE represented various offices in the department. The state administrators were selected based on their knowledge and expertise in the areas of students with disabilities, the NCLB law, and the Alternative Education Program in Georgia. The interview protocol (Appendix F) was used with the GaDOE administrators.

Prior to the interviews with eight CrossRoads AEP building administrators, an informed consent letter (Appendix G) was sent by mail including a self-addressed stamped envelope so the interviewee's signed copy could be returned to the researcher. The interviews with principals and assistant principals were performed using three different data gathering techniques: face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews, and email interviews. These interviews were held during the months of March, April, May, and June 2007. The interview protocol for Georgia CrossRoads AEP's building administrators was used (Appendix H). The group, which consisted of eight administrators, was diverse in terms of the student enrollment of their buildings, type, years of administrative experience, gender, and race.

None of the persons interviewed agreed to be audio recorded. Therefore, to add rigor to the interview process, probes were used to better ensure depth of the responses. Copious notes were also taken. Member checking was also employed to help validate the accuracy of interview notes.

The data from the survey and from the interviews was assembled. The next step in the mixed methods research approach was to analyze the quantitative and qualitative data. Worthen, Sanders, and Fitzpatrick (1997) acknowledged, "the aim of data analysis is to reduce and synthesize information to make sense out of it and to allow inferences about populations" (p. 364).

Data Analysis

As previously stated, a survey was used to collect quantitative data from alternative program principals. The data obtained from the survey was used to measure

participants' thoughts and ideas about procedures and services available in Georgia's CrossRoads AEPs, as well as the relationship of the procedures and services available towards the successful transition of a student to a traditional school. Using a Likert-type scale, the data obtained was first analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Descriptive data were generated in the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 11 and categorized in terms of three demographic variables: years of professional experience, school type, and school size. Administrative experience was grouped into two subcategories: ten years or less of administrative experience or 16 plus years or more administrative experience. School type was classified by being urban, suburban, or rural. School size was grouped by student enrollment either 50 or fewer students or 51 or more students.

In order to determine if differences exist between groups using the descriptive categories from the survey responses, independent sample t-tests were performed. Huck (2004) states:

It is best to consider a t-test to be a general tool that can be used to accomplish a variety of inferential goals. Although a t-test can focus on many things, it is used most often when the research is concerned with one or two means. (p. 262)

An alpha level of .05 was established to decide if a significant statistical relationship existed between the participants' thoughts and ideas about procedures and services available in Georgia's AEPs and the differences that exist between procedures and services to successfully transition to a traditional school for students with disabilities. After performing the independent sample t-tests it was determined that, the means of three survey items indicated a significant statistical relationship between the descriptive

categories of school size and years of administrative experience. This will be further discussed in Chapter 4.

The analysis of quantitative data consisted of analyzing descriptive statistics generated from the survey using SPSS Software. To determine if differences existed between groups using the descriptive categories from the survey responses independent sample t-tests were performed. The next phase of data analysis for this study consisted of analyzing the qualitative data.

Patton (2002) informed researchers that creating a controllable classification or coding system is the first step in qualitative data analysis and interpretation. Creswell (2003) also outlined the six steps involved in qualitative data analysis and interpretation.

1. Organize and prepare the data for analysis.
2. Read through all the data.
3. Begin detailed analysis with a coding progress.
4. Use the coding process to generate a description of the setting or people as well as categories or themes for analysis.
5. Advance how the description and themes will be represented in the qualitative narrative. The most popular approach is to use a narrative passage to convey the findings of the analysis.
6. A final step in data analysis involves making an interpretation or meaning of the data. (p. 191–195)

These steps were utilized by the researcher to analyze and interpret the study's qualitative data.

The initial step for data analysis involved transcribing interviews in order to organize and prepare the data for analysis. After all the data had been read the next step of data, analysis process was referred to as the coding process. Coding enables, the researcher to organize the material into chunks (identified categories or themes). Subsequently themes were created for analysis. These themes emerge as major findings in qualitative studies.

The final step in the data analysis for this study was to provide an interpretation or meaning to the data. As stated, the qualitative approach used in this study was grounded theory. As summarized by Patton (2002) “grounded theory begins with the basic description, moves to conceptual ordering (organizing data into discrete categories) and then theorizing” (p. 490).

In order to facilitate the analysis of the qualitative data and to move from conceptual ordering to theorizing, four appendixes were developed using Microsoft Word (see Chapter 4). Appendix I of the study was titled “Analysis of Qualitative Data from Three (GaDOE) Administrators”. This appendix analyzed the data from interviews held with GaDOE administrators in terms of their perceptions about what state rules, federal laws, and state guidelines are effective in providing services and procedures that facilitate a successful transition for students with disabilities enrolled in Georgia’s CrossRoads AEP. This was accomplished by analyzing the data from the interviews that reflected the administrators’ frustrations, projections, and stated needs regarding the transition of special education students to their high school.

Appendix I, titled “Analysis of Qualitative Data from Eight Georgia CrossRoads Building Level Administrators” analyzed the data using the same themes as Appendix I

but from the perspective of CrossRoads principals. Appendix J of the research was titled “Disconnect between Mandates and Practice”. This appendix analyzed the data in terms of GaDOE administrators and CrossRoads principals’ perceptions of the policies and procedures that facilitate a successful transition for students. The data depicted the administrators’ perception of the written mandates that govern how students with disabilities are educated nationally, how CrossRoads AEPs are implemented, and how the day-to-day operations of CrossRoads AEPs are actually being implemented and interpreted by practicing administrators. The themes used to analyze the data were administrators’ comments or implementations and stated needs.

Appendix K of the investigation was titled “Responses to Section B of the Interview Protocol Interview Questions for CrossRoads Alternative Education Program Principals”. This table analyzed the data from interviews held with the eight CrossRoads alternative education program principals in terms of their perceptions of services that are being effectively implemented to provide a successful transition for students with disabilities enrolled in Georgia’s CrossRoads AEPs. The themes were: Stated Intent or Purpose of the Service, Principal’s Perceptions, Does the service accomplish the purpose, and Reasons Why or Why Not.

Worthen, Sanders, and Fitzpatrick (1997) reflected “Data analysis focuses on organizing and reducing information and making logical or statistical inferences” (p. 391). This section has explained the methods of data analysis used during the investigation. The following section identifies the limitations of the methodology.

Limitations of the Methodology

The purpose of this study was to identify the procedures and services needed to facilitate a successful transition for special education students with SLD and EBD enrolled in a Georgia CrossRoad Alternative Education Program. The CrossRoads AEPs are one of four models of alternative education identified in Georgia State Board of Education Rules. The researcher used the subsequent eight major precautions to add rigor to this investigation.

The first precaution was to develop four research questions as focal points for the study. These questions investigated policies, procedures, and services that would facilitate a student's successful return to their traditional school. The questions also examined instructional programs that may improve the academic performance of students with disabilities enrolled in Georgia's AEPs. The questions also sought information regarding instructional strategies that correlate with improved achievement levels of students with disabilities. Emphasis was placed on mathematics, reading, behavior management, and dropout prevention.

The second precaution was that the research portrayed, in detail, the Georgia CrossRoads setting. This was done by providing two figures depicting the 2006 CrossRoads AEPs racial demographics (Figure 2) and gender demographics (Figure 3). Enrollment data was also examined. The available data secured from the GaDOE revealed that in 2006 students with disabilities comprised 20% of Georgia's CrossRoads AEP.

The third precaution to add rigor to the research was to collect the data in four stages. Stage one involved the gathering of quantitative demographic data provided by

the Georgia Department of Education. Stage two involved the collection of quantitative data from the “CrossRoads Alternative Education Program Assessment of Services for Students with Disabilities Survey”. Stages three and four involved the compilation of qualitative data. In stage, three data were derived from interviews with Georgia Department of Education administrators. Stage four involved data from interviews with CrossRoads building level administrators. In order to provide a clear understanding of how the data for the study was collected, the researcher developed Figure 4 titled “The Four Stages of the Collection of Data.

For this investigation, a variety of data was collected. For the fourth precaution to ensure thoroughness of the study, three instruments were developed to collect the data. A survey titled the “CrossRoads Alternative Education Program Assessment of Services for Students with Disabilities Survey” which consisted of ten sections and 30 questions was developed along with two interview protocols: (a) “The Interview Protocol for GaDOE Administrators” which consisted of 15 questions and (b) “Interview Questions for Principals of Alternative Education Programs”. This protocol consisted of four sections and 15 questions.

In order to add rigor to the data analysis phase, the researcher, as a fifth provision, created four tables that were categorized in terms of demographic variables to analyze the demographic quantitative data. Four appendixes were produced to analyze the qualitative data from the interviews. The sixth provision to address the issue of adding rigor to this phase of the study involved utilizing the six steps cited previously by Creswell (2003) for analyzing and interpreting qualitative data.

As part of the effort to add rigor, various details involved in the development of the research design and the implementation of the procedures had to be addressed in order to conduct this research. This research used a mixed methods approach that incorporated a sequential explanatory strategy. In the development of a mixed method research design, according to Creswell (2003), there are six major strategies that can be incorporated in the mixed methods procedures. The six major strategies are: (a) sequential explanatory strategy, (b) sequential exploratory strategy, (c) sequential transformative strategy, (d) concurrent triangulation strategy, (e) concurrent nested strategy, and (f) concurrent transformative strategy.

After each of these strategies was examined and evaluated the sequential explanatory strategy was selected. This strategy was selected because as stated by Creswell “the straightforward nature of this design is one of its main strengths. The steps fall into clear, separate stages. In addition, this design feature makes it easy to describe and to report” (p. 215). The selection of the sequential explanatory strategy was the seventh precaution.

The procedures phase of the research initially involved sending the “CrossRoads Alternative Education Program Assessment of Services for Students with Disabilities Survey” to CrossRoads AEP building administrators and interviewing three GaDOE administrators. In order to add more thoroughness, an eighth precaution was implemented. This was to revise the Research Protocol Review Form to include interviews with CrossRoads AEP administrators. It was determined that interviews would be based on the results and data analysis of the survey. It was also decided that the results of the interviews of the building principals would increase the amount of research data

and would strengthen the body of knowledge in the field. The body of knowledge in the field would be strengthened in terms of providing information that may assist the research participants and other educators in future educational program planning to improve the academic progress, discipline, and high school completion rate for students with disabilities in Georgia's AEPs.

As a result, the interviews with the GaDOE administrators were held from February–April, 2007. All of the interviews were conducted face-to-face. Interviews with eight CrossRoads principals of alternative education programs were conducted from March–June, 2007. These interviews were conducted face-to-face, via telephone and by email. The principals of CrossRoads AEPs represented the following geographical areas in Georgia: Metropolitan Atlanta, North Georgia, and Middle Georgia. None of the interviewees wanted to be audiotaped. According to Patton (2002), “When it is not possible to use a tape recorder because of some sensitive situation, notes must become much more thorough and comprehensive” (p. 381). As a result, copious detailed notes of the interviews were taken. To verify the correctness of the interview responses the validation system of member checking was used.

Notwithstanding all of the precautions to add rigor to the research and the precaution of the attention to various details, limitations to the methodology did occur. The survey questions were presented in a Likert scale format with response options of Strongly Agree, Agree, Undecided, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. This format is subject to producing responses based on a variety of individual interpretations and as a result may be a limitation.

The sample size of 43 survey respondents is small. Statistically, this has an impact on effect size (the degree to which the phenomenon is present in the population). A small effect size also has an impact of the possibility of a Type I error, (rejecting the null hypothesis when it should not have been rejected) or a Type II error (failure to reject the null hypothesis when it should have been rejected).

Throughout the study, 11 interviews were conducted. Three GaDOE administrators and eight Georgia CrossRoads AEP building level administrators participated in this part of the study. These interviews were conducted face-to-face, by telephone or via email. Creswell (2003) identified four specific limitations associated with face-to-face, and telephone interviews: (1) “indirect information is filtered through the views of the interviewees, (2) provides information in a designated place rather than the natural field setting, (3) the researcher’s presence may bias response, and (4) people are not equally articulate” (186).

None of the persons interviewed would agree to a tape-recorded interview. This was another limitation. Patton (2002) noted, “no matter what style of interviewing you use it all comes to naught if you fail to capture the actual words of the person being interviewed” (p. 380). The actual words are vital to ensure the accuracy of the findings. Therefore, as stated previously detailed notes were taken and several quotations from participants were used.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to identify the procedures and services needed to facilitate the return of SLD and EBD students to their traditional school. The *CrossRoads*

Alternative Education Program Assessment of Services for Students with Disabilities

Survey was developed by the researcher. Survey validity was established by using a panel of Georgia CrossRoads AEP building administrators. Survey reliability was established by using the alpha of .05. The survey was sent to 100 administrators of Georgia CrossRoads AEPs with 43 responses providing a return rate of 43%.

Interviews were conducted with three Georgia Department of Education administrators and eight building administrators. Face-to-face, telephone and email interviews were conducted using interview protocols developed by the researcher. Themes were developed to interpret the data from both sets of interviews and member checking was used to help validate the accuracy of the interview findings.

Both the quantitative and qualitative findings of the research are discussed in Chapter Four. The results from descriptive statistics from the survey and those based on the characteristics of the participants are examined. Tables and narratives are used to help explain the findings.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

A purpose of this study was to identify the procedures and services needed to facilitate a successful student transition from a Georgia CrossRoads Alternative Education Program (AEP) to a traditional school program. The purposes of this study also involved identifying procedures and services needed to increase the graduation rate for students with specific learning disabilities (SLD) and emotional behavioral disorders (EBD) enrolled in Georgia CrossRoads Alternative Education Programs (AEPs). A successful transition, for the purpose of this study, is defined as a student returning to a traditional school from an AEP and exiting the traditional school with a regular high school diploma.

The research design used a mixed methods approach to evaluate statewide and local school system procedures, services, instructional programs, and instructional strategies implemented in Georgia's CrossRoads AEPs. This study is timely and relevant due to the limited number of studies on students with disabilities in AEPs. The research conducted by Ahearn (2004), Lange and Sletten (2002), and Lehr (2005) note that the lack of studies conducted on students with disabilities in AEPs is unfortunate due to the number of students with disabilities enrolled in these programs. Equally, regrettable as cited in studies by Lehr (2004), Thurlow, Sinclair, and Johnson (2002), and the GaDOE

document titled “Graduation Counts! Readiness to Results in Grades 6-12” is the low incidence rate of high school completion for students with disabilities.

The results of the study may provide school systems with information regarding educational programs and strategies that lead to improved academic progress, instruction, discipline, and high school completion rates for students with disabilities. Chapter Three presented a description of the study’s research methodology, which included a description of the setting, participants, instrument development, instrumentation, procedures, data analysis, and limitations of the methodology. This chapter presents the findings of the study, which sought to determine the components of a Georgia alternative education program that would allow students to progress in the state curriculum, return to a traditional school and graduate with a regular high school diploma. The subsequent research questions helped to structure the presentation of findings from the study.

1. What policies and procedures are in place to facilitate a successful transition for students with disabilities enrolled in Georgia’s CrossRoads AEPs to their traditional school?
2. What services are needed to facilitate a successful transition for students with disabilities enrolled in Georgia’s CrossRoads AEPs to their traditional school?
3. What instructional programs may be effective in improving the academic performance of students with disabilities enrolled in a Georgia CrossRoads AEP?
4. What instructional strategies may correlate with improved achievement levels of students with disabilities enrolled in a Georgia CrossRoads AEP?

The analysis of the data concerning identifying the procedures and services needed to facilitate an effective transition to a traditional school program is presented in

three sections. The first section covers participants' characteristics and demographic data. The second section discloses the quantitative data from the researcher developed instrument: "CrossRoads AEP Assessment of Services for Students with Disabilities Survey". The data from this section were gathered from 30 Likert type questions. The Likert type scale items were scored on a five point rating scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = undecided, 4 = agree and 5 = strongly agree. The computer software program Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 11.0 was used to analyze the data. The third section consists of qualitative data taken from 15 interview questions that were asked of three Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) administrators and an additional 15 interview questions that were asked of eight Georgia CrossRoads AEP building administrators. The data from this section were analyzed by, as outlined by Patton (2002), identifying emerging themes.

Participants requested that they not be audiotaped during their interviews due to the political nature of this study. Therefore, the researcher took notes rather than audio tape. Although the researcher made an effort to capture the exact words used by participants when there was a particularly interesting comment, most comments framed as quotes within the study are actually paraphrased statements that capture the essence of the comments made by participants.

Participant Characteristics and Demographic Data

The sample for this study consisted of three sets of participants: (a) 43 survey respondents, (b) three interviewees from the GaDOE, and (c) eight interviewees representing CrossRoads AEP principals. Surveys were mailed to 100 CrossRoads

administrators during the spring of 2006, and 43% of the surveys being returned.

Interviews were held with participants from the GaDOE from February to April of 2007.

Interviews were conducted with the CrossRoads administrators during the spring and summer of 2007.

Educational Levels

Table 2 indicates the educational levels of 42 of the 43 survey respondents who answered the statement regarding educational level. One survey was received that did not respond to the survey question regarding educational level. The educational levels were categorized by highest degree earned: masters, educational specialist, and doctorate. The results indicated that 26 administrators (62%) had an educational specialist degree followed by nine administrators (21%) with a doctorate degree, and seven administrators (16%) with master's degrees. The entry degree for a valid leadership certification in Georgia is the master's degree.

Table 2

Respondents' Educational Levels

Educational Levels	N	%
Masters	7	17
Educational Specialist	26	62
Doctorate	9	21
No Response	1	0
Total	43	100

Years of Administrative Experience

Table 3 displays the years of administrative experience. The responses were grouped into four categories based on the number of years in a leadership position. The four categories were: (a) 1–5 years, (b) 6–10 years, (c) 11–15 years, and (d) 16 and more years. The results of the data received revealed that the majority of Georgia’s CrossRoads AEP principals who responded to the survey were experienced administrators. Most administrators in Georgia’s CrossRoads AEPs (56%) had 16 or more years of administrative experience. Twenty-three percent of CrossRoads AEP administrators had 1–5 years of experience. Twelve percent of the AEP principals had 11–15 years of administrative experience. Those AEP administrators with 6–10 years of administrative experience comprised the smallest group with 9%.

Table 3

Respondents’ Years of Administrative Experience

Years	N	%
1–5	10	23
6–10	4	9
11–15	5	12
16+	24	56
Total	43	100

School Type

Table 4 shows the respondents' school type. The responses were grouped into three categories: (a) urban, (b) rural, and (c) suburban. The results indicated that the majority of the respondents were from CrossRoads AEPs in rural areas with 29 programs (67%). The suburban schools ranked second with 8 programs (19%) followed by urban schools with 6 program administrators responding (14%).

Table 4

Respondents' School Type

Location	N	%
Urban	6	14
Rural	29	67
Suburban	8	19
Total	43	100

Student Enrollment

Table 5 indicates the student enrollment of AEPs administered by the 43 respondents. The range of student enrollment was from 50 or less students to 351 plus students. Based on the data received, 18 AEPs have a student enrollment of 50 or less students (42%). This was followed by 13 AEPs having a student enrollment of 51–100 (13%). Four AEPs enrolled 351+ students (9%). Three administrators of AEPs reported student enrollments of 101–150 and three additional administrators reported 201–250

students enrolled (7%) in their AEPs. A student enrollment of 151–200 was reported by two administrators of AEPs (5%).

Table 5

Respondents' Student Enrollment in AEPs

Student Enrollment	N	%
50 or less	18	42
51–100	13	30
101–150	3	7
151–200	2	5
201–250	3	7
251–300	0	0
301–350	0	0
351+	4	9
Total	43	100

Data Analysis

This section analyzes the quantitative and qualitative findings of this study.

Quantitative findings are derived from data from the researcher-developed instrument titled *CrossRoads AEP Assessment of Services for Students with Disabilities Survey*.

Qualitative findings are based on the interview response data from GaDOE administrators and principals of AEPs.

Quantitative Findings

This second section discloses the significant data from the instrument titled *CrossRoads AEP Assessment of Services for Students with Disabilities Survey* (see Appendix B). This was a researcher-designed instrument. The data reported in this section were gathered from 30 Likert type questions. The questions focused on the respondents' perceptions of procedures and services needed for students with disabilities attending an AEP to return to their base school and graduate with a regular high school diploma. Respondents were asked to select the response that best reflected their opinion about each statement. The Likert type scale items were assigned a numerical value for each response. The responses were: (1) strongly agree, (2) agree, (3) undecided, (4) disagree, and (5) strongly disagree.

The quantitative data gained from the survey responses were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 11.0 and categorized in terms of three demographic variables: years of professional experience, school type, and school size for analysis. Professional experience was grouped into two subcategories: ten years or less of administrative experience or 16 years or more years of administrative experience. After reviewing the survey data for professional experience, it was noted that the numbers of administrators who had 11–15 years of professional experience were small in number (5) and would be statistically insignificant. As a result, the four subcategories of professional experience identified on the survey (1–5, 6–10, 11–15, and 16 or more) were collapsed into two subcategories: ten years or less years of administrative experience or 16 years or more of administrative experience.

School type was classified by being urban/suburban or rural. School size was grouped by student enrollment of either 50 or fewer students or 51 or more students. In order to determine if differences exist between groups using the descriptive categories from the survey responses, independent sample t-tests were performed. Data analysis indicated six significant items. These items are discussed in terms of the three demographic variables: years of professional/administrative experience, school type, and school size.

Years of Administrative Experience

The demographic variable of professional experience was grouped into two subcategories: ten years or less of administrative experience or 16 years or more of administrative experience. There were four significant survey items in this demographic variable. The four significant items were:

Item #8 – There is need for special education students to be involved in the governance of the CrossRoads Alternative Education Program ($t = 2.333$, $p = .02$). The data revealed that survey respondents with 10 years or less administrative experience agreed (50%) with this statement. However, of the survey respondents with 16 years or more of administrative experience 14% agreed.

Item #10 – There is a need for students with disabilities in the CrossRoads Alternative Education Program to be involved in a mentoring program ($t = 1.947$, $p = .05$). It was noted that survey respondents with 10 years or less administrative experience strongly agreed (50%) with this statement. However, survey

respondents with 16 years or more of administrative were not as supportive. The data showed that 31% agreed with the statement.

Item #19 – There is a need for the CrossRoads Alternative Education Program to provide childcare for students with disabilities ($t = -1.761, p = .08$). Survey respondents with 10 years or less administrative experience (79%) and respondents with 16 years or more of administrative experience (52%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement.

Item #21 – There is a need for a rites of passage celebration program when students exit the CrossRoads Alternative Education Program to return to their traditional school ($t = -.038, p = .97$). Respondents with 10 years of less of administrative experience (43%) and respondents with 16 years or more administrative experience (31%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement.

Item #8 (governance) was statistically significant ($p = .02$) for the demographic variable “years of experience”. There is a statistical difference between administrators with 10 or less years of administrative experience and those with 16 or more years regarding special education students’ involvement in the governance of the AEP. The data showed that administrators with 10 or less years were in agreement with students with disabilities being involved in the governance of the AEP (50%). Yet, of administrators with 16 or more years, 14% agreed with this statement.

Item #10 (mentoring) was also statistically significant ($p = .05$) for the demographic variable years of administrative experience. In terms of AEP student participation in a mentoring program, there was a statistically significant difference

between administrators with 10 or less years of experience and those with 16 or more years of experience. Administrators with 10 or less years were supportive of students with disabilities participating in mentoring programs (50% strongly agreed).

Administrators with more than 16 years of experience were not as supportive with 31% strongly agreeing with special education students participating in mentoring programs.

Item #19 (childcare) and Item #21 (rites celebration) were determined to be relevant. These items were determined relevant because of the items' importance in terms of the conceptual framework. Childcare and passage of rites celebrations are screened using the macro systems lens, which involves social and cultural issue. In addition, these relevant items influenced the script of the interview protocol (see Appendix H) for CrossRoads administrators. Table 6 displays the items, the results of the independent samples t-test and the two-tailed alpha levels.

Table 6

Administrators' Perceptions to Survey Response — Administrative Experience

Item Number	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
8 – There is a need for special education students to be involved in the governance of the CrossRoads Alternative Education Program.	2.333	.02
10 – There is a need for students with disabilities in the CrossRoads Alternative Education Program to be involved in an established mentoring program.	1.947	.05

Table 6 (continued)

Item Number	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
19 – There is a need for the CrossRoads Alternative Education Program to provide childcare for student with disabilities.	-1.761	.08
21 – There is a need for celebration/rites of passage program when students exit the CrossRoads Alternative Education Program to return to their traditional school.	-.038	.97

School Type

The second demographic variable was school type. This variable was identified as urban, suburban, or rural. There was one statistically significant item in this variable category — survey item #27.

Item #27 – There is a need to ensure that students with disabilities have a sense of belonging to the CrossRoads Alternative Education Program as an intervention to decrease the dropout rate for students with disabilities ($t = -2.091$, $p = .043$).

When considering the importance of students’ sense of belonging there was a statistically significant difference between administrators at rural schools versus urban or suburban schools. The data revealed that rural programs were very supportive of this statement (96% strongly agreed or agreed). However, urban and suburban programs were far less supportive (65% strongly agreed or agreed).

Table 7 provides the results of the independent samples t-test and the two-tailed alpha levels for administrator’s perceptions of item #27 based on school type.

Table 7

Administrator’s Perceptions to Survey Responses — Based on School Type

Item Number	Type -Rural	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
27 –	There is a need to ensure that students with disabilities have a sense of belonging to the CrossRoads Alternative Education Program as an intervention to decrease the dropout rate for students with disabilities.	-2.091	.04

School Size

The third demographic variable was school size, which was defined based on student enrollment. The demographic variable was divided into two categories: student enrollment of 50 students or less, and 51 students or more. Item #30 — There is a need for family outreach strategies to be implemented in the CrossRoads Alternative Education Program as an intervention to decrease the dropout rate for students with disabilities — was discussed in this section. The results from the survey showed that administrators from small programs (50 or less students) strongly agreed (44%) with this

statement. Yet, administrators in large programs (51 or more students) according to the data were less supportive with 24% strongly agreed on this issue.

This item, though not statistically significant, is relevant to the conceptual framework of the study. The conceptual framework, discussed in Chapter One, noted the meso systems of this study centered on the lens that focused on the insights of AEP administrators on the interrelations among the school, home, and community. Table 8 presents the results of the independent samples t-test and the two-tailed alpha levels for AEP administrators' perceptions of item #30 based on school size. Item #30 states: There is a need for family outreach strategies to be implemented in the CrossRoads Alternative Education Program as an intervention to decrease the dropout rate for students with disabilities ($t = 1.644, p = .108$).

