The Effect of Alternative School Placement on Disciplinary Referrals for At-Risk Students

by

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Abstract

Across the country alternative schools and programs for middle and high school at-risk students are increasingly popular. They often function as an alternative to expelling or suspending at-risk students who may not be succeeding in traditional classrooms. The purpose of this study was to investigate the relations between alternative education on norm violating behaviors in a study of 92 at-risk middle and high school students in an alternative setting in a rural public school district. Using PowerSchool Database, disciplinary referrals were compared for these students in initial regular school placement, subsequent placement in alternative school, and re-entry back into regular school over a three year period. Single subject research using A-B-A design identified that attending alternative school was effective in decreasing disciplinary log referrals. Significant differences exist between genders for disciplinary log referrals, with females receiving fewer referrals than males.

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CHAPTER I.

Introduction

Across the country alternative schools and programs for middle and high school "at-risk" students are increasingly popular. They often function as an alternative to expelling or suspending at-risk students who may not be succeeding in traditional classrooms. Most school systems in America are attempting to combat increasing frequencies of aggression and antisocial student behaviors. Kim and Taylor (2008) state that, the growing number of alternative schools being built appears to correlate positively with the increase in disenfranchised students. Social, economic and political issues may be the cause of this relationship. Alternative schools were built on the basic principle that some students need a different environment to meet their potential when traditional education fails. However, alternative schools of today are viewed by some as "dumping sites" for at-risk youths and juvenile delinquents who do not receive equitable education in comparison to their regular school counterparts. In addition to problems created for victims of these behaviors, they affect the quality of education received by all students and student achievement.

In many cases when students are reintegrated from alternative schools back into regular schools, the transition is not smooth and behavioral and academic problems persist. Unsuccessful transitioning and rocky reintegrating of students from alternative schools has led to continued academic and behavior deficits. Poor academic achievement has led to many educational initiatives such as the No Child Left Behind (No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2002). NCLB,

2002 supports standard-based education reform, which is based on the belief that setting high standards and establishing measurable goals can improve individual outcomes in education. The Act requires states to develop assessments in basic skills to be given to all students in certain grades and tied attainment of specific goals to continued federal aid. NCLB mandated that all states must use high quality assessments to measure the success of all children, including those in special education. The U.S. Department of Education has recently relaxed NCLB standards for some states. The focus state for this study, Georgia, was granted a waiver from NCLB (http://www.doe.k12.ga.us/Pages/Home.aspx).

Every school is assessed to determine if it is making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). All schools are subject to sanctions for not making AYP. However, only Title 1 schools are subject to lose special fundings. The Criterion-Reference Competency Tests (CRCTs), the Georgia High School Graduation Test (GHSGT), and the Georgia Alternative Assessment (GAA) in reading/English/language arts, mathematics and science are calculated for AYP in Georgia. The AYP definition requires that performance goals be established for all students and for each of the following categories.

- Race/ethnicity (American Indian/Alaskan Native, Asian/Pacific Islander, Black, Hispanic, Multiracial, and White),

- Disability

- Limited English proficiency (LED)

- Socioeconomic status.

Georgia has elected to use the same performance goals for all subgroups. A subgroup must have at least 40 students for its results to count towards AYP determination. (http://www.georgiaeducation.org/topics/handouts/adequate-yearly-progress.pdf). To meet AYP, a school must meet the following three requirements:

1. All students and each subgroup (at or above the minimum number of 40 students) must have 95% participation on the assessments.

2. All students and each subgroup (at or above the minimum number of 40 students) present for the full academic year (in the October Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) count through the testing date) must meet or exceed the performance goals.

3. Each school must show progress on an additional academic indicator. Secondary schools will be required to show progress on graduation rates. School districts selected the elementary/middle school indicator from a Georgia Department of Education (DOE) list of valid indicators. The indicator selected for 2004-2005 was to remain in place at least 3 years and then new/revised indicators could be selected (http://www.georgiaeducation.org/topics/handouts/adequate-yearly-progress.pdf).

When a school fails to make AYP for two or more consecutive years in the same subject, it is placed on the Needs Improvement list and must offer students the opportunity to transfer to a higher performing school within the district. Schools that fail to make AYP for three or more

consecutive years must offer low-performing students tutoring or supplemental educational

services with the school or an outside provider. The 2011 AYP report lists 376 (17.52%) of

Georgia's 2146 schools that are on the needs improvement list. This is an increase from the 2010

AYP report of 278 (12.5%) (http://www.doe.k12.ga.us/ayp2011.aspx).

Public school systems are diligently working to develop strategies to address the deficits

experienced by low performing students to meet the NCLB, 2002 standards. Public school

systems have constructed magnet schools, charter schools, vocational centers and alternative

schools in attempts to address the needs of low performing students. The alternative schools are

the main focus of the present study. Alternative schools have been established since the 1970s to

meet the needs of children and adolescents who cannot learn effectively in a traditional school

environment (i.e., conventional public or parochial schools) due to learning disabilities, certain

medical conditions, psychological and behavioral issues, or advanced skills (Mottaz, 2002). In

general, alternative schools often have curriculum elements that focus on improving student self-

esteem, fostering growth of individuality, and enhancing social skills. Alternative schools are

often more flexible in their organization and administration, which often allows for more variety

in educational programs.

While early alternative schools were originally primarily for disruptive students and those

at risk for dropping out of a traditional school environment, alternative schools have expanded

significantly in function as educators, parents, and wider communities recognize that many

children cannot learn effectively in a traditional school environment (Mottaz, 2002). For children

and adolescents with psychological and behavioral problems, such as personality disorders, substance use and abuse, depression, and violence, alternative schools can provide a safer therapeutic environment and more individualized attention than traditional schools. For children and adolescents with learning disabilities and certain medical conditions, such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), dyslexia, and Asperger's syndrome, alternative schools can provide integrated education and clinical services in one place to facilitate learning (Mottaz, 2002).

The transition from elementary school to middle school is marked with major changes in expectations and practices for students and parents. Some research suggests that the transition to middle schools may create many of the challenges being experienced by youths today (Akos, 2006). The early middle school movement was based upon the belief that by the time students entered sixth grade, they were intellectually and socially advanced beyond the confines of elementary schools, and that as most students in sixth grade had reached puberty, and hence entering the first stages of adulthood, sixth grade was the appropriate grade to begin to transition from elementary to secondary education (Blyth, Simmons, & Bush, 1978). The current understanding of puberty is that it can begin any time between ages 8 and 14, but by age 10 most adolescents are in the midst of it (Faden, Ruffin, Newes-Adeyi, & Chen, 2010). Keulers, Evers, Stiers and Jolles (2010) described adolescence as a social-psychological construct that refers to the transition period between childhood and adulthood, characterized by profound physical (e.g., strength), cognitive (e.g., inhibitory control) and social (e.g., independence) development. The rapid growth of middle schools in the U.S. helped with logistical problems, such as

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overcrowding, and spread teachers and administrators more evenly among school districts (Manning, 2000).

However, middle schools of today are becoming known as the place where students become lost academically (Akos & Galassi, 2004; Balfanz, Herzog & Mac Iver, 2007; Haselhuhn et al. 2007). There is a trend beginning in many U.S. cities where elementary schools are extended through eighth grade (K-8). The switch is eliminating middle schools. Cincinnati and Cleveland, Ohio; Minneapolis, Minn.; Philadelphia; Memphis, Tenn.; and Baltimore, Md., are in various stages of reconfiguring their schools away from the middle school model and toward K-8s (Wallis, Miranda & Rubiner, 2005). Huss and Eastep (2011), noted that currently there is a continuation of the shift away from traditional middle schools to K-8 organizational structures. Similarly, in a study conducted with middle school principals and district directors of education from Florida, it was determined that key elements of the middle school model were disappearing from daily experiences of teachers and students (George, 2007; Huss & Eastep, 2011).

When children enter middle school they must interact with more peers and teachers. They must also take on more individual responsibility than in elementary school. Middle school is a marked difference from the self-contained, familiarity of peers and teachers in a smaller more family oriented environment of elementary school. Another factor that could negatively impact middle school is that children are also experiencing physical changes and puberty. This can make the transition to middle school a complicated and frightening time. Thirdly, transition to middle school has been associated with academic declines, decrease performance motivation,

and lower self-esteem (Haselhuhn et al. 2007). Fourthly, many at-risk behaviors are experimented with during the middle school years. Adolescence is viewed as the time during which youths initiate and increase their alcohol consumption, substance abuse, and risky sexual behavior (Faden et al. 2010).

Literature would seem to suggest that middle school students lose essential factors needed to be successful in middle school in the transition from elementary school (Haselhuhn et al. 2007). The middle school adolescent needs to feel that he/she belong in this new larger environment. Motivations may sometimes decline as students transition from elementary to middle school and from middle to high school. The decline in motivation may be associated with changes in achievement (Haselhuhn et al. 2007). Research would also seem to suggest that middle school behaviors and academic achievement may be a strong indication of future high school performance (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007).

When students become disengaged at the start of middle grades, it greatly reduces the odds that they will graduate (Balfanz, Herzog, & Mac Iver, 2007). Graduation requirements and difficult transitions from middle school to high school comprise a majority of the reasons students struggle, fail, and drop out (McCallumore & Sparapani, 2008). High school can be challenging when transferring to a new school. It can create a transition period marked by declining academic, increased absences, and disruptive behaviors (McCallumore & Sparapani, 2008). Ninth grade could be considered the gauge for measuring possible high school success.

In many respects transitioning to high school is just as pivotal as the transition to middle school. Both transitions can become the gate way to alternative school, when the transition is not

smooth. The transition is often more difficult because of the new academic and social differences. Freshman academies are being utilized in some schools to provide ninth graders an entire year to transition (Kennelly & Monrad, 2007; McCallumore & Sparapani, 2008).

In the educational setting transition problems are a common theme among disenfranchised and struggling students. Malaspina and Rimm-Kaufman (2008) studied the early predictors for school performance decreasing at school transitional points. Their study found that behavioral and academic stability was positively linked to early social competencies, which resulted in fewer disciplinary infractions at school transition points. Socio-demographic factors were found to predict greater performance declines following transitions (Malaspina & Rimm-Kaufman, 2008). Educators have spent the last 100 years trying to develop a solution to transition problems or a successful school "in the middle" (Manning, 2000). The battle continues to rage. More research is needed on the effect of transitioning and reintegrating students back into regular school.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationships between the maladaptive behaviors of at-risk students in regular school and in alternative school. The student success factor was the disciplinary log referrals. This study examined disciplinary logs for 91 alternative middle and high school students. The data were examined in an attempt to determine the effect alternative school has on norm violating behaviors as reported by the number of disciplinary referrals logged by administrators and teachers for each student over a three year time span.

The literature pertaining to alternative school students continue to grow but it is limited in the examination of the effect of disengagement from regular school. There is significant literature addressing the influence of aggression and anti social behaviors (LeSure-Lester, 2000; Escobar-Chaves, Tortolero, Markham, Kelder, & Kapadia, 2002). The research appears limited in addressing successful prevention and interventions to keep these at-risk students engaged and in school.

There is very limited research on Georgia alternative schools and at-risk youth they served (http://www.GeorgiaAAAE.org). This study provides the state of Georgia with data which could possibly advance attention need to these institutions. Gable, Bullock and Evans (2006) noted one obstacle to ensuring children and youth quality services is that few empirical studies have been conducted, so this study is intended to address that need.

Many constituencies may find the data and results from this study useful. Administrators of middle school and alternative programs will have research based data that may be useful to

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guide them in hiring faculty and staff for at-risk students. Institutions of higher education can use this information to assist them in preparing future educators.

Background of the Study

Georgia is considered a state in drop out crisis, even though the graduation rate has increased substantially since 2003. Georgia's graduation rates from 2003 to 2010 were: 2003-63.3%; 2004-65.4%; 2005-69.4%; 2006-70.8%; 2007-72.3%; 2008-75.4%; 2009-2010-78.9%; 2010-2011-80.8% (Cardoza, 2008; 2010; Cox, 2008). The Department of Education reported that there are 323 schools in Georgia in Needs Improvement Status, meaning these schools have missed AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress) for at least two consecutive years and face sanctions. In order to make AYP, a school must meet state-set goals in test participation, academic achievement and a "second indicator" statistics (graduation rate for high schools and attendance rate for elementary and middle schools) (Cardoza, 2007). A school must have a certain percentage of students pass the state curriculum tests in Math and Reading/English Language Arts. In Georgia the percentage of secondary schools making AYP is still significantly low at 65.3 percent of middle schools and 56.0 percent of high schools when compared to the national average (Cardoza, 2007). Cox (2007) reported several programs that were designed to improve Georgia's graduation rate:

- Graduation Coaches are already in nearly every high school and were placed in most Georgia middle schools by 2008. The coaches build relationships and use data to identify students who are at risk for dropping out and help them stay on track toward graduation.

- The state's curriculum has been implemented and provides more rigor, focus and relevance in the core areas of Math, English, Social Studies and Science.

- Changes have been made to Georgia's Career, Technical and Agricultural Education programs ensure that students are seeing the relevance of what they are learning and can translate that into the work place.

- Georgia continues to embrace innovation by providing different options for learning, from charter schools to career academic to virtual schools.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) mandates a 100 percent proficiency rate for all schools by 2014. Georgia is one of ten states in 2012 that has been granted a waiver from NCLB. NCLB espouses a standards-based approach to reforming schools that specifies setting high standards for what should be taught and how student performance should be measured. Four principles that characterize school accountability under NCLB are:

1. A focus on student achievement as the primary measure of school success.

2. An emphasis on challenging academic standards that specify the knowledge and skills students should acquire and the levels at which they should demonstrate mastery.

3. A desire to extend the standards to all students, including those for whom expectations have been traditionally low.

4. Heavy reliance on achievement testing to spur the reforms and to monitor their impact. (Hardman, Drew & Egan 2004)

Definitions of Terms

Alternative schools: Include diverse educational programs and service delivery models intended for, (a) students with special education needs, (b) at-risk students, (c) disruptive students, (d) advanced-placement students, and (e) home-schooled children and youths.

Antisocial behavior: Behavior that is defined as "recurrent violations of socially prescribed patterns of behavior," usually involving aggression, vandalism, rule infractions, defiance of adult authority, and violation of social norms and mores (Simcha-Fagan, Gersten & Langner, 1986).

Empathy: Empathy refers to an affective reaction that stems from the apprehension or comprehension of another's emotional state or condition, and that is identical or very similar to what the other person is feeling or would be expected to feel (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998).

Aggression: Aggression refers to behavior that is intentional and is regarded as negative by the targeted individual(s). Furthermore, there is an attempt to hurt or destroy an individual(s) psychologically and/or physically (Galen & Underwood, 1997).

Bullying: Bullying is the systematic abuse of power, which repeatedly and deliberately harms others (Reid & Rivers, 2004).

Externalizing behaviors: Refer to negative behaviors that are expressed in such a way as to affect other people and society. These behaviors can be serious conduct disorders, aggression, and fighting (Zhou, Eisenberg, Losoya, 2002).

Sympathy: Sympathy is defined as another-oriented emotional response that is based on the apprehension of another's negative emotional state or condition; it involves feelings of concern and the desire to alleviate the other's negative emotion (Eisenberg et al. 1994).

Personal distress: Personal distress involves a negative reaction such as anxiety or discomfort upon perceiving cues related to another's distress (Batson, 1991).

Expressiveness: Expressiveness is defined as "a persistent pattern or style in exhibiting nonverbal and verbal expressions that often but not always appears to be emotion-related." (Halberstadt, Cassidy, Stifter, Parker, & Fox, 1995, p.93).

Conclusion

Over the past three decades there has been an increase in research on the development of aggression and antisocial behavior in children (Van Acker, 2007). To ensure a safe school environment while continuing to provide quality education to students who display antisocial, violent, and aggressive behavior, some schools turned to alternative school programs where these at-risk and challenging students can be educated in a setting that is typically removed from the general education population (Van Acker, 2007). Chapter II will provide the literature review that explores the development of aggressive and antisocial behavior and the effect of alternative school placement on these norm violating behaviors.

CHAPTER II.

Review of Literature

The United States has the highest youth homicide and suicide rate among the wealthiest developed nations (National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2006). In 2000 homicide was the second leading cause of death for youths ages 15-19, and suicide was the third (Synder, 2000). In 2010 homicide continued to be the second leading cause of death for individuals ages 15-19 (http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/pdf/ss/ss5904.pdf). Suicide was the third leading cause for individuals ages 15-19 (http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/pdf/wk/mm6035.pdf). Between 1980 and 2000, a dramatic rise in school violence and aggression resulted in public concern and several legislative responses to the problem (Van Acker, 2007). Schools took action to curb the growth of aggressive, violent and antisocial behavior. Many schools increased security measures, such as security guards, metal detectors, and video surveillance of public areas (Van Acker, 2007). Schools adopted zero-tolerance policies and often punished target behaviors (e.g., violence, aggression, truancy, substance abuse) with harsh and punitive consequences (e.g., suspension;, expulsion). The rate of suspensions and expulsions skyrocketed across the United States (Skiba, 2001), but these policies and harsh punitive consequences have not resulted in a decrease in the problem. The tendency to criminalize school behavior is associated with increased school dropout, higher levels of incarceration, and minority overrepresentation in juvenile detention (Skiba, Raush, & Ritter, 2004).

