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THE PERCEPTIONS OF ADMINISTRATORS AND TEACHERS REGARDING THE FEATURES OF ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS IN GEORGIA

Leslie McAffee

Georgia Southern University
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June 18, 1999

To the Graduate School:

This dissertation entitled "The Perceptions of Administrators and Teachers Regarding Program Features of Alternative Schools" and written by Leslie McAffee is presented to the College of Graduate Studies of Georgia Southern University. I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education with a major in Educational Administration.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to:

My family who constantly supported my efforts and were understanding of sacrifices that had to be made to help me reach my goal.

My greatest achievement, my daughter, Linda, who through faith and determination has reached her educational goal this year. I thank you for the many times you gave your love, support, and encouragement. Pooh, I love you more than words can say.

My husband, Duane, who has been my supporter, encourager, editor, copier, and chauffeur. Your love has helped me through the often *troubled waters* over the past few years. I love you.

And finally, this dissertation is dedicated to the at-risk children in the state of Georgia. I hope that in some small way this study will assist them in having a better chance at completing their high school education and having wonderful and fulfilling lives.

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It is with immense appreciation I recognize the following individuals for playing instrumental roles in the completion of my dissertation:

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My father-in-law and mother-in-law, Max and Dora, who were always checking on me to see how the dissertation was coming and understood the short vacations home.

My parents, Ben and Carol-Lea, I love you and I thank you for being there to listen to me all the times I got frustrated or upset. I hope I have made you proud.

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ABSTRACT

THE PERCEPTIONS OF ADMINSTRATORS AND TEACHERS REGARDING THE FEATURES OF ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS IN GEORGIA

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The purpose of the study was to determine the perceptions of administrators and teachers at alternative schools in Georgia of the importance of identified key program features of these schools by comparison with the existence of these features at their own schools. All administrators and teachers at all 117 alternative schools in Georgia that serve disruptive students were mailed surveys for this study. Fifty-six percent of the schools returned completed surveys. Teachers and administrators were asked to rate the importance of 40 features of alternative schools and the existence of these features in their respective alternative schools. Each feature belonged to one of six categories: (1) Leadership, (2) Student Attitudes, (3) School Climate, (4) Student Needs, (5) General Perceptions About Alternative Schools, and (6) Student Services. Biographic data on each administrator and teacher and demographic data on each school were also collected.

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences was used for all statistical analysis. Frequencies and percentages were determined for biographic and demographic data. Means and standard deviations were calculated for the importance and existence of each item for teachers and administrators. A comparison of teachers' and principals' responses for each item was determined using independent t-tests. A mean difference was calculated using dependent t-tests to compare teachers' responses on the importance and existence of each item and administrators' responses on the importance and existence of each item.

Results from this study indicated that administrators and teachers perceived 34 of the 40 features identified from the literature were important to alternative schools. The same features were identified as important by both teachers and administrators. The administrators and teachers differed significantly, however, in their perceptions of the importance of 5 of the 40 features of alternative schools. They also differed significantly in their perceptions of the existence of 20 of the 40 features. Administrators at alternative schools in Georgia perceived that 23 of 40 specific features of alternative schools existed to a large or very large extent within their schools, while teachers at alternative schools in Georgia perceived that 15 of 40 specific features of alternative schools existed to at least a large extent within their schools.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

General Introduction

Educators, politicians, and the media often cite the importance of a high-quality education for America's youth as a major concern of most Americans (Futrell, 1996). The completion of at least a high school education is generally recognized as essential if today's youth--tomorrow's adults--are to secure their place as responsible citizens in American society. In 1848, Horace Mann (as cited in Cremin, 1957, p. 72) espoused the importance of an education when he stated, "Education, then, beyond all other devices of human origin, is the great equalizer of the conditions of men,--the balance-wheel of the social machinery." Over 150 years later, this statement is still valid. Unfortunately, with over 25% of America's youth dropping out of school each year, proponents of public education are as yet unable to boast that America's public schools are helping all students achieve this equality (U.S. Department of Education, 1997).