Table 8

Administrators' Perceptions to Survey Responses – Based on School Size

Item Number	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
30 – There is a need for family outreach strategies to be implemented in the CrossRoads Alternative Education Program as an intervention to decrease the dropout rate for students with disabilities.	1.644	.108

This portion of Chapter Four has examined the statistically significant and other relevant data regarding the results of participants' characteristics and demographics and the relevant quantitative data from the instrument titled "CrossRoads Alternative Assessment of Services for Students with Disabilities Survey". This examination of data was done by reviewing data displayed in seven different tables. These tables outlined, based on the survey, six significant and/or relevant statements that identified procedures and services needed to facilitate special education students enrolled in AEP transition to their base school. The tables framed data from three demographic variables: years of administrative experience, school location, and school size. Section three is an analysis of the qualitative data of the study.

Qualitative Findings

According to Patton (2002),

The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective. Qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit. We interview to find out what is in and on someone else's mind, to gather their stories. (p. 341)

This section consists of an analysis of the perspectives of three GaDOE administrators and eight AEP administrators by which were obtained from their interview data. Data were captured from responses received from 15 interview questions asked face to face individually with three Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) administrators and from responses received from 15-interview question asked individually to eight

Georgia CrossRoads AEP building administrators. To analyze the emerging themes from the 11 interviews, tables were created using Microsoft Office Word 2007.

Responses to Section B of the Interview Protocol (Appendix I) “Interview Questions for AEP Principals” illustrates the principals’ perceptions on mandated or designated services based on responses to the six significant survey items analyzed in Table 6, Table 7, and Table 8. Those six survey items were:

1. There is a need for special education students to be involved in the governance of the CrossRoads Alternative Education Program.
2. There is a need for students with disabilities to be involved in an established mentoring program.
3. There is a need for the CrossRoads Alternative Education Program to provide childcare for students with disabilities.
4. There is a need for celebration/rites of passage programs when students exit the CrossRoads Alternative Education Program to return to their traditional school.
5. There is a need to ensure that students with disabilities have a sense of belonging to the CrossRoads Alternative Education Program as an intervention to decrease the dropout rate for students with disabilities.

There is a need for family outreach strategies to be implemented in the CrossRoads Alternative Education Program as an intervention to decrease the dropout rate for students with disabilities.

The principals were asked to comment on why their colleagues responded to the statements regarding student governance (#1) and mentoring programs (#2) with such

disparity in terms of years of administrative experience. Principals were also asked why in terms of years of administrative experience neither group of principals (those with 10 or less years of administrative experience or 16 or more years of administrative experience) agreed with statements concerning childcare (#3) and rites of passage celebrations (#4). In addition, principals were also asked to give their point of view as to why there would be such dissimilarity in response, in terms of school type, on the issue of a sense of belonging (#5). Finally, principals were asked to share their opinion as to why there was disparity in the responses on family outreach (#6) in terms of school size. Their responses are reflected in Appendix K.

As stated previously, the purpose of this study was to identify procedures and services needed to facilitate a successful transition from AEP to traditional schools. Appendix K illustrates the interview data from principals regarding services needed to facilitate transition by using four themes: stated intent or purpose of service, principals' perceptions, mandated/does it accomplish purpose and reasons why/why not. The identified services included providing governance, mentoring, childcare, rites of passage programs, sense of belonging and family outreach. The results follow.

Governance

The intent of the service of governance is to develop the personal, social skills, and the decision-making abilities of the student. Student governance is not mandated by state rule; however, it is recommended in the GaDOE guidelines for AEP. The recommendation is that each local school system utilized a local community collaborative group in order to assist in planning and supporting their system level alternative education program. The GaDOE states that the collaborative should include current or

former students. GaDOE Alternative Education Program Self-Assessment Instrument's (2005) Indicator 3.8 states that the AEP administrator facilitates the cooperation and collaboration of appropriate stakeholders (which includes students). The recommendation further states that the administrator facilitate in a manner, which enables stakeholders to accomplish the mission, standards, and plan for program improvement.

The principals' perceptions as to why there was such disparity between the novice administrators and the veteran administrators may be explained by the belief system of the two groups of administrators. The veteran principals, according to the interviewees, see the role of principal as a dictatorship in which the principal makes the rules. The leadership style is grounded in traditional beliefs. Beliefs of novice administrators may be grounded in new educational trends of student involvement and the belief that administrators need to be open-minded concerning new strategies.

Based on the survey responses and the principals' perceptions, the service of governance does not accomplish its purpose of providing personal/social development. The reason may be due to a lack of implementation of this service in the AEPs. Comments that reflect the principals' perceptions are:

“Younger administrators are aware of the new educational trends –students being involved. Older administrators [on the other hand] are out of touch with the new trends. [Older administrators] may have tried it [governance] did not work and do not see the point. [Older administrators may] feel children are too far gone.”

“Younger [administrators are] idealistic. [When] you have over 10 years [of administrative experience you have] tried strategies and realize [they] don't work.”

“[Old leadership style] principal dealt as dictator; principal made rules; [New leadership style] more open minded; if kids help run school it will be better.”

“Administrators who are looking for ways to improve and provide the utmost learning environment for the students would not only welcome, but encourage input and ownership into the program.”

Mentoring

The intent of providing a mentoring program, according to the GaDOE (2005), mentoring is a service for students in AEP is to provide student support and to serve as a dropout prevention strategy. Mentoring, mandated by Georgia House Bill 1027, is a responsibility of the High School Graduation Specialist. (The terms Graduation Specialist and Graduation Coaches are used interchangeably in local school systems.) Graduation specialists are expected to develop a local mentoring program with business partners and to connect individual students with mentors. The need to provide mentors is also noted as a dropout prevention strategy in the GaDOE AEP Self-Assessment. Indicator 6.3 of this assessment states that the program should provide research based dropout prevention strategies such as mentors.

Based on this study, principals' perceptions as to the disparity between novice and veteran administrators on the issue of providing mentoring programs, can be viewed in terms of how administrators perceive the students in the alternative program. Comments from the interviewees suggest that the veteran administrators who disagreed with the need to provide mentors to students believed the students would not benefit from this service because they feel there is no hope for these students. However, based on the

comments, novice administrators, feel that mentoring can be viewed as a positive support service for students.

As a result, of the diverse views of mentoring held by administrators based on the perceptions of administrators in this study, this mandate is not accomplishing the stated purpose of reducing dropout rates. This purpose is not being met because mentoring programs are not being fully implemented or not being fully supported by principals in AEPs. Principals' specific comments on this issue are:

“Older administrators don't feel mentoring program would help”.

“Veteran administrators may have thought [mentoring program not needed because the program would be of] no help for [students]”

“Why veterans disagree- may feel [students have] been given opportunities throughout life – used up opportunities. Everyone has tried to do for them [May feel students are a] lost cause [and they are] not going to be anything anyway”.

“Can't understand why [veterans] disagreed. Most [of our students] need positive adult role models in their lives. [If students] can get one extra positive adult in [their] life [it] is a good thing”.

“Do need mentoring to [assist in] correcting what [behaviors] brought them [to the alternative program”].

Childcare

The GaDOE rule titled Student Support Services mandates that schools have a plan for addressing methods to reduce absences and increase attendance. The plan for reducing absences and increasing attendance in AEPs is to make available the service of

childcare. As a result, the purpose of providing childcare is to prevent students in AEPs from having to sacrifice attending school in order to care for their children.

Based on of interviews with AEP administrators perceptions as to why administrators did not agree with providing the service of childcare resulted in two viewpoints. The first is the administrators' belief that childcare does not improve attendance. The second is the administrators view on teen pregnancy. The prevailing perception of this viewpoint was that by providing daycare, the program was sending a message of acceptance and was rewarding teenage pregnancy. Specific comments addressing the issue of providing daycare services to students enrolled in AEPs are as follows:

“Veteran administrators know that providing childcare will not increase attendance. [In our system] you can only bring one child even though the student may have more than one child”.

“If, students do not like the adult [supervising] the childcare [students] will not send the child. [Therefore childcare is] not a big motivator for students to attend”.

“Belief is that teenage pregnancy would be an issue. Should be intervening before problem occurs and should not provide daycare”

“May think we are doing too much, we are [making it] convenient for them to make bad choices [it is as if we are saying] have children okay- we are going to provide day care just bring child to school”.

“We should not make it comfortable for them- it's okay to have child I can take them to school”.

“No childcare, [do] not want to encourage that type of behavior”.

Rites of Passage

The purpose of providing a rites of passage program for students when they exit the AEPs is to help them focus on their transition from the program back into a traditional setting. This service of assisting students in transitioning from AEPs to a traditional education setting is mandated in the state's AEP rule and in the state's AEP Self-Assessment Instrument. The State Rule Alternative Education Programs (2001) states that "the local school system shall provide an alternative education program that provides instruction that will enable students to return to a general or career education program as quickly as possible" (p. 2). Further, the GaDOE Self-Assessment (2005) outlines effective transition services.

An effective alternative program provides appropriate services in a fair and equitable manner to assist students during transition, from pre-entry through post-exit. Prior to a student's exit from a long-term alternative education program, transition services are planned by traditional education and alternative education staff, student and parent(s) to ensure a successful return to the traditional home school. Students in alternative education programs are provided with various opportunities to develop and maintain supportive links to the traditional school program. Transition services are routinely evaluated to determine their effectiveness in promoting the successful return and continued success of students in the traditional school program. (p. 9)

Principals' perceptions as to why no veteran administrators or novice administrators supported a rites of passage program suggest a strong belief exists that students should not be rewarded for doing what is expected. It appears rites of passage

programs are not accomplishing the intended purpose because they are not being implemented. The principals' comments on this survey item include:

“Don't need to celebrate what [they] needed to do in the first place”.

“Don't know why [people] would not want to celebrate. Everyone in life makes a mistake. [The rites of passage programs] would build self-esteem. [It is a] reward to go back to traditional school. Everyone doesn't get to go [back to their traditional school]”.

“Don't believe [we] should celebrate doing the right thing. I do not think [we] should celebrate letting you out of here. [We] don't celebrate traditional students doing the right thing”.

“Alternative education is viewed as a tool to help those who cannot make it in a regular school program by many administrators. Instead of embracing the idea that all students learn differently and need different strategies and support, many view it as a negative educational site”.

Sense of Belonging

A sense of belonging serves as a dropout prevention strategy. Sense of belonging, as defined in the literature, is associated with student-staff caring relationships (Lange & Sletten, 2002). Sense of belonging, student self-esteem, and satisfaction are generally examined together in studies on AEPs because of the similar characteristics and their significance for the success of students who are estranged from the education system. The National Dropout Prevention Center, according to Lange and Sletten (2006), identifies the emphasis on caring relationships as an effective strategy for reaching students at risk of dropping out of school.

Providing a culture that fosters a sense of belonging is mandated in HB1027-Graduation Specialist, State Rule Student Support Services, and in the GaDOE AEP Self-Assessment. HB 1027 requires Graduation specialists to work to improve graduation rates for all population subgroups within the school. Graduation coaches are also required to develop and implement individual intervention strategies and to work with students to develop a graduation and achievement plan that includes post secondary goals. Individual interventions could help to build a caring relationship.

The Student Support Services rule mandates that each school system develop a student services plan including the following: (a) Alternative Education Programs; (b) School psychological/psychological counseling; (c) School counseling and guidance services including individual, group, and classroom counseling; and (d) School social work/visiting teacher including individual and group counseling. These components may help create and strengthen a caring student-staff relationship.

The standards and indicators outlined to determine the effectiveness of School Climate of the AEP in the GaDOE (2005) Self-Assessment support creating a sense of belonging for students. The standard states that effective AEPs provide a safe, positive, and nurturing environment and in that environment, students are valued and supported to achieve their potential. The indicators for school climate state that AEPs are to demonstrate an understanding and sensitivity to the academic, cultural, social, and behavioral well-being of their students. The GaDOE (2005) Self- Assessment indicators further state that the atmosphere of the AEP be one of mutual respect on behalf of students and their learning.

Principals' perceptions as to why rural programs were very supportive of providing a sense of belonging and urban/suburban program were less supportive in terms of providing this service suggest that the lack of support was due to a disconnection between what a "sense of belonging" means to principals contrasted with the GaDOE's meaning. To the principals, a sense of belonging is achieved by the school and students developing a sense of community or a sense of family by students being involved in school sponsored community activities. To the GaDOE a sense of belonging is achieved by establishing student-staff involved and caring relationships. These relationships can occur within the school community during the school day.

It is unclear as to whether or not this service is accomplishing its intended purpose. The intended purpose behind the GaDOE supporting creating a sense of belonging is to create student-staff caring relationships. However, based on principals' interview comments and survey responses as stated before, the intended purpose may not be thoroughly understood by alternative education program administrators. Therefore, the mandated elements of providing a sense of belonging may be in place in AEPs but not reflected in comments made by administrators. Illustrative interview comments include:

"Urban/suburban programs have larger numbers and cover a large geographical area. Students become more transient and don't have closeness [with others in the program]".

"Rural [programs tend to be] more community related: Participants know each other one on one. [There is an] I know your uncle [attitude]. Rural programs are smaller. [Everyone] knows the children".

"Rural society more sense of family; know names of every one".

“Urban [programs are] disconnected. People do not know the community. [“People] are not connected outside of school and are not willing to provide the connection”.

Family Outreach

Dropout prevention is the intended purpose for providing the service of family outreach. Family outreach involves actively engaging the students’ family in the various aspects of the AEP. Family outreach is mandated by GaDOE state rule Student Support Services and is recommended in the GaDOE AEP Self-Assessment Instrument.

The Student Support Services (2000) rule compels school systems to establish guidelines that provide: (a) psychological consultations to student support teams, parents, teachers, and administrators; (b) efforts to enlist parent support; (c) counseling and guidance services that have parent consultation as a component; (d) health services that address requests by parents that the school provide appropriate health procedures to allow students to remain in school and increase opportunities for academic success; (e) family counseling; and (f) networking of appropriate home, school, and community services to address identified student problems. The GaDOE AEP Self-Assessment Instrument states that AEPs must have a comprehensive system of student assistance to support optimal student development. This includes offering opportunities for parents to be included and supported in the development of their children. This would serve as a catalyst for family outreach.

Principals’ perceptions as to why small programs strongly agreed that family outreach was a needed service but large programs were generally less supportive regarding this mandate revealed that there are various constraints. The constraints cited

were the number of students enrolled in the large program, the large geographical areas of the programs, difficulty in getting parents to come to the school, and the feeling that many administrators do not want parent involvement. This service appears not be accomplishing the intended purpose in large AEPs due to these constraints. The following comments regarding family outreach offer insights into these constraints:

“For larger schools going into [the homes of students] may be a safety issue”. [Administrators] may not want to plan for such large numbers of students. To make contacts may cost money [administrators] do not have. Smaller programs numbers [of students] are more manageable [because] teachers can help defray cost”.

“[In] larger program [there is an] economic gap between staff and students. [This results in administrators] not wanting to get involved with the families”.

Perspectives of Select Georgia CrossRoads Administrators

Appendix I titled Analysis of Qualitative Data from Eight Georgia CrossRoads Building Level Administrators was used to further portray the data from the interviews reflecting in the administrators’ insights on federal laws, state rules, state guidelines, policies, and procedures. Appendix I present the data in terms of five themes. The themes were: what is effective, what is not effective, the administrators’ frustrations, administrators’ projections (administrators’ observations of how procedures or services are impacting the education of students in AEPs) and the stated needs of the administrators. The stated needs of the administrators were reported concerning the procedures and services that influence the transition of SLD and EBD students enrolled

in Georgia's AEPs. In order to obtain these data administrators were asked the four research questions of the study.

Effective Policies and Procedures

The administrators' responses identified five local school system policies and procedures implemented in AEPs that effectively facilitate a successful transition for students with disabilities. The procedures were: (a) monitoring the implementation of individualized education programs (IEPs), (b) conducting manifestation determination meetings, and (c) conducting collaborative meetings with school base counselors and alternative program counselors. Two policies were recognized as effective in supporting a successful transition. The first was local school systems' policies of the superintendent, student, parent, alternative education program principal, and graduation coach meeting monthly to discuss the student's progress in the program. The second involved local school systems' policies that alternative education program students must attend school, maintain a 70% average, and show a decrease in discipline.

Effective Services

Administrators of AEPs collectively perceived five services employed their education programs as being effective in facilitating an effective transition. Those effective services were: (a) mentoring, (b) counseling, (c) contacts with the Department of Family and Children Services, (d) services provided by graduation coaches, and (e) services provided by social workers. The majority of these services correlate with those mandates identified in the state rule titled Student Support Services.

As previously mentioned the Student Support Services rule mandates that school systems develop student services plans that include individual and group counseling and

services provided by a school social worker such as working with individual students and family counseling. These services, along with the services provided by graduation coaches, are associated with the dropout strategy of providing students with a sense of belonging, which is linked, to providing students with student-staff caring relationships. The need for ensuring that students with disabilities enrolled in Georgia's AEPs have a sense of belonging was a significant statistical quantitative finding of this study.

Effective Instructional Strategies

The responses to this theme can be summarized into three categories. These categories are (a) effective instructional strategies, (b) effective special education strategies, and (c) support from state agencies. Effective classroom instructional strategies mentioned by the principals were smaller class size, differentiated instruction, service learning, providing extra time (to complete assignments), teaching basic skills, graphic organizers, mathematics manipulatives, writing centers, supplemental materials and using the approved method of presenting the state curriculum.

Many of these strategies such as providing extra time, graphic organizers, and manipulatives, are defined as accommodations. According to Nolet and McLaughlin (2000), "an accommodation is a service or support that is provided to help a student access subject matter and instruction" (p. 71). Using these supports in the classroom may increase academic achievement levels of both regular education and special education students attending AEPs.

The second category, special education instructional strategies, includes those services that are mandated in law or considered best practices in special education service delivery models. Effective special education instructional strategies that were referred by

principals were: (a) resource classes, addressing goals in the students' Individualized Education Program (IEP), and (c) individual assistance. Using these strategies may offer students with disabilities additional instructional support. The additional support the students may receive in resource classes, with individual assistance and by implementing their IEP could enable students with disabilities to have full access to the general education curriculum.

The third category, support from state agencies, centered on services provided various state organizations. The administrators recognized the effectiveness of services provided by these agencies in terms of assisting students in preparing them to return to their home school. The agencies specifically mentioned were Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), the Department of Family and Children Services (DFACS) and GaDOE. Rutherford and Quinn (1999) identify this kind of collaboration as providing a system of wraparound programming. This kind of programming involves the AEP student, the alternative school staff, families, the student's traditional school staff, and persons of a variety of state agencies in order to assist the student in acquiring school success.

Effective Instructional Programs

Administrators were very candid in their comments regarding instructional program effectiveness. Instructional programs that are effective when improving academic performance in the areas of reading or mathematics included three specific computer programs. The programs, in the opinion of the principals interviewed, were NC, SI, and PL. It was noted that these computer programs increase student engagement in the education process.

Ineffective Policies and Practices

Administrators also provided insight into specific local procedures and instructional programs that were ineffective. Illustrative comments regarding ineffective local procedures and instructional programs were:

“Using teachers as counselors [as opposed to using] certified school counselors”.

“[When] the mentor program is not structured [it is not effective].”

“For students with disabilities NN computer program [is not effective]. Students must read and take notes; this is difficult for students with disabilities”.

These ineffective policies and practices may hinder the students’ progress in terms of behavior and academics resulting in delaying their return to a traditional school.

Counseling and mentoring are repeating themes as services when provided appropriately that could make possible a successful transition for students to their traditional school. Improving academic achievement particularly in the areas of reading and mathematics has also been a consistent theme throughout this study. Providing students effective instructional programs could address this issue.

Frustrations

The frustrations of the eight principals interviewed were expressed in the areas of procedures, services, and instruction programs. Procedural frustrations expressed primarily focused on the GaDOE rule titled Waivers and Variances of High School Graduation Assessments. Frustration with not having sufficient services such as mentoring, and sufficient support from graduation coaches was the basis for administrators’ frustrations in the area of services that would facilitate the transition to a traditional school for students with disabilities. Having an instructional program that does

not meet the needs of students, lack of an instructional program, or lack of instructional materials were also cause for frustration noted in the administrators' comments.

Responses that illustrate administrators' frustration were:

“[The state] should provide classes geared to passing the high school graduation test”.

“The state rule on variance [of the high school graduation assessment requires students to re-take the assessment so many times - four] without passing. Why [should students] have to keep retaking? The state should reduce the number of times have to retake the test”.

“[The state] does not have established rules for transition in place”.

“No mentoring component-want to put one in”.

“Graduation coaches spend little time advising students; therefore students fall in the cracks because not getting services to plan for their success.

Don't have computer based instructional program”

“NN— is not very through in English—basically grammar not enough literature”.

“Don't have anything to supplement the [Criterion Referenced Competency Tests] CRCT”

It has been acknowledged by the majority of administrators that graduation coaches and mentoring are services that are perceived by administrators of AEPs as being effective. Not having these services or the services not being sufficiently implemented may be the basis of their frustration. Jerald (2006) cites that “students who struggle in the classroom and fall behind academically are more likely to drop out” (p. 5). The lack of computer based instructional programs, the lack of appropriate computer based

instructional programs, and the lack of appropriate instructional materials may cause frustration and concern for administrators because of the emphasis on increasing academic achievement and increasing the graduation rate for SLD and EBD students.

Projections

Projections are principals' observations of the influence that current policies, or services have on the education of SLD and EBD students enrolled in AEPs. The majority of the projections stated by the principals centered on implementing the following: a school wide discipline program, NCLB, and the Georgia Performance Standards (state curriculum). The projections were also made on the effectiveness of a computer instructional program.

“This program [AEPs] should have school wide discipline programs. It would increase the expectation level of [student behavior]”.

“Implementing NCLB is the best thing to happen to students with disabilities. Since [NCLB's] focus is on students passing [state wide] tests [students are] getting attention that they need”.

“Georgia Performance Standards has strong academic focus. When they [student in AEPs] go back, [teachers in the traditional schools] do not want to see gaps. [Teachers in the traditional schools] want them [the students] to be able to pick up and go”.

“NC can keep students engaged”.

The projections were the observation of administrators of how current procedures and services such as discipline programs, NCLB, the state curriculum, and specific instructional programs can positively influence the education of students with disabilities

enrolled in Georgia's AEPs. Based on the projections of the administrators interviewed the implementation of these services and policies can increase academic performance and positive behaviors of students. Increased academic performance and increased positive behaviors of students could enhance the possibility of students returning to their traditional school.

Stated Needs

The final theme presented in Appendix I was stated needs. The comments received in this theme address a variety of concerns. Several of the stated needs would require being addressed by the GaDOE as implementation of these stated needs might necessitate additional funding at the state level and changing some current state rules. Listed are illustrative comments that addressing this theme.

“[The state] should provide classes geared to passing the high school graduation test”.

“The state should look at what systems are doing [in terms of program effectiveness]; [and] have a focus group and come up with a good plan [to enhance program effectiveness]”.

“Need materials to supplement Criterion Referenced Competency Test”.

“Access to more instructional resources [are needed]”.

“Administrators (GaDOE) should be required to teach [in an alternative education program] so many hours (10) [to] understand what [is] really needed [in AEPs].”

“Training [is needed for developing] skills whether it is job skills, life skills, or study/academic skills for all students.

[Training is needed in how to teach] skills in making productive decisions”.

“More family outreach, more counselors, more mental health counselors, more training with staff on how to deal with this population [is needed].”

“Procedures for transition [are needed].”

“Teachers need opportunity to talk about transition, strategies, and techniques for children having difficulty in functioning in the mainstream.”

“Separate counselor for students with disabilities [are needed] to discuss jobs and roles in society and to be on track to be a productive citizen, an aid to society, work, and have a family.”

The administrators’ responses indicated needs in the areas of procedures and services. The need for the state to develop focus groups to discuss effective practices for AEPs and the need for GaDOE administrators to be required to teach classes in alternative programs are procedures that may need to be presented and discussed with staff of the GaDOE. The stated needs of providing professional learning to teachers in the AEPs, providing counselors, and providing instructional materials needed to pass a state mandated assessment are services that could be provided at the state and local level. The implementation of these stated needs may enhance the opportunity for students with disabilities to return to their traditional school and may enhance their opportunity to graduate from high school.

Appendix I addressed five themes: (a) What is not effective, (b) What is not effective, (c) frustrations, (d) projections and (e) stated needs. The interview responses recognized various effective services that would enhance the education of students with disabilities such as counseling, mentoring, family outreach, and instructional computer programs. Ineffectiveness was viewed as when services such as counseling and

mentoring were not being provided appropriately. Frustrations were grounded in local AEPs not being able to provide those services that were perceived as being effective.

Implementing NCLB and the state curriculum, based on projections made by administrators, have a positive impact on educating SLD and EBD students in AEPs. Additional professional learning for teachers of AEPs and the GaDOE conducting a statewide focus group to identify best practices for providing effective programs in alternative education were viewed as stated needs. Appendix L, presented in the subsequent section, will discuss qualitative data obtained from the interview responses of the GaDOE administrators.

Select Georgia Department of Administrators' Perspectives

Appendix L is titled Qualitative Data from Three GaDOE Administrators. This appendix was developed to help further analyze the data from interviews held with GaDOE administrators in terms of their perceptions about what state rules, federal laws, and state guidelines are effective in providing services and procedures that facilitate a successful transition for students with disabilities enrolled in Georgia's CrossRoads AEP. The analysis of data was done by comparing the interview responses with the five themes identified in Appendix I: what is effective, what is not effective, frustrations, projections, and stated needs. In terms of the areas generated by the study's research questions, the responses from the GaDOE administrators primarily responded to the question: What policies and procedures are in place that facilitates a successful transition?

The theme of effectiveness generated several comments from the state department administrators as they respond to the eight interview questions:

- (a) Are there statewide initiatives that will assist students with disabilities in achieving Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)?
- (b) Are there statewide initiatives that will address the issue of dropout prevention for students with disabilities?
- (c) Does the state fund and/or offer technical assistance to schools to support initiatives involving family outreach services to students with disabilities in the CrossRoads Alternative Education Program?
- (d) Does the state have initiatives that will assist in reducing the number of school discipline referrals for students with disabilities?
- (e) Does the state fund and/or offer technical assistance to schools to provide and maintain after school programs to address literacy and mathematics instruction for students with disabilities in CrossRoads Alternative Education Programs?
- (f) Does the state provide technical assistance to assist regular education teachers in implementing the classroom modifications written on the Individualized Education Program (IEP) in order for students with disabilities to be taught grade level curriculum with appropriate modifications?
- (g) There is an achievement gap between African Americans and Caucasians. How is this being addressed at the state level?
- (h) There is an achievement gap between socioeconomic levels. How is this being addressed at the state level?

The comments regarding what is effective in terms of these eight interview questions are listed below.

Effective Policies and Procedures

Administrators referenced several effective state policies and state procedures put into practice by various GaDOE offices, and other state agencies that they perceived could address the issue of transition for students with disabilities. The effective policies and procedures are: (a) Georgia Learning Resources Systems (GLRS), (b) the GaDOE Round Table, (c) Georgia's Student Achievement Pyramid of Interventions, and (d) School Improvement Teams were mentioned in the administrators' comments. According to the state rule, GLRS (2007) "develops and provides training, coaching, and support for the implementation of evidence-based practices through on-going professional learning in coordination with the GaDOE and the office Special Education Services and Supports" (p. 1). According to the comments, GLRS provides to school districts a half-time AYP liaison to meet with teachers of students with disabilities to assist students in making AYP.