The History of School Organization

Middle schools and junior high schools are schools in the secondary education system

that usually bridge the gap between elementary and high school. Although there is some variation in grade grouping, middle schools usually consist of sixth, seventh, and eighth grades and junior high schools traditionally include only seventh and eighth grades. Middle schools are most popular in the United States. The middle school in the United States came in the late nineteenth century, after a major study by the president of Harvard University and the National Education Association's Committee of Ten on Secondary School Studies that outlined a re-organization of education in America (McEwin, Dickinson, & Jenkins, 1996). Before that time, elementary schools usually consisted of 1-8, and high schools grades 9-12 (Manning, 2000). The core argument of the Harvard study was that students would benefit from starting more advanced studies earlier in their education. The resulting solution was to change elementary schools to house grades 1-6 and high schools grades would be 7-12. The first junior high school was established in Columbus, Ohio in 1909. The first junior high schools had a focus of transitioning students from elementary studies to more advanced subjects and extracurricular activities, such as sports, in order to properly prepare students for high school (Manning, 2000).

A movement began in the middle of the twentieth century that established the middle school. The early middle school movement was based upon the belief that by the time students entered sixth grade, they were intellectually and socially advanced beyond the confines of elementary schools, and that as most students in sixth grade were of the age of puberty, and hence entering the first stages of adulthood, sixth grade was the appropriate grade to begin to transition from elementary to secondary education (Blyth, Simmons, & Bush, 1978). The rapid growth of middle schools in the U.S. helped with logistical problems, such as overcrowding, and

spread teachers and administrators more evenly among school districts (Alexander & Williams, 1968).

Changing Trend

U.S. middle schools have become known as the place where students become lost academically (Wallis, Miranda, & Rubiner, 2005). There is a trend beginning in many U.S. cities where elementary schools are extended through eighth grade (K-8), eliminating middle schools. Cincinnati and Cleveland, Ohio; Minneapolis, Minn.; Philadelphia; Memphis, Tenn.; and Baltimore, Md., are in various stages of reconfiguring their schools away from the middle school model and toward K-8 (Wallis, Miranda & Rubiner, 2005). Jonas (2007) reported some education reformers support combining the middle grades with high school, rather than elementary school. In Rochester, New York the city's schools have been reconfigured into a system in which most students attend grade 7-12 schools (Jonas 2007). There is no universal decision on which grade configuration is best. Weiss and Baker-Smith (2010) conducted a study to address grade configuration by comparing middle schools and k-8 schools. They examined whether students who attended middle schools had more challenges transitioning to high school than those students who attended k-8 school. They found that students who attended a middle school for eighth grade had lower grades than students who went to a k-8 school. Weiss and Baker-Smith (2010) results also showed that students who were absent often in eighth grade and who had been held back a grade were more likely to be absent in ninth grade, while those whose families had a higher socio-economic status and who had a more positive attitude toward school were less likely to be absent in ninth grade.

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Transition

Transitioning from elementary school to middle school is experienced by more than 88% of public school students (Stoffner & Williamson, 2000). The transition from elementary school to middle school is marked with major changes in expectations and practices for the students and parents. When children enter middle school they must interact with more peers, teachers and take on more individual responsibility. Middle school is a marked difference from the self-contained, familiarity of peers and teachers in a smaller more family oriented environment of elementary school (http://www.ncmsa.net/NMSA-Transition.html). Middle school children are also experiencing physical changes. Middle school can be a very complicated and frightening time. For many students this complicated period of transition has been associated with academic declines, decrease performance motivation, and lower self-esteem (Haselhuhn et al. 2007). The middle school years can be a very volatile time (Wallis, Miranda, & Rubiner, 2005). Many at-risk behaviors are experimented with during the middle school years (Stoffner & Williamson, 2000). Literature suggests that middle school students lose essential factors such as; motivation, feelings of belonging, and ability to adjust successfully to more rigorous academic requirements needed to be successful in middle school in the transition from elementary school. The middle school adolescent needs to feel that he/she belong in this new larger environment (Balfanz, Herzog, & Mac Iver, 2007).

Motivation can decline as student transition from elementary to middle school. The decline in motivation may be associated with changes in academic achievement (Haselhuhn et al. 2007). As academic achievement decreases, the probability of graduating on time decreases as

well. The transition from elementary school can be the start of the disengagement process that could affect the student's entire educational career (Balfanz, Herzog, & Mac Iver, 2007). The transition to high school has been found to bring similar problematic challenges as middle school. Furthermore, there is often an increase in the number of students in the high school environment which can make for a more anonymous setting than the middle school environment (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007).

Reis, Trockel, and Mulhall (2007) investigated individual and school predictors of middle school aggression. Clusters of aggressive and antisocial behavior are thought to be predictive of longer term aggression and pose threats to the peace and security of a school (Reis et al. 2007). Reis et al. (2007) analyzed the successive layers of influence on aggressive behavior of the child, the child's family, and the child's school in context using hierarchical linear modeling (HLM). A child's decision-making and problem-solving skills were discovered to be modifiable predictors of antisocial behavior at the individual level (Reis et al. 2007). They also found in their study that the second level of influence for the child was found to be the parents. Reis et al. (2007) results also showed that parenting was discovered to be instrumental in the development and continuation of antisocial behavior. Parents model social responses and teach children what to expect from interactions with others (Reis et al. 2007). Reid and Patterson (1991) linked aggression in children with authoritarian parents who have inconsistent rules and low emotional involvement. Authoritarian parents may fail to establish boundaries of acceptable behavior, thus the child may engage in escalating, disruptive aggression or in other different dynamics using aggression as a defense against negative treatment (Brezina, 1998; Reis et al. 2007). The

authoritarian style of parenting is usually combative and reinforces the child's expectation of negativity (Reis et al. 2007).

The third level of influence on children's antisocial behavior is the school. Each school has its own unique personality which influences the people who attend and work in the school. School environments constructed to be in synchrony with young adolescents' trajectory toward greater independence may alleviate stress during potentially troublesome periods (Reid et al. 2007). Schools may restrict the maturing process by limiting student's individuality and creativity. Middle schools experiences often predict high school behavior and success. Middle school students who struggle academically and behaviorally have difficulty with transitioning to high school, which can lead to alternative school placement (McCallumore & Sparapani, 2008).

Alternative Schools

The number of students served in alternative schools has increased significantly over the past 10 years (Kleiner, Porch, & Farris, 2002; Mendez, 2007). There has been an increase in the programs serving alternative school students. Mendez (2007) noted that a number of service delivery models (e.g., charter schools, public alternative schools, special programs) are operated by school districts. Some programs serve students who exhibit challenging behaviors, while other programs focus on academics and often serve students who significantly lag academically when compared to their same-aged peers (Gable, Bullock, & Evans, 2006). In some programs students with behavioral problems and academic deficits are served in the same alternative setting. Skiba (2001) demonstrated success of individualized curricula designed to meet the

varied needs of individual students who have not experienced success in traditional public school classrooms.

To provide a safe school environment while continuing to provide quality education to students who display aggressive, violent and antisocial behavior, some schools turned to alternative school programs where these at-risk and challenging students can be educated in a setting that is typically removed from the general education population (Van Acker, 2007). Raywid (1994) produced a typology that some scholar-practitioners commonly use while exploring alternative schools. Raywid (1994) grouped alternative schools and programs into the following three types:

- Type I: Schools of choice, sometimes resembling magnet schools, based on themes with an emphasis on innovative programs or strategies to attract students.

- Type II: "Last chance" schools where students are placed as a last step before expulsion. Emphasis is typically on behavior modification or remediation.

- Type III: Schools designed with a remedial focus on academic issues, social-emotional issues, or both. These schools ascribe to more of a nonpunitive, therapeutic approach. Type III programs were rehabilitative, successful with distinct disadvantages and returned students to mainstream schools after successful intervention.

Typically, an alternative education program manifested one dominant tendency while also exhibiting aspects from one or more additional types (Henrich, 2005). These three types have provided an organizing framework for understanding alternative schools for many years (Lehr & Lange, 2003). Currently in use is the Type III alternative school in Georgia which was used for

the purpose of this research. Common alternative education program characteristics are derived largely through empirical and qualitative studies, and alternative school attributes generally have the characteristics listed in Table 1 (Henrich, 2005, p. 26).

Table 1.

Typical Alternative Education Program Characteristics

Staffing	Instruction	Focus	Nontraditional
Small school, class size, staff	Standards-based	Supportive environment	Flexible scheduling, evening hours, multiple shifts
Low student-to-teacher ratio	Innovative and varied curricula	Informal or high structure	Student and staff entry choice
Adult mentors	Functional behavior assessments	Student-orientation	Reduced school days
Leadership from either a Principal or director/ Teacher-director	Self-paced instruction	Proactive or problem focus (i.e., last chance)	Linkages between schools and workplaces
Lack of specialized services (e.g., library, career counseling)	Vocational training involving work in the community	Character, theme, or emphasis from interests of founding teachers	Intensive counseling and monitoring
Dynamic leadership	Social skills instruction	Teacher-student and student-student relationships	Collaboration across school systems and other human service agencies
Fewer rules and less bureaucracy	Individualized and personalized learning		Collegiality with faculty and students

Henrich (2005) noted that alternative education programs typically improved student attendance, grades, and graduation rates and decreased behavior problems, and these were markers for program effectiveness. Well-designed alternative schools were effective in helping youth who were failing in traditional settings. Matching specific student needs against corresponding alternative school characteristics boded well for student outcomes (Rayle, 1998). Organizationally, effective alternative schools have often used democratic principles and processes as staffs sought to influence rather than control students, and the students were involved in the design of their educational process (Barr & Parrett, 2001; Henrich, 2005). Typically, youth in effective alternative schools have reported high levels of engagement with staff members (Barr & Parrett, 2001).

Henrich (2005) noted that alternative schools have several social and curricular approaches:

Social deficits approach.

Youth-oriented social programs that address social deficits usually fail, as alternative education organizational activities fell short of remediating student behavior (Henrich, 2005). There are alternative schools that appear to offer student repair and return services (Henrich, 2005). In a study focused on detecting if participation in an alternative middle school would decrease delinquent behaviors, students who were temporarily placed in an alternative school and then returned to a traditional school demonstrated recurrently poor behaviors (Cox, 1999; Henrich, 2005). Alternative schools that demonstrated positive attributes of a learning

environment (i.e., small class size and individualized instruction) returned students to home schools with similar unsuccessful results (Henrich, 2005).

Curricular deficits approach.

Henrich (2005) viewed academic issues to be in stark contrast to the social aspects of alternative education organizational activity. With a focus on increasing student academic achievement, the alternative school staff usually sought indicators for determining organizational effectiveness. Henrich (2005) found the emergent properties of academic achievement in alternative schools included percentages and rates of students who: (a) graduate with a diploma, (b) earn a GED, (c) improve their grade point average, (d) earn credits toward graduation, (e) return to the regular high school and earned passing grades, (f) improve scores on standardized tests, and (g) reduce failing grades.

Georgia alternative education program.

The Georgia Department of Education notes that the state Alternative Education Programs began as a state grant funded program in 1994 and was known as the "CrossRoads Alternative Education Program". CrossRoads grants were eliminated with the passing of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000. Afterward, Quality Basic Education (QBE) funds began providing for the new Alternative Education Program for students in grades 6-12.

Georgia's Alternative Education Program is designed to provide some program flexibility at the local level. A local school system may provide the following:

- An in-school suspension program
- A disciplinary alternative education program

- A school-community guidance center

- A community-based alternative education program

- Other alternative education program models that otherwise meets the requirements of the
  State Board of Education Rule 160-4-8-.12, Alternative Education Programs.

The local alternative education program may function as a single-system or multi-system
program and may be located on or off a regular school campus. The Georgia Department of
Education lists three basic rules for all Georgia alternative education programs:

1. Alternative Education Programs must follow the Georgia Performance Standards

2. Alternative Education Programs must focus on English/language arts, math, science,
   social studies, and self-discipline.

3. Alternative Education Program must award course credit in the same manner as other
   programs.

The alternative education programs have to be provided the same instructional materials,
resources, and textbooks as provided to the regular program.

Students in alternative settings.

The options for alternative school programs are varied. Reilly and Reilly (1983)
identified three types of alternative schools: (1) nonpublic (e.g., parochial, military); (2) upper-
socioeconomic preparatory schools for wealthy and college-bound students; and (3)
compensatory schools that serve students who do not function well in traditional schools (e.g.,
behavior-disordered students, and potential dropouts). Most alternative schools fall into the third
category and have been directed toward those students with attendance or discipline problems

who are potential or actual dropouts (Ascher, 1982). Dollar (1983), reporting on a research project known as Alternatives in Education, found that of the 1,200 schools and programs participating in the study, many had begun as a response to the problem of dropouts and truants. Most alternative schools were designed as an attempt to keep problem youths in school (Collins, 1987). For this reason, alternative schools have become socio-educational intervention programs for at-risk youths and in many ways share similar rehabilitative purposes as social programs for these youths. Alternative schools are similar to social programs in that they not only focus on the education of at-risk youths, but also attempt to increase the youths' social functioning and behavior competencies.

Many factors have contributed to the ever-broadening group of students who are at risk of dropping out. Alternative school educators have often been able to engage many students who had marked problems in regular school settings. McCall (2003) list the following are some principal reasons for referral to an alternative program:

1. Behavioral dysfunction in the school. These are students who have been referred to the principal or disciplinary board for chronic or serious problems that have led to disciplinary action, such as detention, suspension, or expulsion.

2. Need for academic remediation. These are students whose test scores show a significant degree of academic deficiency that requires a more individualized educational program.

3. Social skill dysfunction. These students have experienced difficulties in the community that may have required court or social service involvement, such as status offenses or delinquent behavior.

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4. Family disruption or conflict. These students have experienced destabilizing or traumatic family events. This includes stresses related to single parenting, family substance abuse, parent incarceration, and child abuse or neglect.

5. Chronic absenteeism. In this category are students whom can be referred to as "phantom participants" or "drop-ins." They attend school sporadically, which we define as 50% of the time or less. (p. 113)

Only one of the above factors is needed to meet an alternative program criterion. McCall (2003) found that it was not uncommon for a student with behavioral and academic difficulties to also be experiencing problems in the family and community and to present a pattern of chronic absenteeism in school. Many students who experience serious crises in the lives literally loose their ability to cope (Parese, 1999).

Between four and six million children and youths in schools each year are identified as displaying serious and repeated substance abuse, aggression, truancy, and sexual deviant behaviors (Kazdin, 1993). Dryfoos (1990) reported that, more than 10% of American youth aged 10-17 engage at some time in three or more of the four antisocial behaviors most commonly associated with high risk: poor school performance, substance abuse, delinquency, and early unprotected sexual activity. Many of these children have not been identified as displaying an educational disability; thus, they are not eligible for special education services (Van Acker, 2007). Often these students engage in behavior that seriously endangers others or otherwise disrupts the educational setting in a manner that impedes the education of other students (Van

Acker, 2007). More recently, the CDC reported that 8.7% of persons 12 years and over reported using illicit drugs (http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/druguse.htm).

Escobar-Chaves et al. (2002), compared results from the 1998 Alternative Youth Risk Behavior Survey (ALT-YRBS-98) with a sample of 8,918 to the 1999 national YRBS results with a sample of 15,349 demonstrating that the prevalence of most violent behaviors such as carrying guns, knives, and clubs, and fighting are significantly higher among students attending alternative high schools compared with students at regular high schools. Alternative high school students were almost three times more likely to carry a gun on one or more days of the 30 days preceding the survey compared to students from regular schools (Escobar-Chaves et al. 2002). When compared to regular school students, approximately 60% of students from the alternative school had been in a physical fight at least once the past year compared to 35.7% of students from the regular schools (Escobar-Chaves et al., 2002).

Purpose of alternative school.

Van Acker (2007) proposed that placement of these children within the alternative school setting is thought to (a) protect the majority of the students from the dangerous behavior of the few and (b) provide a more intensive and meaningful educational program to these at-risk and targeted children and youth. Dryfoos (1990) noted that, aggression and antisocial behavior could be a reaction to ineffective schooling and feelings of frustration and failure. Student alienation has been identified as one of the key factors related to the display of aggression and antisocial behavior (Dryfoos, 1990).