Researchers have determined several major risk factors that indicate a predisposition to dropping out of school (Hahn, Danzberger, & Lefkowitz, 1987; Hefner-Packer, 1991; Knutson, 1996). Students who demonstrate chronically disruptive or delinquent behavior, exhibit poor academic performance, have a strong dislike for school, become pregnant, live on public assistance, have poor attendance or are habitually truant, or display a combination of these factors have an increased risk for dropping out of school (Gavin, 1997; Hahn, Danzberger, & Lefkowitz, 1987; Knutson, 1996; Neumann, 1994).

Students with social or emotional difficulties are also at an increased risk of dropping out of school (Hefner-Packer, 1991; Knutson, 1996). Retained students are also at greater risk. This risk factor is of special importance to educational leaders in Georgia, since over 50,000 students in kindergarten through grade 12 were retained in Georgia during the 1996-1997 school year (Georgia Department of Education, 1998a).

Educators have known for years that children learn in different ways and that no single program will ever meet the needs of all students (Conant, 1992; Smith, 1974). Many educational systems, however, continue to educate children as if they all learn the same way in the same setting (Hefner-Packer, 1991; Knutson, 1996). It has been the tradition in American public education for one type of school to serve the needs of all the students in a community (Argyris, 1974; Murphy, 1993; Scherer, 1995). School systems adhering to that tradition have failed to adjust to changes in society, changes in the culture of communities, and changes brought about by diverse student populations. This has resulted in an inability to provide an educational environment that meets the needs of all students as suggested by the increasing numbers of students dropping out of school each year (Conant, 1992; Fuller & Sabatino, 1996).

The challenge of educating today's youth is further complicated by an increasing amount of violence in schools and a rising number of disruptive and delinquent students, often interfering with learning opportunities for other students (Furlong & Morrison, 1994; Futrell, 1996; Gable & Bullock, 1995). Speaking as president of the American Federation of Teachers, the late Albert Shanker stated in 1995 that the "disruption of the many by the few" is a major concern of educators, parents, and the general public (p. 8). The results of the 1995 Phi Delta Kappa Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the

Public Schools (Elam & Rose, 1995) found that "people do not generally believe that students who are guilty of disruptive behavior or violence in school should be expelled. Instead a majority opts for transfer to separate facilities where students can be given special attention" (p. 45). The results of the 1997 Phi Delta Kappa Gallup Poll (Rose, Gallup, & Elam, 1997), 2 years later, again maintained that discipline problems and violence in schools are major concerns of the general public.

The development of public alternative education programs, including alternative schools, according to Fuller and Sabatino (1996), offers a strategy for school systems to combat the problems associated with students dropping out of school prior to obtaining a diploma. In addition, they present an approach for schools to become more responsive to the needs of their students and the communities the school systems serve. The term *alternative school* encompasses a variety of school options but usually represents change and innovation from the more traditional schools (Knutson, 1996). Alternative schools provide different learning experiences to those offered by conventional schools, more flexibility in instructional practices, and more varied curriculum offerings. They are often separate administrative units with their own students, staff, and distinct mission (Raywid, 1994).

The most prevalent perception of alternative education programs is of schools that serve students with delinquent or disruptive behaviors or other difficulties that place these youth more at risk of dropping out of school prior to graduation. Slavin and Madden (1989) describe an at-risk student as one who has a reduced chance of completing his or her education as well as an inability to obtain the skills required for future employment.

Educational leaders realize that, when students exit high school prior to graduating, they severely limit their economic potential and social well-being throughout their lives. Rumberger (1987) stated that dropouts often face a lifetime of difficulty finding secure, adequate-paying jobs and are more inclined to become welfare recipients. High school dropouts, especially those who were chronically truant, according to Gavin (1997), are also more likely to engage in crime than their counterparts who graduate from high school. Many school districts, to curb the economic disadvantage created by high dropout rates, have established alternative schools to meet the needs of students in jeopardy of dropping out of school (Knutson, 1996).

Alternative schools are often viewed as the panacea that will help at-risk students start or stay on the road to success in school. These schools are viewed as effective if they are able to assist students in either successfully returning to the traditional school setting or are instrumental in helping students graduate from high school and become productive citizens (Raywid, 1994). A problem exists, however, as to whether alternative schools are meeting the needs of the students they serve. Many alternative schools are viewed as merely holding tanks for disruptive youth without unique characteristics that make them different from traditional high schools (Knutson, 1996).