The GaDOE Round Table, focus on policies that impact student learning by analyzing data and coordinating programs across GaDOE divisions to discourage duplication of services in the department. As noted in the GaDOE, document *Graduation Counts! Readiness to Results in Grades 6-12* (2006) Georgia's Student Achievement Pyramid of Interventions is a local school's universal and methodical response to struggling students who need additional educational support. The GaDOE's School Improvement Teams include representatives from the following GaDOE offices: School Improvement, Title I, and Curriculum and Instruction.

School Improvement Teams also include personnel from other state agencies such as Regional Educational Service Agencies (RESA), Professional Standards Commission (PSC), Georgia Learning Resources System (GLRS), Educational Technology Training Center (ETTC), and University System of Georgia. These offices and state agencies formed as a team provide regional support and school improvement process training across the state. As perceived by administrators collectively GLRS, the GaDOE Round Table, the Georgia Student Achievement Pyramid of Interventions, and School Improvement Teams could effectively address the issue of transition for students with disabilities.

Statewide Initiatives Addressing Dropout Rates

The interview responses of the GaDOE administrators also identified several statewide initiatives that may address the issue of dropout prevention for students with disabilities.

“Graduation coaches [are used to] develop plans for those at risk of not graduating”.

“Alliance of Agency Heads is the Governor’s initiative in which heads of education agencies meet to discuss priorities to [decrease] the dropout rate”.

“[The] AEPs Redesign [is a state initiative that] is trying to incorporate strategies that [may] assist any student [that is not] up to grade level. [These] strategies, [would also be designed] to increase the high school graduation rates [for students enrolled in AEPs]. [Strategies] such as on-line courses [that are] taken on site, off site, or taken as extended day, credit recovery-computer assisted programs, and a General Education Development (GED) option that would allow all students to

take the GED and[if obtain a passing score the student would receive a] regular education diploma are being considered”.

Graduation coaches and the Alliance of Agency Heads are initiatives that are currently in operation. Administrators of AEPs also saw graduation coaches as an effective service needed to assist in the transition of student with disabilities. The AEPs Redesign is according to one GaDOE administrator is in the planning stage. Perhaps, when it is operational it may have a positive impact on decreasing the dropout rate for special education students.

Support for Family Outreach Initiatives

A GaDOE administrator recognized through their interview responses state technical assistance initiatives to assist schools in engaging in family outreach provided by Title 1 federal funds. The administrators’ comments indicated the following:

“If a CrossRoads [alternative education is a school] the school is eligible for Title 1 funds. That school would receive [Title 1] funds for parent involvement programs. A LEA (Local Education Agency) [can] give Title 1 funds to schools but must be a school not a program”.

“There are however, two ways that a program can utilize the Title 1 funds for parent involvement. (a) The students can access the services if their base [home] school is providing the classes for parent literacy and the system allows the parents to attend the classes at the base school. (b) The local school system can offer district-wide services in which any child’s parent can attend whose home school is a Title 1 school. The classes could be held at the district office”.

Georgia's CrossRoads are programs not schools. Therefore, AEPs are eligible for Title 1 funds for family outreach services by using one of the two procedures previously mentioned. This initiative would enhance the family outreach program for AEPs.

Initiatives to Reduce Discipline Referrals

During the interview, administrators identified state initiatives that would assist in reducing the number of discipline referrals for students with disabilities. Generally, according to the responses, the state initiatives centered on professional learning held during state conferences.

“The GaDOE Office of Special Education Services and Supports and the Office of Title I Programs are working on technical assistance for issues related to discipline referrals. [During the] Title I – conferences the Office of Special Education Services and Supports staff attend meetings (sessions) on reducing discipline”.

“School Improvement Division is working with schools/programs on how to develop skills to manage classrooms”.

“Yes—At state AEP Conference [we] have speakers (sessions) on classroom management, differentiated instruction, and EBIS (Effective Behavioral Instructional Supports)”

“State trains local school systems how to implement school wide discipline”.

“The state uses federal funds from Title 2A (Teacher and Principal Training) and Title 2D (Technology Grants) for schools in Needs Improvement to manage classrooms”.

The GaDOE provides professional learning in the area of discipline. Providing teachers with professional learning on topics concerning classroom management, differentiated instruction, and behavioral supports may assist in reducing discipline referrals. These initiatives may have an impact on students being successful in schools.

Assistance for Afterschool Programs

GaDOE administrators addressed the issue of how the state department offers technical assistance to schools to provide and maintain after school programs. The response from one administrator specifically addressed this issue.

“Title 1 picks up where [the] IEP leaves off” such as offering tutoring services”.

“Title 1 offers tutoring [through service providers who] work with students with disabilities [as well as regular education students]”.

Afterschool programs primarily provide instruction in literacy and mathematics. Allowing students with disabilities to participate in these programs would enhance their academic achievement. For students with disabilities enrolled in AEPs this may assist in reducing their dropout rate as well as facilitating a successful transition.

Assistance for Regular Education Teachers

A GaDOE administrator was able to respond to the question concerning technical assistance provided by the state to assist regular education teachers in implementing classroom modifications written on the IEP in order for students with disabilities to be taught grade level curriculum. The comment reflected on the services of the GLRS.

“Georgia Learning Resources Systems (GLRS) offers Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) Academies.” LRE Academies retrain teachers on the following components: models of co-teaching, differentiated instruction, accommodations and modifications,

classroom behavior management, and attitudes [which focuses on] understanding the [classroom] environment.

According to the state rule on AEPs, a requirement is that programs enable students to make academic progress toward grade level while attending the program. Therefore, training teachers on implementing the IEP modifications to enable students to be taught on grade level is in line with the state mandate. In addition, teaching students with disabilities on grade level may assist them in increasing their level of academic achievement.

Addressing Racial Achievement Gaps

Administrators were asked to discuss programs the GaDOE had in place to address the issue of the achievement gap between African American and Caucasians. The administrators identified four programs that addressed this issue. The Early Intervention Program, the Remedial Reading Program, Georgia Virtual School, and Leadership Facilitators were programs identified by state department administrators that address the issue of the racial achievement gap. Illustrative quotes were:

“[The Georgia legislature committed to providing state resources for [the] Early Intervention Program and [the] Remedial Education Program”.

“Virtual school program offers Advance Placement (AP) classes. [The] increase access to Advanced Placement classes to minority students [assures that these students are taking courses] with rigor of content. [The] state [is] paying teachers to [become] certified to teach AP classes”.

[“The state provided] training [for teachers to] know what a standard is and how to teach a standard. State researched work of Edmonds and Marzano - in

development of Georgia Performance Standards (GPS). [The] GPS is most critical in addressing [the] achievement gap”

“Leadership Facilitators – [Leadership Facilitators] do gap analysis”. [They] look at [achievement] gaps in the analysis of data”. [They view the achievement] gap between races;

The purpose of the Early Intervention Program based on a report by the GaDOE (2004) is to:

serve students who are at risk of not reaching or maintaining academic grade level, including but not limited to students who are identified through the first grade readiness assessment and students with identified academic performance below grade levels for grades one through five. (p. 6)

The Remedial Education Program as describe by the GaDOE (2005) is a program designed to provide individualized instruction for students in grades 9-12 who have deficiencies in reading, writing, and mathematics. Students who receive services under Title 1 Part A – Improving Basic Programs Operated by Local Educational Agencies are eligible for this program.

Georgia Virtual School is an instructional program that offers students online academic courses. Leadership Facilitators are an integral part of the School Improvement Division. Leadership Facilitators serve as coaches for schools indentified as in needs improvement as defined by NCLB for one through eight years. Leadership Facilitators , as acknowledged by the GaDOE (2003) “ provides tools for collecting and analyzing qualitative and quantitative data, guidance for analyzing causes and establishing

improvement priorities, and a model for action planning and matching needs to resources” (p.2).

Addressing Socioeconomic Achievement Gaps

In order to approach the concern of the achievement gap between socioeconomic levels administrators were asked how the state department was addressing this issue.

Responses from the administrators are as follows:

“[The] state pays for student to take [Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test] PSAT [to assist the] economically disadvantaged to do better on the [Scholastic Aptitude Test] SAT. [As a result, this is done to] assist in closing the achievement gap”.

“[The] Title 1 program exists to eliminate achievement gap between social disadvantage and others. Georgia’s allocation (498,278, 436) [is] given to schools to ensure every child [is] meeting state standards.”

“[The] Remedial Education Program [which is state funded program, assist in addressing this issue”].

The GaDOE administrators perceived three initiatives as procedures used by the state department to address the state’s socioeconomic achievement gap. The initiatives were: (a) paying for economically disadvantaged students’ registration fee for the PSAT, (b) The Title I Program and (c) the state funded Remedial Education Program. Participation in these initiatives could reduce the achievement gaps between socioeconomic levels.

Ineffective Policies and Procedures

The theme of what is not effective produced various comments from the state department administrators. The majority of responses came from two interview questions

that discussed the impact of NCLB on students with disabilities and the racial achievement gap. Those interview questions were: (a) what aspects of NCLB do you feel hinder students with disabilities successful transition to a traditional school? (b) There is an achievement gap between African Americans and Caucasians. How is this being addressed at the state level?

Aspects of NCLB that Hinder Special Education Students' Transition

GaDOE administrators perceived that NCLB hindered the transition for special education students in AEPs in the areas graduation rates and the unsafe school choice option. The Annual Performance Report of the GaDOE (2007) in accordance with NCLB identifies a graduate as a student who leaves high school with a regular diploma in four years. The Annual Performance Report further clarifies that a regular diploma does not include certificates of attendance or special education diplomas. In Georgia, the graduation rate indicates the percentage of students who entered ninth grade in a given year and were in the graduating class receiving a regular diploma four years later.

In agreement with the unsafe school choice, option as specified in Georgia state rule (2006) and in accordance with NCLB the GaDOE must identify unsafe schools. Local school systems that have schools identified by the GaDOE as persistently dangerous schools must allow students to transfer out of persistently dangerous schools. The receiving school must be a school “that is making adequate yearly progress and has not been identified as being in school improvement, corrective action or restructuring” (p. 3). A persistently dangerous school is defined in state rule as is a public school for three consecutive years on the school property or during a school sponsored event that at least one student enrolled in that school was found by official action to have committed a

violation of a school rule that involved a criminal offense. The comments associated with this theme were:

“Can’t count special education diploma towards graduation rate; NCLB [defines the] graduation rate [as the] number of students [who] graduate [in a] prescribe time period and with [a] regular diploma. Therefore, since [the] special education diploma cannot be counted [there is] no incentive for administrators to transition them back because [special education students] cannot help graduation rate”.

“[Under] NCLB’s unsafe schools have choice option, [which would include] students with disabilities. Students with disabilities have discipline problems, [which would result in attending] tribunals [for such violations] as drugs, weapons, [and] bodily harm these discipline problems count against school”.

“If a child has [a history of these] offenses why [would school administrators] want them back”?

As emphasized in the comments GaDOE administrators interviewed perceived that traditional school administrators feel that because of the mandates of NCLB that require reporting graduation rates and offering unsafe school choice that special education students returning would negatively impact the traditional school.

Addressing Racial Achievement Gaps

GaDOE administrators responded to how the state was addressing the issue of the racial achievement gap in accordance to percentages of students meeting standards on statewide assessments. The Georgia Report Card for the 2005–2006 school year indicated that in the sixth grade in the content area of reading on the CRCT 20% of the Black students did not meet standards as compared to 7% of the White students not meeting

standards. In the content area of mathematics on the CRCT 52% of the Black, students did not meet standards compared to 26% of the White students not meeting standards. A GaDOE administrator responded.

[“The state is addressing the issue by] focusing on disproportionality for students with disabilities. [School systems identified as disproportionate] do a plan and they go to a meeting. [Schools systems identified as disproportionate] must use 15% [of their] federal funds to address this issue. [For] other students [nondisabled students] at [the] district level no one accountable. In ‘theory’, RTI [Response to Intervention] may address this issue”.

Frustrations

The next theme was frustrations. This theme, as the others, garnered comments from the state department administrators. The responses came primarily from two interview questions that were: (a) does the state fund and/or offer technical assistance to schools to provide and maintain after school programs to address literacy and mathematics instruction for students with disabilities in CrossRoads Alternative Education Programs? (b) What aspects of NCLB do you feel hinder students with disabilities successful transition to a traditional school?

Assistance for Afterschool Programs

The question asked of GaDOE administrators concerned the level of technical assistance provided by the state department to schools to provide after school programs. Georgia’s 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program (2005) is a federally funded program that enables schools to establish centers that operate during before or after school hours. The program provides opportunities for academic enrichment and

tutorial services to reinforce and complement the regular academic program. The 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program offers families of the students involved in the program opportunities for literacy and related educational development. States must implement a competitive application process to provide funding to schools. This theme of frustration generated the following comment.

“[This year] only one alternative education program applied. [The reason is] it is difficult to write [the] grant. [The programs] need grant writing assistance. [The] local school system [administration] has to “buy in” to the alternative education program applying for the grant. It [also] takes time to write [the grant].”

Aspects of NCLB

Administrators interviewed expressed frustrations with aspects of NCLB, which they suspected hindered students with disabilities successful transition to a traditional school. Their frustrations were grounded in the mandate requiring that special students be taught the same challenging academic standards as regular education students. The requirement of NCLB that students with disabilities be included in AYP calculations was also frustrating for some administrators in terms of the impact it could have on students returning to their home school.

“[NCLB requires students with disabilities be taught] standards on grade level. [However, students with disabilities not exposed to previous grade level] materials or [are] not on grade level academically”.

“[When the traditional school’s] test scores go down, students with disabilities (SWD) are blamed for not making AYP. They (SWD) are considered a hindrance for the traditional school [because the traditional school] wants to make AYP.”

“Students with disabilities come back and disrupt the traditional program and they are further behind academically. Who [would] want them back? “

The purpose of NCLB (2001) is to ensure that all children have an opportunity to acquire a quality education. NCLB (2001) does mandate that the academic standards shall be the same academic standards that the state applies to all children in the state. It further requires that adequate yearly progress be defined by the state in a manner that includes separate measurable annual objectives for continuous and considerable improvement for students with disabilities.

Projections

Projections were the next theme. As stated previously projections are observations of the influence that current policies, or services have on the education of SLD and EBD students enrolled in AEPs. Similar to the other themes, projection generated several comments from the state department administrators. The responses for this theme generally came from four interview questions, which were: (a) does the state fund and/or offer technical assistance to schools to support initiatives involving family outreach services to students with disabilities in the CrossRoads Alternative Education Program? (b) What aspects of NCLB do you feel hinder students with disabilities successful transition to a traditional school? What aspects support their transition? (c) There is an achievement gap between African Americans and Caucasians. How is this being addressed at the state level? (d) There are a disproportionate number of African American males in Georgia’s CrossRoads Alternative Education Program. How is this issue being addressed at the state level?

Assistance for Family Outreach Services

GaDOE administrators commented on technical assistance provided by the state department to support initiatives involved in family outreach services to students with disabilities in AEPs. The projections on family outreach services from one administrator were:

[“State department staff of AEPs] have been discussing with staff in the Office of Special Education Services and Supports the development of a cadre of trained people to get families involved. [It will be similar to Office of Special Education Services and Supports’] parent mentor program [Georgia Parent Mentor Partnership]. [The staff person in charge of special education parent mentor] program will be asked to do training with AEP administrators and teachers [emphasizing] how to get parents involved”.

The GaDOE document titled *Parents and Educators Partnerships (2005)* reinforces the opinion that family of children with disabilities collaborating with educators to create better outcomes for students is pivotal in IDEA 2004. The Georgia Parent Mentor Partnership is a state initiative intended to encourage school systems to employ a parent of student with a disability to assist the system in bridging the gap between home and school. The parent mentors strive to increase family engagement at each tier of the Georgia’s Student Achievement Pyramid of Interventions.

Aspects of NCLB

The GaDOE administrators express their projections on aspects of NCLB that hinder or support a successful transition during the interviews. Their responses centered on the federal provision of Title IV, Part A, Safe and Drug Free Schools and

Communities. Their responses also focused on and the purposes and requirements of NCLB that states ensure that all children including students with disabilities reach proficiency on academic standards.

The GaDOE document *Title IV, Part A, Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities* (2005) suggests that AEPs are as authorized drug and violence prevention activities. This provision reinforces school systems authority to assign students who violate the school conduct code in relation to drugs and violence to AEPs. The document further suggests that activities that support the prevention of drug use and violence include: (a) promoting a sense of individual responsibility, (b) teaching students that most people do not illegally use drugs (c) involving families, community sectors, and a variety of drugs and violence prevention providers in setting clear expectations against violence and illegal use of drugs.

The purpose of NCLB (2001) is to ensure that all children have a fair and equal, and significant opportunity to obtain proficiency on challenging state academic achievement standards. The law also stipulates that the purpose of NCLB can be accomplished by meeting the educational needs of children with disabilities. The law also mandates that the standardized test scores of students with disabilities be included in AYP calculations. The comments made by GaDOE administrators concerning these federal provisions were:

“In reference to the NCLB-Safe and Drug Free Schools [and its relation to AEPs the question is] are they serving time or being rehabilitated”? “Are the students sent [to AEPs because of discipline and as a result [are the students] serving time; or are they being taught behavior modifications and academics”

“NCLB will not allow you to let kids fall through the cracks”.

“[Schools can’t set low expectations for students [and justify by saying] just special education [students]”.

Addressing Racial Achievement Gaps

GaDOE administrators’ observations of the influence that the racial achievement gaps has on the education of SLD and EBD students enrolled in AEPs focused on implementing the state curriculum. The state curriculum is referred to as the GPS. One comment was:

“[The state researched the studies] of Ron Edmonds and Robert Marzano in the development of the Georgia Performance Standards. The GPS are the most critical component in addressing achievement gap”.

Calligan, Line, Shearer, and Mitchell (2005) note that:

Performance standards define specific expectations of what students should know and be able to do. The GPS document is the curriculum document that contains all standards that should be learned by all students. Georgia’s performance standards are composed of four components: content standard, tasks, student work, and teacher commentary. (p. 26)

Addressing Disproportionality

Disproportionate representation is defined by Salend, Duhaney, Montgomery (2002) as the presence of students from a specific group in an educational program being higher or lower than one would expect based on their representation in the general population of students (p. 1). In the 2005–2006 school year African Americans were 38% of Georgia’s public school population. However, during the same school year in AEPs

approximately 60% of the students were African Americans. Projections made by GaDOE administrators as to how the issue of the disproportionate number of African American enrolled in AEPs is being addressed by the state department were:

“I don’t know. However, I would suspect [the issue is] not being addressed. The students [in the AEPs are removed from [traditional] classes so who cares.

“[The] more inadequate the [alternative education] program the more disproportionate the program”.

Stated Needs

The final theme noted on Appendix L was stated needs. Comments from this theme were drawn from responses to three interview questions: (a) Does the state provide training to address the specific needs of the special education population to school guidance counselors and school social workers? (b) Does the state fund and/or provide technical assistance to schools to provide and maintain mentoring programs for student with disabilities in CrossRoads Alternative Education Programs? (c) Are there state rules that support students with disabilities successful transition to a traditional school?

Lange and Sletten (2002) revealed that:

Students with emotional behavioral issues or learning disabilities often struggle in the conventional school system, and they may become disenfranchised and drop out. [However], a picture emerges from the literature that suggests links between attendance at alternative programs and reduction of dropout rates for students at risk. (p. 13)

Research conducted by Lange and Sletten (2002), Thurlow, Sinclair, and Johnson (2002), and Lehr (2004) note that a caring relationship between an adult and student is

major component of an effective dropout prevention strategy and program. Services provided by counselors and mentors are critical in building a caring relationship for students in AEPs as part of dropout prevention. The comments that reflected the need for the services of counseling and mentoring in Georgia’s AEPs are as follows:

“[The Alternative Education Subcommittee recommended funding] for counselors. [However], must have ‘buy in’ from the State Superintendent, the State Board of Education, and Georgia General Assembly.”

“Need state funded mentoring program”.

GaDOE administrators did not comment on state rules that support students with disabilities successful transition to a traditional school. However, a comment was made regarding a provision in the Alternative Education Programs (2001) GaDOE rule that states that AEPs “provide instruction that will enable students to return to a general or career education program as quickly as possible” (p. 2). The comment suggests the need to revise the rule.

“Some students are successful in AEPs because they feel comfortable in the alternative program. [As a result, when they do transition to their traditional school because of the success they had in the alternative program] the student may feel compelled to do something stupid so have to return. We should provide them a choice to stay in the alternative program if they are comfortable in the alternative [setting]. Let them stay so don’t have to do something stupid to stay”

Disconnects Between Mandates and Practice

The final display of qualitative data from the study is shown in Appendix J titled “Disconnect between Mandates and Practice”. This appendix illustrates perceptions about

the procedures used in facilitating a successful transition for students with disabilities to their traditional school. Appendix J presents data from various federal and state mandates. However, the major state and federal mandates of Appendix J are presented in this section: (a) No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), (b) Individuals with Disabilities Education Act–2004 (IDEA–2004), (c) House Bill 1027 (d) State Rule–Student Support Services, and (e) State Rule–Waivers and Variances.

No Child Left Behind

This section of the study summarized the mandates/program guidelines and reviewed the comments of administrators. The first mandate on Appendix J is No Child Left Behind. Some of the stated purposes and requirements of NCLB are:

1. To ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging state academic achievement standards and state academic assessments.
2. Allow students to transfer when: A school is determined to be persistently dangerous and /or a student becomes the victim of a violent crime at a school. The LEA (Local Education Agency – Local School System) must allow the student to transfer to another public school.
3. Each State Plan shall demonstrate, based on academic assessments, what constitutes adequate yearly progress (AYP) of the State, and of all public elementary schools, secondary schools, and local education agencies in the State.

NCLB requires that states must determine what constitutes Adequate Yearly Progress. This mandate is to ensure that states apply the same high standards of academic achievement to all students and to monitor for constant and significant improvement in achievement for all students. AYP must be reported to the public and there are sanctions for those schools that consistently do not make AYP. GaDOE administrators' comments on the implementation of this requirement of NCLB reflect a backlash of resentment toward students with disabilities, as students with disabilities are perceived to be the reason why schools are not making AYP.

“No incentive for administrators to transition them [special education students back to traditional school because] can't help graduation rate. [In fact special education students] can have negative impact on graduation rate”.

“Teaching [students with disabilities] standards on grade level students not being exposed to previous materials or [they] are not on grade level academically [as a result] test scores go down and students with disabilities [are the] blame for not making AYP”.

“They [students with disabilities] are considered a hindrance for the traditional school to make AYP”.

The purpose of NCLB is to ensure that all children have an opportunity to obtain a high quality education and to achieve proficiency on challenging state academic standards and state academic assessments. The law in section 1001, “stipulates that this purpose can be accomplished by closing the achievement gap between high and low performing students and by holding schools accountable for improving the academic achievement of all students” (p. 17). Improving the academic achievement, ensuring a

high quality education, and reaching proficiency on state standards and assessments are purpose or goals established in the law. NCLB also established AYP as a way of monitoring the progress schools and schools systems towards the goals.

The law requires that students with disabilities be included in the student population striving to reach the law's goals. Based on the comments received from administrators, in practice the purpose or goals of the law are viewed as an attempt to persecute local schools by reporting the progress or lack of progress of students with disabilities are making towards obtaining a high quality education. This appears to be a disconnection between the mandate and practice.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act–2004

The second mandate considered on Appendix J was IDEA–2004. The purposes of IDEA–2004 as they pertain to this study concentrated on the issue of disproportionality and the use of scientific based interventions. IDEA–2004 requires any local educational agency identified as having a disproportionate representation of special education students to use not more than 15% of federal funds to develop and implement coordinated early intervening services.

Early intervening services may include interagency financing structures for students in kindergarten through grade 12 (with a particular emphasis on students in kindergarten through grade 3) who have not been identified as needing special education or related services but who need additional academic and behavioral support to succeed in a general education environment. In implementing coordinated early intervening services a local educational agency may carry out activities that include professional development for teachers and other school staff

to enable such personnel to deliver scientifically based academic instruction and behavioral interventions, including scientifically based literacy instruction.

(IDEA–2004, Section 613 (f), p.75)

A comment made by an administrator that related to the issues of disproportionality and use of scientifically based interventions such as Response to Interventions (RTI). The comment was

“[The state is addressing the issue by] focusing on disproportionality for students with disabilities. [School systems identified as disproportionate] do a plan and they go to a meeting. [Schools systems identified as disproportionate] must use 15% [of their] federal funds to address this issue. [For] other students [nondisabled students] at [the] district level no one accountable. In “theory” RTI [Response to Intervention] may address this issue”.

The disconnection between the mandate and practice can be summarized as articulation versus implementation. The mandate outlines or articulates procedures for addressing the issues of disproportionality and the use of scientifically based interventions. However, phrases in the administrator’s comments such as “no one accountable” and “in theory may address this issue” may result in a lack of implementation or a lack of systematic and systemic implementation of the requirements of the mandate.

IDEA–2004 addresses the issue of disproportionality and the use of scientifically based interventions as a method to enhance the academic achievement of students with disabilities. By enhancing the academic achievement of students with disabilities, the result may be an increased graduation rate for these students. Georgia has a statewide

initiative that addresses the issue of increasing the graduation rate for special education students. This initiative involves the use of graduation coaches. The initiative is referred to in Appendix J and is reviewed in the following section.

House Bill 1027

House Bill 1027 was a mandate passed by the 2006 Georgia General Assembly. The purpose of this legislation was cited in GaDOE Curriculum and Instruction Newsletter (2006). The major principle of this legislation was for local boards of education to “ensure that every high school in its jurisdiction has the full-time services of a high school graduation specialist who is engaged in a process of providing assistance to all high school students, individually and in groups, regarding high school graduation” (p. 1).

GaDOE program guidance states that the responsibilities of graduation specialist are:

1. To develop and implement individual intervention strategies to increase the likelihood that these students will stay in school and graduate
2. To work with students to develop a graduation and achievement plan
3. To identify and link area social agencies with youth at risk of not graduating.

Two illustrative quotes follows:

“Graduation coaches spend little time advising students; therefore students fall in the cracks because [they are] not getting services to plan for their success”.

“The graduation coaches should be required to spend more time advising students; and plan for students’ success”.

The comments made regarding this mandate were discussed previously in this section on qualitative data during the discussion on the provision of services. These comments reveal administrators' thoughts on how graduation coaches are currently addressing the issue of increasing the graduation rate and how graduation coaches should address this issue. Again, there appears to be a disconnection between what is articulated in the law and what is being implemented in the schools. The law specifies specific duties and responsibilities of the graduation coaches. However it appears based on the comments of the administrators interviewed that these responsibilities are not being fulfilled throughout the state.