Effective characteristics of alternative schools.

There are several characteristics that effective alternative schools seem to have in common. Alternative public schools are often unconventional in their structuring of the educational experience, their management of student activities and their use of community resources (Trickett et al. 1985). Franklin (1992) identified nine effective characteristics of alternative schools:

1. Small size. One characteristic shared by all alternative schools and very few traditional schools is their small size. Most alternative schools enroll fewer than 200 students, and their low enrollment is believed to provide a basis for a supportive school environment.

2. Supportive environment. Socio-emotional support has been described as essential to the positive educational outcomes of at-risk youths. In alternative schools, students and staff tend to take on a variety of roles, tasks, and responsibilities that bring them into close contact with one another. These extended relationships are believed to provide an opportunity for social support, sense of belonging, and bonding that extends beyond the interpersonal experiences found in most traditional schools.

3. Individual programming. Students attending alternative schools are given individualized attention, and their school programs are tailor-made to suit their needs academically, socially, and emotionally. Alternative schools frequently provide self-paced, mastery-based curricula. Students are allowed to attend

school on an alternate schedule, and the time required for school attendance may be adjusted to accommodate work and family demands.

4. Many choices. Students are provided with several options for pursuing their education, and these options are further accommodations to their specific needs or life circumstances. Choices in programming are believed to contribute to positive morale of the students and staff of the school, and a sense of ownership is reported to emerge in alternative school programs.

5. Autonomy and democratic structure. Alternative schools are egalitarian, and governance of the school is on-site. Teachers and students identify their own learning objectives and define their own means of reaching their goals. The schools follow a participatory decision-making model, and teachers and students are frequently involved in the school governance as well as in determining classroom goals and activities. In addition, parents, significant others, community leaders, and other professionals may be included as an integral part of the school's decision-making structure.

6. Broad participation of family and community. Parents or significant others may share the school experience. Parents or significant others may be involved in organizing and attending a self-help group at the school. Alternative schools also use community resources in serving their students. Students may be allowed to earn academic credit for their work or volunteer experience. They may be given course credit for completing a course of study outside the alternative school, such

as at the community college.

7. Well-defined standards and rules. Alternative schools clearly communicate what students must do to succeed in the school. Rules and consequences for breaking them are also clearly spelled out and are consistently enforced. However, the number of rules is kept to a minimum to be consistent with the informal structure of the school experience. There is a strong emphasis on maintaining a good standing in the school, and this good standing may be backed up by peer group participation. Alternative school programs immediately reward the positive performance of students.

8. Targeted services. Alternative school programs are highly specialized in the sense that they are developed to be effective at education a well-defined or particular group of youths.

9. Accountability and constant evaluation. Alternative schools are reportedly under constant scrutiny and have to prove their right to exist. (pp. 242-245)

Many of the characteristics of alternative schools that have been associated with their effectiveness with at-risk populations are becoming integrated into mainstream public education (Franklin, 1992).

Alternative School students' disengagement from regular school.

Even students who are successful in alternative schools often have trouble reengaging to regular schools. McCall (2003) found that a majority of students who disengaged from regular school reported that the school had an "attitude" about them, and this was why they left school.

Students were mixed about relationships with public school teachers, with only a third reporting these were "good" (McCall, 2003). Successful alternative students who dropped out of regular school were not engaged in positive or productive relationships with most regular school personnel. McCall (2003) also found that a typical school drop out was a student of color with significant achievement problems who came from a single parent home with a reported income of less than $10,000 a year. Marrs, Hemmert, and Jansen (2007) sought to develop a greater understanding of the experiences of at-risk students in a rural high school by investigating their levels of school engagement. Marrs et al. (2007) use the multifaceted concept of "school engagement," as the theoretical concept for understanding the experiences of at-risk youths. Three types of engagement were investigated: behavioral engagement, emotional engagement, and cognitive engagement. Behavioral engagement in school refers to involvement in school-related activities. Small rural schools could provide the ideal location for promoting the behavioral engagement of students because of the limited number of students for the various activities (sports, clubs, band, etc.) available. Emotional engagement refers to the emotional connections that students have with teachers, students, and academic work. The intimate interactions and frequent contact found in small classrooms seem to intensify emotions, both positively and negatively (Marrs et al. 2007). For their research, Marrs et al. (2007) described cognitive engagement as the effort students put forth towards their academic work. They interviewed nine students (six females, three males; four freshman, three sophomores, two juniors) from a small (less than 200 students in grades 9-12), rural high school in the Midwest who were identified as at risk by school personnel. These nine students were interviewed about

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their perceptions of their school experience, and four of the nine students interviewed described in detail emotionally-laden encounters with their peers. These students recognized the social hierarchy in their schools and their place outside the inner circles. Two students were found to describe social conflicts that led to "harassment" or fights. Of the nine students interviewed, three described at least one teacher who was supportive and offered help when they experienced difficulty. Two students described teachers who automatically assumed they were causing trouble. Four of the students struggled to complete homework on a daily basis, and for two students coming to school and staying were major challenges.

Chapin (2008) conducted research on perceptions of social support in the development of resilience for urban at-risk boys and girls. Social support promotes the development of confidence in abilities and strengthens the skills that contribute to competence in their environment. Resilience is defined by Masten (2001):

Resilience appears to be a common phenomenon that results in most cases from the operation of basic human adaptational systems. If those systems are protected and in good working order, development is robust even in the face of severe adversity; if these systems are impaired, antecedent or consequent to adversity, then the risk for developmental problems is much greater, particularly if the environmental hazards are prolonged. (p.227)

Changes Proposed for Alternative Schools

McCall (2003) suggested educators bring the skills of alternative educators into mainstream by the following:

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1. Turning problems into opportunities. All educators and support personnel need specific skills to disengage from conflict and connect with reluctant students. Training in recognizing conflict cycles is central to building safe school and reclaiming disengaged students. Beyond the classroom, every school building needs a team of staff trained to turn problems into teaching opportunities.

2. Creating cultural safety. The fact that minority youth are disproportionately disengaged provides yet another clue to action, although it has been fashionable to sweep this unpleasant reality under the carpet. The great racial divide is the premier unresolved issue for the twenty-first century. Unless students of color feel culturally safe they will continue to disengage from regular school.

3. Creating respectful school climates. Marginalized students are drawn to other peers who also feel like educational outcasts. There are large numbers of alienated students in any school, and schools alone cannot be expected to solve all of their problems. But, schools bear responsibility for developing positive learning climates for all students. Most alienated students don't go ballistic; they just go away. Beyond the search for programs to "mediate conflict" or "bully proof" schools, we need to create deeper change in the cultures of our schools. (pp.116-117)

Schools use a variety of strategies to prevent and reduce violence, which may be conceptualized broadly as emphasizing physical safety and security or focusing primarily on psychological safety (Nickerson, 2008). A focus on physical safety usually includes zero tolerance policies. An example of zero tolerance would be suspending students who violate

school rules, restricting autonomy through the use of punitive measures, and policing functions, such as hiring resource officers and installing metal detectors (Pagliocca & Nickerson, 2001). Approaches that focus on psychological safety are often educational or therapeutic, with the assumption that improving school climate, involving parents, teaching conflict resolution, and counseling prevent and reduce school disruption and crime (Pagliocca & Nicerson, 2001). Axtman (2005) argued that zero tolerance has led to decreased school violence in the late 1990s by discouraging students from engaging in violence to avoid harsh consequences. Zero tolerance is also intended to provide punishment uniformly, regardless of socioeconomic status (Axtman, 2005). Stader (2004) found courts tended to rule in favor of schools that use zero tolerance policies. State laws reflect the trend to control crime by authorizing funds for hiring law enforcement officers and installing security hardware (Nickerson 2008).   Nickerson (2008) examined the extent to which three approaches to violence prevention and responses were associated with the incidence of school crime and disruption after accounting for the influence of demographic variables.

Person-centered approach to disruptive classroom behavior

The person-centered approach is based on the work of Carl Rogers and was designed to create a comfortable non-judgmental environment between the therapist and client. The relationship is developed through the therapist use of congruence, empathy, and unconditional positive regard towards clients while using a non-directive approach. The goal of person-centered approach is for clients to find their own solutions to their problems. Gatongi (2007) used three of the "core conditions" to study the effectiveness when used to disruptive behavior in

the classroom. Empathy is the helper's attempt to enter and understand the world of the client. It is often viewed as the most important and difficult step in person-centered approach. An important condition for empathy is that it must be accurate and made known to the client. Secondly, congruence, sometimes called genuineness is a characteristic of being transparent, real, and honest in a helping relationship. The therapist must communicate genuine feelings and allow the client to be aware of this, rather than keep his/her feelings to him/herself. Lastly, unconditional positive regard is a non-judgmental acceptance of the client.

Client-centered approach in the classroom.

The Assertive Discipline Plan was first developed in 1976 with the aim of managing classroom behavior. Today the Assertive Discipline Plan has taken the center stage in managing challenging student behavior by holding students responsible for their own actions (Gatongi, 2007). This approach helps teachers create a cooperative environment enabling students to make the right behavior choice. Teachers and students are in constant contact, allowing for effective teaching and academic and social growth. Gatongi (2007) found it to be beneficial that student views are taken into consideration on matters regarding their education. He found success in allowing students to play a role in their education and the responsibility attached. The following topics appear to be concerns that continue to impact at-risk students and successful transitions and integrations back into regular schools.

Causes of Aggression and Anti-Social Behaviors

It is unclear why some students fail in traditional classroom settings and struggle with transitions. Alternative students have characteristics that differ from the norm (Quinn, Poirier,

Faller, Gable & Tonelson, 2006). Alternative schools are taking a holistic approach to educating at risk students. They consider empathy, parental support, emotional factors, aggression, physically abused youths, and environmental factors when addressing their students' challenges (Quinn et al., 2006; Balfanz 2007; Burchinal et al. 2008). The following sections will examine possible causes and interventions for some of the differences encountered in alternative schools.

Aggression and empathy are learned through observation and interactions with parents, caregivers, and others (Zhou et al. 2002). Children's social interactions in the home, school and in the community greatly influence their perception of others and the level of empathy they are able to experience and express. Parents' warmth and positive expression of empathy has a great effect on their children's ability to express empathy for others and express less aggression. Empathy is a major component in decreasing aggression (Spinrad & Losoya, 1999).

Empathy has long been hypothesized to be crucial contributor to interpersonal sensitivity and social competence (Zhou et al. 2002). Children and adolescents who are able to empathize with others should have a greater understanding of others feelings and exhibit positive behaviors and are socially competent. In contrast, individuals with low empathy are believed to be especially at risk for externalizing behaviors (Zhou et al. 2002). Consistent with theoretical expectations, investigators have found links between children's and adolescents' empathy or sympathy and their positive behaviors, such as helping and comforting, as well as their social competence (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1990). In contrast, deficits in empathy and remorse are recognized as common in individuals with antisocial personality disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). The associations between externalizing problem behaviors and low

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awareness of, and concern for, the affective consequences of one's behavior for others are consistent with the view that empathy plays an important function in the reduction or inhibition of aggressive or antisocial actions toward others (Feshbach & Feshbach, 1982).

Parental Support

Researchers have suggested numerous ways by which socialization agents may influence the development of empathy-related responding. For example, one proposal is that the development of empathy is most likely to occur in a family environment that (1) satisfies the child's own emotional needs and discourages excessive self-concern, (2) encourages the child to experience and express a broad range of emotions, and (3) provides opportunities for the child to observe and interact with others who encourage emotional sensitivity and responsiveness (Barnett, 1987). Parental warmth or responsivity usually is viewed as an aspect of parenting style displayed in interactions with the child. Displaying warmth/responsively reflects parents' general tendencies to be supportive, affectionate, and sensitive to the child's need, as well as to express approval and direct positive emotion and behaviors toward the child (Darling & Steinberg, 1993).

Several socialization processes have been hypothesized to contribute to children's empathy-related responding, including the quality of parent-child interaction, modeling and reinforcement (Spinrad & Losoya, 1999). This process begins as early as infancy. It was noted by Spinrad and Losoya (1999) that attachment theorists have argued that infants who develop a secure, trusting relationship with their care-givers form more positive relationships with others and are more responsive to others' needs. Based on the parent-child relationship history,

children will carry forward expectations and feelings about early relationships to new relationships with other individuals. Also consistent with this view, securely attached infants have been found to be more empathic and prosocial as children than have infants who were classified as insecurely attached to their mothers.

In their study, Zhou et al. (2002) found support for the hypothesis that parent's positive expression mediated the relation between parental warmth and children's empathy. This study focused on the concurrent and cross-time relations of parental observed warmth and positive expressivity to children's situational facial and self-reported empathic responding, social competence, and externalizing problems in a sample of 180 elementary school children. The results suggest that parental warmth and positive expressiveness in interactions with their children are related to children's empathy and social functioning, especially for older children. The parent-driven socialization model fit the data well: parental warmth was positively associated with parental positive expressiveness, which was, in turn, positively related to children's empathy with negative emotions. Warm supportive parents tended to express more positive emotions in the presence of their children. The children of these parents displayed more empathy in response to the emotional stimuli provided by their parents.

Parental Characteristics

Janssens et al. (1989), found that both maternal and paternal demandingness (the parent's tendency to point at responsibility or say which behavior he or she expects in a situation) were associated with elementary school children's self-reported empathy. Baumrind (1971) concluded that supportive parenting combined with parental firmness in setting limits and

standards was associated with socially responsible behavior in children. Eisenberg, Fabes, Schaller, Carlo and Miller (1991), examined the relation of parental empathy-related characteristics and emotion-related child-rearing practices to third and sixth graders' vicarious emotional responding. They found that parental characteristics and practices are associated with children's vicarious emotional responding. Eisenberg et al. (1991), found parental sympathy tended to be negatively related to markers of personal distress in same-sex offspring and, for both parents positively associated with sons' reported dispositional sympathy or empathy. In addition, fathers' sympathy was positively correlated with sons' dispositional empathy (Eisenberg et al. 1991). The findings are consistent with other research that empathic/sympathetic parents help their children to cope effectively with their emotions when they are distressed, thus controlling or reducing aggression.

Emotional Factors

Emotional factors are strongly related to children's empathy, which in turn strongly predict prosocial behavior (Strayer & Roberts, 2002). Expressions of emotions are thought to have an important impact for social competency and psychopathology in children. Empathy has been linked to children's ability to be emotionally expressive. Girls' and boys' empathy was strongly linked with their emotional expressiveness, their expression of anger, the frequency with which they denied feeling sad, frightened, or angry and congruence between their facially expressed and verbally reported emotions (Roberts & Strayer, 1996).

Spinrad & Losoya (1999), examined whether parents' affect and encouragement were associated with children's empathy-related responses and moral behavior. They found that

parent's emotionality differentially related to both boys' and girls' dispositional sympathy. Parents' positive emotionality was related to higher sympathy in daughters, and parents' negative emotionality was linked with lower sympathy in sons (Spinrad & Losoya, 1999). Parental encouragement was associated with both boys' and girls' increased sympathy. Parents who were supportive and responded warmly to their children in stressful or novel contexts had children who focused on others' needs and emotions (Spinrad & Losoya, 1999). Parents who were supportive and accepting in response to their children's negative emotions in situations that did not hurt other people provided the optimal amount of emotional support enabling the children to deal with their own distress in other contexts (Spinrad & Losoya, 1999). However, when parents sanction or responded negatively to their children's emotion, the children responded with anxiety in response to others' distress because of the association between the expression of negative emotions and sanctions (Spinrad & Losoya, 1999).

Aggression and Empathy in Physically Abused Youths

In a study to determine if empathy would differentially predict interpersonal aggression and behavior compliance among physically abused youth who reside in group home placement, LeSure-Lester (2000), found a strong relationship between higher levels of empathy and lower rates of interpersonal aggression and a strong relationship between empathy and higher rates of behavior compliance. Also in support of the strong relationship between empathy and aggression was an earlier study conducted by Straker and Jacobson (1981) on aggression, emotional maladjustment and empathy in abused children finding that abused children in their research did not differ significantly from the control group on any of the measures of aggression.

Aggressive behavior is a social response which has the defining characteristic of inflicting injury upon persons or objects (Feshbach & Feshbach, 1969). These noxious consequences may serve to reinforce the aggressive response or may function as discriminative cues mediating the use of aggressive behavior in attaining non aggressive goals (Feshbach, Stiles, & Bitter, 1967). Feshbach and Feshbach (1969), in a study on empathy functioning as an inhibitor of overt aggressive behavior, found that in the older age group (6-7 year old) high empathy boys were significantly less aggressive than low empathy boys while the reverse held for the younger boys (4-5 year olds). The distress response of a child who is the victim of the aggressive act may signal to the aggressor that the attack has been effective as well as produce distress responses through empathy in the aggressor.