There are several common features associated with effective alternative schools. These features include establishing an environment and curriculum conducive to students' needs, reducing class size, individualizing teaching strategies and the curriculum, providing specialized counseling services, and providing health services for students (Hefner-Packer, 1991; Knutson, 1996). Establishing faculties composed of teachers with the desire and specialized training to work with at-risk students is another positive factor

(Mickens, 1994; Raywid, 1994). An additional positive feature of alternative schools pertains to the educational leader of the school. Principals of effective alternative schools, according to Mickens (1994), need to serve as instructional leaders of their schools. He further contends that principals must encourage teachers to work together to create a curriculum that meets the needs of individual students and an environment where all students believe they can succeed. Although the important features of effective alternative schools have been the subject of numerous research efforts and think pieces in professional literature, there are many alternative schools that do not possess these critical features (Gold & Mann, 1984; Harrington-Lueker, 1995; Knutson, 1996; Wiseman, 1996; Young, 1990). This study was conducted to determine the views of alternative school faculties on the extent that these critical features are in place at alternative schools in Georgia.

Statement of the Problem

In A Blueprint for Progress for Georgia's Children: An Education for the 21st Century (1997), Linda Schrenko, Georgia's State Superintendent of Schools, stated that Georgia has one of the highest dropout rates in the nation and, according to the 1990 Census, 29% of Georgians aged 25 and older do not have a high school diploma. This statistic adds credence to the need for high-quality alternative schools in Georgia. Alternative schools for at-risk youth are designed to serve a function for a particular population of students. These students are more likely to leave school before completing high school. Schools that serve a specific population, according to Young and Clinchy (1995), are more prone to have greater agreement among staff and students about the philosophy and direction of the school.

In 1994, the Georgia Department of Education instituted a statewide educational initiative known as *CrossRoads* to "address the needs of chronically disruptive youth in middle schools and high schools across the state" (Harnish & Henderson, 1996, p. 70). The goals of alternative schools in Georgia are multifaceted. One goal is to maintain the safety and security of the public middle and high schools by removing the disruptive and violent students from the regular school setting. This also creates an environment more conducive to learning in the traditional schools since the behavior of disruptive students detracts from the education of other students. An additional goal, however, is to keep at-risk students from dropping out of school by providing an educational environment that will meet their emotional, physical, social, and academic needs and allow them to gain the skills necessary to become productive citizens (Georgia Department of Education, 1998b). The 89 CrossRoads school programs served 3,400 students in grades 6 through 12 in their first year of operation during the 1994-1995 school year. Over 80% of the students in the program exhibited chronically disruptive behavior (Harnish & Henderson, 1996). By 1997, the number of Georgia alternative schools had grown to 124 programs funded through the CrossRoads initiative.

Many researchers have focused on the common features of successful alternative schools, as well as the positive and negative outcomes for students attending these schools (Conant, 1992; Gold & Mann, 1984; Harrington-Lueker, 1995; Knutson, 1996; Raywid, 1994; Wiseman, 1996; Young, 1990). A telephone interview with the Director of Student Support Services for the Georgia Department of Education (M. Tolbert, personal communication, May 10, 1998) revealed that, although Georgia's CrossRoads

school programs receive over $17 million in funding each year, there are no established guidelines for specific features that must be in place at all alternative schools in Georgia.

The extant research indicated there were specific features that should be in place at alternative schools if they are to be successful in helping at-risk students stay in school. The perceptions of teachers and administrators pertaining to the importance of these features, and the extent to which these features exist in Georgia's alternative schools have not been examined. This study examined the perceptions of teachers and administrators at alternative schools in Georgia pertaining to the existence in their schools of features considered important to a successful alternative school program. This study also examined the importance teachers and administrators place on each feature, whether or not the feature existed at their respective schools.