The intent of providing graduation coaches to school thorough out the state was to make available a service that would assist in offering guidance to students in making the correct decisions to ensure their successful completion of high school. The GaDOE state rule Student Support Services that is discussed in the subsequent section also provides services that may ensure a successful completion of high school for students with disabilities.

Student Support Services State Rule

Student Support Services is the fourth mandate evaluated in Appendix J. The Student Support rule has various purposes, three of which are:

School Counseling and Guidance Services — guidance program planning, implementation and evaluation; individual and group counseling; classroom and small group guidance; career and educational development; parent and teacher consultation; and referral

School Social Work/Visiting Teacher Services- technical assistance on school climate issues; assessment and intervention, including written social histories; individual, group and family counseling and network of appropriate home, school, and community services to address identified student problems

School Climate Management is a plan for addressing the reasons that affect school climate. This comprises efforts to recruit parent and community supports.

Some comments were received that addressed this mandate.

["Funding is needed] for counselors or social workers [to work] in the CrossRoads alternative program."

"More counselors trained to work with students with disabilities in alternative education programs [are needed]."

"A school wide discipline program [is need.] Our program does not have one. I believe [a school wide discipline program] would increase expectation [of positive behavior.]"

"More family outreach [services are need in the program]"

The administrators' comments suggest the need for additional procedures to provide three services to facilitate an effective transition for SLD and EBD students.

These services are additional student services providers, discipline programs, and family outreach. The fact that the administrators are requesting services that are required by state department regulations emphasizes the disconnection between what is mandate and what is practiced.

The need for additional or required services was evidenced the comments made by administrators. The services of counselors, social workers, family outreach, and an

established discipline program could benefit students in terms of facilitating their return to a traditional school and graduating with a regular diploma. The next mandate to be discussed involves passing the Georgia High School Graduation Test, which is a requirement to receive the state's regular high diploma.

Waivers and Variances State Rule

The fifth mandate analyzed is the State Rule Waivers and Variances of High School Graduation Assessments (2005). A variance, according to state program guidelines, is "a decision to grant a modification to all or part of the literal requirements of a rule in lieu of the standard application of the rule" (p. 1). The eligibility procedures for receiving a variance are outlined in the state rule. The key requirements are that the student has taken the Georgia High School Graduation Test or the Georgia High School Writing Test four or more times without passing and the student has successfully completed remedial class (es) after each attempt to pass the relevant section(s).

The comment regarding this mandate reflected dissatisfaction with the state rule.

The comment was:

"The state rule on variance [and waivers requires] students re-take [the test] four times without passing. Why [should students need to keep retaking [the test?]] The state should reduce the number of times [students must] retake the test."

The disconnection between the mandate and practice is based on the interpretation of the intent of the state rule. According to the state rule (2005) the intent of this rule is provide a waiver to a student who due to a disability (as documented in his IEP) is rendered incapable of passing the graduation assessment. If a student is not rendered incapable of passing, the graduation assessments due to a disability a variance may be

granted to allow the student to use alternative means of demonstrating academic proficiency in lieu of passing the assessment. The student also must successfully complete a remedial class or classes after each attempt to pass the assessment.

Therefore, it must be determined that the student lacks the competence or skills needed to master academic content and therefore cannot pass the assessment (s). This appears to be the reason providing documentation of the severity of the student's disability, for taking the test multiple times, and the student receiving additional remedial support. It is appears that the rule involves more than just taking the test four times.

Summary

This chapter presented the findings of the study. The analyses of the findings were presented in three sections. Section one discussed the demographic data of the participants. Section two analyzed the quantitative data from the survey titled "CrossRoads Alternative Education Program Assessment of Services for Students with Disabilities Survey". Section three analyzed the qualitative data from the interviews held with GaDOE administrators and administrators of AEPs.

The findings from the data analysis revealed that both GaDOE administrators and principals perceived that counseling and mentoring programs were services that were needed to facilitate a successful transition for students with disabilities. However, there was diversity in the administrators' perception of effective programs. The GaDOE administrators perceived Title I programs, online courses, LRE Academies, and graduation coaches as effective programs to enhance transition from AEPs to a traditional school for students with disabilities. Administrators of AEPs perceived that in addition to

mentoring programs and counseling services that computer based instructional programs might be effective in facilitating a successful transition for students with disabilities.

Chapter five discusses the data collected and analyzed in the study and makes recommendations about effective educational programming that may assist students with disabilities enrolled in Georgia's CrossRoads AEP when returning to their home school. The chapter will also discuss limitations to the study. Finally, the chapter recommends dropout prevention strategies and proposed topics for further research.

V. CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to identify the procedures and services needed to facilitate a successful transition for special education students with specific learning disabilities (SLD) and emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) enrolled in Georgia CrossRoads Alternative Education Program (AEP). For the purpose of this study, procedures are defined as federal and state laws, rules, regulations, local school system policies, and methods of operations. Services are defined as instructional strategies and programs that enable SLD and EBD students' greater understanding of the state's general curriculum, implementing instructional programs, implementing instructional strategies, offering technical assistance, and providing student support services. Georgia Department of Education's (GaDOE) Alternative Education Program Self-Assessment Instrument (2005) defines an effective AEP as one that "provides students with opportunities to maintain or accelerate their current progress towards graduation and provides, prior to a student's exit from a long-term AEP, transition services to ensure a successful return to the traditional home school" (p. 9). The identification of policies, procedures, and services that may enhance the academic achievement of special education students

enrolled in AEPs will provide educational practices to assist these students in returning to their traditional school.

This research examined Georgia's policies, legislation, and the guidelines affecting the education of students with disabilities in the Georgia CrossRoads AEP. The research also studied methods used by students enrolled in AEPs to access the state's curriculum, instructional programs, instructional and behavior strategies, and strategies for increasing the high school completion rate for this population.

The significance of this research is twofold. First, at present, on a national level there is little research that has investigated issues concerning students with disabilities enrolled in AEPs. Consequently, there are few, studies that have focused on academic, behavior, or dropout rate issues for students with disabilities enrolled in Georgia's CrossRoads AEPs. This study adds to the body of research in these areas.

Secondly, this study identified educational programs and strategies that may improve academic progress, instruction, discipline, and the high school completion rate for students with disabilities. The research conducted in this study may assist teachers and administrators in curriculum and instructional planning. The implementation of these educational programs and strategies may increase the number of students with disabilities who successfully transition to a traditional school from Georgia CrossRoads AEPs and complete high school.

Restatement of Study Procedures

This study utilized a mixed methods approach using a Sequential Explanatory Design (Creswell, 2003). The Sequential Explanatory Design involved the collection and

analysis of quantitative data followed by collection and analysis of qualitative data. The intermingling of quantitative and qualitative data allowed for a deeper understanding of the issues surrounding successful transition for students with disabilities than would have been achieved using only one research approach.

Quantitative data were collected using a researcher-designed survey. The survey was titled *CrossRoads Alternative Education Program Assessment of Services for Students with Disabilities Survey* (See Appendix B). The survey was administered to 43 Georgia CrossRoads' principals and assistant principals. The survey collected information regarding procedures and services that the respondents viewed as necessary to facilitate a successful transition for students with disabilities.

Qualitative data were collected using semistructured interviews with GaDOE administrators and AEP administrators. The instruments used to conduct the interviews were titled *The Interview Protocol for GaDOE Administrators* and *The Interview Protocol for Georgia CrossRoads AEP'S Building Administrators* (See Appendix F and Appendix H). Semi-structured interviews with three state department administrators addressed GaDOE policies and procedures concerning transition for students with disabilities. Semi-structured interviews with eight building administrators investigated questions raised from survey responses on instruction, and dropout prevention.

Interpretations and Conclusions

Participants' Characteristics and Demographics

The educational levels of 42 of the 43 survey respondents who answered the statements regarding educational level were categorized by their earned degrees: masters,

educational specialist, and doctorate. The results indicated that 26 administrators (60%) held an educational specialist degree followed by nine administrators (21%) that held a doctorate degree and seven administrators (16%) that held masters degrees.

The years of administrative experience were grouped from a range of 1 to 16 or more years of administrative experience. The most frequent response was 16 or more years with a total of 24 administrators (56%), followed by 1–5 years of administrative experience, with 10 administrators (23%), 11–15 years of administrative experience with 5 administrators (12%), and lastly, 6–10 years of administrative experience with 4 administrators (9%).

School type information was grouped into three selections: urban, rural, and suburban. The results indicated that the majority of the respondents were from CrossRoads AEPs in rural areas with 29 responses (67%). The suburban location ranked second with 8 responses (19%) followed by the urban location with 6 program administrators responding (14%).

The range of student enrollment was from 50 or fewer students to 351 or more students. Based on the data received, 18 AEPs have a student enrollment of 50 or less students (42%), 13 AEPs have a student enrollment of 51-100 (13%), four AEPs enroll 351+ students (9%), three AEPs reported student enrollments of 101-150 (7%), and three AEPs reported 201-250 students enrolled (7%). A student enrollment of 151-200 was reported by two AEPs (5%).

Survey Responses

As explained above, the quantitative data gained from the responses from the survey were categorized in terms of three demographic variables: years of professional

experience, school type, and school size. In order to determine if differences exist between groups using the descriptive categories from the survey responses, independent sample t-tests were performed. The analysis of the data indicated six significant items. These items were discussed in terms of the three demographic variables.

There were four survey items of significance related to the demographic variable of administrative experience. Item number eight was the only one that was statistically significant. The four significant items were:

Item number 8 – There is need for special education students to be involved in the governance of the CrossRoads Alternative Education Programs ($t = 2.333$, $p = .026$).

Item number 10 – There is a need for students with disabilities in the CrossRoads Alternative Education Programs to be involved in a mentoring program ($t = 1.947$, $p = .059$).

Item number 19 – There is a need for the CrossRoads Alternative Education Programs to provide childcare for students with disabilities ($t = -1.761$, $p = .087$).

Item number 21 – There is a need for a celebration of passage program when students exit the CrossRoads Alternative Education Programs to return to their traditional school ($t = -.038$, $p = .970$).

The second demographic variable was school type. School types were urban, suburban, and rural. There was one statistically significant item in this variable category, survey item number 27.

Item number 27 – There is a need to ensure that students with disabilities have a sense of belonging to the CrossRoads Alternative Education Programs as an

intervention to decrease the dropout rate for students with disabilities ($t = -2.091$
 $p = .043$).

The third demographic variable was school size. This was based on student enrollment. Item number 30 was the one significant statement in this variable.

Item number 30 – There is a need for family outreach strategies to be implemented in the CrossRoads Alternative Education Programs as an intervention to decrease the dropout rate for students with disabilities ($t = 1.644$, $p = .108$).

Interviews with AEP Building Administrators

Four research questions were analyzed for this study. The data for the Qualitative Data section were analyzed by examining and interpreting the notes of interviews with AEP administrators that captured their comments on federal laws, state rules, state guidelines, policy, procedures, and services that are influencing the education of students with disabilities attending AEPs and subsequently affect the students' chances of returning to a traditional school. The following sections include the findings from the data analysis for each of the four research questions.

What policies and procedures are in place to facilitate a successful transition for students with disabilities enrolled in Georgia's CrossRoads AEPs to their traditional school?

The administrators' interview responses identified six policies and or procedures that were currently in place or need to be in place to facilitate successful transition. The administrators identified their local alternative education program policy on student

enrollment and withdrawal from the program as being an effective method of facilitating transition. A principal's response that reflected the local polices effectiveness was:

In our system, student and parent meet with the assistant superintendent; student and parent meet with the principal of the alternative school. The student conferences each month with the graduation coach/specialist and the student and parent meet with the alternative education principal, graduation coach/specialist to ease transition back into the home school program.

Another principal noted the basic criteria for students to return to their home school. "Attendance, behavior and grades must be satisfactory to return to the base school". This criterion was indicated in the interview responses of two other alternative education principals.

Conducting Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings and monitoring the implementation of the IEP was the second procedure identified that facilitates a successful transition. This is supported by replies from principals such as "IEPs are monitored" and "The IEP team meets to determine the need for placement."

The third procedure cited as one that needs to be implemented in order for students to successfully transition to their home school would establish measures to implement a support team for special education teachers in AEPs. The principal's comment was "I would like to see a support team for special education teachers. The teachers could talk about things for successful transition. Strategies and techniques for child having difficulty in functioning in the mainstream could be discussed".

A fourth identified procedure was a suggestion to revise one of the GaDOE's rules. Rule 160-1-3-.09 is titled *Waivers and Variances of High School Graduation Assessments* (2005). The purpose of the rule is:

This rule sets forth the eligibility criteria and procedures for requesting and granting either a waiver or variance to the requirement of students to pass all sections of the Georgia High School Graduation Tests (GHSGT) and the Georgia High School Writing Tests (GSWT). For the purpose of this rule, a waiver may be granted to a student who, due to a disability, is rendered incapable of passing a section of the GHSGT or the GSWT as documented in the student's individualized education plan (program). (p.1)

A requirement of the rule is the student must have attempted the graduation tests four or more times. One of the interview responses was that the number of attempts should be reduced. "The state rule on variance – the student has to re-take so many times without passing. Why have to keep retaking? The state should reduce the number of times have to retake the test."

The fifth procedure identified as a needed to facilitate a successful transition would establish a focus group to develop an effective plan for the transition of students in AEPs. "The state should look at what systems are doing; have a focus group and come up with a good plan." The state does however, have an Alternative Education Subcommittee that has reported recommendations to the GaDOE in an effort to enhance AEPs.

The sixth suggested procedure for the state to implement to enhance transition offered by an AEP building principal was for state administrators to teach (in the AEP) for at least 10 hours. According to the administrator, this would enable the GaDOE

administrators to understand the needs of AEPs. GaDOE “administrators should be required to teach so many hours (10) to understand what is really needed”.

What services are needed to facilitate a successful transition for students with disabilities enrolled in Georgia’s CrossRoads AEPs to their traditional school?

The eight administrators identified the four services as needed to effectively transition students with disabilities enrolled in AEPs to their traditional school.

Mentoring was recognized by seven of the eight principals interviewed as a service that was needed to make possible a smooth transition. Some of the interview responses were: “A teacher from the base program is assigned as a mentor to make sure the student is on the right track”, “No mentoring program but I want to put one in place”, and “The collaboration with the mentoring program and the court system is effective”.

Counseling was recognized as a service needed to support the transition of special education students in AEPs. This service was identified by 50% of the participants. Some of the interview responses on how counseling could benefit students were: “Have a mental health counselor on site everyday” and “mental health counselors through Department of Family and Children Services and Department of Juvenile Justice”.

Instructional resources and supplemental materials to assist students in achieving a passing score on Georgia’s Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT) was recognized as a service needed to support the transition of special education students in AEPs. The CRCT is intended to measure how well students obtain the skills and knowledge described in the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS). The CRCT yields information on academic achievement at the student, class, school, system, and state

levels. The interview response to address this service was AEPs “need materials to supplement the CRCT and access to more instructional resources”.

Offering professional learning in training students in survival skills was recommended as a service needed to generate positive outcomes for special education students attending AEPs. The specific comment was “Training for skills whether it is job skills, life skills, study skills, (or) academic skills. All students need survival skills in making productive decisions.”

What instructional strategies may correlate with improved achievement levels of students with disabilities enrolled in Georgia CrossRoads AEPs?

The responses to this research question can be summarized into two categories: methodology and accommodations. A variety of instructional methods were revealed through the interview responses as strategies that may correlate with improved achievement levels: (a) use of the state’s prescribed method of teaching the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS), (b) individualized instruction, (c) teaching basic skills, (d) smaller class sizes, (e) use of resource classes, (f) differentiated instruction, and (g) use of manipulatives. Participants’ comments that supported the use of a variety of instructional strategies to enhance achievement levels were: “For math one-to-one work with student; students need individual attention”, “Use instructional strategies designed in GPS Roll Out. “ Same curriculum as the general population, have strong academic focus, when they go back do not want to see gaps-want them to be able to pick up and go”, and “Start with basic skills; re-teach what they need to know.”

An accommodation is a service that is provided to help a student access the subject matter and instruction. There are three groups of accommodations: alternative

acquisition modes, content enhancements, and alternative response modes. Principals interviewed recognized the importance of using the content enhancement accommodations of graphic organizers, and peer mediated instruction to increase the student's level of understanding the academic content. The use of the alternative response mode accommodation of providing extra time to complete assignments was also identified as instructional strategies that would improve achievement levels. Some of the comments that addressed this question were: "Graphic organizers, technology, and manipulatives are used." Supplemental materials for extra practice, small group activities, and extra time are used to improve achievement."

What instructional programs may be effective in improving the academic performance of students with disabilities enrolled in CrossRoads AEP?

Instructional programs that are effective in improving academic performance, particularly in the areas of reading or mathematics as perceived by administrators interviewed, were three specific computer programs. The programs, in the opinion of the principals interviewed, were NC, SI, and PL. It was noted by the administrators that computer programs increase student engagement in the education process.

The comments from the principals were as follows: "NC- reading, mathematics and writing component, it is effective in the classes where teachers monitor students' work". "NC- is successful when used properly" "SI- good for remediation- successful for students with disabilities; students can work at their own pace". "PL is very successful; have staff and paraprofessionals to assist students with disabilities". "PL is used by our staff as a supplemental tool along with many websites and computer programs".

Interviews with GaDOE Administrators

Data in this section was analyzed by examining and interpreting the interview responses with GaDOE administrators. Responses reflecting insights on federal laws, state rules, state guidelines, policy, procedures and services that impact the education of students with disabilities attending AEPs were analyzed. Services are defined as technical assistance from the GaDOE that is made available to local school systems. The replies from the GaDOE administrators primarily responded to the questions concerning policies, procedures, and services.

What policies and procedures are in place that facilitates a successful transition for students with disabilities enrolled in Georgia's CrossRoads AEPs to their traditional school?

The GaDOE polices discussed during the interview were NCLB, Title I (offering tutoring programs), State Rule 160-7-1-.01- Single Statewide Accountability System, Title II Part A, and Title 2D. NCLB was seen as a policy that provided students with disabilities the supports they need to be successfully returned to their home school. "NCLB will not allow you to let kids fall through the cracks. Opportunity to notice children who may fall through the crack-can't set low expectations for students-say just special education".

According to the GaDOE (2007), Title I programs provide technical assistance and resources to school systems to make certain that all children have an opportunity to acquire a high quality education and to achieve proficiency on high academic standards. "The Title I program exists to eliminate the achievement gap between the socially disadvantaged and others. Title I picks up where the IEP leaves off".

State Rule 160-7-1-.01 Single State-wide Accountability System's purpose is to provide "valid, reliable accountability determinations at the school, local education agency (school system), and state level that can help promote continuous improvement in raising student achievement" (GaDOE, 2005, p.1). A GaDOE administrator noted, in addition to, State Rule 160-7-.01, the GaDOE has made available a guidance document to assist school systems with the implementation of Georgia's Single State-wide Accountability System. The GaDOE administrator identified the major focus of the accountability system: "The Single Statewide Accountability System's focus is on schools closing the gap". Closing the achievement gap would assist students in AEPs in making a successful return to their home schools.

Title II Part A of NCLB is titled *Teacher and Principal Training and Recruiting Fund*. The purpose of Title II Part A, as referenced in NCLB, is to provide grants to state departments of education in order to increase student achievement by improving teacher and principal quality, increasing the number of highly qualified teachers in the classroom, as well as increasing the number of highly qualified principals and assistant principals in schools. The purpose of Title II Part A also involves holding local school systems and schools accountable for improvements in student academic achievement and behavior by providing professional learning.

During an interview, it was reported that the GaDOE's Office of School Improvement "provides funds from Title II Part A to high priority schools, those schools in needs improvement based on AYP". As previously stated, Lehr, Moreau et al. (2004) designed a survey to collect up-to-date information about alternative programs across the nation. Their survey revealed that 44% of survey respondents were concerned with the

quality of the staff in alternative education programs. In Chapter 2 of this study, it was revealed that the Georgia Professional Standards Commission (GAPSC), the state agency that is responsible for teacher certification, issued 12,008 non-regular teaching (not highly qualified) certificates of which 5,748 were in the field of special education. The implementation of this policy would address an identified need of improving the quality of the staff involved in the education of students with disabilities in AEPs. This would subsequently improve the academic achievement of these students, which would have a positive impact on their opportunity to return to a traditional school.

The main purposes of Title II D of NCLB, *Enhancing Education through Technology Act of 2001*, are: (a) to provide assistance to States for implementation and support of a comprehensive system that effectively uses technology in elementary schools and secondary schools to improve student achievement, (b) to promote initiatives that provide school teachers, principals, and administrators with the capacity to integrate technology effectively into curricula and instruction that are aligned with challenging State academic content and student academic achievement standards, through such means as high-quality professional development programs. (NCLB, Section 2420, 2001)

The U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) has established Technology Grants for states to provide to local school systems. The Division of School Improvement also provides these Grants for high priority schools to improve in the area of academic achievement. Again, the implementation of this policy, which focuses increasing student academic engagement, may facilitate a successful transition.

Two procedures were primarily discussed during the interview with GaDOE administrators when asked what was needed to support a student's successful return to a

traditional school: Georgia's Student Achievement Pyramid of Interventions and procedures outlined in Georgia's *Graduation Counts Readiness to Results in Grades 6–12 (2006)* manual. "A pyramid of academic interventions is a school's systemic and systematic response to struggling students who need additional support" (p. 47).

"Georgia's Pyramids of (Academic) Interventions is the state's way of students learning in standards based classroom. It is Georgia's way of trying to help all students".

The Graduation Counts! Readiness to Results in Grades 6–12 manual outlines the "foundations and strategic actions for improving graduation rates and academic successes for all students" (p. 1). This manual was viewed by a GaDOE administrator as a procedural guide to reduce the dropout rate for special education students. "A state-wide initiative to address the issue of dropout prevention for students with disabilities is the resource manual *Graduation Counts*. Implementing this procedure may facilitate a successful transition".

The policy and procedures that would facilitate a successful transition that were identified during the GaDOE administrators interviews were: NCLB, Title II Part A, Title II D, Georgia's Student Achievement Pyramid of Interventions, and the resource manual *Graduation Counts! Readiness to Results in Grades 6–12*. These policies and procedures emphasized student academic achievement and dropout prevention. Schools putting into practice policies and procedures that address the issues of student academic achievement and dropout prevention could enhance the opportunities for students with disabilities enrolled in Georgia's CrossRoads AEPs to return to their home school and graduate with a regular high school diploma.

What services are needed to facilitate a successful transition for students with disabilities enrolled in Georgia's CrossRoads AEPs to their traditional school?

Services are defined as instructional strategies and programs that enable SLD and EBD students to have greater understanding of and access to the state's general curriculum. Four services were identified by GaDOE administrators who participated in this study as needed to facilitate a successful transition for students with disabilities enrolled in alternative education. The services identified were: Graduation Coaches, Least Restrictive Education (LRE) Academies, Leadership Facilitators, and 21st Century Grants.

Graduation Coaches are to serve as a resource person to assist students' advancement towards graduation. An administrator surmised that: "Graduation Coaches develop plans for those at risk of not graduating. Have one per high school. The focus for the state is every child graduates."

The Georgia Learning Resources System (GLRS) is a network of 17 centers throughout the state that provide training and resources to educators and parents of students with disabilities. Each center sponsors an LRE Academy. According to a GaDOE administrator the "LRE Academies' mission is to re-train teachers in five instructional strategies that enable students to understand and access the state's curriculum". The five areas of training are: (a) models of co-teaching, (b) differentiated instruction, (c) accommodations and modifications, (d) classroom behavior management, and (e) scheduling.

Services provided by GaDOE Leadership Facilitators were identified as needed to make possible a successful transition for students with disabilities enrolled in AEPs.

“Leadership Facilitators assist local school systems in developing School Improvement Plans and Corrective Action Plans. They analyze school and system data, check the research that is available, and check to make sure that teachers have content knowledge”.

Making available to local school systems 21st Century Grants as a technical assistance service provided by the GaDOE also was identified as needed to enable emphasis on literacy and mathematics. These grants provided funding for academic enrichment and tutorial services. “School systems and AEPs can apply for 21st Century Grants for before, after school, and Saturday programs” was the response made referring to these grants.

Four services that would facilitate the transition of students with disabilities enrolled in AEPs were identified by administrators of the GaDOE. The service provided by Graduation Coaches that assist students’ in earning a high school diploma and the services of GLRS’ LRE Academies that provide professional learning for teachers in instructional strategies that enable students with disabilities access to the general curriculum were identified as needed for students to be able to return to their traditional school and graduate. Two additional services recognized as essential in the transition of SLD and EBD students in AEP were those provide by Leadership Facilitators and 21st Century Grants. Leadership Facilitators assist school systems in developing and implementing improvement plans. 21st Century Grants provide school systems funding for schools to afford the opportunity for students to participate in literacy and math tutoring programs. The overarching theme of all of these services is to enhance students’ educational achievements to obtain a high school diploma.

Discussion

Due to the political nature of the study, confidentiality was critical. For the three GaDOE administrators, this was a major concern considering state department policies and procedures were asked to be evaluated in terms of supporting or hindering the successful transition of students with disabilities to a traditional school. The role of the researcher as a former GaDOE employee may have caused some anxiety among current state department employees participating in the study.

For AEP administrators, the issue of confidentiality was critical and the study held a political nature as well. First, AEP administrators were reporting on the strengths and weaknesses of their programs. Secondly, during the interview they were asked to elaborate on the survey responses of their colleagues. Thirdly, they were asked to discuss the level of effectiveness of the GaDOE.

Despite the political nature of the study, the survey data revealed six significant survey items, which were further explored through interviews with eight principals. Each of these areas is discussed in the following sections. The six items were: (a) Student Involvement in Governance, (b) Mentoring Programs, (c) Childcare, (d) Rite of Passage Program, (e) Sense of Belonging, and (f) Family Outreach Strategies. Interview questions for building administrators of AEPs are shown in Appendix H.

Student Involvement in Governance

The interview question was: There is a need for special education students to be involved in the governance of the CrossRoads Alternative Education Program. Survey respondents with 10 or less years of experience in administration agreed with this statement. However, survey respondents with 16 or more years of experience in

administration disagreed. Would you please comment on why you think this disparity occurred?

The disparity, according to the principals' perceptions, may be explained by the belief system of the two groups of administrators. The veteran principals tend to view their role as a dictatorship. Novice administrators on the other hand, see their role as facilitator. One principal said: "Old School principal dealt as dictator; principal made rule. New age principal more open-minded. They don't mind if kids help run the school".

Mentoring Programs

The eight building administrators were asked: There is a need for students with disabilities in the CrossRoads Alternative Education Program to be involved in an established mentoring program. Survey respondents with 10 or less years of administrative experience strongly agreed with this statement. However, survey respondents with 16 or more years of administrative experience were not as supportive. Would you please offer your opinion on why this disparity occurred?