Early Mother Characteristics

Feshbach (1975) proposed an integrative model in which there are three components to empathy. Two are cognitive and one is affective. There is a socialization process in which the child first learns the cognitive ability to understand the feeling perspective of another. Later, the child learns to understand the role of the other. Finally, the child develops the affective ability to feel those feelings on behalf of the other. Some children do not complete development through all three phases nor have all adults achieved the ability to empathize at all three levels.

Ruffman et al. (2006) conducted a longitudinal study with 55 middle and upper middle-class children to investigate the relation between early mother characteristics (e.g. mental state talk, general parenting style) and later child characteristics (e.g. theory of mind, conflict/cooperation). The children were tested twice, once at 3 years old and again at 4 years

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old. At each testing time the children were given a task in which the mothers helped the child and a friend draw items with a drawing toy. Mother's parenting style (warmth) was uniquely related only to one later child conflict/cooperation measure. This study also concluded that child theory of mind was not related to any child conflict/cooperation measures. Ruffman et al.'s (2006) findings suggest that only the things mothers say (their mental state talk) relates to child theory of mind. Additional, both what they say and what they do (mothers' warmth) relates to child conflict/cooperation.

Parental expressiveness reflects parents' tendencies to express emotions (e.g., through facial expressions), often in situations that do not directly involve the child and when the emotion is not directed at the child (Eisenberg et al. 2001). The intensity or frequency of parents' positive expressiveness, including both parents' general tendency to express positive emotion and parents' positive expressiveness in interactions with children and other family members, is typically referred to as "family expressiveness," and has been linked to children's high sociometric status and prosocial behavior, socially appropriate behavior, and low levels of aggression (Eisenberg et al. 1991). Children from emotionally expressive families tend to be emotionally expressive themselves, either because of some enduring biological substrate that is shared by family members or because of children's limitation and emotional contagion in interactions with parents (Saarni, Mumme, & Campos, 1998). Children with greater ability to experience and express positive as well as negative emotion are likely better able to feel others' emotions, and are more empathic than children who are low in expressiveness (Roberts & Strayer, 1996).

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Environments

Family and school environments have been linked to psychosocial and behavioral maladjustment in adolescent. Studies conclude that aggressive adolescents at school show a very strong need for social recognition; they would like to be considered as powerful, socially accepted, different, and rebellious by their classmates (Rodriquez, 2004). The quality of adolescent-parent, adolescent-peer and adolescent-teacher interactions influence, and may determine, the way adolescents perceive themselves in relation to others (Werner, 2004). Prior studies have shown that a negative communication with parents and lack of parental support has a substantial and negative effect on the development of particular social skills in children, such as the capacity to use non-aggressive solutions to interpersonal problems or to empathize (Lopez, Perez, Ochoa & Ruiz, 2008).

<center>**Predictors of School Failure**</center>

Balfanz, Herzog, and Mac Iver (2007), used longitudinal analyses to follow almost 13,000 students from 1996 until 2004 to demonstrate how predictive indicators reflecting poor attendance, misbehavior, and course failures in sixth grade can be used to identify 60% of the students who would not graduate from high school. Balfanz, Herzog, and Mac Iver (2007), developed four sets of predictor variables based on behavioral disengagement, dropout prediction, and student data routine available in the school system:

1. Academic performance variables: standardized test scores from the spring of fifth grade and final course marks from sixth grade.

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2. Indicators of misbehavior: end-of-year behavior marks in each course, in school and out of school suspensions.

3. Attendance: both total days absent and by descending cut points, that is percentage attending 80% or less.

4. Status variables that might indicate underlying but unmeasured academic or behavioral outcomes: special education status, English as a Second Language status, and being one or more years over age for grade. (p. 226)

Multivariate logistical regression was used to analyze the data. They found students with chronic absentees were 68% less likely than other students to graduate, those with an unsatisfactory behavior grade were 56% less likely to graduate than others, those who failed math were 54% less likely to graduate than others, and students who failed English were 42% less likely to graduate than other students.

Just as there have been studies showing what factors are likely to cause students to fail, other studies suggest some strategies that may lead to success. Smith-Adcock et al. (2008) found that holistic group counseling could promote wellness for girls who were at risk for delinquent behaviors. Pre and post intervention questionnaires were used to determine the success in the girls' attitudes and behaviors. Their findings indicated group counseling experience help the girls change their understanding of wellness and revealed to them many assets related to personal wellness.

Rationale for the Research Questions

Research suggests that many students become lost during school transition (Akos & Galassi, 2004; Wallis, Miranda & Rubiner, 2005) and alternative school attendance is on the rise. The research also suggests that effective alternative schools can influence students' behaviors (Franklin, 1992; McCall, 2003). But little research has been done to evaluate the effectiveness of alternative schools. One way of doing this is to compare the number of reported maladaptive behaviors at regular school with the number of reports of maladaptive behavior while the student is placed in alternative school. If the alternative school placement is effective, one would expect that maladaptive behavior referrals would be fewer during the year when the student returns to regular school. The following questions will be addressed in this study:

1. What is the pattern of disciplinary referrals across the four quarters of Year 1 in regular school? Do they increase, decrease, or remain at the same level during the year?

2. Do disciplinary referrals decrease or increase during Year 2 in Alternative School?

3. When students return to regular school in Year 3, do disciplinary referrals return to their Year 1 baseline or show decrease in comparison with Year 1?

4. Are there differences by gender in the pattern of disciplinary referrals?

5. Are there differences by type of school (Middle versus High School) in the pattern of disciplinary referrals?

6. Are there different patterns for individual students? That is, do all students show the
    same basic pattern as the group average or are there different patterns for some
    students?

CHAPTER III

Method

This chapter will describe the research method and design used to investigate the relations of alternative school placement to at-risk students' norm-violating behaviors. The research questions, sample description, instrumentation, data collection procedures and statistical data analyses are discussed.

Sample

The sample for this study consisted of 92 at-risk middle and high school students who were attending alternative school during the 2008-2009 school year. The school district included two high schools, two middle schools, three elementary schools, one special needs pre-k and one alternative school during the initial data collection period. The alternative school was closed in 2010. The sample for this study was a non-random sample of students composed of 69.6% African American, 28.3% Caucasian, and 2.2% Multi-race. The alternative school was comprised of 16 (13.65%) middle school students and 76 (69.16%) high school students. Data were gathered from 36 females and 56 males. Existing data from 2007-2010 school years were used for this study, which negated the need to contact any students or parents.

Instrumentation

Students' records were reviewed from the PowerSchool Database for the current study. PowerSchool has been shown to be an efficient method for gathering and storing data for research. Day, Gardner and Hsin (2010) used PowerSchool to track grades that students received in general education classes as a measure of academic performance in their research on

increasing on-task behaviors of high school students with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity

Disorder (ADHD). This study used PowerSchool to track students' disciplinary log referrals in

regular school, alternative school and when they returned to regular school. The norm-violating

behaviors and staff or administrator name is entered into the database for tracking and

documentation purposes. PowerSchool can only be accessed by authorized faculty and staff. The

database is password protected.

Measures

Discipline Log Entries. The disciplinary logs provide a systematic way of identifying norm-

violating behaviors in students. Authorized faculty and staff record norm-violating behaviors,

consultations, and disciplinary actions in the disciplinary logs.

Design and Procedure

A permission letter was signed by the school district board of education superintendent

and special education director. A summary of the study design and contact information was

provided on the permission letter. After Auburn University's Office of Research Compliance

Institutional Review Board (IRB) granted permission to conduct this study, the PowerSchool

database was used to gather data from the disciplinary logs. Each student was assigned a random

set of alphabetical letters to further protect his/her identity.

Data Analysis

Single-subject research is a scientific methodology that can be used to define basic

principles of behavior and establish evidence-based practices (Horner et al., 2005). The

methodology has been around since the 1960's (Sidman, 1960). There are extensive summaries

of single-subject design elements available (Hersen & Barlow, 1976; Kazdin, 1982). The major

function of single-subject research is experimental rather than correlational or descriptive, and its

purpose is to document causal, or functional, relationships between independent and dependent

variables.

One or more dependent variables are defined and measured in single-subject research.

The dependent variable in single-subject educational research is usually a form of observational

behavior. In single-subject research the independent variable is generally the intervention, or

behavioral mechanism under investigation. Horner et al (2005) described single-subject baseline

condition as being similar to a treatment as usual condition in group designs, whereas single-

subject research designs compare performance during the baseline condition, and then contrast

this pattern with performance under an intervention condition. Experimental control is provided

for most threats to internal validity and allow for confirmation of a functional relationship

between manipulation of the independent variable and change in the dependent variable.

Graphs for all students were based on an ABA design with data for the baseline period

(first A phase/regular school disciplinary referrals), for the intervention period (B

phase/alternative school disciplinary referrals) and for the return to baseline period (second A

phase/return to regular school). The ABA design allows conclusions as to whether an

intervention (phase B) affects a dependent variable under scrutiny by providing information on

the changes following introduction and removal of the intervention (Kinugasa, Cerin, & Hooper,

2004). Participants serve as their own control and performance prior to intervention is compared

to performance during and/or after intervention (Horner et al., 2005).

Twelve Figures reflect summations of different combinations of students (i.e., the whole group; middle school students only; by gender, etc.) and selected individual students in each of the three conditions (before, during, and after Alternative School). Single-subject design cannot compare different groups, but it can compare the same group in different settings. Student's profiles are included in four groupings (i.e., whole; grade level; gender, etc.) with one specific profile group. One student's profile met the criteria for two specific profile groups.

CHAPTER IV

Results

This chapter describes the results of the statistical analyses used to analyze the hypotheses of this study. First is a summary of the descriptive statistics of the sample participants.

Sample Characteristics

Ninety-two non-randomly selected alternative school students' disciplinary referrals were used in this study. One middle school student was expelled from regular school for the 2007-2008 school year and was not counted. Similarly, two high school students transferred out of the school district for the regular school attendance for 2007-2008 school year. One high school student transferred out of the school district for the 2008-2009 school year. This student returned to the school district for the 2009-2010 school year. One middle school was sentenced to one year in a youth detention center and not included for the 2009-2010 data. One high school student transferred out of the school district during the 2009-2010 school year. One high school student died from medical complications during the 2009-2010 school year. Thus, a total of three students were removed from the data count for year 3 re-entry back into regular school.

The sample demographic characteristics were analyzed using descriptive statistics, principal frequencies. Demographic information collected includes: a) gender, b) race or ethnicity, d) classification, and e) high school graduation. The results for demographics are presented in Table 2.

Sixty percent of the sample population for this study were male; 39% of the sample were females (Table 2). Twenty-eight percent of the sample self-described as White/Caucasian; 69% Black or African American; and 2% Bi-racial or other (Table 2). In this sample the students' current classifications were 17.3% middle school students and 82.6% high school students. Of the seventy-four high school students enrolled in the school district for the 2009-2010 school year 56.8% graduated.

Table 2

Demographic Description

Descriptor	Variable	n	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	56	60.9
	Female	36	39.1
Race or Ethnicity	White/Caucasian	26	28.3
	Black or African American	64	69.6
	Bi-racial or Other	2	2.2
Classification	Middle School (6-8)	16	17.4
	High School (9-12)	76	82.6
High School	Graduated	42	55.3
	Transferred Out	26	34.2

Research Question 1: What is the pattern of disciplinary referrals across the four quarters of Year 1 in regular school? Do they increase, decrease, or remain at the same level during the year?

Frequencies of disciplinary referrals for norm-violating behaviors for the whole group during regular school placement, subsequent alternative school placement, and return to regular school are depicted in Figure 1. For the whole group of students, in year 1, during the First Quarter, there were 168 disciplinary referrals. In the Second Quarter that number decreased to 129 disciplinary referrals. That number continued to decrease to 71 disciplinary referrals by the Fourth Quarter.

Research Question 2: Do disciplinary referrals decrease or increase during Year 2 in Alternative School?

During the First Quarter, there were 124 disciplinary referrals. The Second Quarter of alternative school showed an increase in disciplinary referrals to 154. The disciplinary referrals dropped in the Third Quarter to 81 and dropped even more ending the Fourth Quarter of the year at 17.

Research Question 3: When students return to regular school in Year 3, do disciplinary referrals return to their Year 1 baseline or show decreases in comparison with Year 1?

In the First Quarter of year 3, there were 146 disciplinary referrals. That number decreased to 81 disciplinary referrals in the Second Quarter. In the Third Quarter the disciplinary referrals continued to drop ending with 55 referrals for the whole group. Disciplinary referrals

decreased to 29 by the end of the Fourth Quarter. Disciplinary referrals appear to have decreased

compared to referrals in the year before alternative school placement, Year 1.

Figure1. Total Number of Disciplinary Referrals for the Group Over Three Years (values on x axis are number of referrals)
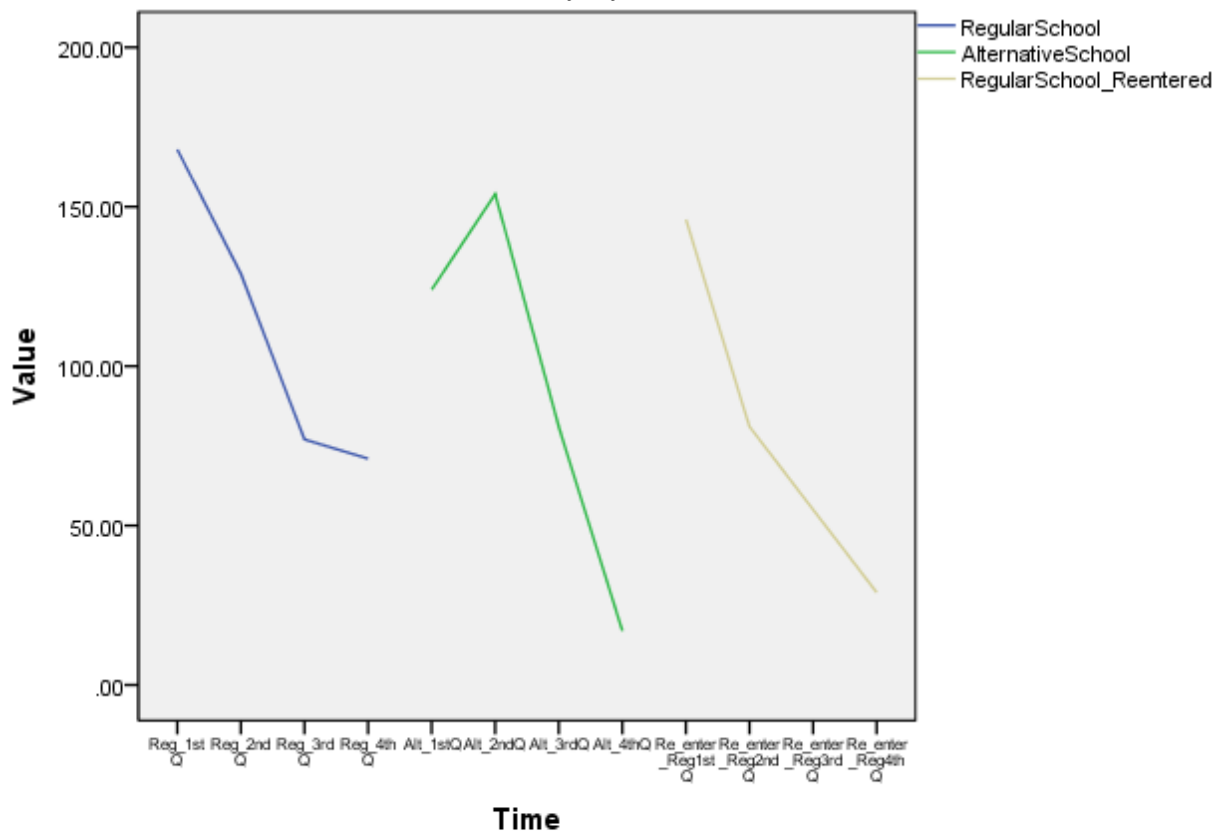
Research Question 4: Are there differences by gender in the pattern of disciplinary

referrals?