Importance of the Study

The number of alternative schools in Georgia serving at-risk students has grown every year since the CrossRoads initiative began in 1994. This increased role of alternative schools in Georgia as havens for students who are not able to function within the boundaries of conventional schools should be of special interest to educational administrators. As more at-risk students are assigned to alternative schools, administrators must make the determination as to whether they want to use their schools as holding tanks until the students decide to quit school or as avenues to help these students graduate prepared to enter college, vocational/technical school, the workforce, or the armed forces. The potential demands on society directly related to students ending their educational careers early make these administrators' decisions even more important.

The present researcher hopes that the results of this study assists alternative school administrators in evaluating their programs She further intends that the results of this study assist in expanding the existing knowledge base pertaining to the program features existing in alternative schools in Georgia.

Assumption

The following assumption was made in conducting this study: The teachers and administrators surveyed would provide accurate and honest information pertaining to their perceptions of the importance and existence of specific program features of alternative schools in Georgia.

Research Questions

The following research question provided the focus for this study: What are the program features of alternative schools in Georgia, as perceived by teachers and administrators?

Subquestions were:

1. What program features do administrators identify as important to alternative schools?
2. What program features do teachers identify as important to alternative schools?
3. What program features do administrators identify as existing in their respective alternative schools?
4. What program features do teachers identify as existing in their respective alternative schools?

5. What differences, if any, are there between administrators' and teachers' perceptions regarding the importance of program features in alternative schools in Georgia?
6. What differences, if any, are there between administrators' and teachers' perceptions regarding the existence of program features in alternative schools in Georgia?
7. What differences, if any, are there between administrators' perceptions pertaining to the existence of program features and the importance of program features in alternative schools in Georgia?
8. What differences, if any, are there between teachers' perceptions pertaining to the existence of program features and the importance of program features in alternative schools in Georgia?

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study that should be noted. First, only public alternative schools in Georgia were studied. As a result, no generalization may be inferred for private schools or alternative schools in other states. Second, the study only included alternative schools that were specifically designed for students at risk of dropping out of school prior to graduation, and therefore the findings may not be inferred for alternative schools that have been established on other criteria.

Definitions of Terms

The following definitions were utilized in this study:

Perception: achieving understanding of ideas by means of the senses.

Traditional or conventional high school: a school in which emphasis is placed on academics with strict procedures, rules, and a set curriculum.

Alternative school: a school which provides at-risk students with various learning opportunities different from the conventional school setting. The grade configuration at the school may vary but will generally include 6th through 12th grade or 9th through 12th grades.

At-risk student: a student who is not likely to graduate in a traditional high school setting and likely to drop out of school due to certain circumstances. These circumstances may include, but are not limited to, behavior problems, pregnancy, discipline problems, poor attendance, and poor academic performance (Hefner-Packer, 1991).

Dropout: a student who quits school prior to completing high school. This student may or may not eventually obtain a GED.

Alternative education: an educational program or school designed to provide learning experiences which strive to meet student needs using strategies that differ from traditional educational programs (Hefner-Packer, 1991).

High school student: students enrolled in 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th grades or 10th, 11th, and 12th grades, depending on the grade configuration of the high school.

Middle school student: students enrolled in 6th, 7th, and 8th grades.

Program features: those features identified in the professional literature important to effective alternative schools. These include small class size, a caring and supportive environment, strong leadership, availability of counseling services, and an individualized curriculum.

Small class size: classes maintained at 12 or fewer students per adult.

Summary

Alternative schools for at-risk students are intended to provide students with an environment that is more conducive to their needs than a traditional high school setting and assist these students in remaining in school until they graduate. They are also intended to provide the students who remain in the traditional high schools with a safe-school atmosphere free from the disorder caused by violent or disruptive students. There are several program features that are considered important to the maintenance of effective alternative schools. These include, but are not limited to, establishing an environment and curriculum conducive to students' needs, reducing class size, individualizing teaching strategies, and providing specialized counseling services.

Additional features include having strong, innovative instructional leaders and teachers who truly care about the students they are teaching and who are specifically trained to work with at-risk students. It was not known whether some or all of the previously mentioned features were evident in alternative schools in Georgia. The importance teachers and administrators place on specific program features, whether or not those features exist in their schools, was also unknown.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter includes summaries of literature describing the relationship between the dropout situation in the United States and the rationale for alternative schools. The characteristics of potential dropouts and students attending alternative schools, the critical features of effective alternative schools, and the Georgia CrossRoads Alternative School Program are also discussed.