Again, according to the principals' perceptions, the disparity is based on how the veteran administrators perceive the students. It was reported by the principals interviewed that veteran administrators perceive the students as hopeless. Comments made that reflect these perceptions were: "May be because veteran administrators may have thought no hope for them", "Why veterans disagree? Everyone has tried to do for them- lost cause not going to be anything anyway".

Childcare

The interview question for participants that discussed the issue of childcare being provided in AEPs was: There is a need for the CrossRoads Alternative Education

Program to provide childcare for students with disabilities. This statement received strong opposition from survey respondents with 16 or more years experience as an administrator and those with 10 or less years of experience as an administrator. Would you please provide your opinion as to why this statement received such strong opposition?

Both groups of administrators disagreed with the service of providing childcare. The reason for the strong disagreement may be grounded in the administrators' view on morality in terms of teenage pregnancy. The widespread opinion was that by providing daycare the program was sending a message of accepting and rewarding teenage pregnancy. This perception is reflected in the comments made by principals. "We should not make it comfortable for them. It's okay to have child I can take them to school", "Don't make it easier- it's the one thing they don't need. Need to focus more on education of students", "No childcare- not want to encourage that type of behavior. Education is first and foremost, not going to say behavior is okay".

Rite of Passage Program

The participants were asked to respond to the statement: There is a need for celebration/rites of passage program when students exit the CrossRoads Alternative Education Program to return to their traditional school. Survey respondents in both categories, 10 years or less of administrative experience and 16 years or more of administrative experience, disagreed with this statement. Could you share your opinion as to why this statement did not garner more support among CrossRoads' building administrators?

As with the issue of childcare, neither of the groups of administrators, veterans or novice, supported this service. Again, this lack of support may possibly be based on the

belief system of the administrators. Administrators believe that students should not be rewarded for doing what is expected. Comments made that reveal this opinion made by principals were: “Don’t need to celebrate what needed to do in the first place”, “Don’t believe should celebrate doing the right thing. Don’t celebrate traditional students doing the right thing”.

Sense of Belonging

The statement that principals were asked to reply to was: There is a need to ensure that students with disabilities have a sense of belonging to the CrossRoads Alternative Education Program as an intervention to decrease the dropout rate for students with disabilities. Rural programs were very supportive of this statement. However, urban/suburban programs were far less supportive. Would you please provide your opinion as to why this issue caused such disparity among urban/suburban and rural programs?

The opinions of the principals interviewed were that the lack of support for this statement was generated from a disconnection between the urban/suburban programs and the communities they serve. Reactions from administrators that mirror this perception were: “Urban–disconnect, don’t know (community), not connected outside of school, and not willing to provide the connect”, “More connection (in rural areas) everyone knows everyone school cornerstone – more sense belonging not a lot of social activity going on”, “Urban/suburban larger numbers, large geographical area; become more transient don’t have closeness”.

Family Outreach Strategies

Participants were asked to elaborate on this statement: There is a need for family outreach (family engagement, the family being involved in their child's education) strategies to be implemented in the CrossRoads Alternative Education Programs as an intervention to decrease the dropout rate for students with disabilities. Survey respondents representing schools with less than 50 students strongly agreed this statement. Yet, survey respondents representing schools with more than 50 students generally did not strongly agree with this statement. Would you care to elaborate as to why administrators of large CrossRoads Alternative Education Programs overwhelmingly did not strongly agree with this statement?

The survey revealed that this statement garnered support from small programs. However, large programs were generally less supportive based on specific constraints. The constraints identified by the principals were the number of students enrolled in the large program, the large geographical areas of the programs, safety issues, and difficulty in getting parents to come to the school. Also one principal felt that administrators of large programs did not want parent involvement due to the economic gap between staff and students. The comments made in response to this statement were: "For larger schools going into homes may be a safety issue", "Larger programs may not want to plan for such large numbers of students and increase work load", "Larger programs in city, economic gap between staff and students, don't want to get involved with families".

Implications

The purpose of this study was to identify the procedures and services needed to facilitate a successful transition for special education students with (SLD) and (EBD) enrolled in a Georgia CrossRoads Alternative Education Program (AEP) as perceived by the administrators responsible for their operation. It is important for teachers and administrators to be knowledgeable of educational procedures and services that improve student success. To facilitate the successful transition for special education students with (SLD) and (EBD) enrolled in Georgia CrossRoads AEPs the implementation of the following procedures and services are recommended.

Procedures

1. Rule for AEPs nor the state program guidelines outline the procedures for effective transition planning. The survey results for this item suggested that AEP administrators agreed that there is a need for a multidisciplinary team to develop procedures and service to ensure continued support to students with disabilities when the students transition into and from the CrossRoads AEP. The means for this survey item based on years of administrative experience, school type, and school size were 4.36, 3.93, and 4.28 respectively.

Rutherford and Quinn (1999) identified transition programs and procedures as being an essential component for effective special education in an alternative education setting. The GaDOE should consider outlining transition procedures as identified by Rutherford and Quinn (1999). These procedures would consist of four basic mandated provisions that could be identified in a revised State Rule for AEPs.

The first provision would require that the student's traditional school's IEP team and the staff of the AEP to coordinate the transfer of the student. Furthermore, to ensure successful transition into and out of the alternative education program, the second provision should require that students with disabilities IEPs include academic, attendance, and behavior goals, a functional behavioral assessment, and a behavior intervention plan. Thirdly, the state should incorporate a provision in the revised rule stating that complete, accurate, and current information relating to the cognitive ability and achievement levels of a special education student is provided to the alternative program when the student transfers into the program. The fourth provision that should be integrated into the revised state rule could be the provision that there is follow-up and continuous support for the student in the traditional school setting. The framework for the follow-up and support should be outlined in the revised rule.

Lehr and Lange (2003) stated that the most frequently reported major issue for state education agencies concerning AEPs was the need for increased monitoring and compliance from state departments. Their findings, from interviews conducted with state directors of special education, revealed that there was a "need for increased monitoring to determine quality of the instructional program, student enrollment, demographic information, progress, outcomes, and special education due process and procedures" (p. 6). A comment from a GaDOE administrator was "the department does not monitor AEPs. We do not have enough staff to do state monitoring". The GaDOE should implement compliance monitoring procedures for CrossRoads AEPs.

The GaDOE could establish procedures that would monitor AEPs for five years using a team approach to conduct the monitoring procedures. It is recommended that the

team include GaDOE staff from the following state offices: Special Education Services and Supports, Alternative Education and Magnet Schools Programs, Title I Programs, School Improvement Division, and the Georgia Learning Resources Systems (GLRS). The team should also include AEP building administrators. Compliance monitoring should require those AEPs being monitored to complete and submit to the state department the *GaDOE Alternative Education Program Self- Assessment Instrument* prior to the compliance-monitoring visit.

Also, prior to the compliance-monitoring visit, the GaDOE monitoring team would review information regarding those programs to be monitored currently available to the state. This information would include standardized testing data, student enrollment data, attendance data, and discipline data for regular and special education students. The state may also consider requiring personnel data for those working with regular and special education students. Specific special education data that the state may or may not have for this targeted population could be requested, such as least restrictive environment data, data on student enrollment by disability category, entry and exit data, and manifestation determination data. After a thorough examination of the data, the state could do an onsite visit that would include reviewing a random selection of IEPs, staff interviews, and classroom observations.

During the onsite compliance-monitoring visit, the state could monitor the implementation of the state rule for AEPs and state program guidelines as well as compliance with any state rules and legislation. Based on the findings of this study, this would address those services identified in state policies or guidelines not being implemented such as mentoring programs, student governance, and childcare as a method

to improve attendance. The state could provide a monitoring report with recommendations for program improvement that would be implemented within a specified period. The state could also include in the monitoring report commendations for the AEP.

Services

1. During this research study, the AEP principals alleged that mentoring was a service needed to facilitate a successful transition for students with disabilities. The survey revealed that principals agreed that there was a need for students with disabilities in AEPs to be involved in an established mentoring program. For this survey item the means based on years of administrative experience, school type, and school size were 4.43, 3.93, and 4.28 respectively.

2. Remarks made by principals were “The mentoring program is not structured”, “No mentoring component – want to put (one) into place”, and “Need state funded mentoring program”. The last comment is reflective of a disconnection between mandate and practice (See Appendix K). The GaDOE (2006) has identified the responsibilities of graduation coaches. One of the responsibilities of the graduation coaches is to develop a local mentoring program and to connect individual students with mentors. The state has funded graduation coaches for every middle and high school in Georgia. Graduation coaches are employed but the perception is that the services are not being provided appropriately to students in AEPs throughout the state.

As a result, from comments and responses from AEP administrators, the GaDOE should provide technical assistance in establishing mentoring programs for AEPs using local school system graduation coaches as facilitators. As part of this assistance, the

GaDOE could identify ways to recruit and retain mentors, establish criteria for mentors, and identify the role of the mentors in an AEP. The GaDOE could require that a component of a school's mentoring program be a Caring Adult Team (CAT). The CAT would include a mentor, a parent/guardian, and a teacher of the student. The CAT would work collaboratively to support the student's success academically, socially, and in the community.

3. GaDOE administrators interviewed for this study expressed that counseling was a service needed to facilitate a successful transition for students with disabilities. Counseling was also identified as a need by AEP administrators (See Appendix J). Some comments were: We need "more counselors and more mental health counselors" and "Separate counselors for students with disabilities to discuss jobs and roles have in society (to) be on the right track to be a productive citizen".

This is consistent with state recommendations. For example, the Georgia Alternative Education Subcommittee Report lists counseling as a key element of an effective AEP. "Counseling programs are an integral part of the curriculum. They (counseling programs) are not limited to academic issues, but help students deal with problems and events both in school and in their daily lives" (p. 5).

The Alternative Education Subcommittee, according to the GaDOE, made the recommendation to assign counselors to the AEP at the current FTE Funding Formula (1:100) but to date, funding is still an issue. Therefore, it is recommended that the Georgia Association for Alternative Education collaborate with the Georgia Association of Educational Leaders. The Georgia Association of Educational Leaders organization is comprised of the Georgia School Superintendents Association, Georgia Association of

Middle School Principals, Georgia Association of Secondary School Principals, and Georgia Council of Administrators of Special Education. The collaboration of voices and the collaboration of efforts from multiple groups supporting the issue of assigning and funding counselors to the CrossRoads AEPs may be beneficial in effectively and promptly addressing this recommendation.

4. One of the survey questions was: What supports or services should be provided statewide to improve the graduation rate for students with disabilities? A response from one of the building administrators was: The state “should provide classes geared to passing the high school graduation test. Don’t take away the reading accommodation”. Byrnes (2004) recognized that a major challenge in the ability of students with disabilities to master the general curriculum is that special education teachers may not have expertise teaching the general curriculum. Therefore, it is recommended that the GaDOE provide technical assistance training for special education teachers assigned to AEPs in teaching the content standards of the state curriculum. This assistance can be provided regionally by GLRS. The technical assistance training should place emphasis on unpacking the standards, providing sample tasks to implement the standards, and sample assessments. It may be beneficial for technical assistance to be scheduled throughout the school year. Scheduling the technical assistance throughout the year would provide ongoing support for the teachers as opposed to a one-day training session.

In terms of providing appropriate accommodations, Nolet and Laughlin (2000) noted that a major challenge to special education teachers was deciding which accommodations would best allow the student to be engaged in the general curriculum.

The appropriate accommodation could enable the student to demonstrate academic achievement. Therefore, the technical assistance training provided by GLRS should include instructing teachers on various accommodations that will assist students with disabilities in accessing the general curriculum. GLRS staff should conduct school visits to assist teachers in implementing the strategies discussed during the training in the classroom.

Areas for Further Research

1. This study could be replicated using AEP special education teachers as participants in a national or Georgia statewide study. In studies conducted, on a national level, by Katsiyannis and Williams (1998), Lehr, Lanners, and Lange (2003) and Lehr, Moreau, Lange, and Lanners (2004) the participants were state department of education administrators. This study's participants were state department administrators and AEP principals.

A national or Georgia statewide study focusing on the perceptions of special education teachers assigned to AEPs in the area of needed procedures and services to facilitate a successful transition for students with disabilities to a traditional educational setting could add diverse lenses in viewing this issue. The lenses used by special education teachers in the areas of instructional strategies, instructional programs, appropriate accommodations, and the impact of federal laws could provide other dimensions to effectively address this issue.

2. Research could be conducted to determine a correlation between the use of specific testing accommodations (allowing extended time for completion, taking the test

in a small group setting, preferential seating) and SLD and EBD students enrolled in Georgia's AEPs receiving a proficient grade level score on the reading and mathematics portions of the Georgia Criterion Referenced- Competency Tests (CRCT). According to the GaDOE (2005), the CRCT is intended to assess how well students obtain the skills and knowledge described in the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) and the Quality Core Curriculum (QCC). The CRCT yields information on student academic achievement. The CRCT is administered to students in grades 1–8 and focuses on basic skills.

Georgia State Board Rule 160-4-2-.11 Promotion, Placement, and Retention states that students in the eighth grade cannot be promoted if they do not achieve on grade level in the areas of reading and mathematics as determined by this assessment. Jerald (2006) recognizes “being held back one or more times as an educational risk factor for dropping out of school. Therefore, this research could provide data to provide additional dropout prevention strategies.

The GaDOE Accommodations Manual: *A Guide to Selecting, Administering, and Evaluating the Use of Test Administration Accommodations for Students with Disabilities* (2007) specifies that “the accommodations provided to students in state assessments must be accommodations that are also provided during classroom instruction and assessment” (p. 7). Nolet and McLaughlin (2000) define an accommodation as a support that is provided to help students fully access the subject matter and instruction as well as demonstrate what the student knows. “Accommodations do not change the content of the instruction or performance expectations. That means that a special education student is expected to learn to a defined level of mastery all of the information that typical students

will learn” (p. 71). The two highest incidents disability categories in Georgia according to the Exceptional Students 2006–2007 State Annual Report are SLD and EBD. As a result, targeting this student population could be very beneficial in increasing the academic success of students with disabilities.

Overall, conducting research using special education teachers assigned to AEPs and students enrolled in AEPs as participants could benefit students in Georgia in a variety of ways. Conducting a study involving AEP special education teachers should assist in providing data on instructional strategies to enhance the academic achievement of students in AEPs. The research could also serve as a pilot project to be replicated throughout the state in a variety of educational settings providing new information that should enable academic success for Georgia’s special education students.

The data from a study examining the correlation between testing accommodation and receiving a proficient grade level score in reading and mathematics on the CRCT based on findings resulting from SLD and EBD students enrolled in AEPs as participants could be beneficial. The data could offer insight on how to teach students the basic skills needed to master mathematics and reading. As a result, the data could also improve the academic achievement level of a subgroup (students with disabilities) that historically has not met state standards as documented on the CRCT. An investigation of this nature could assist in improving the graduation rate for a large portion of the special education population.

Limitations to the Study

The sample size of 43 survey respondents is small. Statistically, this has an impact on effect size, which is the degree to which the phenomenon is present in the population. As a result, this limitation may hinder the generalizability of the research to other target populations.

The study focused on AEPs only in the state of Georgia. The National Center for Educational Statistics reported that in the 2000–2001 school year there were 10,900 alternative schools and programs for at-risk students in the United States and that these schools were established in all geographical areas of this nation. Again, the limited geographic concentration of the study limits the study's generalizability to other target populations.

The study interviewed eight Georgia CrossRoads AEP building administrators. There are approximately 100 CrossRoads AEPs in Georgia. Therefore, the study interviewed less than 10% of the Georgia CrossRoads AEP building administrators. Although other AEP administrators were invited to participate in the research, few were willing.

None of the persons interviewed would agree to a tape-recorded interview. Tape recording may have augmented the data collection process and ensured greater accuracy of the data. However, as Patton (2002) remarked “When it is not possible to use a tape recorder because of some sensitive situation, interviewee request, or tape recorder malfunction, notes must become much more thorough and comprehensive” (p. 381). All attempts were made to take careful, accurate notes.

Summary

Chapter 5 concludes this study that was designed to identify administrators and policy maker perceptions about the procedures and services needed to facilitate a successful transition for special education students with SLD and EBD enrolled in a Georgia CrossRoads AEP. Analyzing the data through the lenses of the study's research questions and through the four lenses of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory provided profound insight into procedures and services need to facilitate a successful transition for students with disabilities enrolled in Georgia's CrossRoads Alternative Education Programs. The significance of the study was that the research identified educational strategies and programs that may: (a) Improve the academic progress of students with disabilities in AEPs, (b) improve the discipline of students with disabilities in AEPs, (c) improve the instruction of students with disabilities in AEPs, (d) decrease the dropout rate of students with disabilities in AEPs, and (e) increase the number of students with disabilities that complete high school with a regular high school diploma who were enrolled in AEPs.

This study identified two strategies that may improve the academic progress of students with disabilities in AEPs. The use of peer-assisted learning and curriculum based measurements and using an instructional sequence strategy that begins with concrete levels and advances through semi-concrete and abstract levels may improve special education students' academic progress in mathematic skills. To gain insights on instructional strategies to improve academic progress in reading, the study identified the strategy of Computer- Assisted Collaborative Strategic Reading (CACSR).

The study identified positive behavior supports (PBS) interventions used school-wide, in non-classroom settings, and classroom settings as methods that may be effective in improving the discipline of students with disabilities. The study further identified strategies that may improve the instruction provided to students with disabilities in CrossRoads AEPs. One identified strategy was the use of specific accommodations such as alternative acquisition modes, content enhancements, and alternative response modes that enable students with disabilities to access the general curriculum and thus may improve instruction.

The study also discussed a model teacher observation and rating instrument that would ensure IEP implementation in the classroom. Implementing this instrument may enhance the instruction of students with disabilities in AEPs. Using the prescribed GaDOE method of understanding and evaluating, the state's curriculum standards may also improve the instruction for students in Georgia's CrossRoads AEP.

Five interventions that may decrease the dropout rate of students with disabilities were discussed in the study: personal/affective interventions, academic interventions, family outreach, interventions addressing school structure, and work-related interventions. Five dropout prevention programs were also recognized in the study: Check and Connect, Support Center for Adolescent Mothers, School Transitional Environment Project, Teen Outreach Program, and Personal Growth Class. The major Georgia intervention identified in the study to assist in increasing the graduation rate for students with disabilities was the effective use of Graduation Coaches.

Graduation Coaches are assigned to every middle and high school in Georgia. Graduation coaches work to improve graduation rates for all population subgroups with

the school by performing a variety of responsibilities. These responsibilities are gathering and analyzing data for individual students, identifying potential barriers to graduation, developing and implementing individual intervention strategies, and working with students to develop a graduation and achievement plan to include the best program to meet academic and post-secondary goals (GaDOE, 2006, p. 1).

Six recommendations were made identifying procedures and services needed to facilitate the successful transition for special education students enrolled in Georgia's CrossRoads AEPs. The recommendations were: (a) procedures for effective transition planning, (b) increased monitoring and compliance from state departments, (c) mentoring programs, (d) counseling, (e) offering technical assistance on teaching content standards, and (f) offering technical assistance on the use of appropriate accommodations. These recommendations address procedures and services that the GaDOE, GLRS, or the Georgia Association for Alternative Education (GAEE) should consider implementing. The implementation of the recommendations may not only assist in the transition of special education students enrolled in the state's AEPs to their traditional schools but also may improve the education performance and decrease the dropout rate for students with disabilities in other settings.

The importance of this research for AEP teachers and administrators is that educational programs and strategies that may improve academic progress, instruction, discipline, and the high school completion rate for students with disabilities in AEPs were identified and analyzed. The implementation of these educational programs and strategies could increase the number of students with disabilities who successfully transition to a

traditional school from a Georgia CrossRoads AEP and complete high school with a regular high school diploma.

In 1972, Edmonds made the following comment based on his research on effective schools.

It seems to me, therefore, that what is left of this discussion are three declarative statements: (a) We can, whenever and wherever we choose, successfully teach all children whose schooling is of interest to us, (b) We already know more than we need to do that, and (c) Whether or not we do it must finally depend on how we feel about the fact that we haven't so far. (As cited in Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 2001, p. 41)

In 2008, it appears this statement is still appropriate in terms of the effectiveness of Georgia's AEPs and procedures and services needed to facilitate the successful transition of students with disabilities to their traditional school. Instructional strategies and programs that could facilitate a successful transition from Georgia's AEPs to a traditional school have been presented in this study. Procedures have been identified that could be implemented to facilitate a successful return for students enrolled in AEPs in Georgia to their traditional school. Implications for future educational programs and practices were outlined in this study that could enhance the academic achievement levels for SLD and EBD students attending AEPs. Whether these identified policies, procedures, and services are implemented may depend on how we as educators feel about the fact that to date we have not.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
AUBURN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB) APPROVAL
LETTER AND INFORMATION SHEET

AES

Auburn University

Auburn University, Alabama 36849



Office of Human Subjects Research
307 Sanford Hall

Telephone: 334-844-5966
Fax: 334-844-4391
hsubjec@auburn.edu

April 14, 2006

MEMORANDUM TO: Penny Paulette Bragg
Educational Foundations Leadership and Technology

PROTOCOL TITLE: "Procedures and Services Needed to Facilitate a Successful Transition for Students with Disabilities Enrolled in Georgia's CrossRoads Alternative Education Programs"

IRB FILE: 06-054 EP 0603

APPROVAL DATE: March 27, 2006
EXPIRATION DATE: March 26, 2007

The above referenced protocol was approved by IRB Expedited procedure under Expedited Category #7 on March 27, 2006. You should report to the IRB any proposed changes in the protocol or procedures and any unanticipated problems involving risk to subjects or others. Please reference the above authorization number in any future correspondence regarding this project.

If you will be unable to file a Final Report on your project before March 26, 2007, you must submit a request for an extension of approval to the IRB no later than March 1, 2007. If your IRB authorization expires and/or you have not received written notice that a request for an extension has been approved prior to March 26, 2007, you must suspend the project immediately and contact the Office of Human Subjects Research for assistance.

A Final Report will be required to close your IRB project file. You are reminded that consent forms must be retained at least three years after completion of your study.

If you have any questions concerning this Board action, please contact the Office of Human Subjects Research at 844-5966.

Sincerely,

Peter W. Grandjean, Chair
Institutional Review Board for the Use of Human
Subjects in Research

cc: William Spencer
Cynthia Reed



AUBURN
UNIVERSITY

Office of Human Subjects Research
307 Sanford Hall
Auburn University, AL 36849

Telephone: 334-844-5966
Fax: 334-844-4391
hsubjec@auburn.edu

March 20, 2007

MEMORANDUM TO: P. Paulette Bragg
Education Found, Leadership & Tech

PROTOCOL TITLE: "Procedures and Services Needed to Facilitate a Successful Transition for
Students with Disabilities Enrolled in Georgia's CrossRoads Alternative
Education Programs

IRB AUTHORIZATION NO.: 06-054 EP 0603

ORIGINAL APPROVAL: March 27, 2006
RENEWAL DATE: March 19, 2007
EXPIRATION DATE: March 26, 2008

The renewal and modification for the above referenced protocol was approved by IRB Expedited procedure under 45 CFR 46.110 (#7) on March 19, 2007. You should report to the IRB any proposed changes in the protocol or procedures and any unanticipated problems involving risk to subjects or others. Please reference the above authorization number in any future correspondence regarding this project.

If you will be unable to file a Final Report on your project before March 26, 2008, you must submit a request for an extension of approval to the IRB no later than February 27, 2008. If your IRB authorization expires and/or you have not received written notice that a request for an extension has been approved prior to March 26, 2008 you must suspend the project immediately and contact the Office of Human Subjects Research for assistance.

A Final Report will be required to close your IRB project file. Please note that only the approved, stamped version of your informed consent (enclosed) should be provided to participants during the consent process. You are also reminded that signed consent forms must be retained at least three years after completion of your study.

If you have any questions concerning this Board action, please contact the Office of Human Subjects Research at 844-5966.

Sincerely,

Peter W. Grandjean, Chair
Institutional Review Board for the Use of Human
Subjects in Research

Enclosure

cc: Dr. William Spencer
Dr. Cynthia Reed

APPENDIX B

CROSSROADS ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAM ASSESSMENT OF
SERVICES FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES SURVEY

**CrossRoads Alternative Education Program Assessment of Services for Students
with Disabilities Survey**

(Circle one response for each statement)

Student Eligibility

1. There is a need for established system criteria for admitting special education students to the CrossRoads Alternative Education Program.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

2. There is a need for students with disabilities and their parents to attend a **required** school orientation program prior to admittance to the school/program.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

3. There is a need for procedures to transition the educational records of students with disabilities upon their entry to and exit from the CrossRoads Alternative Education Program.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

Human Resources

4. There is a need to have teachers certified in special education in order to work effectively with the special education student population in this program.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

5. There is a need for general education teachers to have professional training in how to work with students with learning disabilities, emotional behavioral disorders and attention deficit disorders in order to work effectively with the total student population.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

6. There is a need for teachers to be involved in the interviewing process for prospective teachers and principals.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

7. There is a need for parents to be involved in the interviewing process for prospective teachers and principals.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

Social Development

8. There is a need for special education students to be involved in the governance of the CrossRoads Alternative Education Program.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

Instruction

9. There is a need for students with disabilities in the CrossRoads Alternative Education Program to be provided tutoring in reading and mathematics.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

10. There is a need for students with disabilities in the CrossRoads Alternative Education Program to be involved in an established mentoring program.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

11. There is a need for the CrossRoads Alternative Education Program to have vocational training and internships for students with disabilities.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

12. There is a need for students with disabilities to use technology consistently in their learning settings.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

13. There is a need for the CrossRoads Alternative Education Program to conduct functional assessments (assessments that identify skill deficits) for students with disabilities.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

14. There is a need for the CrossRoads Alternative Education Program to allow students to engage in a functional curriculum (a curriculum that focuses on the general curriculum and the student's IEP goals).

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

15. There is a need for CrossRoads Alternative Education Programs to provide hands on project-based learning activities for students with disabilities in order for them to be actively engaged in the learning process.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

16. There is a need for academic awards recognition programs for students with disabilities enrolled in a CrossRoads Alternative Education Program.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

17. There is a need for adequate instructional materials and supplies to educate students with disabilities on grade level.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

Community Services

18. There is a need for the CrossRoads Alternative Education Program to assist students with disabilities with mental health services.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

19. There is a need for the CrossRoads Alternative Education Program to provide childcare for students with disabilities.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

20. There is a need for the CrossRoads Alternative Education Program to provide parenting classes for the parents of students with disabilities attending the CrossRoads Alternative Education Program.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

Transition Services

21. There is a need for celebration/rites of passage program when students exit the CrossRoads Alternative Education Program to return to their traditional school.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

22. There is a need for a multidisciplinary team to develop procedures and services to ensure continued support to students with disabilities when the students transition into and from the CrossRoads Alternative Education Program.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

Supports for Students with Disabilities

23. There is a need for the IEP team to meet periodically (more than once a year) to determine if services are being provided as documented on the student's IEP.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

24. There is a need for CrossRoads Alternative Education Programs to be used in an Interim Alternative Educational Setting. (Note: According to IDEA–2004 Guidance from the Georgia Department of Education, students may be removed to an interim alternative educational setting for up to 45 school days when behaviors occur that involve weapons, illegal drugs, or serious bodily injury.)