The fourth research question examined male and female in disciplinary referrals. Single-subject does not allow for comparison between different groups, but comparisons of the same group at different times. Thus, the girls disciplinary referrals are discussed separately from the boys, differences are noted. The girls received 37 disciplinary referrals in the First Quarter in year 1. The referrals increased to 39 for the Second Quarter. In the Third Quarter there was a decreased to 23 disciplinary referrals. The girls received 24 disciplinary referrals for the Fourth Quarter. The girls started the First Quarter of year 2 with 34 disciplinary referrals. The referrals decreased to 29 for the Second Quarter. There were 20 disciplinary referrals for the Third Quarter and only 5 for the Fourth Quarter of year 2. Upon re-entry into regular school for year 3, found the girls beginning the First Quarter with 36 disciplinary referrals. There was a drop in referrals for the Second Quarter to 21. The Third Quarter showed a steep decrease in referrals to 4, in the Fourth Quarter of year 3 (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Girls'Disciplinary Referrals Over Three Years (values on x axis are number of referrals)
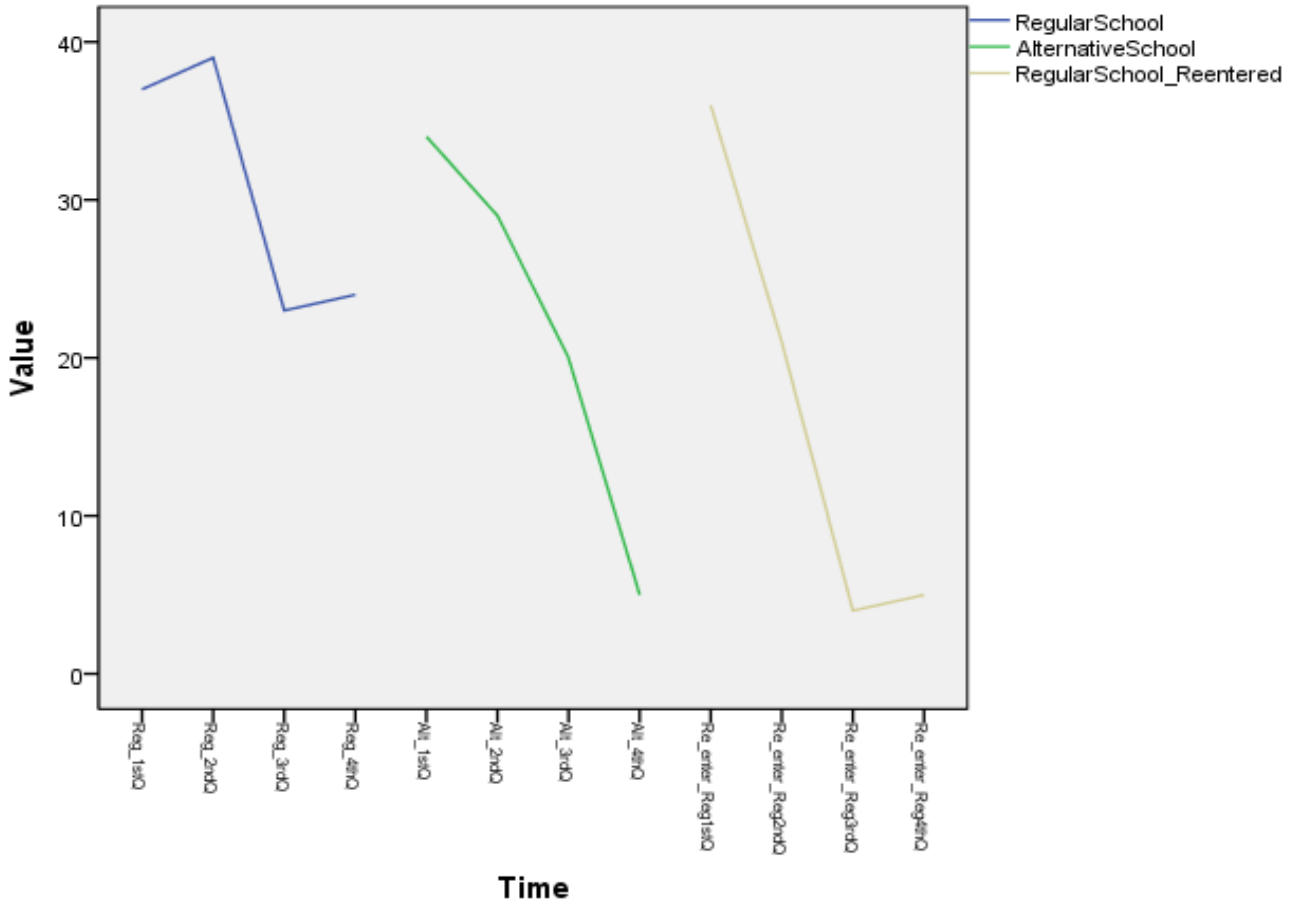
The boys received 131 disciplinary referrals for the First Quarter of year 1. The referrals decreased to 90 for the Second Quarter and to 54 for the Third Quarter. The boys received 47 disciplinary referrals in the Fourth Quarter. The boys received 90 disciplinary referrals for the First Quarter of year 2. There was an increase to 125 for the Second Quarter. The referrals decreased to 61 for the Third Quarter and lower still at 12 for the Fourth Quarter of year 2. The

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boys received 110 disciplinary referrals for the First Quarter of year 3. The referrals dropped to

60 for the Second Quarter and 51 for the Third Quarter. The boys received 24 disciplinary

referrals for the Fourth Quarter of year 3 (Figure 3). The graphs show a "spike" in disciplinary

referrals for the boys during Quarter 2 at the alternative school. The boys started each Quarter 1

of the all three years with high disciplinary referrals that decreased by Quarter 4 of each year

regardless of the school.

Figure 3. Boys' Disciplinary Referrals Over Three Years (values on x axis are number of referrals)
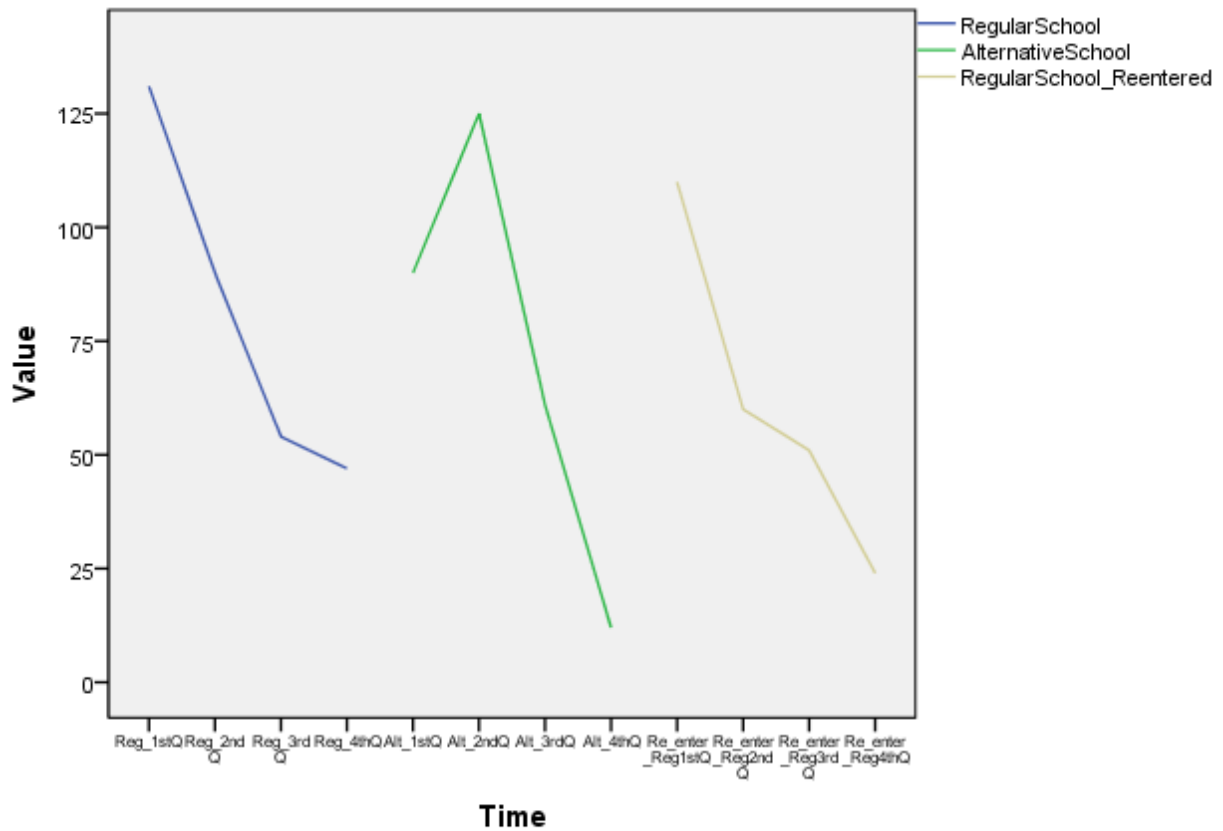
Research Question 5: Are there differences by type of school (Middle versus High School) in the pattern of disciplinary referrals?

For middle school students in year 1, during the First Quarter, there were 34 disciplinary referrals. There were 26 for the Second Quarter. In the Third Quarter they increased to 28. There

was a decrease to 18 for the Fourth Quarter of year 1. In the First Quarter of year 2, there were

32 disciplinary referrals. There was an increase to 75 for the Second Quarter. In the Third

Quarter there was a decrease to 46 referrals. There were 9 referrals for the Fourth Quarter of year

2. There were 68 disciplinary referrals for the First Quarter of year 3. There was a decrease to 47

for the Second Quarter and 35 for the Third Quarter. The referrals dropped to 13 for the Fourth

Quarter of year 3 (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Middle School Disciplinary Referrals (values on x axis are number of referrals)
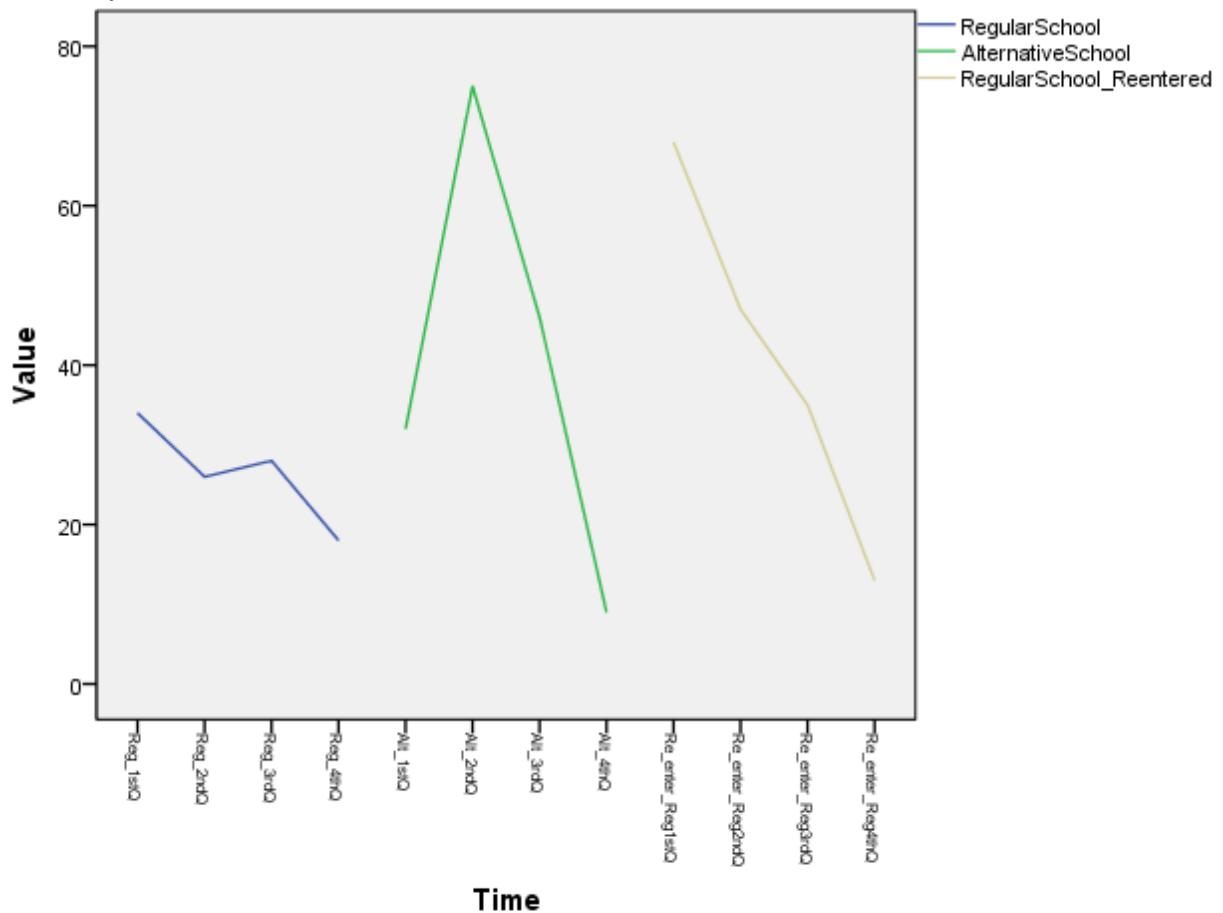
The high school students received 167 disciplinary referrals for the First Quarter of year 1. There was a decrease to 128 referrals for the Second Quarter. Third Quarter disciplinary referrals decreased to 77 and to 70 for the Fourth Quarter. In the First Quarter of the year 2, there were 92 referrals. There were 79 referrals for the Second Quarter. The referrals for the Third Quarter decrease to 35, and then to 8 for the Fourth Quarter. During the re-entry into

regular school, year 3, there were 78 disciplinary referrals in the First Quarter. This decreased to

34 referrals for the Second Quarter and to 20 for the Third Quarter. There were 16 disciplinary

referrals for the Fourth Quarter of year 3 (Figure 5).

Figure 5. High School Disciplinary Referrals(values on x axis are number of referrals)
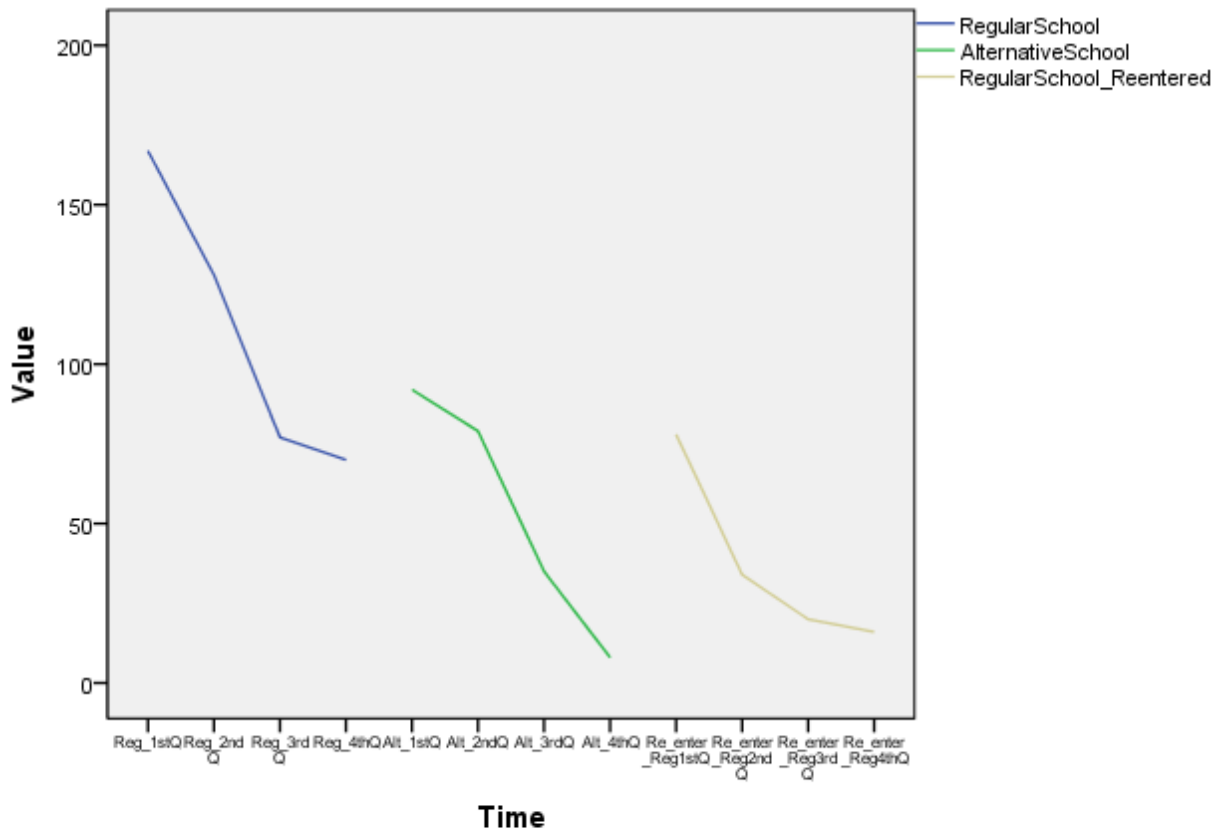
Research Question 6: Are there different patterns for individual students? That is, do all students show the same basic pattern as the group total or are there different patterns for some students?