The enrollment in Georgia's public schools in kindergarten through grade 12 was approximately 1,320,000 students for the 1996-1997 school year. Over 32,000 students in grades 6-12 dropped out of school during the same year. Students were reported as dropouts if they left school for several reasons, including expulsion, incarceration, low grades or school failure, taking a job, pregnancy, or lack of attendance. Of the students who stay in schools, a rising number are labeled as chronically disruptive or violent (Georgia Department of Education, 1998b). Concern over the high number of students dropping out of school each year and worsening student behavior for students has grown, and pressure from both teachers and parents has led to the creation of more learning options for adolescents (Duke & Perry, 1978; Raywid, 1995). Programs for disruptive youth comprised approximately one-third of all alternative programs in the United States during the 1995-1996 school year (Cox, Davidson, & Bynum, 1995). The special facilitative school climate offered by alternative schools, according to its proponents, can

improve student self-esteem, increase academic achievement, reduce behavior problems, and ultimately decrease the dropout rate (Fuller & Sabatino, 1996).

Public alternative schools are becoming increasingly regarded as viable and necessary options, as educators try to make schools more responsive to the diverse needs of students (Knutson, 1996; Young, 1990). Hefner-Packer (1991), in an examination of alternative education programs in Georgia, advocated the need for programs that meet the needs of all students. If alternative education programs are not available to these students, she maintained, many will lose interest, become disruptive, or drop out:

> There is an awareness by the public and the profession that schools are not responsive to the needs of some students--the potential dropout, the ethnically diverse, and the poor. One response to these concerns is to search for alternatives--alternative curricula, alternative modes of instruction, and alternative organizational structures. (p. 3)

Advocates of alternative schools state that alternative schools are needed so violent and disruptive students can be removed from the regular classroom setting (Goode, 1995; Knutson, 1996). Doing so, they contend, serves two functions. It allows the teachers to work with other students in the regular classroom without constant disruptions, and it allows the disruptive students to learn in an environment more conducive to their special needs (Conant, 1992). Proponents of alternative schools maintain that the ultimate goal of these schools should be to produce productive citizens by offering students opportunities to learn in an environment more conducive to their needs and keep them in school (Fuller & Sabatino, 1996; Harrington-Lueker, 1994).

The rationale proponents of alternative schools use to support their position is that many disruptive and delinquent adolescents behave that way because they have experienced repeated failure in school. Scholastic failure, they contend, lowers students'

self-esteem. They further conclude that if these students' school experiences were altered sufficiently to raise their self-esteem, their disruptive and delinquent behavior would subside. While there are no standard models for enhancing self-esteem, proponents state that alternative schools are generally designed to create a positive learning environment for at-risk students and facilitate desired behaviors on the part of the students (Gold & Mann, 1984; Harrington-Lueker, 1994; Raywid, 1988).

During the past decade, the United States government has demonstrated growing concern over the increase in the number of students dropping out of school each year and unsafe safe school environments. President George Bush and the nation's governors, in 1991, adopted as one of six education goals reducing the national high school dropout rate from 25% to 10% by the end of the 20th century (Orlich, 1994). This was in response to increasing concerns associated with dropout rates. On January 25, 1994, ongoing concern compelled the Congress of the United States of America to endorse the National Education Goals: Goals 2000: Educate America Act (U.S. Department of Education). Goal two of this act pertained to school completion and stated that by the year 2000, the high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90%. The objectives for this goal are that the school dropout rate will be reduced dramatically, and 75% of the students who drop out will earn a high school diploma or complete a General Education Diploma (GED).