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

25. There is a need for procedures to prevent the over identification by race of students with disabilities in CrossRoads Alternative Education Programs.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

Drop Out Prevention Interventions

26. There is a need to monitor the occurrence of risk behaviors (absenteeism, suspensions, poor academic performance) as an intervention in a CrossRoads Alternative Education Program in order to decrease the drop out rate for students with disabilities.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

27. There is a need to ensure that students with disabilities have a sense of belonging to the CrossRoads Alternative Education Program as an intervention to decrease the drop out rate for students with disabilities.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

28. There is a need for cognitive behavioral interventions (problem solving, anger control, self control) to be implemented in the CrossRoads Alternative Education Program to decrease the drop out rate for students with disabilities.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

29. There is a need for individual counseling to be provided for students with disabilities in the CrossRoads Alternative Education Program as an intervention to decrease the drop out rate for students with disabilities.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

30. There is a need for family outreach strategies to be implemented in the CrossRoads Alternative Education Program as an intervention to decrease the drop out rate for students with disabilities.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

APPENDIX C
SURVEY COVER LETTER

Memorandum

April 24, 2006

To: Alternative Education Program Administrator
From: P. Paulette Bragg
Subject: Survey Cover Letter

I am employed with the Newton County School System at Sharp Learning Center which is an Alternative Education Program. The Spring Conference of the Georgia Association for Alternative Education was held in February in Augusta, Georgia. During the Business Meeting of this conference I was given the opportunity to request that administrators of alternative education programs participate in a statewide research study designed to identify the procedures and services needed to facilitate a successful transition for students with disabilities from an alternative education setting to a traditional setting.

The attached survey has been printed on the front side and the back side of the page to conserve paper and takes approximately 15-20 minutes to complete. I have enclosed a self-addressed stamped envelope for you to return the survey. This memorandum and the information sheet from Auburn University are yours to keep.

I would greatly appreciate you taking the time to complete the attached survey.

APPENDIX D
INFORMATION SHEET

INFORMATION SHEET

For Research Study Entitled Procedures and Services Needed to Facilitate a Successful Transition for Students with Disabilities Enrolled in Georgia's CrossRoads Alternative Education Programs

You are invited to participate in a research study to identify the procedures and services needed to facilitate a successful transition for students with disabilities enrolled in a Georgia CrossRoads Alternative Education Program. The Georgia Department of Education defines successful as the "successful return and continued success of students in the traditional school program." This study is being conducted by P. Paulette Bragg under the supervision of Dr. Cynthia Reed Director, Truman Pierce Institute and Associate Professor Educational Leadership. I hope to learn the relationships between students who successfully transition to a traditional high school and those who do not, to determine which services and procedures are needed to aid in successfully transitioning students to a traditional school and by interviewing state administrators identify federal laws, state rules, state regulations and state initiatives that may support or hinder the successful transition of students with disabilities. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a building level administrator in CrossRoads Alternative Education Program.

If you decide to participate, I will request that you complete The CrossRoads Alternative Education Program Assessment of Services for Student with Disabilities Survey. The survey should take 20 minutes to complete. You are to complete the survey once.

Reasonable benefits to participants can expect are draft copies of the results of the study, conference power point presentations of the study sent via email and information that may assist the participants in future educational program planning to improve the transition of students with disabilities from alternative settings to regular school settings. Reasonable benefits to the general population that may be generated from this study are effective strategies that may improve the academic progress, discipline, instruction, and increase the high school completion rate of students with disabilities. I cannot promise you that you will receive any or all of the benefits described.

Any information obtained in connection with this study will remain anonymous. Information collected through your participation may be used to fulfill an educational requirement for the doctoral program, published in a professional journal, and/or presented at a professional meeting. Participants must also be informed that they may withdraw from participation at any time, without penalty, however, after they have provided anonymous information they will be unable to withdraw their data after participation since there will be no way to identify individual information.

Your decision whether or not to participate will not jeopardize your future relations with Auburn University or Educational Foundations, Leadership and Technology Department.

If you have any questions I invite you to ask them now. If you have questions later, P. Paulette Bragg, 404-861-4619, pbraggsigma@charter.net or Dr. Cynthia Reed 334-844-4488, reedcyn@auburn.edu will be happy to answer them.

For more information regarding your rights as a research participant you may contact the Auburn University Office of Human Subjects Research or the Institutional Review Board by phone (334)-844-5966 or e-mail at hsubjec@auburn.edu or IRBChair@auburn.edu .

HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED, YOU MUST DECIDE WHETHER TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT. IF YOU DECIDE TO PARTICIPATE, THE DATA YOU PROVIDE WILL SERVE AS YOUR AGREEMENT TO DO SO. THIS LETTER IS YOURS TO KEEP.

Investigator's signature

Date

APPENDIX E
INFORMATION SHEET FOR GaDOE ADMINISTRATORS

INFORMATION SHEET

For Research Study Entitled Procedures and Services Needed to Facilitate a Successful Transition for Students with Disabilities Enrolled in Georgia's Alternative Education Programs

You are invited to participate in a research study to identify the procedures and services needed to facilitate a successful transition for students with disabilities enrolled in a Georgia CrossRoads Alternative Education Program. The Georgia Department of Education defines successful as the "successful return and continued success of students in the traditional school program." This study is being conducted by P. Paulette Bragg under the supervision of Dr. Cynthia Reed Director, Truman Pierce Institute and Associate Professor Educational Leadership. I hope to learn the relationships between students who successfully transition to a traditional high school and those who do not, to determine which services and procedures are needed to aid in successfully transitioning students to a traditional school and by interviewing state administrators identify federal laws, state rules, state regulations and state initiatives that may support or hinder the successful transition of students with disabilities. You were selected as a possible participant because of your knowledge and expertise in the areas of students with disabilities, the federal law No Child Left Behind and the CrossRoads Alternative Education Program in Georgia.

If you decide to participate, I request that you agree to be interviewed on the subject of procedures and services needed to facilitate a successful transition for students with disabilities enrolled in a Georgia CrossRoads Alternative Education Program. The interview should take 45 minutes to complete.

Reasonable benefits to participants can expect are draft copies of the results of the study, conference power point presentations of the study sent via email and information that may assist the participants in future educational program planning to improve the transition of students with disabilities from alternative settings to regular school settings. Reasonable benefits to the general population that may be generated from this study are effective strategies that may improve the academic progress, discipline, instruction, and increase the high school completion rate of students with disabilities. I cannot promise you that you will receive any or all of the benefits described.

Any information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential. Information collected through your participation may be used to fulfill an educational requirement for the doctoral program, published in a professional journal, and/or presented at a professional meeting. Participants must also be informed that they may withdraw from participation at any time, without penalty; however, after they have provided confidential information they will be unable to withdraw their data after participation.

Your decision whether or not to participate will not jeopardize your future relations with Auburn University or Educational Foundations, Leadership and Technology Department.

If you have any questions I invite you to ask them now. If you have questions later, P. Paulette Bragg, 404-861-4619, pbraggsigma@charter.net or Dr. Cynthia Reed 334-844-4488, reedcyn@auburn.edu will be happy to answer them.

For more information regarding your rights as a research participant you may contact the Auburn University Office of Human Subjects Research or the Institutional Review Board by phone (334)-844-5966 or e-mail at hsubjec@auburn.edu or IRBChair@auburn.edu .

HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED, YOU MUST DECIDE WHETHER TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT. IF YOU DECIDE TO PARTICIPATE, THE DATA YOU PROVIDE WILL SERVE AS YOUR AGREEMENT TO DO SO. THIS LETTER IS YOURS TO KEEP.

Investigator's signature

Date

APPENDIX F

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR GaDOE ADMINISTRATORS

The Interview Protocol for GaDOE Administrators

1. Are there statewide initiatives that will assist student with disabilities in achieving AYP?
2. Are there statewide initiatives that will address the issue of dropout prevention for students with disabilities?
3. Student with disabilities in CrossRoads Alternative Education Programs are in need of counseling services, and social worker services. Does the state provide training to address the specific needs of this student population to school guidance counselors and school social workers?
4. Does the state fund and/or offer technical assistance to schools to support initiatives involving family outreach services to students with disabilities in the CrossRoads Alternative Education Program?
5. Does the state fund and/or offer technical assistance to schools to provide and maintain after school programs to address literacy and mathematics instruction for student with disabilities in CrossRoads Alternative Education Programs?
6. Does the state fund and/or provide technical assistance to schools to provide and maintain mentoring programs for student with disabilities in CrossRoads Alternative Education Programs?
7. Does the state have initiatives that will assist in reducing the number of school discipline referrals for students with disabilities?
8. Does the state provide technical assistance to assist regular education teachers in implementing the classroom modifications written on the Individualized Education Program (IEP) in order for students with disabilities to be taught grade level curriculum with appropriate modifications?
9. What aspects of NCLB do you feel hinder students with disabilities successful transition to a traditional school? What aspects support their transition?
10. What aspects of IDEA-2004 hinder students with disabilities successful transition to a traditional school? What aspects support their transition?
11. Are there any state rules or regulations that hinder students with disabilities successful transition to a traditional school? Are there state rules that support students with disabilities successful transition to a traditional school?

12. Are there state rules that support students with disabilities successful transition to a traditional school?
13. There are a disproportionate number of African American males in Georgia's CrossRoads Alternative Education Program. How is this issue being addressed at the state level?
14. There is an achievement gap between African Americans and Caucasians. How is this being addressed at the state level?
15. There is an achievement gap between socioeconomic levels. How is this being addressed at the state level?

APPENDIX G

INFORMED CONSENT LETTER FOR INTERVIEWING PRINCIPALS

INFORMED CONSENT

For a Research Study Entitled Procedures and Services Needed to Facilitate a Successful Transition for Students with Disabilities Enrolled in Georgia's CrossRoads Alternative Education Programs

You are invited to participate in a research study to identify the procedures and services needed to facilitate a successful transition for students with disabilities enrolled in a Georgia CrossRoads Alternative Education Program. The Georgia Department of Education defines successful as the "successful return and continued success of students in the traditional school program." This study is being conducted by P. Paulette Bragg under the supervision of Dr. Cynthia Reed Director, Truman Pierce Institute and Associate Professor Educational Leadership. I hope to learn the relationships between students who successfully transition to a traditional high school and those who do not, to determine which services and procedures are needed to aid in successfully transitioning students to a traditional school and by interviewing state administrators identify federal laws, state rules, state regulations, and state initiatives that may support or hinder the successful transition of students with disabilities. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a building level administrator in a CrossRoads Alternative Education Program.

If you decide to participate, I will request that you agree to be interviewed on the subject of procedures and services needed to facilitate a successful transition for students with disabilities enrolled in a Georgia CrossRoads Alternative Education Program. The interview should take 45 minutes to complete. You will be interviewed once.

There are minimal risks associated with this study if you decide to participate. Interview data will be confidential. I will take precautions to make sure that the readers can not readily identify the persons interviewed by eliminating positional information and any other identifying information.

Reasonable benefits participants can expect are draft copies of the results of the study, conference power point presentations of the study sent via email and information that may assist participants in future educational program planning to improve the transition of students with disabilities from alternative settings to regular school settings. Reasonable benefits to the general population that may be generated from this study are effective strategies that may improve the academic progress, discipline, instruction, and high school completion rate of students with disabilities. I cannot promise you that you will receive any or all of the benefits described.

Any information obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential. The participants' data will be coded by giving each interviewed participant an assigned letter code. All references to their positions and any

other identifying information will be eliminated. Information collected through your participation may be used to fulfill an educational requirement for the doctoral program, published in a professional journal, and/or presented at a professional meeting. If so, none of your identifiable information will be included.

All confidential information will be protected. All identifying codes will be destroyed upon completion all educational requirements of the doctoral program. Participants may withdraw from participation at any time, without penalty, and may withdraw any data which has been collected about them, as long as that data is identifiable.

Your decision whether or not to participate will not jeopardize your future relations with Auburn University or Educational Foundations, Leadership and Technology Department and the Georgia Department of Education.

If you have any questions I invite you to ask them now. If you have questions later, P. Paulette Bragg, 404-861-4619, pbraggsigma@charter.net or Dr. Cynthia Reed, 334-844-4488, reedcyn@auburn.edu will be happy to answer them. You will be provided a copy of this form to keep.

For more information regarding your rights as a research participant you may contact the Auburn University Office of Human Subjects Research or the Institutional Review Board by phone (334)-844-5966 or e-mail at hsubjec@auburn.edu or IRBChair@auburn.edu.

HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED, YOU MUST DECIDE WHETHER OR NOT YOU WISH TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY. YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES YOUR WILLINGNESS TO PARTICIPATE.

Participant's signature Date

Investigator obtaining consent Date

Print Name

Print Name

APPENDIX H

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR GEORGIA CROSSROADS AEP'S BUILDING

ADMINISTRATORS

Interview Questions for AEP Principals

Section A – This section consists of the identified Research Questions

1. What policies and procedures (rules, laws, identified guidelines, standard operational methods) are in place that facilitate a successful transition?
2. What services (tutoring, mentoring, counseling, family outreach,) are in place that facilitates a successful transition?
3. What instructional strategies, especially in the areas of reading and mathematics, correlate with improved achievement?
4. What instructional programs, especially in the areas of reading and mathematics, are effective in improving academic performance?

Section B- These questions are being revisited to obtain follow up information originally gained from the “CrossRoads Alternative Education Program Assessment of Services for Students with Disabilities Survey”

5. There is a need for special education students to be involved in the governance of the CrossRoads Alternative Education Program.

Survey respondents with less than 10 years of experience in administration strongly agreed with this statement. However, survey respondents with more than 10 years of experience in administration disagreed.

Would you please comment on why you think this disparity occurred?

6. There is a need for students with disabilities in the CrossRoads Alternative Education Program to be involved in an established mentoring program.

Survey respondents with less than 10 years of administrative experience agreed with this statement. However, survey respondents with more than 10 years of administrative experience disagreed with this statement.

Would you please offer your opinion on why this disparity occurred?

7. There is a need for the CrossRoads Alternative Education Program to provide childcare for students with disabilities.

Survey respondents with less than 10 years of administrative experience and respondents with more than 10 years of administrative experience disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement.

Would you please comment on why you believe this statement received such strong opposition from CrossRoads' building administrators?

8. There is a need for celebration/rites of passage program when students exit the CrossRoads Alternative Education Program to return to their traditional school.

Survey respondents with less than 10 years of administrative experience and respondents with more than 10 years of administrative experience disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement.

Could you share your opinion as to why this statement did not garner more support among CrossRoads' building administrators?

9. There is a need for family outreach (family engagement, being involved in their child's education) strategies to be implemented in the CrossRoads Alternative Education Program as an intervention to decrease the drop out rate for students with disabilities.

Survey respondents from small programs (less than 50 students) agreed with this statement. However, survey respondents from large programs (more than 50 students) generally were undecided on this issue.

Would you please share your thoughts as to why large programs would be undecided on the issue of the need for family outreach?

10. There is a need to ensure that students with disabilities have a sense of belonging to the CrossRoads Alternative Education Program as an intervention to decrease the drop out rate for students with disabilities.

Rural programs were very supportive of this statement. However, urban/suburban programs were far less supported.

Would you please provide your opinion as to why this issue caused such disparity among urban/suburban and rural programs?

Section C – This section consists of additional questions to elaborate on the survey topics of instruction and drop out prevention.

11. What computer based instructional program does your school use for students with disabilities and is this program successful for students with disabilities?
12. What supports or services should be provided state wide to improve the graduation rate for students with disabilities?
13. Does your school have a school wide discipline program currently being implemented? If so, please describe the program, how it was implemented and how you would evaluate the program.
14. Does your program integrate positive behavioral supports in managing challenging behaviors of individual students or the entire school? If so what positive behavioral support are used for individual students or the entire school? How would you evaluate the effectiveness of using positive behavioral supports?
15. If your school does not have a school wide discipline program are positive behavioral supports used in individual classrooms? What are the positive behavioral supports used and how would you evaluate their effectiveness.

APPENDIX I
QUALITATIVE DATA FROM EIGHT GEORGIA CROSSROADS BUILDING
LEVEL ADMINISTRATORS

Appendix I — Qualitative Data from Eight Georgia’s CrossRoads Building Level Administrators

Years as AEP Principal	Gender	Race	Years as Adm.	What is Effective	What is not Effective	Frustrations	Projections	Stated Needs
A-4	Female	African American	4	<p>Services – Mentoring, counseling, mental health , DJJ, DEFACS, KidsNet</p> <p>Instructional Strategies Smaller class sizes SPED resource classes;</p> <p>Instructional Programs SPED- NI Computer Program-RDG, Math, Writing</p>	<p>Procedures- “Use teachers as individual counselors- need specific program or class”</p>	<p>“Mentoring program is not structured”</p> <p>Statewide Services to Improve Graduation Rate “Should provide classes geared to passing the high school graduation test. The state rule on Variance have to take (re-take) so many times (4) without passing. Why have to keep retaking? The state should reduce the number of times have to retake the test. Don’t take away the reading accommodation. Look at the content of the science test.”</p> <p>NI “Teachers need to monitor student’s work on NI”</p>	<p>“This program should have school wide discipline program would increase expectation level.”</p>	<p>“Should provide classes geared to passing the high school graduation test. The state rule on Variance have to take (re-take) so many times (4) without passing. Why have to keep retaking? The state should reduce the number of times have to retake the test. Don’t take away the reading accommodation. Look at the content of the science test.”</p>

Appendix I — Analysis of Qualitative Data from Eight Georgia’s CrossRoads Building Level Administrators

Years as AEP Principal	Gender	Race	Years as Adm.	What is Effective	What is not Effective	Frustrations	Projections	Stated Needs
B – 1	Female	African American	16	<p>Procedure Student Contract; Level 2 system</p> <p>Services- Tutoring in Reading and Math for Test Prep and ; Remediation; Mentoring</p> <p>Instructional Strategies; GPS Roll Out From RESA</p> <p>Instructional Program SI-computer based</p> <p>Discipline- PBS School wide discipline plan (Level 2 system)</p>	<p>Instructional Program, “NN-for SWD must read and take notes, difficult for SWD.”</p>	<p>“Family Night have dinner share with them where the school is going(direction school is headed) parents are so young that the information goes over their heads like water on a duck’s back.”</p>	<p>GPS (GA-Curriculum) “Have strong academic focus. When they go back do not want to see gaps. Want them to be able to pick up and go.”</p>	<p>Graduation rate “State should look at what systems are doing; have a focus group and come up with a good plan.”</p>

Appendix I — Analysis of Qualitative Data from Eight Georgia’s CrossRoads Building Level Administrators

Years as AEP Principal	Gender	Race	Years as Adm.	What is Effective	What is not Effective	Frustrations	Projections	Stated Needs
C – 1	Female	African American	1	<p>Procedures Monitor IEPs, collaborative meetings with base school counselors</p> <p>Services Collaboration with Mentoring Program; Court System;</p> <p>Instructional Strategies; Technology, Graphic Organizers, manipulatives, Writing Center- get newspaper summarize articles create newspapers</p>	None Stated	<p>“Don’t have computer based instructional program.”</p> <p>“Don’t have anything to supplement CRCT.”</p> <p>“Graduation coaches spend little time advising students; therefore students fall in the cracks because not getting services to plan for their success.”</p>	None Stated	<p>“Need materials to supplement CRCT Access to more instructional resources; The graduation coaches should be required to spend more time advising students; and plan for students success; administrators (GADOE) should be required to teach so many hours (10) understand what really need.”</p>

Appendix I — Analysis of Qualitative Data from Eight Georgia’s CrossRoads Building Level Administrators

Years as AEP Principal	Gender	Race	Years as Adm.	What is Effective	What is not Effective	Frustrations	Projections	Stated Needs
D- 11	Female	African American	11	<p>Procedures Review Board-Superintendent or Assistant Superintendent, Administrator from base school interview student, check attendance, behavior, grades all must be satisfactory to return to base school.</p> <p>Services Mentoring program a teacher from the base school is assigned as mentor to make sure student on right track.</p> <p>Instructional Strategies Differentiated Instruction</p>	None Stated	None Stated	None Stated	None Stated

Appendix I — Analysis of Qualitative Data from Eight Georgia’s CrossRoads Building Level Administrators

Years as AEP Principal	Gender	Race	Years as Adm.	What is Effective	What is not Effective	Frustrations	Projections	Stated Needs
D- 11	Female	African American	11	Instructional Strategies Differentiated Instruction Instructional Programs High School – RD Program, Credit Recovery Lab- PL School wide Discipline Plan Dress Code, Intervention work detail at bus shop 3 strikes then suspended	“PBS system used Kids earn pts (40 pts per week at the end of month have Friday Fling) for incentives such as movies, pizza, ice cream, board game Most would do fine w/o the incentive program; Some feel will not earn so do not try.”	None Stated	“Implementing NCLB is the best thing to happen to SWD- getting attention need. Since focus is on students passing tests getting attention that they need.”	None Stated

Appendix I — Analysis of Qualitative Data from Eight Georgia’s CrossRoads Building Level Administrators

Years as AEP Principal	Gender	Race	Years as Adm.	What is Effective	What is not Effective	Frustrations	Projections	Stated Needs
E – Not Reported	Female	Caucasian	Not Reported	Procedures GADOE Board Policy Placement and (SWD)Transition Services After manifestation has been determined IEP team determines placement; meeting with student, parent Asst. Superintendent, student, parent meet with AEP Prin. Conf. each month w/ graduation coach Student, parent, prin. Grad. Coach meets to ease transition back to base school. Services Tutoring, mentoring, counseling, service	None Stated	None Stated	“In our system alternative education is punitive.”	None Stated

Appendix I — Analysis of Qualitative Data from Eight Georgia’s CrossRoads Building Level Administrators

Years as AEP Principal	Gender	Race	Years as Adm.	What is Effective	What is not Effective	Frustrations	Projections	Stated Needs
E –Not Reported	Female	Caucasian	Not Reported	<p>Services Tutoring, mentoring, counseling, service learning, small group counseling, team building and goal setting activities, motivational speakers, community involvement programs</p> <p>Instructional Strategies Following identified goals in IEP, service learning, extra time, individual help, supplemental materials</p> <p>Instructional Program PL</p> <p>Discipline Program Point reward system school wide.</p>	None Stated	None Stated	None Stated	<p>Graduation Rate</p> <p>“Training for skills whether it be job skills, life skills, study/academic skills. All students need survival Skills in making productive decisions.’</p>

Appendix I — Analysis of Qualitative Data from Eight Georgia’s CrossRoads Building Level Administrators

Years as AEP Principal	Gender	Race	Years as Adm.	What is Effective	What is not Effective	Frustrations	Projections	Stated Needs
F- 5.5	Male	African American	Not Reported	<p>Procedure Rules- come to school, 70 average, decreased discipline</p> <p>Service Tutoring, mentoring, mental health counselor</p> <p>Instructional Strategies LFS Techniques, Start with Basic skills, reteach what need to know, teach on student’s level till learn it.</p> <p>Instructional Programs NC School wide Discipline Immediate consequence ISS; then Project Decision (Boot Camp)</p>	None Stated	None Stated	<p>“Some students ask to stay. Teachers need to be consistent in their discipline. Has gotten better over time must train more training and retraining of teachers on PBS Be positive as possible; “Forget about your past.”</p>	<p>Graduation rate</p> <p>“More family outreach, more counselors, more mental health counselors, more training with staff on how to deal with this population.”</p>

Appendix I — Analysis of Qualitative Data from Eight Georgia’s CrossRoads Building Level Administrators

Years as AEP Principal	Gender	Race	Years as Adm.	What is Effective	What is not Effective	Frustrations	Projections	Stated Needs
F- 5.5	Male	African American	Not Reported	<p>Procedure Rules- come to school, 70 average, decreased discipline</p> <p>Service Tutoring, mentoring, mental health counselor</p> <p>Instructional Strategies LFS Techniques, Start with Basic skills, reteach what need to know, teach on student’s level till learn it.</p> <p>Instructional Programs NC School wide Discipline Immediate consequence ISS; then Project Decision (Boot Camp)</p>	None Stated	None Stated	None Stated	“More family outreach, more counselors, more mental health counselors, more training with staff on how to deal with this population.”

Appendix I — Analysis of Qualitative Data from Eight Georgia’s CrossRoads Building Level Administrators

Years as AEP Principal	Gender	Race	Years as Adm.	What is Effective	What is not Effective	Frustrations	Projections	Stated Needs
G - 1	Female	African American	1	Services- counseling outside of school; mental health counselor, DEFACS, Court System	None Stated	Procedures- “Do not have established rules for transition in place. NC—do not have enough access. Teachers not being pushed to use—not holding selves accountable. Need computer lab should close day care room and create second computer lab Interviewers Note: Middle School does not have access. Do not have computers in most rooms. The school lab is used for NN for High School. Have a cart with 18 laptops cannot uses (needs to be reimaged).”	“NC can keep students engaged”	“Procedure for Transition Teachers need opportunity to talk about things for transition and strategies and techniques for children having difficulty in functioning in the mainstream.” “Separate counselor for SW D. Discuss jobs and roles in society. Be on track to be a productive citizen, an aid to society work and have a family.”