To answer Research Question 6, each individual profile was examined. The individual profiles were then placed into groups; extremely high, extremely low, general profile, students who began high and ended low each year, students who began Quarter 1 year 2 higher than Quarter 1 year 1, and students who ended Quarter 4 year 2 higher than Quarter 4 year 1. The groups' averages were then calculated. Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were then analyzed from the averages.

The extremely high group was comprised of two students who started Quarter 1 year 1 with 10 or more disciplinary referrals. Each individual profile was analyzed for frequency data. Student 1 received 15 disciplinary referrals during Quarter 1 of year 1. There were 8 disciplinary referrals for Quarter 1 year 2. Disciplinary referrals increased to 18 for Quarter 1 of year 3. Student 1 experienced the lowest number of disciplinary referrals for year 2 while attending alternative school. However, upon re-entry into regular school Quarter 1 of year 3, Student 1 experienced the greatest number of disciplinary referrals. Alternative school did not produce a lasting decrease in disciplinary referrals for Student 1. See Figure 6.

Figure 6. Graph of Extremely High Student 1 (values on x axis are number of referrals)
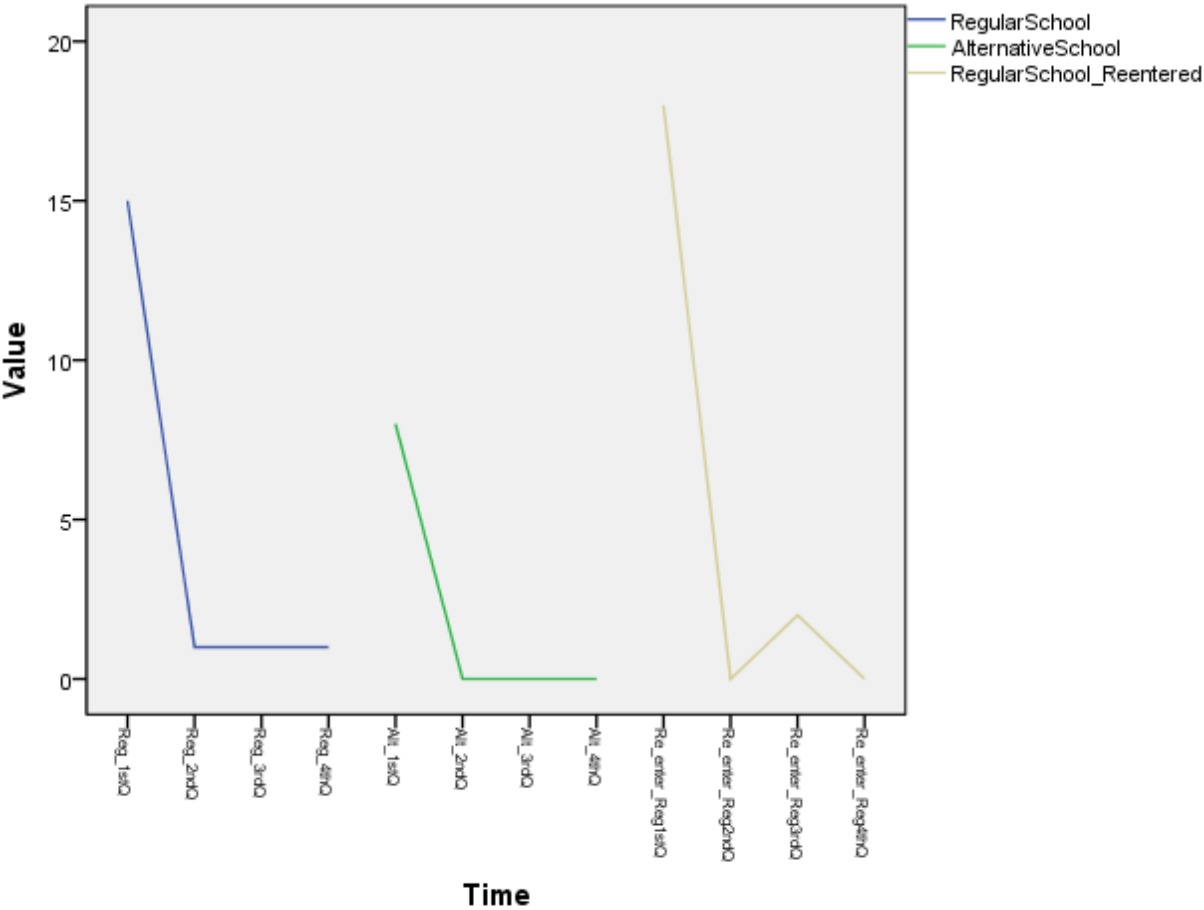
Student 2 received 10 disciplinary referrals for Quarter 1 of year 1. There were 8 referrals

for Quarter 2, 2 referrals for Quarter 3, and 1 for Quarter 4 of year 1. Student 2 was then sent to

alternative school for year 2. There were no disciplinary referrals for year 2. Similarly, there
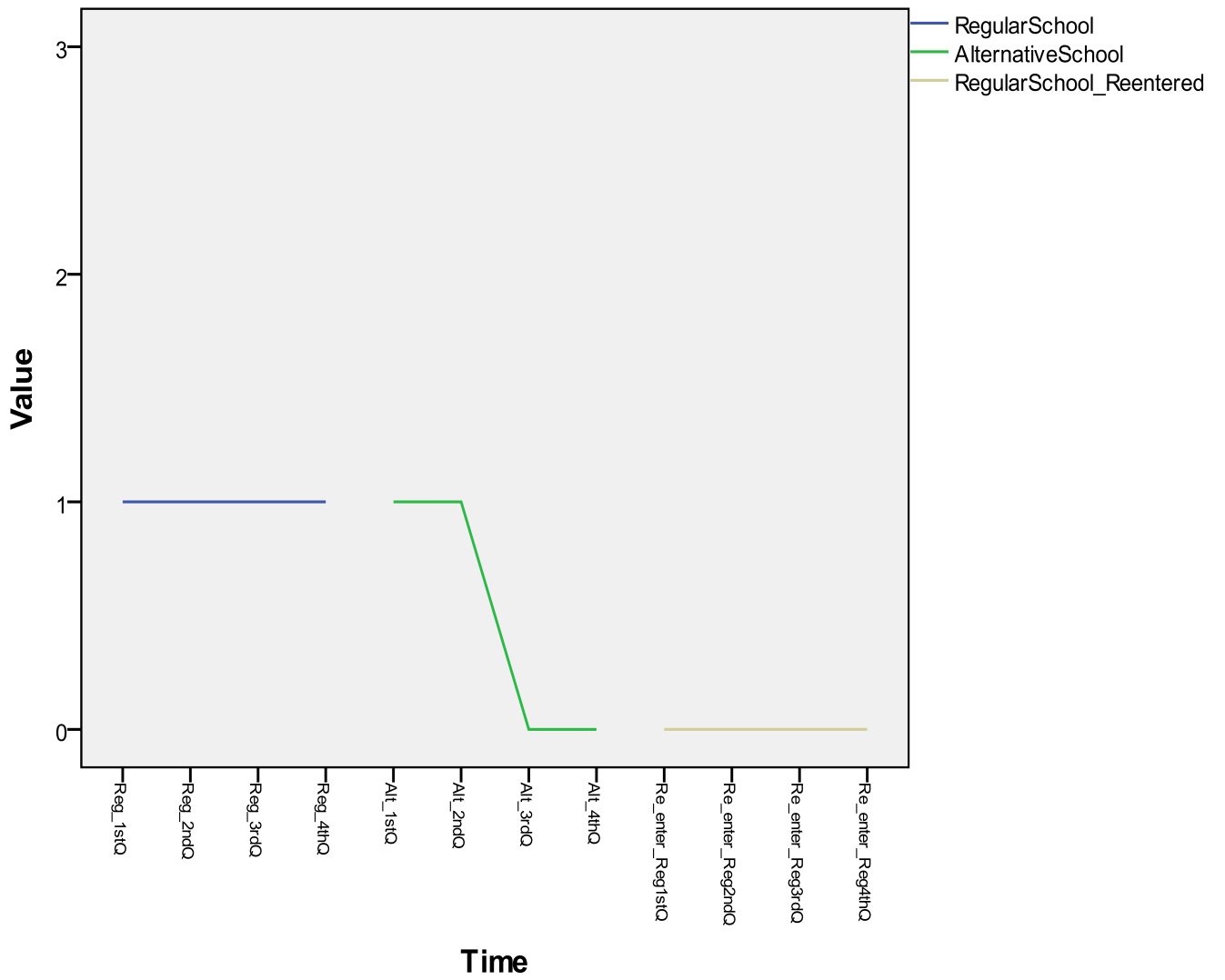
were no disciplinary referrals for year 3 upon re-entry into regular school. The disciplinary

referrals started extremely high in year 1, decreased to zero for both years 2 and 3 (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Graph of Extremely High Student 2 (values on x axis are number of referrals)
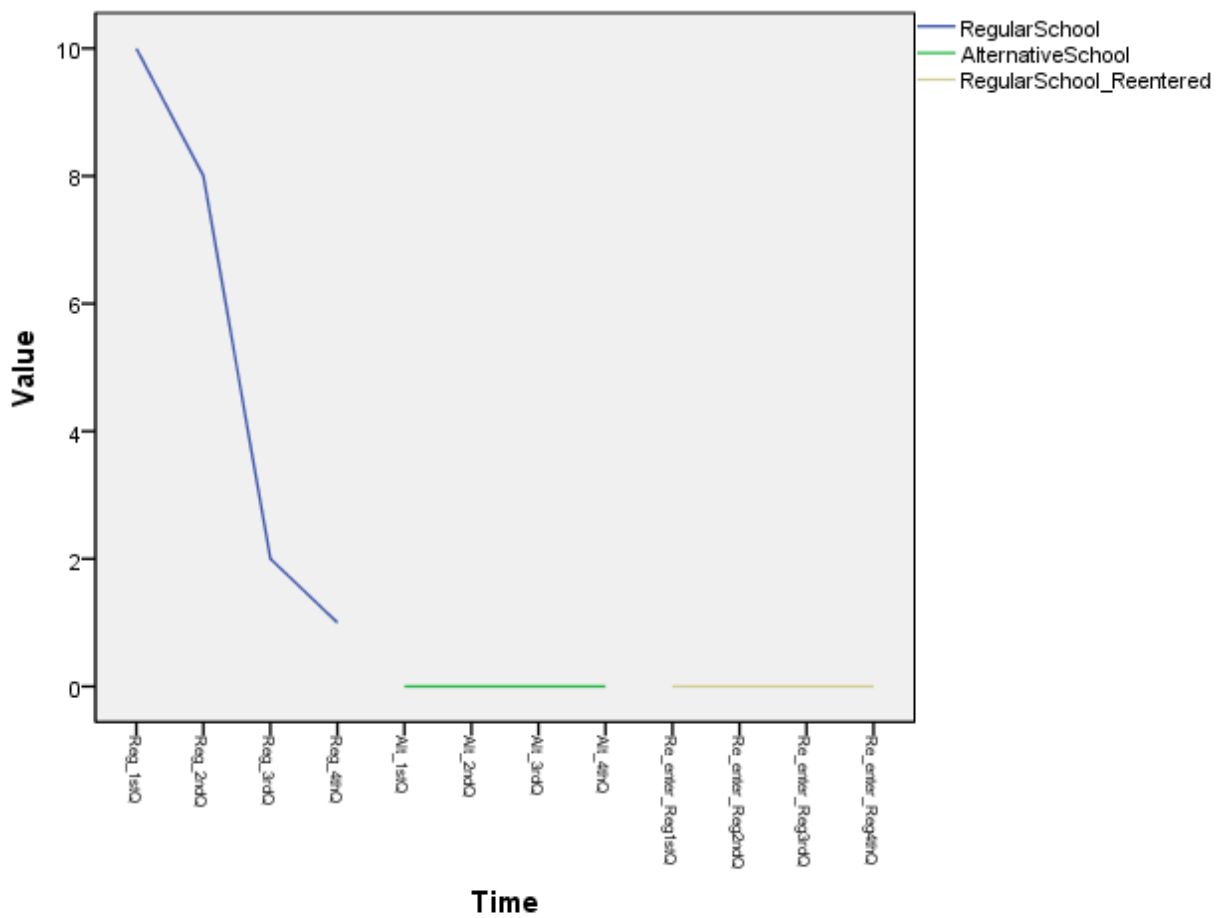
The extremely low group consisted of 44 students who began Quarter 1 year 1 with two or fewer disciplinary referrals. The extremely low group received the fewest disciplinary referrals but, their behaviors were very disruptive. There total number of disciplinary referrals never increased above five. The average for the extremely low group was calculated and descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data. In year1 (regular school), the extremely low group mean was 1.00 (SD= .000) for disciplinary referrals. The mean was .50 (SD= .58) for year 2(alternative school). The extremely low group averaged a mean of .00 (SD= .000) for re-entry into regular school (year 3). The results from the extremely low group showed a "floor effect." It is not possible to ascertain if Alternative School worked because the initial baseline was already low. See figure 8.

Figure 8. Chart of Extremely Low Group Average (values on x axis are number of

referrals)

The next group to be analyzed was the general group. This group consisted of 20 students who fit the profile of 3 or more disciplinary referrals in Quarter 1 of year 1, three or fewer referrals for Quarter 1 of year 2 and start Quarter 1 of year 3 with two or fewer disciplinary referrals. The mean for disciplinary referrals in Regular School (year 1) was 2.75 (SD= 1.71). The students were then placed in alternative school for year 2. The mean for Alternative School (year 2) was .75 (SD= .96) for disciplinary referrals. The students re-entered regular school for year 3. The mean was .75 (SD= .50) for disciplinary referrals. The results of the graph indicate that Alternative School worked.

See Figure 9.

Figure 9. Graph of General Group Output Averages (values on x axis are number of referrals)
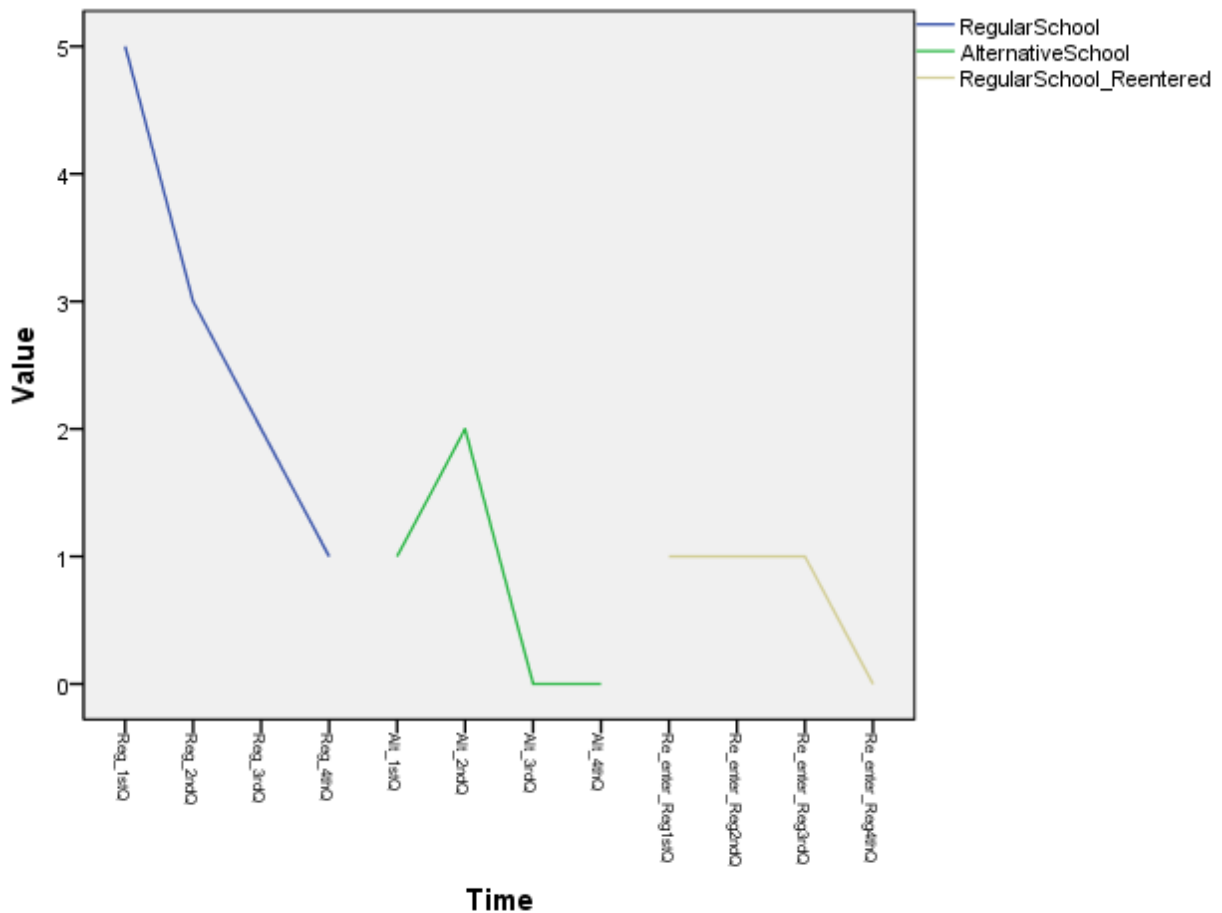
The students' profiles were again examined to determine additional groups. Seven students' profiles were consistent for beginning each quarter high (greater than 5) and ending each 4th quarter low (less than 3). These seven students were placed in a group and their results

were analyzed. For Regular School (year 1) there was a mean of 3.25 (SD= 1.89). The

disciplinary referrals for Alternative School (year 2) received a mean of 2.25 (SD= 1.71). The

mean was 2.25 (SD= 2.63) for Regular School Re-entry disciplinary referrals. See Figure 10.