Dropping out of school is a complex social problem that affects more than just the individuals who do not complete a high school education (Hargroves, 1987). Peck, Law, and Mills (1987) examined the relationship of dropouts and their impact on society and determined that:

> increasingly, it is being recognized that the issues of dropping out and dropout prevention cannot be separated from issues affecting our total economic and social structure. These issues include poverty, unemployment, discrimination, the role of the family, social values, the welfare cycle, child abuse, and drug abuse. (p. 3)

The proportion of individuals who have failed to finish high school has decreased substantially during the latter half of this century. According to Pascal Forgione (1994), the U.S. Commissioner of Education Statistics,

> between the late 1970s and 1993, event dropout rates--the proportion of students who drop out during a given year--declined 33%, and the status dropout rates--the proportion of 16- through 24-year-olds who are not in school and have not completed high school, regardless of when they dropped out--declined 23%. (p. 1)

As previously noted, dropout rates have declined to approximately 25% from almost 94% during the first decade of this century (Knutson, 1996; Wells, 1990). While this decline is substantial, Forgione (1994) and Wylie and Hunter (1994) noted that, in 1993, approximately 381,000 students ages 15 through 24 dropped out of high school and over 3.4 million persons ages 16 through 24 had not completed high school and were not currently enrolled in school. The number of students who dropped out of school in 1996 reached nearly half a million (U.S. Department of Education, 1997).

Consequences of Dropping Out

One of the primary goals of alternative schools is to help students finish their high school education, reducing the propensity of problems associated with dropping out of school (Slayman, 1997). These consequences affect both dropouts and the greater society. The burden these individuals place on society is often manifested in an undereducated workforce, unemployment, lost tax revenues, and an increased reliance on welfare. High school dropouts, especially those who were chronically truant, are also more likely

to engage in crime than their peers who graduated from high school (Gavin, 1997; McLaughlin, 1992).

During the latter part of the 19th and early part of the 20th centuries, it was possible to obtain suitable employment with less than a high school education. The economic fate of dropouts in the last 20 years has shifted dramatically. Dropouts face a life of uncertainty, plagued with a greater propensity toward unemployment and earning potential far below that of high school graduates (Cantelon & LeBoeuf, 1997; Knutson, 1996; Rumberger, 1987; Wells, 1990). Many companies will not consider an individual for employment without at least a high school diploma, and many potential employers still consider the GED as a step below a traditional high school education.

Individuals who did not complete high school often face lifelong problems of unemployment, since they often find themselves faced with disadvantages in the labor force. Many dropouts find themselves locked out of an increasing variety of employment opportunities as the job market requires higher-skilled labor (McLaughlin, 1992; Wehlage, Rutter, & Turnbaugh, 1987). An additional problem related to the problems of unemployment of undereducated individuals is the effect on their children. Lewit (1993), in an examination of poverty among children, determined that the decline in the earning capacity of adults, particularly men, with limited education contributes to a substantial increase in poverty among their children.

High school dropouts, females in particular, are more likely to become dependent on public assistance than are high school graduates (Neumann, 1994). This is due in part to the increase in the number of unwed mothers who have dropped out of school prior to graduation. It is anticipated that the recent changes in welfare laws, in particular Georgia

Senate Bill 104, now known as Act 389 (Georgia Department of Human Resources, 1998), will have a great impact on unwed teen mothers. According to the major provisions of the bill, a teen parent is required to live with a parent or responsible relative and must stay in school. In addition, all recipients of public assistance must participate in a work activity, and welfare recipients are limited to 48 months of assistance. This makes it even more important that teen mothers obtain at least a high school education to improve their potential job opportunities.

In addition to teen pregnancy, students who cut classes, have disciplinary problems, have been suspended, or have trouble with the police are much more likely to drop out. These potential dropouts were also more likely to be involved in delinquent behavior or criminal activities than graduates (Bachman, Green, & Wirtanen, 1971). The increase in crime prevalent among high school dropouts has had a significant economic impact on society as more are incarcerated at the expense of the taxpaying public. The challenge of educating today's youth is further complicated by an increasing amount of violence in schools and a rising number of disruptive and delinquent students, often interfering with learning opportunities for other students (Furlong & Morrison, 1994; Futrell, 1996; Gable & Bullock, 1995). Many school districts, to curb the economic disadvantage created by high dropout rates, have established alternative schools to meet the needs of students they have identified in jeopardy of dropping out (Bachman, Green, & Wirtanen, 1971; Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, & Rock, 1987; Knutson, 1996; Neumann, 1994).