Appendix I — Analysis of Qualitative Data from Eight Georgia’s CrossRoads Building Level Administrators

Years as AEP Principal	Gender	Race	Years as Adm.	What is Effective	What is not Effective	Frustrations	Projections	Stated Needs
H - 1 year	Male	African American	2	Services Graduation Coaches Counselors Social Worker BIP Developed Quickly Do behavior management plan goals and consequences	“When go back to home school–6 weeks probation principals checks on them checks grades, behavior- could come back”	“No mentoring component–want to put one in. Don’t have a lot of services- have counseling NN –not very through in English-basically grammar not enough literature”	“When go back to home school–6 weeks probation principals checks on them checks grades, behavior- could come back.”	“Mentoring component”

APPENDIX J

DISCONNECT BETWEEN MANDATES AND PRACTICE

**Appendix J — Disconnect Between Mandates and Practice
(Procedures)**

Mandate	Program Guidelines	Administrators’ Comments on Implementations	Stated Needs
<p>NCLB - Purpose- “To ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging State academic achievement standards and State academic assessments.”</p>	<p>Graduation Rate - NCLB- “Defined as the percentage of students who graduate from secondary school with a regular diploma in the standard number of years.”</p>	<p>NCLB – Hinder Transition “Can’t count special education as diploma - no incentive for administrators to transition them back - can’t help graduation rate; can have negative impact on graduation rate”</p>	<p>“NCLB - No flexibility to consider individual student – students don’t have advocate to return.”</p>
<p>NCLB- Purpose - To ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging State academic achievement standards and State academic assessments.</p>	<p>Choice Provisions – Unsafe Schools Choice Options Allows students to transfer when: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A school is determined to be persistently dangerous and /or 2. A student becomes the victim of a violent crime at a school. 3. The LEA (Local Education Agency – Local School System) must allow the student to transfer to another public school. <p>The State should develop the criteria used to identify unsafe schools</p> </p>	<p>NCLB Unsafe Schools “AEP students seen as discipline problems – count against school”</p>	<p>None Stated</p>

**Appendix J — Disconnect Between Mandates and Practice
(Procedures)**

Mandate	Program Guidelines	Administrators’ Comments on Implementations	Stated Needs
<p>NCLB – Purpose - To ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging State academic achievement standards and State academic assessments.</p>	<p>Each State plan shall demonstrate that the State, in consultation with local education agencies, has implemented a set of high-quality yearly student academic assessments that include, at a minimum, academic assessments in mathematics, reading or language arts and science, that will be used as the primary means of determining the yearly performance of the State and of each local education agency and school in the state.</p> <p>Each State plan shall demonstrate, based on academic assessments, what constitutes adequate yearly progress (AYP) of the State, and of all public elementary schools, secondary schools, and local education agencies in the State.</p>	<p>NCLB – Hinder Transition</p> <p>“Teaching standards on grade level not being exposed to previous materials or not on grade level academically; test scores go down – SWD blame for not making AYP.”</p> <p>“They (SWD) are considered a hindrance for the traditional school- want to make AYP.”</p>	<p>None Stated</p>

**Appendix J — Disconnect Between Mandates and Practice
(Procedures)**

Mandate	Program Guidelines	Administrators’ Comments on Implementations	Stated Needs
<p>NCLB – Purpose - To ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging State academic achievement standards and State academic assessments. Closing the achievement gap between high and low performing children, especially the achievement gaps between minority and nonminority students, and between disadvantaged children and their more advantaged peers.</p>	<p>Georgia - Policy Brief – Achievement Gap Reading and Mathematics in Grades Four, Six and Eight</p> <p>The greatest progress in reducing the achievement gap between schools serving predominately black and those serving predominately-white students occurred in fourth grade Reading. The overall progress in decreasing the achievement gap in Mathematics has not been as notable as the progress in Reading. However, the greatest progress in reducing the achievement gap in Mathematics also occurred in grade four.</p>	<p>Achievement gap between African American and Caucasians (How is the state addressing this issue?)</p> <p>“It Isn’t”</p>	<p>None Stated</p>

**Appendix J — Disconnect Between Mandates and Practice
(Procedures)**

Mandate	Program Guidelines	Administrators’ Comments on Implementations	Stated Needs
<p>IDEA- 2004 The State has in effect policies and procedures designed to prevent the inappropriate over identification or disproportionate representation by race and ethnicity of children as children with disabilities, including children with disabilities with a particular impairment.</p> <p>Require any local educational agency to reserve the maximum amount of funds to provide comprehensive coordinated early intervening services to serve children in the local education agency particularly that were significantly over identified.</p> <p>A local education agency may not use more than 15 percent of the amount such agency receives for any fiscal year.</p>	<p>State Guidelines System data reflects Significant Disproportionality: If inappropriate policies, procedures, or practices were identified, submit revised Georgia Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process Plan detailing activities for Early Intervening Services designed to address areas of disproportionality to the GADOE (Division for Exceptional Students). Include a budget for 15% of federal VIB funds to be expended. Division for Exceptional Students will review and approve the plan and budget or request revisions, if needed.</p>	<p>Initiative Achievement gap between African American and Caucasians (How is the state addressing this issue?)</p> <p>“For SWD – system identified as disproportionate goes to meeting, do a plan, use 15% of federal funds to address the issue.”</p>	<p>None Stated</p>

**Appendix J — Disconnect Between Mandates and Practice
(Procedures)**

Mandate	Program Guidelines	Administrators’ Comments on Implementations	Stated Needs
<p>NCLB – Scientifically (Reading) Based Research Employs systematic, empirical methods that draw on observation or experiment; involves rigorous data analysis that are adequate to test the stated hypotheses and justify the general conclusions drawn; relies on measurements or observational methods that provide valid data across evaluators and observers and across multiple measurements and observations; and has been accepted by a peer-reviewed journal or comparably rigorous, objective and scientific review.</p> <p>IDEA–2004-Regulations - Student with SLD) Must permit the use of a process based on scientific, research–based intervention</p>	<p>GADOE-Student Achievement Pyramid of Interventions</p> <p>The Student Achievement Pyramid of Interventions represents the process of continually implementing “progress monitoring” and then providing layers of more and more intensive interventions so that students can be successful and progress in their learning. This approach focus on determining when students are struggling and providing strategic interventions to help them shore up their areas of need; it also documents students’ strengths and provides additional challenges in a variety of ways.</p> <p>There are four tiers to the Student Achievement Pyramid of Interventions:</p> <p>Tier 1- Standards Based Classroom Learning</p> <p>Tier 2- Needs Based Instruction/Learning: Standards Intervention Protocols</p> <p>Tier 3- Student Support Team Driven Instruction/Learning</p> <p>Tier 4- Specially Designed Instruction/Learning</p>	<p>Initiative Achievement gap between African American and Caucasians (How is the state addressing this issue?)</p> <p>“No one accountable at district level – In theory RTI (Response to Interventions GADOE - Pyramids of Interventions) may address this issue.”</p>	<p>None Stated</p>

**Appendix J — Disconnect Between Mandates and Practice
(Procedures)**

Mandate	Program Guidelines	Administrators' Comments on Implementations	Stated Needs
<p>State Rule- Student Support Services <u>School Counseling and Guidance Services</u> - guidance program planning, implementation and evaluation; individual and group counseling; classroom and small group guidance; career and educational development; parent and teacher consultation; and referral <u>School Social Work/Visiting Teacher Services</u>- technical assistance on school climate issues; assessment and intervention, including written social histories; individual, group, and family counseling; and network of appropriate home, school, and community services to address identified student problems.</p>	<p>School Counselor duties</p> <p>Program design, planning, and leadership</p> <p>Counseling Guidance and Collaboration (with school staff)</p> <p>Consultation and Coordination (system/staff, parents and community)</p> <p>School Social Worker duties</p> <p>Use prevention strategies focusing on the total wellness of the student body</p> <p>Intervention strategies targeting those students at risk</p> <p>Encourage all students to learn and to develop social competence.</p>	<p>Does the state provide training for guidance counselors and school social workers?</p> <p>“Inadequate”</p> <p>“more counselors, more mental health counselors, more training with staff on how to deal with this population”</p>	<p>“Counselor or social worker funded for CrossRoads Programs”</p> <p>“More counselors trained to work with SWD in AEP”</p>

**Appendix J — Disconnect Between Mandates and Practice
(Procedures)**

Mandate	Program Guidelines	Administrators' Comments on Implementations	Stated Needs
<p>State Grant 21st Century Community Learning Centers (CCLC) Purpose – provide federal funds to establish or expand community learning centers that operate during out-of- school hours and that have three specific purposes; (program guidelines)</p>	<p>To provide opportunities for academic enrichment and tutorial services To offer students a broad array of additional services, programs, and activities to reinforce and complement the regular academic program; and To offer families of 21st CCLC students opportunities for literacy and related educational development</p>	<p>Does the state provide technical assistance to address literacy and math instruction? “State Funded 21st Century Grant only one AEP applied”</p>	<p>“Only one AEP applied Difficult to write Grant; need assistance in grant writing, Local School System has to “buy in”, takes time to write”</p>

**Appendix J — Disconnect Between Mandates and Practice
(Procedures)**

Mandate	Program Guidelines	Administrators' Comments on Implementations	Stated Needs
<p>Mentoring Not mandated in State Rule –Alternative Education Programs However, GADOE Self- Assessment Identifies Standard –VI- “An effective AEP has a comprehensive system of student assistance that provides guidance and related services to support optimal student development.” Indicator- 6.3 “The program provides research based dropout prevention strategies and programs (e.g. like skills and mentors).” Mandated in HB 1027 The appropriation for each local Board of Education ensures that every high school in its jurisdiction has the full-time services of a high school Graduation Specialist who is engaged in a process of providing assistance to all high school students, individually and in groups, regarding high school graduation.</p>	<p>To complete the Alternative Education Program Assessments, use the rating scale rubric. (Exemplary - 3; Proficient – 2 Progressing- 1; Not Meeting Expectations- 0) Rate each indicator on the extent to which the traditional school contributes to the AEPs success in meeting standard.</p> <p>Graduation Specialist GADOE Guidance as one of their responsibilities is to “Develop a local mentoring program with business partners and connect individual students with mentors.”</p>	<p>Mentoring-Procedures</p> <p>“Depends on the mentoring program; the more detailed the better- should be well organized, everyone involved, very structured.”</p> <p>“High-maintenance kids don’t like to give them to mentors because mentor needs success -so do not get disgusted.”</p> <p>“Most need positive adult role models in their lives.”</p> <p>“Can get one extra positive adult in life is a good thing.”</p> <p>“Older administrators don’t feel mentoring program would help - administrators may have thought no hope for them I believe every child needs a mentor especially SWD.”</p> <p>“Do need mentoring - to correct what brought them there; different voice than administration or teacher-saying same thing- different mouth.”</p> <p>“Why veterans disagree - May feel been given opportunities throughout life – used up opportunities. Everyone has tried to do for then- Lost Cause- Not going to be anything any way. Wrong attitude to have- mentors give all attention.”</p>	<p>“Need State Funded Mentoring Program”</p>

**Appendix J — Disconnect Between Mandates and Practice
(Procedures)**

Mandate	Program Guidelines	Administrators' Comments on Implementations	Stated Needs
<p>Mandated in State Rule - Alternative Education Program</p> <p>“Provides instruction that will enable students to return to a general or career education program as quickly as possible.”</p>	<p>AEP must provide instruction that will enable students to return to a general or career education program as quickly as possible.</p>	<p>State Rules that hinder transition</p> <p>“We should provide them a choice to stay - if comfortable let them stay so don't have to do something stupid to stay”</p>	<p>“We should provide them a choice to stay”</p>
<p>State Rule- Waivers and Variances of High School Graduation Assessments Variance – a decision to grant a modification to all or part of the literal requirements of a rule in lieu of the standard application of the rule.</p>	<p>Upon receipt of a request for a variance, the local school superintendent shall certify that a student has met the following minimum eligibility criteria: The student has attempted the relevant section(s) of the GHSGT or the GHSWT four or more times without passing and The student has successfully completed a structured remedial class (es) after each attempt to pass the relevant section(s) of the GHSGT or the GHSWT.</p>	<p>State Rules that hinder transition</p> <p>“The state rule on Variance have to take (re-take) so many times (4) without passing. Why have to keep retaking? The state should reduce the number of times have to retake the test. Do not take away the reading accommodation. Look at the content of the science test.”</p>	<p>“Should provide classes geared to passing the high school graduation test.”</p>

**Appendix J — Disconnect Between Mandates and Practice
(Procedures)**

Mandate	Program Guidelines	Administrators’ Comments on Implementations	Stated Needs
<p>State Rule Student Support Services Each local school system shall develop a Student Services Plan that prescribes and identifies programs and services that incorporate school climate improvement and management processes.</p> <p>School Climate Management-systematic plan for addressing the factors that affect school climate including... efforts to enlist parent and community supports.</p>	<p>Parental Involvement Process</p> <p>This parent component may be coordinated with other programs as part of the system’s/school’s overall plan for involving parents. Title 1, Middle School After-School, and Special Education are just a few of the educational programs that require some form of parent involvement.</p> <p>Strategies that encourage two-way communication through personal contacts are extremely valuable. It is important to provide ongoing opportunities for schools to hear parents concerns and comments as well as providing them information.</p>	<p>Family Outreach</p> <p>“More family outreach. Parents are so young that the information goes over their heads like water on a duck’s back.”</p>	<p>None Stated</p>

**Appendix J — Disconnect Between Mandates and Practice
(Procedures)**

Mandate	Program Guidelines	Administrators' Comments on Implementations	Stated Needs
<p>State Rule Student Support Services Each local school system shall develop a Student Services Plan that prescribes and identifies programs and services that incorporate school climate improvement and management processes.</p> <p>School Climate Management - systematic plan for addressing the factors that affect school climate including... a code of expected behavior, a code of disciplinary responses</p>	<p>Behavior Support Process</p> <p>A behavior support process is a mechanism for identifying and addresses those behaviors and environmental influences that promote the positive emotional, mental, social, and physical health needs of students.</p> <p>The delivery model of the Behavior Support Process should be student centered, family focused, community based prevention oriented and goals oriented.</p>	<p>School wide Discipline</p> <p>“Program - our program does not have one; believe would increase expectation (behavior) level.”</p> <p>“PBS system used Kids earn pts (40 pts per week at the end of month have Friday Fling) for incentives such as movies, pizza, ice cream, board game Most would do fine w/o the incentive program; Some feel will not earn so do not try.”</p>	<p>“School Wide Discipline Program”</p>

**Appendix J — Disconnect Between Mandates and Practice
(Procedures)**

Mandate	Program Guidelines	Administrators' Comments on Implementations	Stated Needs
<p>State Rule – Testing Programs - Student Assessment Local systems shall access all (grades 1-8) students with.... Criterion –Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) in reading, English/language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies annually according to a schedule established by the State Board of Education.</p> <p>Mandated in HB 1027 The appropriation is for each local board of education to ensure that every high school in its jurisdiction has the full-time services of a high school Graduation Specialist who is engaged in a process of providing assistance to all high school students, individually and in groups, regarding high school graduation.</p>	<p>The CRCT are designed to measure how well students acquire the skills and knowledge described in the state adopted curriculum.</p> <p>Direct Support to Students</p> <p>Develop and implement individual intervention strategies to increase the likelihood that these students will stay in school and graduate.</p> <p>Work with students to develop a graduation and achievement plan</p> <p>Identify and link area social agencies with youth at risk of not graduating.</p>	<p>What instructional programs improve academic performance? “Don’t have anything to supplement CRCT.”</p> <p>What supports and services should be provided statewide to improve graduation rates for SWD? “Graduation coaches spend little time advising students; therefore students fall in the cracks because not getting services to plan for their success.”</p>	<p>“Need materials to supplement CRCT access to more instructional resources.”</p> <p>“The graduation coaches should be required to spend more time advising students; and plan for students success”</p>

APPENDIX K
RESPONSES TO SECTION B OF THE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL “INTERVIEW
QUESTIONS FOR AEP PRINCIPALS”

Appendix K — Responses to Section B of the Interview Protocol “Interview Questions for AEP Principals” (Services)

Service	Stated Intent or Purpose of Service	Principals’ Perceptions	Mandated/Does it Accomplish Purpose	Reasons Why/Why Not
governance	Personal/Social development-decision making skills, working cooperatively	Principal A- “Younger administrators are aware of the new educational trends-students being involved. Older administrators are out of touch with the new trends; may have tried it all did not work see no point; “feel their children are too far gone” Personally – shared governance if administered the buy in may help create change, and change behavior. It depends on student population-the harden criminals that have been through the system (DJJ) may not work”	Not mandated by state rule. However, GADOE Guidelines States Mission – Behaviorally, the mission of the alternative education programs is to enable students to develop high character and make appropriate choices for their success in school and in the larger community GADOE guidelines recommend “each local school systems utilized a local community collaborative group to assist in planning and supporting their system level alternative education program. The GADOE states that the collaborative should include current or former students. In the GADOE Alternative Education Program Self-Assessment Instrument (the GADOE does not require LSS to complete this assessment) Identifies Standard III- Governance and Leadership - An effective alternative education program operates under a governing board and administrative leadership	Not Accomplished The principal felt that most veteran administrators see no point in implementing. Even though this principal felt that shared governance could create change she felt that students from Dept. of Juvenile Justice would not benefit.

Service	Stated Intent or Purpose of Service	Principals' Perceptions	Mandated/Does it Accomplish Purpose	Reasons Why/Why Not
Mentoring	Student Support Dropout Prevention	Principal A "Depends on the mentoring program; the more detailed the better-should be well organized, everyone involved, very structured"	<p>that fulfill their roles in a manner that supports the mission, standards, and plan for program improvement</p> <p>Indicator 3.8 The program administrator facilitates the cooperation and collaboration of appropriate stakeholders (students) and empowers them to accomplish goals</p> <p>Does not accomplish purpose</p> <p>Not mandated in State Rule –Alternative Education Programs</p> <p>However, GADOE Self-Assessment Identifies Standard –VI An effective AEP has a comprehensive system of student assistance that provides guidance and related services to support optimal student development. Indicator- 6.3 The program provides research based dropout prevention strategies and programs (e.g. like skills and mentors).</p> <p>Mandated in HB 1027 Graduation Specialist GADOE Develop a local mentoring program with business partners and connect individual students with mentors.</p>	<p>Accomplish purpose yes and no Yes- if organized, structured and school wide involvement No – if mentoring program is not organized, structured, and does not have school wide involvement.</p>

Service	Stated Intent or Purpose of Service	Principals' Perceptions	Mandated/Does it Accomplish Purpose	Reasons Why/Why Not
			Accomplish purpose – Yes/No	
Childcare	Social Services/ Improve Attendance	<p>“Veteran administrators know that providing child-care will not increase attendance. If students do not like adult [supervising the child-care program then they will] not send child. Childcare is not a big motivator for students to attend. Does not help mothers—the mothers are still discipline problems—get suspended – You can only bring one child even though the student may have more than one child (system rule)”</p>	<p>Not mandated in State Rule-Alternative Education Programs</p> <p>However, GADOE Self-Assessment Standard VIII- An effective alternative education program conducts routine and systematic program evaluation and uses the data for program improvements.</p> <p>Indicator – 8.2 Program evaluations include a review of student attendance.</p> <p>Mandated in State rule – 160-4-8.01 Student Support Services (d) –School Climate Management Systematic plan for addressing the factors that affect school climate including methods to reduce absences and increase attendance</p> <p>Mandated in HB 1027 Graduation Specialist Responsibility GADOE Guidance Conduct an analysis that focuses on data for individual students and subgroups such as attendance.</p> <p>Accomplish purpose – No</p>	<p>Accomplish purpose- no</p> <p>Childcare not perceived as a motivator because by some school systems’ procedures a student can only bring one child to attend childcare. Furthermore, the opinion that the student (mother) has of the child-care program supervisor may influence if the student’s child attends the child-care program.</p>

Service	Stated Intent or Purpose of Service	Principals' Perceptions	Mandated/Does it Accomplish Purpose	Reasons Why/Why Not
Celebration/ Rites of Passage	Transition	<p>“Do not think needs to be a program- the purpose of them being here is for them to go back What happens is that many come back to the AEP. Really needs to be intrinsic reward- student must realize something must do for me”</p>	<p>Mandated in State Rule- Alternative Education Program (g) Each local school system shall provide an alternative education program to serve students in grades 6-12 that: (4) Provides instruction that will enable students to return to a general or career education program as quickly as possible.</p> <p>Program Guidelines VIII -Program Elements Local Alternative Education Program should: Develop a comprehensive transition plan for each student returning to the regular school program. This plan should detail support services to be provided upon the student’s return to the home school.</p> <p>GADOE Self-Assessment Identifies Standard –VII Transition An effective alternative program provides appropriate services in a fair and equitable manner to assist students during transition, from pre-entry through post-exit.</p> <p>Indicator 7.3 Students in alternative education programs are provided with various opportunities to develop and maintain supportive</p>	<p>Accomplish purpose- No</p> <p>The perception is that the rites of passage ceremonies are not being implemented statewide. Administrator feels does not need to be a celebration because the purpose of the program is for the students to return to their school.</p> <p>In addition, many students return to the AEP.</p>

Service	Stated Intent or Purpose of Service	Principals' Perceptions	Mandated/Does it Accomplish Purpose	Reasons Why/Why Not
Family Outreach	Drop Out Prevention	<p>“Sheer number of students- and getting parents to come in is a problem. Several students may not be with parents-Care givers need time to plan time to attend. When parents do become involved, family outreach must be effective – be organized. Large schools hard to get</p>	<p>links to the traditional school program.</p> <p>Indicator 7.5- Prior to a student’s exit from a long- term alternative education program, transition services are planned by traditional education and alternative education staff, student and parent(s), to ensure a successful return to the traditional home school.</p> <p>Indicator 7.6 Transition services are routinely evaluated to determine their effectiveness in promoting the successful return and continued success of students in the traditional school program.</p> <p>Accomplish- No</p> <p>GADOE AEP Self Assessment Standard VI- An effective alternative education program has a comprehensive system of student assistance that provides guidance and related services to support optimal student development.</p> <p>Indicator 6.4 The program offers opportunities for parents to be included and supported in the</p>	<p>Accomplished – No</p> <p>Difficult to get parents involved and students do not wish for their students to be involved.</p>

Service	Stated Intent or Purpose of Service	Principals' Perceptions	Mandated/Does it Accomplish Purpose	Reasons Why/Why Not
		parents to be involved.”	<p>development of their children.</p> <p>Mandated 160-4-8-.01 Student Support Services (2) (a) “Each local school system shall develop a Student Services Plan that prescribes and identifies programs and services that incorporated school climate improvement and management processes.</p> <p>(2) (b) Each Student Services Plan must minimally include guidelines for the systematic provisions of the following components: (1) Alternative Education Programs (2) School psychological – consultations to support parents concerns services (3) School climate management –efforts to enlist parent support (4) School counseling and guidance services – parent consultation (5) School health services – address requests by parents that the school provide appropriate health procedures to allow students to remain in school and increase opportunities for academic success (6) School social work/visiting teacher services – family counseling; and networking of appropriate home, school, and community services to</p>	

Service	Stated Intent or Purpose of Service	Principals' Perceptions	Mandated/Does it Accomplish Purpose	Reasons Why/Why Not
Sense of Belonging	Drop Out Prevention	<p>Principal A "In rural- everyone knows every one- smaller set of people Urban- children are involved in gangs- don't want to do anything in school Or they do not care- because have other things in community (involved)."</p> <p>"Rural - don't have a lot of community activities."</p>	<p>address identified student problems.</p> <p>(2) (c) " The local school board of education shall provide for a School Climate Management Process"</p> <p>Accomplished- No</p> <p>Mandated Graduation Specialist –HB 1027 A high school Graduation Specialist will work to improve graduation rates for all population subgroups within the school by performing responsibilities such as gathering and analyzing data for identifying potential barriers to graduation; developing and implementing individual intervention strategies, and working with students to develop a graduation and achievement plan to include the best program and post secondary goals.</p> <p>Mandated 160-4-8-.01 Student Support Services (2) (a) "Each local school system shall develop a Student Services Pan that prescribes and identifies programs and services that incorporated school climate improvement and management processes.</p> <p>(2) (b) Each Student Services Plan must minimally</p>	<p>Accomplished- No</p> <p>Perceived that in urban areas students are involved in community activities outside of the school and therefore do not want to do anything with the school.</p>

Service	Stated Intent or Purpose of Service	Principals' Perceptions	Mandated/Does it Accomplish Purpose	Reasons Why/Why Not
			<p>include guidelines for the systematic provisions of the following components: (1) Alternative Education Programs (2) School psychological-psychological counseling (3) School counseling and guidance services – individual, group, classroom counseling (4) School social work/visiting teacher – individual and group counseling</p> <p>Mandated GADOE AEP Self- Assessment Standard II Program Climate- An Effective alternative education program utilizes best practices to provide a safe positive, and nurturing environment in which students are valued and supported to achieve their fullest potential.</p> <p>2.2- The program demonstrates an understanding and sensitivity to the academic, cultural, social, behavioral, and developmental needs of students, their parents, staff, and community.</p> <p>2.5 – There is an atmosphere of mutual respect and purposeful effort on behalf of students and their learning</p> <p>Accomplish Purpose- No</p>	

Service	Stated Intent or Purpose of Service	Principals' Perceptions	Mandated/Does it Accomplish Purpose	Reasons Why/Why Not
Governance	Personal/Social Development	<p>Principal B “Personally, I do not have students involved in governance. When get to the point can handle working in-group and develop governance, need to be back where came from. It is our goal to get them to understand and follow rules of day to day life.”</p> <p>“Cannot say why most years disagree. This school not set up for a student council.”</p>	See comments in Principal A	<p>Not accomplished</p> <p>Principal feels that governance is conducted by a student council and school not set up for that. Also feels when students have developed to be able to share in the governance they should transition to their base school.</p>

Service	Stated Intent or Purpose of Service	Principals' Perceptions	Mandated/ Does it Accomplish Purpose	Reason Why/Why Not
Mentoring	Student Support /Drop Out Prevention	<p>Principal B “My school has one. I do not know why (those with most years disagreed.) “Unless stuck in a time warp- still stuck in the 60’s in education. Can’t see why would not agree with getting mentors.”</p> <p>“High-maintenance kids don’t like to give them to mentors- Mentors need success so does not get disgusted.”</p>	See comments in Principal A	Accomplished–No Not given to high-maintenance students;
Childcare	Social Services- Improve Attendance	Principal B- “Not a need for it. If were graduating from here in 4 years yes, but under normal circumstances no need – get-in; get-out”	See comments in Principal A	Accomplished–No Childcare not implemented in this building. Principal feels no need for it.

Service	Stated Intent or Purpose of Service	Principals' Perceptions	Mandated/ Does it Accomplish Purpose	Reason Why/Why Not
Celebration/ Rites of Passage	Transition	Principal B "I see nothing wrong could be very good. For others- Could be numbers are so low or inconsistent. Currently our school tells them if they are returning on the last day of the semester."	See comments in Principal A	Accomplished- No Principal felt because student enrollment figures are low and inconsistent.
Family Outreach	Drop Out Prevention	Principal B "Reason undecided because involving families depends on how involved in the strategies For Example- Family Night Have dinner share with them where school is going (Direction school is headed) parents are so young that the information goes over their heads like water on a ducks back. For larger schools going into homes may be a safety issue Smaller schools can reach parents however, have	See comments in Principal A	Not Accomplish Purpose Parents are too young to comprehend the importance of information being presented and too young to understand the importance. To provide family outreach by visiting homes may be a safety issues.