Figure 10. Students Who Began High and Ended Low (values on x axis are number of referrals)
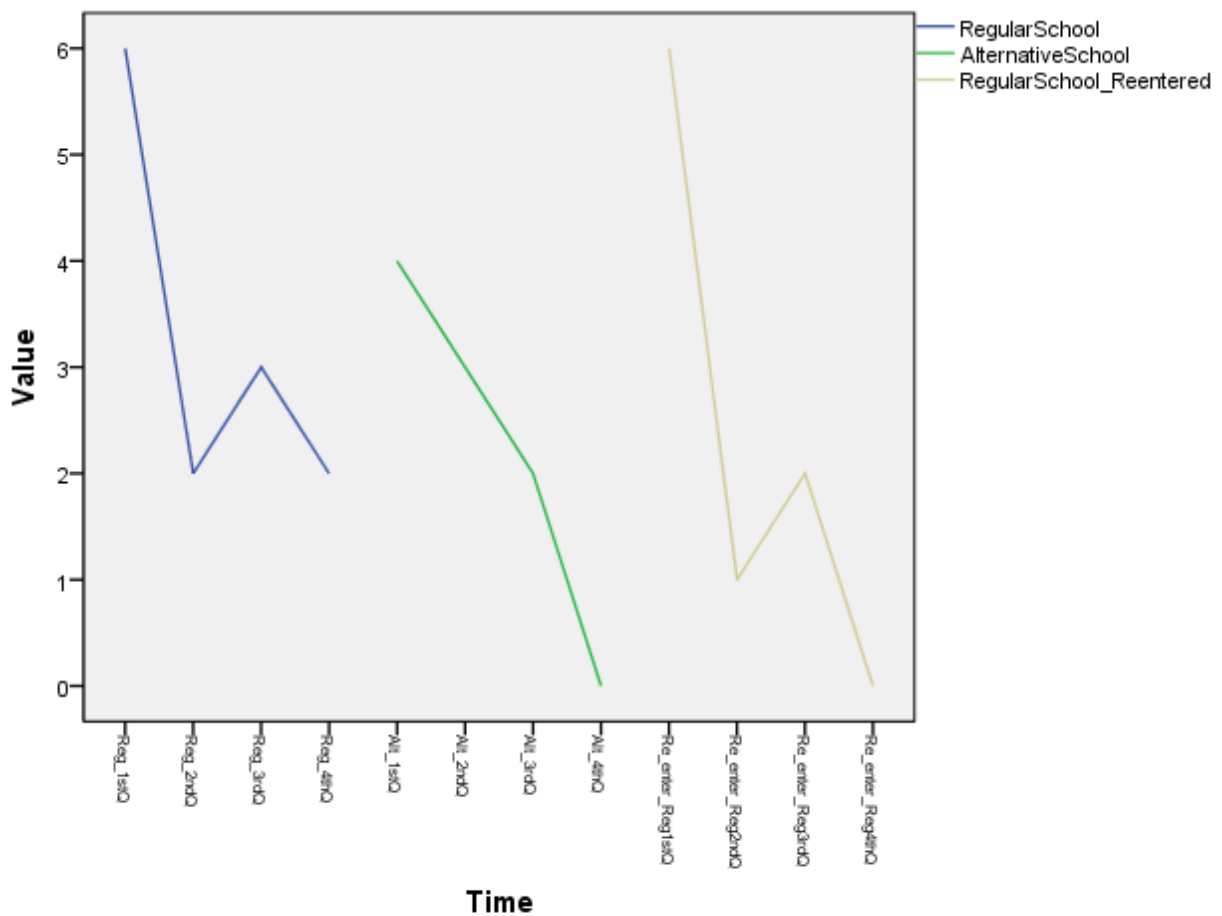
Students' profiles were investigated for further grouping. There were twenty-two students

with profiles beginning higher in Quarter 1 of Alternative School (year 2) than Quarter 1 of

Regular School (year 1). Their results were averaged then analyzed using descriptive statistics.

In Regular School this group of students' disciplinary referrals averaged a mean of 1.00

(SD=.000). The mean was 2.00 (SD=1.41) for Alternative School. These students then re-entered

regular school where their disciplinary referrals averaged a mean of 1.75(SD= .96). See Figure

11.

Figure 11. Graph of Averages for Higher Quarter 1 Year2 than Quarter 1 Year 1(values on x

axis are number of referrals)
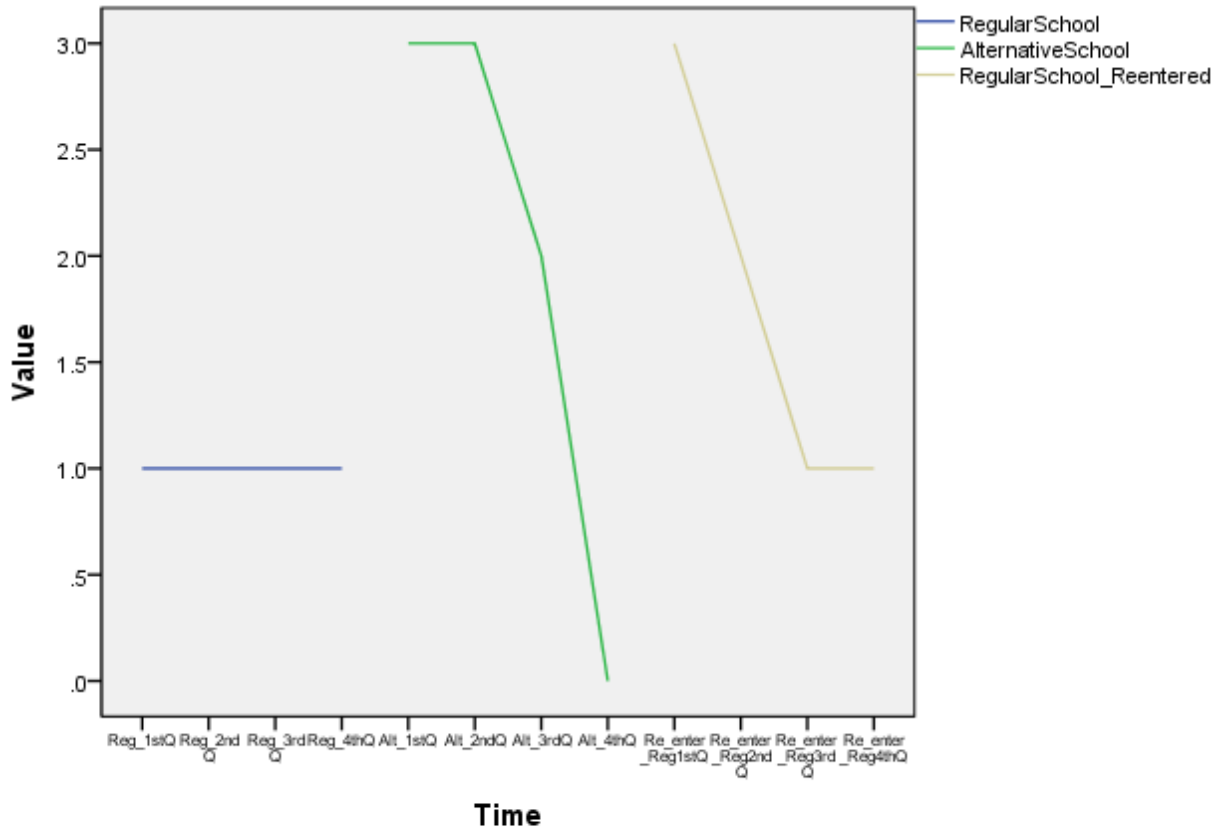
Another group was formed consisting of seven students who ended Quarter 4 of Alternative School (year 2) higher than Quarter 4of Regular School (year 1). The Averages of the disciplinary referrals were calculated and descriptive statistics were analyzed. Regular School disciplinary referrals mean was .75 (SD= .500). The mean was 3.25 (SD= 2.87) for Alternative School. The students then re-entered Regular School. The mean was 3.00 (SD= 2.83) for disciplinary referrals. For this group of students Alternative School increase norm violating behaviors. See Figure 12.

Figure 12. Graph of Students Who Ended Quarter 4 Year 2 Higher than Quarter 4 Year1(values

on x axis are number of referrals)
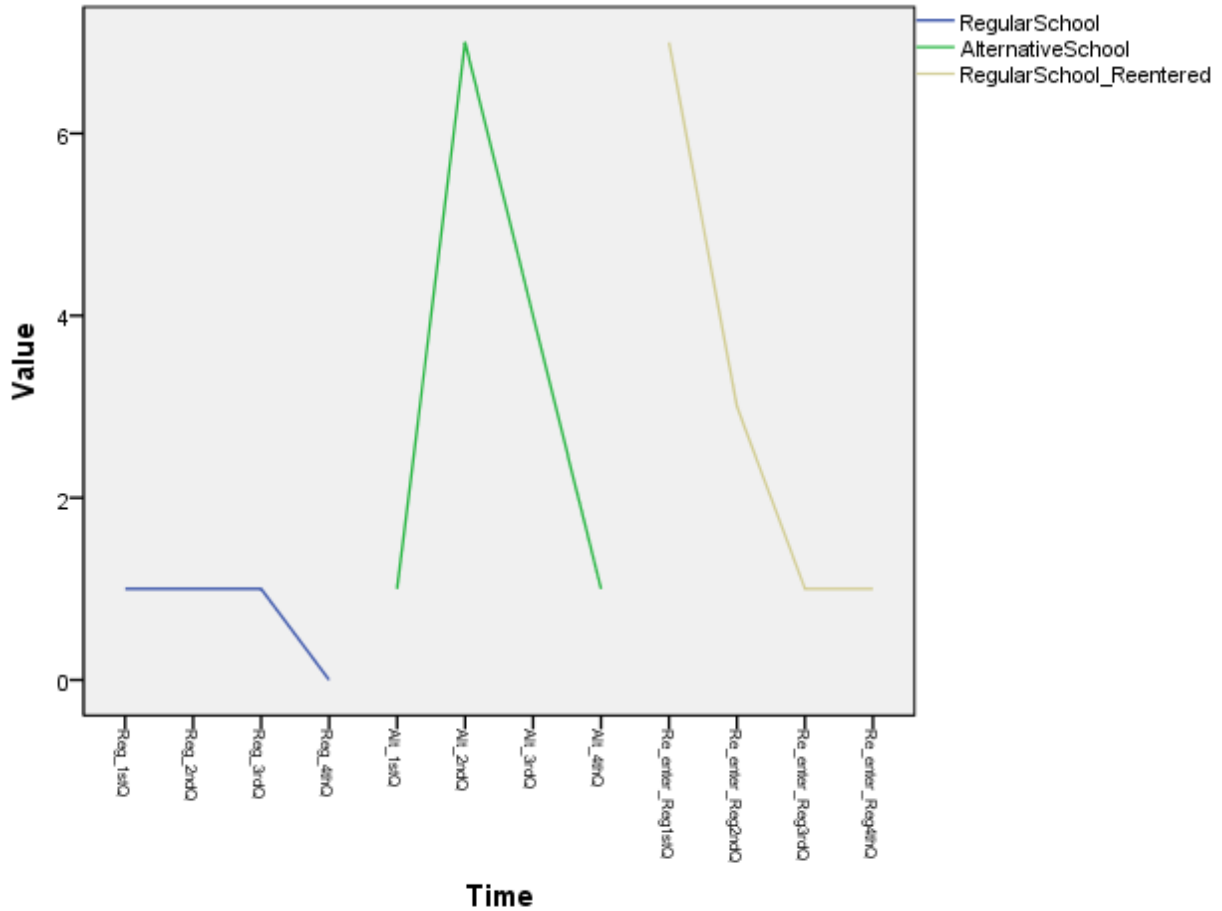
The results described above suggest that the group as a whole experienced the lowest

number of disciplinary referrals Quarter 4 during enrollment in Alternative School. The group as

a whole started each Quarter 1 with elevated disciplinary referrals. The results suggest a decrease

in the number of disciplinary referrals received by students after Alternative School (year 2). The

girls and high school group showed a normal decreased in disciplinary referrals. There was a

spike in referrals for the boys and middle school group. Thus, these results provide some support

that alternative schools may help to decrease norm violating behaviors.

CHAPTER V

Discussion

This chapter discusses the findings related to this study, implications of findings, limitations of this research, and recommendations for future research.

The gender ratio of students in this study was inconsistent with the overall enrollment for the two middle and two high schools in this study. Sixty percent of the sample were male, while 52% were male for 2010 school year for Middle School 1 and 53% for Middle School 2. Fifty-two percent were males at High School 1 and 44% for High School 2. Thirty-nine percent of the sample were females; 48% Middle School 1, 47% Middle School 2, 48% High School 1 and 56% High School 2 were females. (http://www.publicschoolreview.com/school_ov/school_id/21585).

The ethnicity of the student sample for this study was also inconsistent with the overall enrollment for the middle and high schools in the district. In the present study, twenty-eight percent of the students were described as White/Caucasian, 69% Black or African American, and 2% Bi-racial or other. Middle school 1 student population was classified as forty-three percent White/Caucasian, 56% Black or African American, and 1% Asian. Middle School 2 student population was classified as thirty-one percent White/Caucasian, 66% Black or African American, 2% Hispanic, and 1% Unknown. High School 1 student population was forty-one percent White/Caucasian, 57% Black or African American, 1% Asian, and 1% Unknown. High School 2 student enrollment was twenty-four percent White/Caucasian, 73% Black or African American, 2% Hispanic, and 1% Unknown

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(http://www.publicschoolreview.com/school_ov/school_id/21585).

The school district used in this study graduation rate for 2010-2011 was ninety percent (http://www.doe.k12.ga.us). Fifty-five percent ($n= 42$) of the 76 high school students enrolled in alternative school graduated. Thirty-four percent ($n= 26$) of the students in this study transferred out of the district after 2010, graduation could not be verified. The district's high school dropout rate is one percent ($n= 3$) for 2010, 4.7% ($n= 11$) for 2009, and 3.7% ($n= 10$) for 2008 (http://www.doe.k12.ga.us).

The first goal of this study was to ascertain the pattern of disciplinary referrals across the four quarters of Year 1 in regular school. The results suggest that for the Whole Group Quarter 1 of regular school began high for disciplinary referrals. The Whole Group Quarter 2 decreased. Quarter 3 decreased even more. Quarter 4 received the lowest number of disciplinary referrals for Year 1 in regular school. According to Kim and Taylor (2008), unconstructive experiences and negative labeling disenfranchise many students from the regular high school. Therefore it is expected that at-risk students will experience the greatest disciplinary referrals at regular school.

The second and third objectives were combined to investigate the impact of alternative school placement on disciplinary referrals for norm-violating behaviors. The Whole Group experienced the lowest number of disciplinary referrals in Alternative School. The referrals increased during Quarter 1 of Regular School Re-entry. Students attending alternative school reported more satisfaction, more positive attitudes toward school, and decreased delinquent behaviors during alternative school (Gregory, Pugh, & Smith, 1981; Cox 1999; De La Ossa 2005). But the positive effects of alternative school often dissipate when students return to

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regular school (De La Ossa, 2005). In all three years disciplinary referrals peaked and then decreased throughout the remaining three quarters. There is no one simple answer to why some students are disengaging when they re-enter regular school. One consideration may be that some students were negatively labeled at the regular school which caused disenfranchisement (Kim & Taylor, 2008) and returning to the source of their negative labeling resulted in them once again becoming disengaged after being successful in alternative school. Another consideration would be that some students may not have wanted to return to regular school. Researchers have found that students often report alternative school as being a more positive experience in comparison to regular school (McCall, 2003; De La Ossa, 2005; Kim & Taylor, 2008). Alternative schools are usually smaller in school size, class size and allow for a more personal relationship with teachers. De La Ossa (2005), found that students in alternative school reported feeling accepted by peers and teacher, safer, and less likely to be harassed for being different. In Year 3 disciplinary referrals decreased when compared to Year 1 before alternative school.