Service	Stated Intent or Purpose of Service	Principals' Perceptions	Mandated/ Does it Accomplish Purpose	Reason Why/Why Not
Sense of Belonging	Drop Out Prevention	<p>small kids sitting with them acting up, and mother talking on cell phone out in hall." (during Family Night)</p> <p>Principal B- "I really do not know why could be because not getting a reg. diploma."</p>	See comments in Principal A	<p>Accomplished – No</p> <p>Principal felt that perhaps Students with Disabilities do not feel as if they belong because not getting a regular diploma</p>
Governance	Personal/Social Development; Decision Making Skills; Working Cooperatively	Principal C "Veteran Administrators- [leadership styles are] base on traditional style- way things done, new administrators- see need for change."	See comments in Principal A	<p>Accomplished – No</p> <p>Veteran administrators do not want to change and traditionally student not involved in governance.</p>
Mentoring	Student Support Dropout Prevention	Principal C Same as above	See comments in Principal A	<p>Accomplished – No</p> <p>Veteran administrators do not want to change and traditionally student not involved in mentoring programs</p>

Service	Stated Intent or Purpose of Service	Principals' Perceptions	Mandated/ Does it Accomplish Purpose	Reason Why/Why Not
Childcare	Social Services; Improved Attendance	Principal C "Belief is that teenage pregnancy would be an issue- should be intervening before problem occurs- and should not provide child-care."	See comments in Principal A	Accomplished – No Principal believes that should not provide daycare because of the issue of using daycare as an intervention to teenage pregnancy instead of providing interventions before pregnancy occurs and as an intervention to improve attendance.
Celebration/ Rites of Passage	Transition	Principal C "Don't know why would not want to celebrate. Everyone in life make a mistake. Would build self-esteem; reward to go; everyone doesn't get to go When able to leave- give new start." "Veterans- just do what need to do and go- Feel got in trouble; come do time and leave."	See comments in Principal A	Accomplished No Principal recognizes that not everyone wants to leave the alternative education program. (not GADOE focus- Program Guidelines – Program Elements)

Service	Stated Intent or Purpose of Service	Principals' Perceptions	Mandated/ Does it Accomplish Purpose	Reason Why/Why Not
Family Outreach	Drop Out Prevention	Principal C "May not want to plan for such large numbers of students and increase work load; To make contacts may cost money do not have; Smaller numbers more manageable- teachers can help defray cost."	See comments in Principal A	Accomplished – No Large numbers not cost efficient or labor efficient.
Sense of Belonging	Drop Out Prevention	Principal C "Urban/suburban- larger numbers, large geographical area; become more transient don't have closeness Rural- more community related; know one on one; I know your uncle" Rural smaller know children."	See comments in Principal A	Accomplished – No Large geographical and high level of transient areas lose closeness, hinders sense of belonging
Governance	Personal/Social; Development- Decision Making Skills; Working Cooperatively	Principal D Younger idealistic you are over 10+ tried strategies and realize don't work	See comments in Principal A	Accomplished – No Principal believes will not work
Mentoring	Student Support Dropout Prevention	Principal D Cannot understand why 10 plus years disagreed. Most need positive adult role models in their lives	See comments in Principal A	Accomplished – No Principal could not understand why the discrepancy

Service	Stated Intent or Purpose of Service	Principals' Perceptions	Mandated/ Does it Accomplish Purpose	Reason Why/Why Not
Childcare	Social Services- Improve Attendance	<p>“Can get one extra positive adult in life is a good thing”</p> <p>Principal D “Don’t think it should be an option- students may think it is a reward Students not taking responsibility.”</p>	See comments in Principal A	Accomplished – No State’s purpose is to improve attendance; not viewed in terms of improving attendance more thought of as an option for childcare services.
Celebration/ Rites of Passage	Transition	Principal D “In order to go back doing what need to do- Don’t need to celebrate what needed to do in the first place.”	See comments in Principal A	Accomplished- No A celebration is not taking place; but not sure, if what the state is mandating is being implemented.
Family Outreach	Drop Out Prevention	Principal D “Larger program more impersonal don’t know students as well. Larger programs in city- economic gap between staff and students – don’t want to get involved with families.”	See comments in Principal A	Accomplished – NO Large programs appear not to want to become involved with families; due to economic gap between staff and students.

Service	Stated Intent or Purpose of Service	Principals' Perceptions	Mandated/ Does it Accomplish Purpose	Reason Why/Why Not
Sense of Belonging	Drop Out Prevention	Principal D "Rural society more sense of family; know names of every one; Urban – disconnect don't know; not connected outside of school and not willing to provide the connect [a connection]."	See Comments in Principal A section	Accomplished- No Principals perception-disconnect between school and families; and school not willing to be connected.
Governance	Personal/Social; Development- Decision Making Skills; Working Cooperatively	Principal E "Change is difficult. Administrators who believe they have a program set into place see no need for input. Administrators who are looking for ways to improve and provide the utmost learning environment for the students would not only welcome, but also encourage; input and ownership into the program."	See comments in Principal A	Accomplished- No Principals who perceive their program as being established do not see a need to change.

Service	Stated Intent or Purpose of Service	Principals' Perceptions	Mandated/ Does it Accomplish Purpose	Reason Why/Why Not
Mentoring	Student Support Dropout Prevention	Principal E Same as Above	See comments in Principal A	Accomplished–No Principals who perceive their program as being established do not see a need to change.
Childcare	Social Services- Improved Attendance	Same as Above	See comments in Principal A	Accomplished–No Principals who perceive their program as being established do not see a need to change.
Celebration/ Rites of Passage	Transition	Principal E “Alternative education is viewed as a tool to help” “those who cannot make it in a regular school” program by many administrators. Instead of embracing the idea that all students learn differently and need different strategies and support, many view it as a negative educational site.”	See comments in Principal A	Accomplished–No Principals’ view attending an alternative program as a negative site therefore, there is no need for celebration.

Service	Stated Intent or Purpose of Service	Principals' Perceptions	Mandated/ Does it Accomplish Purpose	Reason Why/Why Not
Family Outreach	Drop Out Prevention	Principal E "The stresses of required academic performance tend to be more intense in larger schools. Providing "extra" services are not critical to leaders, or may not be viewed as necessary. In a small program, the school is usually the hub of the community and input is not only needed, but welcomed as community members rally around the program."	See comments in Principal A	Accomplished – No Family Outreach is not implemented in large schools, therefore not being implemented statewide. The reason cited were stresses of ensuring academic performance of students and family outreach being viewed as an extra service that is not critical.
Sense of Belonging	Drop Out Prevention	Principal E Same as Above	See comments in Principal A	Accomplished – No Educational leaders may not feel that this service is critical to the program.
Governance	Personal/Social; Development- Decision Making Skills; Working Cooperatively	Principal F "Difference in age group Old School- principal dealt as dictator; principal made rules; New age – more open mind If kids help run school it will run better."	See comments in Principal A	Accomplished – No Mandate not consistently implemented thorough–out the state. Veteran administrators may not providing governance while novice administrators may.

Service	Stated Intent or Purpose of Service	Principals' Perceptions	Mandated/ Does it Accomplish Purpose	Reason Why/Why Not
Mentoring	Student Support Dropout Prevention	Principal F "Depends on the mentality of the person - Older administrators don't feel mentoring program would help."	See comments in Principal A	Accomplished – No Older administrators may not support the program
Childcare	Social Services- Improve Attendance	Principal F "May think not our job to provide day care -Why when DEFACS pay for Day Care – May think we are doing too much."	See comments in Principal A	Accomplished- No Program not supported because principals may feel should not be a component of the program
		"Making it convenient for them to make bad choices- Have children okay – we are going to provide day care- just bring child to school."	See comments in Principal A	
Celebration/ Rites of Passage	Transition	Principal F "Do not believe should celebrate doing the right thing. Don't celebrate traditional students doing the right thing."	See comments in Principal A	Accomplished – No Perception that the program should not celebrate because the criteria for exiting the program is what students should have been doing

Service	Stated Intent or Purpose of Service	Principals' Perceptions	Mandated/ Does it Accomplish Purpose	Reason Why/Why Not
Family Outreach	Drop Out Prevention	Principal F "Need more family outreach- only way can change kids- Must change environment. Families can get more from program. Small systems family lives around school. Large system like Gwinnett drive may be fifty miles. Hard to reach out."	See comments in Principal A	Accomplished No It s perceived that the mandate is not consistently implemented thorough out the state. The mandate may be implemented in small systems but not in the larger school systems.
Sense of Belonging	Drop Out Prevention	Principal F "Smaller system becomes part of community. Larger [systems] just trying to keep the lid on."	See comments in Principal A	Accomplished No It s perceived that the mandate is not consistently implemented thorough out the state. The mandate may be implemented in small systems but not in the larger school systems.
Governance	Personal/Social Development – Decision Making Skills; Working Cooperatively	Principal G "New administrators have an open mind to see new strategies. More than 10 years [experience] set in ways."	See comments in Principal A	Accomplished No It is perceived that veteran administrators do not support the idea of governance. Therefore, mandate is not consistently implemented throughout the state.

Service	Stated Intent or Purpose of Service	Principals' Perceptions	Mandated/ Does it Accomplish Purpose	Reason Why/Why Not
Mentoring	Student Support Dropout Prevention	Principal G "Veteran administrators may have thought no hope for them. I believe every child needs a mentor especially SWD."	See comments in Principal A	Accomplished No It is perceived that veteran administrators feel that a mentoring program would not help the students. As a result, the program may not be implemented statewide.
Childcare	Social Services- Improve Attendance	Principal G "We should not make comfortable for them -it's ok to have child I can take them to school. Do not make it easier – it is the one thing they don't need (daycare). One student has 3 children. Uses [the daycare] as a crunch. Need to focus more on education of students."	See comments in Principal A	Accomplished No It is perceived that the program should focus on the education of the students.
Celebration/ Rites of Passage	Transition	Principal G "Given [this] age groups should have a sense of pride- don't get from home. Some feel students with disabilities should not be here anyway."	See comments in Principal A	Accomplished No The opinion is that students with disabilities should not be in the AEP, therefore, should not have a rites of passage celebration

Service	Stated Intent or Purpose of Service	Principals' Perceptions	Mandated/ Does it Accomplish Purpose	Reason Why/Why Not
Family Outreach	Drop Out Prevention	Principal G "Too much because of the numbers-, our school is the second largest in the state. Parent and child discuss what coming with and what need to focus on to be successful. Need to have meetings with parents to get them more involved We need to have parents here for positive things."	See comments in Principal A	Accomplished No For large school systems the number of students enrolled in the program makes implementing a family outreach program is to difficult.
Sense of Belonging	Drop Out Prevention	Principal G "In rural systems more connection- everyone knows everyone- school cornerstone of community] more sense of belonging, not a lot of social activities going on. In urban areas, there are other things in community so not so connected to school."	See comments in Principal A	Accomplished No The communities in rural areas may feel more connected to the program than communities in urban areas

Service	Stated Intent or Purpose of Service	Principals' Perceptions	Mandated/ Does it Accomplish Purpose	Reason Why/Why Not
Governance	Personal/Social Development – Decision Making Skills; Working Cooperatively	Principal H “Any student should have input in program; Veterans- the rules are the rules can’t get to far away from the purpose (of the AEP). [Veterans may] feel if wanted more governance stayed in regular environment.”	See comments in Principal A	Accomplished – No It is perceived that veteran principals throughout the state do not “embrace” the idea of students in AEPs participating in the governance of the program.
Mentoring	Student Support Dropout Prevention	“Do need mentoring. [Mentoring provides] a different voice than administration or teacher- saying same thing- different mouth. Why veterans disagree- May feel been given opportunities throughout life – used up opportunities. Everyone has tried to do for then- Lost Cause- Not going to be anything any way.”		Accomplished No Veteran administrators may feel that a mentoring program would not be of benefit to students in AEPs.

Service	Stated Intent or Purpose of Service	Principals' Perceptions	Mandated/ Does it Accomplish Purpose	Reason Why/Why Not
Childcare	Social Services- Improve Attendance	Principal H "No child care [program should be in CrossRoads.] We do not want to encourage that type of behavior. Education is first and foremost not going to say behavior is okay.	See comments in Principal A	Accomplished– No The program is not supported throughout Georgia. This is because (it is supposed) administrators feel that childcare encourages promiscuity.
Celebration/ Rites of Passage	Transition	I agree should have it; however, others [administrators may think that to] celebrate tends to make students complacent."		Accomplished– No Administrators who disagree with having rites of passage celebration may deem that such a celebration would make students complacent.
Family Outreach	Drop Out Prevention	Principal H "I agree in parent outreach Dissenters – Parents don't care about them why go out of my way to reach them; now that they are in AEP.	See comments in Principal A	Accomplished– No This service is does not appear to be implemented statewide. The perception is that large systems' AEPs do not have the time to provide a sense of belonging.
Sense of Belonging	Drop Out Prevention	Agree that children should have a sense of belonging; children can bond with each other; and [sense of belonging] can contribute to them wanting to stay.		

Service	Stated Intent or Purpose of Service	Principals' Perceptions	Mandated/ Does it Accomplish Purpose	Reason Why/Why Not
		Larger areas people do not have time to do one on one special attention- "get in – get out".		

APPENDIX L

QUALITATIVE DATA FROM THREE GADOE ADMINISTRATORS

Appendix L — Qualitative Data from Three GADOE Administrators

Years as GADOE Adm.	Gender	Race	Years as Adm.	What is Effective	What is not Effective	Frustrations	Projections	Stated Needs
A 19 years	Female	Black	19	<p>Initiatives for Achieving AYP:</p> <p>School Improvement Teams, Round Table, GA’s Pyramids of Intervention,</p> <p>Initiatives for Dropout Preventions:</p> <p>Graduation Coaches, Alliance of Agency Heads; Family Outreach; Parent Involvement Title 1 Funds-Programs; parent literacy;</p> <p>Literacy and Math Instruction; Title 1 Funds - after school programs; tutoring through Service Providers</p>	<p>NCLB –Hinder Transition:</p> <p>Cannot count special education diploma towards graduation rate no incentive for administrators to transition them back because cannot help graduation rate; can have negative impact on graduation rate</p> <p>NCLB -Unsafe Schools - discipline problems of AEP students count against school, which could make them deemed as a unsafe school.</p>	<p>NCLB</p> <p>No flexibility to consider individual student – student do not have advocacy from administrators to return.</p>	<p>NCLB Support</p> <p>“NCLB will not allow you to let kids fall through the cracks. Opportunity to notice children [who] may fall through the crack –cannot set low expectations for students [by saying the student is just special education.”</p>	None Stated

Years as GADOE Adm.	Gender	Race	Years as Adm.	What is Effective	What is not Effective	Frustrations	Projections	Stated Needs
A 19 years	Female	African American	19 years	<p>Reducing Discipline Referrals: School Improvement Division work with schools to develop skills to manage the classroom, Title 2A (personnel) and Title 2D (technology grant) for high priority schools.</p> <p>Initiative to Address the Achievement Gap A/Americans and Caucasians:</p> <p>State funded programs –Early Intervention Program (EIP) and Remedial Education Program (REP); Single Statewide Accountability System (focus on schools closing the gap), revised state</p>	None Stated	None Stated	<p>Referencing Racial Achievement Gap</p> <p>“State researched Ron Edmonds and Marzano in development of GPS; GPS most critical in addressing achievement gap.”</p>	None Stated

Years as GADOE Adm.	Gender	Race	Years as Adm.	What is Effective	What is not Effective	Frustrations	Projections	Stated Needs
B-9	Female	Black	9	<p>curriculum standards, Leadership Facilitators</p> <p>Achievement Gap Between Socioeconomic Levels</p> <p>State pays for PSAT for economically disadvantaged students; EIP and REP</p> <p>Initiative in Reducing Discipline Referrals</p> <p>Effective Behavioral Instructional Support – School wide Discipline</p>	<p>Aspects of NCLB Hinder transition</p> <p>Students with disabilities are blamed for schools and school systems not making AYP</p>	<p>Aspects of NCLB Hinder transition</p> <p>“[Having to teach students with disabilities the GPS] on their grade level when these students have not been exposed to previous</p>	<p>Regarding CrossRoads AEP Program</p> <p>“No supports in place for them [SWD] when come back to the traditional school.”</p> <p>“Are they serving time or being rehabilitated? Sent to [AEP]</p>	<p>Traditional School needs to be part of the transition plan</p>

Years as GADOE Adm.	Gender	Race	Years as Adm.	What is Effective	What is not Effective	Frustrations	Projections	Stated Needs
						<p>materials or not on grade level academically. As a result test scores go down [and] students with disabilities (SWD) are blamed for not making AYP.”</p> <p>“They (SWD) are considered a hindrance for the traditional school–want to make AYP; not taught the curriculum and not taught behavior modifications who (would) want them back? Come back and disrupt more of the traditional program and they are further behind academically.”</p>	<p>because of discipline for 3 months. Are they being taught behavior modifications and academics?”</p> <p>“State Standards for transitioning in or out of the AEP is haphazard. [The transitioning is]based on administration and teacher tolerance”</p>	

Years as GADOE Adm.	Gender	Race	Years as Adm.	What is Effective	What is not Effective	Frustrations	Projections	Stated Needs
B-9	Female	Black	9	Technical assist to Reg. Ed. Teachers Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) Academics	Initiative Achievement Gap between African American and Caucasians For SWD – system identified as disproportionate go to meeting, do a plan, use 15% of federal funds to address the issue.	Initiative Achievement Gap Between African American and Caucasian “No one accountable at district level – In theory RTI (Pyramids of Interventions) may address this issue.”	Initiative Achievement Gap Between Socioeconomic Levels “It Isn’t”	None Stated

Appendix L - Analysis of Qualitative Data from Three GADOE Administrators

Years as GADOE Adm.	Gender	Race	Years as Adm.	What is Effective	What is not Effective	Frustrations	Projections	Stated Needs
C- 22	Male	Black	22	<p>Initiative in Achieving AYP</p> <p>Pyramid of Intervention</p> <p>Initiative Dropout Prevention</p> <p>On line courses on and off site Credit Recovery – computer assisted programs, GED options; take GED and pass get reg. diploma Career Technical and Agriculture Education Program</p>	<p>Training for Guidance Counselors and School Social Workers</p> <p>In adequate</p> <p>Initiative to Address Literacy and Math Instruction</p> <p>State Funded 21st Century Grant only one AEP applied</p>	<p>Initiative to Address Literacy and Math Instruction</p> <p>“Only one AEP applied. It is difficult to write a Grant. Administrators need assistance in Grant writing. LSS has to “buy in” to the Grant. It takes time to write Grants”.</p>	<p>Initiative for Family Outreach</p> <p>“Discussing developing a cadre of trained people to get families involved.”</p>	<p>Counselor or social worker funded for CrossRoads Programs by the state</p> <p>Need State Funded Mentoring Program</p> <p>“We should provide them choices to stay- if comfortable let them stay so don’t have to do something stupid to stay.”</p>

Years as GADOE Adm.	Gender	Race	Years as Adm.	What is Effective	What is not Effective	Frustrations	Projections	Stated Needs
C-22	Male	African American	22	<p>Initiative in Achieving AYP Pyramid of Intervention</p> <p>Initiative Dropout Prevention On line courses on and off site–take as extended day Credit Recovery – computer assisted programs, GED options; take GED and pass get reg. diploma Career Technical and Agriculture Education Program- “The good schools have 4 and 5 programs.”</p>	<p>Training for guidance counselors and school social workers In adequate</p> <p>Initiative to address literacy and math instruction State Funded 21st Century Grant only one AEP applied</p>	<p>Initiative to address literacy and math instruction Only one AEP applied Difficult to write Grant; need assistance in Grant writing, LSS has to “buy in”, takes time to write.</p>	<p>Initiative for Family Outreach Discussing developing a cadre of trained people to get families involved</p>	<p>Counselor or social worker funded for CrossRoads Programs</p> <p>Need State Funded Mentoring Program</p> <p>“We should provide them choices to stay- if comfortable let them stay so don’t have to do something stupid to stay.”</p>

APPENDIX M
GROUP DIFFERENCES FOR SURVEY ITEMS BY YEARS OF PROFESSIONAL
EXPERIENCE

Group Differences for Survey Items by Years of Professional Experience

Survey Item	10 years or fewer		16 years or more		df	t	Significant (Yes)	Used for Interview (Int)
	M	SD	M	SD				
1. Criterion	4.50	.855	4.58	.717	36	-.322	No	
2. Orientation	4.86	.363	4.54	.779	36	1.422	No	
3. Record	4.86	.363	4.54	.721	36	1.522	No	
4. Certification	4.79	.426	4.63	.495	36	1.015	No	
5. Training	4.64	.497	4.46	.509	36	1.087	No	
6. Interviewing	3.71	.994	3.42	.974	36	.902	No	
7. Parent	2.71	.994	2.33	.868	36	1.237	No	
8. Governance	3.21	.893	2.43	1.037	35	2.333	Yes	Int.
9. Tutoring	4.36	.633	4.04	.690	36	1.400	No	
10. Mentoring	4.43	.646	4.00	.659	36	1.947	Yes	Int.
11. Vocational	4.07	.917	3.96	1.160	36	.312	No	
12. Technology	4.43	.514	4.42	.584	36	.063	No	
13. Assessments	4.50	.855	4.08	.881	36	1.422	No	
14. Curriculum	4.29	.611	4.21	.658	36	.359	No	
15. Projects	4.29	.611	3.88	.947	36	1.452	No	
16. Recognition	3.64	1.216	3.50	1.216	36	.349	No	
17. Materials	4.64	.497	4.54	.509	36	.596	No	
18. Mental Health	3.71	1.267	3.71	1.122	36	.015	No	

(continues)

Group Differences for Survey Items by Years of Professional Experience

Survey Item	10 years or fewer		16 years or more		df	t	Significant (Yes)	Used for Interview (Int)
	M	SD	M	SD				
19. Childcare	1.85	.899	2.46	1.062	35	1.761		Int.
20. Parenting	3.64	1.082	3.17	1.204	36	1.219		No
21. Rites	3.36	1.499	3.38	1.313	36	-.038		Int.
22. Team	4.36	.633	4.00	.933	36	1.269		No
23. IEP	4.08	1.115	4.13	.797	35	-.152		No
24. Interim Setting	3.71	1.204	3.54	1.351	36	.395		No
25. Identification	3.86	.949	3.62	1.359	33	.568		No
26. Risk Behavior	4.43	.646	4.29	.908	36	.495		No
27. Belonging	4.14	1.099	4.21	.884	36	-.201		No
28. Interventions	4.43	.852	4.38	.711	36	.208		No
29. Counseling	4.50	.519	4.42	.584	36	.442		No
30. Family	4.14	.949	3.91	.949	35	.714		No

*p < .05

Group Differences for Survey Items by School Type

Survey Item	<u>Urban or Suburban</u>		<u>Rural</u>		df	t	Significant (Yes)	Used for Interview (Int)
	M	SD	M	SD				
1. Criterion	4.50	.855	4.55	.686	41	-.214	No	
2. Orientation	4.64	.497	4.62	.728	41	.103	No	
3. Record	4.64	.497	4.62	.677	41	.109	No	
4. Certification	4.64	.497	4.66	.484	41	-.078	No	
5. Training	4.50	.519	4.48	.509	41	.104	No	
6. Interviewing	3.36	1.082	3.72	.922	41	-1.156	No	
7. Parent Int.	2.57	.938	2.52	.911	41	.181	No	
8. Governance	2.50	.941	2.79	1.031	40	-.871	No	
9. Tutoring	4.21	.802	4.17	.602	41	.192	No	
10. Mentoring	3.93	.730	4.28	.591	41	-1.671	No	
11. Vocational	3.93	1.141	4.07	.998	41	-.413	No	
12. Technology	4.57	.514	4.38	.561	41	1.080	No	
13. Assessments	4.50	.650	4.10	.900	41	1.470	No	
14. Curriculum	4.21	.579	4.24	.636	41	-.135	No	
15. Projects	3.93	1.072	4.07	.704	41	-.515	No	
16. Recognition	3.57	1.222	3.62	1.147	41	-.129	No	
17. Materials	4.64	.497	4.48	.509	41	.974	No	
18. Mental Health	3.64	1.151	3.83	1.104	41	-.507	No	

(continued)

Group Differences for Survey Items by School Type

Survey Item	<u>Urban or Suburban</u>		<u>Rural</u>		df	t	Significant (Yes)	Used for Interview (Int)
	M	SD	M	SD				
19. Childcare	2.21	1.051	2.46	1.138	40	-.688	No	
20. Parenting	3.50	1.092	3.38	1.178	41	.322	No	
21. Rites	3.00	1.240	3.59	1.350	41	-1.368	No	
22. Team	3.93	.917	4.24	.739	41	-1.202	No	
23. IEP	4.15	.899	4.10	.860	40	.173	No	
24. Interim Setting	3.50	1.345	3.72	1.192	41	-.554	No	
25. Identification	3.58	1.443	3.75	1.076	38	-.405	No	
26. Risk Behaviors	4.07	.917	4.45	.736	41	-1.451	No	
27. Belonging	3.79	1.188	4.38	.677	41	-2.091	Yes	Int.
28. Interventions	4.21	.802	4.45	.686	41	-.992	No	
29. Counseling	4.29	.469	4.48	.574	41	-1.115	No	
30. Family	3.86	.864	4.11	.916	41	-.849	No	

*p < .05

Group Differences for Survey Items by School Size

Survey Item	<u>50 or less students</u>		<u>51 or more students</u>		df	t	Significant (Yes)	Used for Interview (Int)
	M	SD	M	SD				
1. Criterion	4.39	.778	4.64	.700	41	-1.108	No	
2. Orientation	4.56	.784	4.68	.557	41	-.610	No	
3. Record	4.56	.784	4.68	.476	41	-.647	No	
4. Certification	4.61	.502	4.68	.476	41	-.458	No	
5. Training	4.56	.511	4.44	.507	41	.735	No	
6. Interviewing	3.61	1.037	3.60	.191	41	.036	No	
7. Parent Int.	2.67	1.029	2.44	.821	41	.803	No	
8. Governance	2.89	.963	2.52	1.021	40	1.117	No	
9. Tutoring	4.33	.686	4.08	.640	41	1.242	No	
10. Mentoring	4.28	.752	4.08	.572	41	.981	No	
11. Vocational	4.06	.998	4.00	1.080	41	.172	No	
12. Technology	4.33	.594	4.52	.510	41	-1.105	No	
13. Assessments	4.33	.767	4.16	.898	41	.663	No	
14. Curriculum	4.28	.752	4.20	.500	41	.408	No	
15. Projects	4.11	.832	3.96	.841	41	.584	No	
16. Recognition	3.83	1.098	3.44	1.193	41	1.102	No	
17. Materials	4.50	.514	4.55	.507	41	-.381	No	
18. Mental Health	3.83	1.200	3.72	1.061	41	.327	No	

(continued)

Group Differences for Survey Items by School Size

Survey Item	<u>50 or less students</u>		<u>51 or more students</u>		df	t	Significant (Yes)	Used for Interview (Int)
	M	SD	M	SD				
19. Childcare	2.35	.996	2.40	1.190	40	-.134	No	
20. Parenting	3.50	1.200	3.36	1.114	41	.394	No	
21. Rites	3.56	1.423	3.28	1.275	41	.666	No	
22. Team	4.28	.752	4.04	.841	41	.955	No	
23. IEP	4.22	.647	4.04	.999	40	.668	No	
24. Interim Setting	3.83	.985	3.52	1.388	41	.819	No	
25. Identification	3.61	1.092	3.77	1.270	38	-.426	No	
26. Risk Behaviors	4.44	.784	4.24	.831	41	.815	No	
27. Belonging	4.28	.752	4.12	1.013	41	.558	No	
28. Interventions	4.33	.767	4.40	.707	41	-.294	No	
29. Counseling	4.50	.618	4.36	.490	41	.828	No	
30. Family	4.29	.849	3.84	.898	40	1.644	Int.	

*p < .05