The fourth objective was to investigate the difference in disciplinary referrals between genders. The results suggest there were fewer girls in all three years. Smith-Adcock, Webster, Leonard and Walker (2008), noted that girls make up a small portion of students with delinquent behaviors. The girls in the study disciplinary referrals did not "spike" in alternative school like their male counterparts. The results appear to suggest that the girls were able to conform more and quicker to alternative school. The boys "spike" during alternative school would suggest possible rebellion before conformity and acceptance. Girls have been found to be more resilient in stressful situations and therefore they are more likely to control their emotions and behaviors,

while boys more often act out (Ram & Feng, 2005). The girls may have experienced a more positive relationship with the alternative school teachers than their male counterparts. Students are more likely to have a positive transition to alternative school when they perceived a positive relationship with the teachers (De La Ossa, 2005).

Objective five of the study was to determine the relations of middle and high school on disciplinary referrals. There were seventy-three high school students (2 students transferred out of the district and 1 student died). There were fifteen middle school students (1 student was sent to a youth detention center). There was a greater number of high school students, thus they received the greater numerical number of referrals. However, the graph (Figure 4), indicated that the middle school students received more disciplinary referrals especially in alternative school. These results seem to support previous literature regarding students getting lost during the transition to higher level grades, none more than middle school. The transition to middle school has been associated with academic declines, decrease performance motivation, and lower self-esteem (Haselhuhn et al. 2007). Many at-risk behaviors are experimented with for the first time during middle school (Stoffner & Williamson, 2000).

The sixth objective was to determine the extent of patterns shown from individual profiles. An individual student's profile could meet the criteria for more than one group. Students were placed in the following groups to closer inspect the possibility of frequent offenders and general patterns; extremely high group, extremely low group, general pattern group, students who began high and ended low each year, students who began Quarter 1 of Year

2 higher than Quarter 1 of Year 1, and students who ended Quarter 4 Year 2 higher than Quarter 4 Year 1.

There were two students who received "extremely high" disciplinary referrals for the beginning of Year 1 Quarter 1. For Student 1 of the extremely high group, the lowest disciplinary referrals occurred during Alternative School (Year 2). Student 1 then re-entered Regular School (Year 3) and the disciplinary referrals were "extremely high" once again. Student 1 results suggest that he was successful in alternative school, but disengaged upon his return to regular school. McCall (2003) discovered in his study on students who disengage when they return to regular school, were typically minority students with significant achievement gaps who came from a single parent home where the parent was working at less than subsistence salaries (less than $10,000 per year). Student 1 may have also experienced difficulty developing a meaningful relationship with his teachers and subsequently decided teachers did not care if he stayed in school. In McCall (2003) the highest rated reason students listed for dropping out was lack of concern by their regular school teachers. Student 2 of the extremely high group experienced the most difficulty with behavior at Regular School (Year 1). There were no disciplinary referrals for Alternative School (Year 2) or Regular School Re-entry (Year 3). Alternative School appears to have had a positive influence on Student 2. Student 2 was probably able to form a meaningful relationship with teachers. McCall (2003) found a typical stay-in-school student was Caucasian, probably from a home with more than one parent, and had higher achievement levels than the dropout students.

There were forty-four students in the extremely low group. The students in this group began with two or fewer disciplinary referrals, and with no more than five for the entire three year time frame. The students in the extremely low group appear to have benefited from alternative school placement. The results from the extremely low group would suggest that they experienced fewer transitional problems when they returned to Regular School. Successful transitioning is a major contributor to decrease student disengagement from school. Student disengagement is an important factor, which greatly reduces the odds of graduating (Balfanz, Herzog & Mac Iver, 2007).

Twenty students' profiles were comparable to what could be considered a normal regression in disciplinary referrals throughout the three years. Transitions can be difficult for many students, more so for those considered to be at risk. De La Ossa (2005), noted that initially students are resistant to change until they feel accepted. Student adjustment is a very important factor as it relates to alternative school being a beneficial experience (De La Ossa, 2005). The group of students who began high and ended low each year would appear to have experienced difficulty at the start of each new quarter every year. Their difficulties could be contributed to changes in teachers, classroom, and academic demands (Stoffner & Williamson, 2000).

There were twenty-two students whose referrals at the beginning of the first quarter of Alternative School was higher than for the first quarter of Regular School. The results would appear to suggest that transitioning back into Regular School for year 3 was a challenge. Similarly, students who ended Quarter 4 of Alternative School (Year 2) higher than Quarter 4 of Regular School (Year 1) also appeared to experience challenges transitioning back into Regular

School. Both groups experienced high disciplinary referrals at the beginning of Regular School re-entry (Year 3). De La Ossa (2005), students' perceptions of the alternative school experience are important contributors for school change.

<center>Implications for Elementary and Secondary Administrators</center>

The results of this study could assist elementary and secondary administrators in several ways. Most importantly, this study shows that Alternative Schools can be effective for some students. However, the problems begin before alternative school. Administrators may need to consider modeling alternative school's approach to addressing student norm violating behaviors. Previous literature suggest that successful effective alternative schools provide a caring environment in which students feel comfortable and have a good relationship with teachers who are caring, empathetic, and respectful of their individuality (Kim & Taylor, 2008). Student and teacher involvement in the making of decisions is another vital component in school bonding that increases effectiveness of alternative schools (Quinn et al. 2006; Kim & Taylor, 2008). Another component of effective alternative schools is having a non-authoritarian learning environment (Quinn et al. 2006).

Secondly, transitioning is a crucial time in a student's educational development. The transition from elementary school to middle school and then to high school is very challenging for some students. Unsuccessful adaptation to transitions may be influenced by socio-demographic factors such as ethnicity, gender, and parent's education (Malaspina & Rimm-Kaufman, 2008). When students experience difficulty transitions, there is often a decrease in motivation and an increase in disruptive behaviors that sometimes lead to alternative school

placement. At-risk students can be successful in alternative schools but, transition back into regular school can lead to disengagement if proper supports are not put into place (McCall, 2003). The current study found that the first quarter (transition) of each new school year brought about an increase in disciplinary referrals. School leaders should focus on interventions that geared to transition through the school year for every grade.

Thirdly, there is a need for effective prevention and intervention programs in middle school. Literature suggested that there is a decline in motivation for some students as they transition from elementary school to middle school (Haselhuhn et al. 2007). The decline in motivation could be a contributor to the norm-violating behaviors observed in this study. K-8 schools instead of middle schools may be one answer to improving students' motivation. Students who attended k-8 schools were shown to have better grades and attendance than students who attended middle school (Weiss & Baker-Smith, 2011). Ninth graders also experience this period of declining academic performance, increased absences, and increased behavior problems (McCallumore & Sparapani, 2010).   A simple and affordable intervention would be to provide students attending new schools with bell schedules, maps of the school, and sample packets of tests and homework assignments (McCallumore & Sparapani, 2010). Other possible solutions are, (1) meet the teacher night, (2) orientation for parents and students before school begins, and (3) student mentors (Morgan & Hertzog, 2001; Cushman, 2006; McCallumore & Sparapani, 2010).

Limitations

There are several limitations of this study. The primary limitation of the study is the use of data from PowerSchool that could be influenced by reporter bias. The administrators and teachers could have been influenced by a host of possible factors that could have impacted the decision to document a behavior in the disciplinary log. One possible factor is that once a student is labeled as a "problem," teachers are more likely to see problem behaviors because they are watching for it. Another factor is that behaviors could have gone unreported because of time constraints and demands on teachers. Environmental factors and stress of reporter can also influence whether a behavior is viewed as disruptive and reported in the database.

A second limitation of this study is the inability to generalize the results of this study to statewide or nationally. The small sample size was taken from a non-random group of students attending an alternative school in rural west Georgia, which limits the ability to generalize the findings to other populations.

Future Research

There is a need to continually strive to develop comprehensive prevention and intervention programs to assist at-risk students to stay on track behaviorally and academically. The findings in this study have provided several useful possibilities for future research that could prove beneficial for middle and high school administrators. Future research should be done with larger samples sizes to confirm these results and increase generalizability. The sample should be taken from alternative settings in urban, metropolitan and rural settings. Other samples should be comprised of a more diverse group where possible.

This study also raises other issues for future research. A future controlled study should show the structure of the alternative education provided and the short-term and long-term effect of services. Another consideration for future research is to investigate which alternative education model will best serve which at-risk student. This research represents a portion of the bigger picture in education today. Future research should look at individual level variables (e.g., academic motivation and social involvement). This study encompassed a transitional period that included developmental and contextual changes, future research should include developmental assessments to eliminate confusion between age-related changes and transition-related changes.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A- D

APPENDIX A

AN EXAMPLE OF A DISCIPLINARY LOG

School: Middle School

Term: 2007

Log Entries

Boy, Tom 10 23454647465

9/06/2007	Teacher Robert**- Disturbing** class- Tom would not obey when told to get in line. Pushing, loud talking and extremely disrespectful. "ISS" 2 days 9/7 &8.
9/13/2007	Teacher Robert- **Profanity** Tom continuously talked during silent lunch. Called teacher a "B_ _ _h". "ISS" 3 days 9/14, 15 16.
9/18/2007	Mr. Clover- **Graduation Coach**- Group Session"Using different strategies in the classroom.
10/04/2007	Mr. Clover-**Graduation Coach**- Group Session "Expressing Feelings".
10/09/2007	Mr. Clover- **Graduation Coach**- Group Session "Controlling Anger".
10/11/2007	Teacher Robert- **Disrespectful**- Called teacher a "Queer". "OSS" 1 day 10/17
11/6/2007	Ms. Jacks- **Disrespectful**- Student refused to follow teacher's directions and became argumentative with teacher. "ISS" 2 days 11/7-8
11/7/2007	Mr. Clover- **Graduation Coach**- Contact in ISS
11/9/2007	Teacher Robert- **Threat**- Student threaten to hit the teacher if she said anything else to him. Incident was turned over to the SRO.
2/11/2008	Teacher Robert- **Fighting-** "OSS" 2 days 2/12-13.
3/01/2008	Ms. Jacks- **Shoving a teacher**- Student was observed pushing teacher and telling her to get out of his way.
9/09/2008	Mr. Man- **Rebellion**- Student failed to cooperate and follow instructions given by the Alternative school director. He refused to stop playing with his cell phone.

APPENDIX B

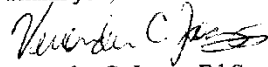REQUEST FOR APPROVAL

November 11, 2011

Carol Lane, Superintendent
Meriwether County Schools
2100 Gaston Street
Greenville, GA 30222

Dear Mrs. Lane,

I am requesting permission to conduct my doctoral research, "An Empirical Study on the Significance of Alternative School Placement for "At-Risk" Students with Norm Violating Behaviors" in your county. I will use information from PowerSchool. No students or parents will be contacted. Please see an abstract of my study below.

Across the country alternative schools and programs for "at-risk" students are increasing in popularity. They often function as an alternative to expelling or suspending at-risk students who may not succeed in traditional classrooms. The purpose of this study will be to investigate the significance. The disciplinary referrals of 91 students who attended alternative school in 2008-2009 school years will be investigated. The disciplinary referrals from regular school, alternative school and return to regular school will be statistically analyzed.

Thank you,

Veronder C. Jones, Ed.S.

Cc. William Edgar, Assistant Superintendent; Lori Garrett, Special Ed. Director; and Dr. Hardwick Johnson, Lead School Psychologist

APPENDIX C

APPROVAL LETTER

Carol L. Lane, Superintendent

MERIWETHER
COUNTY SCHOOLS

AIM HIGH.
ACHIEVE.
GRADUATE.
SUCCEED.

Robin McInvale, Chairman | Leon Coverson, Vice-Chair | Joseph Alexander | Robert Hawk | Allen Parham

November 11, 2011

Institutional Review Board

C/o Office of Human Subjects Research

115 Ramsay Hall

Auburn University, AL 36849

Dear IRB Members,

After reviewing the proposed study, "An Empirical Study on the Significance of Alternative School Placement for At-Risk Students with Norm Violating Behaviors", presented by Mrs. Jones, a doctoral student at Auburn University, I have granted permission for the study to be conducted.

The purpose of the study is to determine the significance of disciplinary referrals from regular school, alternative school, and re-entry into regular school. The primary activity will be to review disciplinary logs and compare referrals. Only students who were enrolled in alternative school during the 2008-2009 school years will be reviewed.

I understand that the review of the students' disciplinary referrals will occur this fall and spring. I expect that this project will end no later than May 07, 2012. Mrs. Jones will not contact or recruit any parents or students. Data will be gathered at Meriwether Board of Education.

I understand that Mrs. Jones will not require the consent of parent/guardian. Mrs. Jones has agreed to provide to my office a copy of all Auburn University IRB-approved, stamped consent documents. Any data collected by Mrs. Jones will be kept confidential and will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in her AU advisor's office. Mrs. Jones has also agreed to provide to us a copy of the aggregate results from her study.

If the IRB has any concerns about the permission being granted by this letter, please contact me at the phone number listed below.

Sincerely,

Carol Lane, Superintendent

Meriwether County School Systems

APPENDIX D

IRB APPROVAL

AUBURN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD for RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS
RESEARCH PROTOCOL REVIEW FORM
For information or help contact **THE OFFICE OF RESEARCH COMPLIANCE**, 115 Ramsay Hall, Auburn University
Phone: 334-844-5966   e-mail: hsubjec@auburn.edu   Web Address: http://www.auburn.edu/research/vpr/ohs/

Revised 03.26.11 -- DO NOT STAPLE, CLIP TOGETHER ONLY. | Save a Copy |

1. PROPOSED START DATE of STUDY: Nov 21, 2011

PROPOSED REVIEW CATEGORY (Check one):   FULL BOARD   EXPEDITED   ✓ EXEMPT

2. PROJECT TITLE: An Empirical Study on the Significance of Alternative School Placement for "At-risk" Students with Norm-Violating Behaviors

3. Veronder C. Jones, Ed.S.   Graduate Student   School Psych   334-298-6294   jonesvc@auburn.edu
   PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR   TITLE   DEPT   PHONE   AU E-MAIL

   4303 Brandywine Drive Phenix City, AL 36869   334-298-6294   veronder@ctvea.net
   MAILING ADDRESS   FAX   ALTERNATE E-MAIL

4. SOURCE OF FUNDING SUPPORT: ✓ Not Applicable ___ Internal ___ External Agency:_____ | Pending | Received

5. LIST ANY CONTRACTORS, SUB-CONTRACTORS, OTHER ENTITIES OR IRBs ASSOCIATED WITH THIS PROJECT:
   Not Applicable
6. GENERAL RESEARCH PROJECT CHARACTERISTICS

6A. Mandatory CITI Training

Names of key personnel who have completed CITI:
Veronder C. Jones ✓
Dr. Joseph Buckhalt

CITI group completed for this study:
✓ Social/Behavioral | Biomedical

PLEASE ATTACH TO HARD COPY ALL CITI CERTIFICATES FOR EACH KEY PERSONNEL

6B. Research Methodology

Please check all descriptors that best apply to the research methodology

Data Source(s): | New Data   ✓ Existing Data
Will recorded data directly or indirectly identify participants?
                   Yes   ✓ No
Data collection will involve the use of:
   Educational Tests (cognitive diagnostic, aptitude, etc.)
   Interview / Observation
   Physical / Physiological Measures or Specimens (see Section 6E.)
   Surveys / Questionnaires
   Internet / Electronic
   Audio / Video / Photos
✓ Private records or files

RECEIVED
NOV 17 2011

6C. Participant Information

Please check all descriptors that apply to the participant population.
✓ Males   ✓ Females   AU students
Vulnerable Populations
   Pregnant Women/Fetuses ___ Prisoners
✓ Children and/or Adolescents (under age 19 in AL)
Persons with:
   ✓ Economic Disadvantages | Physical Disabilities
   ✓ Educational Disadvantages | Intellectual Disabilities
Do you plan to compensate your participants? ___ Yes ✓ No

6D. Risks to Participants

Please identify all risks that participants might encounter in this research.
✓ Breach of Confidentiality* | Coercion
   | Deception | Physical
   | Psychological | Social
   | None | Other:

*Note that if the investigator is using or accessing confidential or identifiable data, breach of confidentiality is always a risk.

Do you need IBC Approval for this study? ✓ No | Yes - BUA #_____   Expiration date _____