Characteristics of Potential Dropouts

Several major risk factors have been identified that indicate a predisposition to drop out of school. Students who demonstrate chronically disruptive or delinquent

behavior, have emotional difficulties, exhibit poor academic performance, have a strong dislike for school, become pregnant, live on public assistance, have poor attendance or are habitually truant, or display a combination of these factors have an increased risk for dropping out of school (Gavin, 1997; Hahn, Danzberger & Lefkowitz, 1987; Hefner-Packer, 1991; Knutson, 1996; Neumann, 1994).

Researchers have devised categories of common factors that directly relate to students' propensity for dropping out of school. Factors may be grouped as school, psychological, family background, or economic related (Fagon & Pabon, 1990; Janosz, LeBlanc, Boulerice, & Tremblay, 1997; Rumberger, 1983; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986; Wells, 1990).

School-Related Factors

Schools themselves may influence students' decisions to drop out since the school experience of dropouts is often negative. Dropouts tend to share the same negative school experiences. These experiences include a history of poor grades, grade retention, low motivation or academic aspirations, truancy, school behavior problems, poor relationships with other students and teachers, and less involvement in extracurricular activities (Fagon & Pabon, 1990; Janosz, LeBlanc, Boulerice, & Tremblay, 1997; Rumberger, 1983; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986; Wells, 1990).

The U.S. Department of Education (1990), in a longitudinal study of dropouts, cited the nine most frequently given school-related reasons students reported they dropped out of school: These reasons included: (a) not liking school, (b) not getting along with teachers, (c) not getting along with other students, (d) not feeling safe at school, (e) getting expelled, (f) feeling that they did not belong, (g) not keeping up with school work, (h) failing school, and (i) changing schools and disliking the new school.

Every year an at-risk student is retained, it increases the likelihood that he or she will become a dropout. Forgione's (1994) research showed that the dropout rate for students in the United States who had repeated more than one grade was four times higher than the rate for students who did not repeat any grades (40.9% versus 9.4%). Grade retention was determined by Walz (1989) to be a primary reason students drop out of school. He maintained that a student who has been retained one time is 60 times more likely to become a dropout. He further concluded that a student who has repeated a grade two times is 250 times more likely to become a dropout.

Psychological Factors

Students with social or emotional difficulties are also at an increased risk for dropping out of school. Results of many studies indicated that students with emotional or behavioral disorders require special intervention to keep them in school. (Fuller & Sabatino, 1996; Harrington-Lueker, 1994; Hefner-Packer, 1991; Knutson, 1996). Many of these students are disruptive or violent, and without intervention would be repeatedly suspended, or, if problems with the students escalate, they risk expulsion. Students suspended from school multiple times are at increased risk for dropping out of school.

Family Background and Economic Factors

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (1992), there are several factors related to labeling students as at-risk that relate directly to their family situations. These factors include belonging to a single-parent family, having a family income of less than $15,000, having an older brother or sister who has dropped out of school, having limited proficiency in English, or having more than 3 hours a day at home without adult supervision. Previous research on family background factors suggested that the

socioeconomic status of a family is one of the most influential factors impacting on a student's likelihood of dropping out of school (Kagan, 1987; Rumberger, 1987).

The close connection between family-related factors and economic factors was apparent in the previously referenced longitudinal study conducted by the U.S. Department of Education (1990). The six most frequently reported family-related reasons students reported they dropped out of school were (a) had to support a family, (b) wanted to have family, (c) was pregnant, (d) became a parent, (e) got married, and (f) had to take care of family members. This study supported the findings of Rumberger (1987) that 20% of the students who dropped out of school did so for economic reasons related to family needs.

Several additional characteristics associated with family background or economic factors have been identified that place students at higher risk for dropping out of school. Griffin (1995) cited several "predisposing factors for at-riskness" (p. 26). These include parent alcoholism, drug use in the family, chronic illness or death of a family member within the last year, low socioeconomic level, low parental education level, dropping out of school by sibling, and disrupted home life. Students who change schools frequently, have outside employment, or become pregnant are also at greater risk of dropping out of school.

Warning Signs of Dropping Out

Griffin (1995) differentiated between the predisposing risk factors and warning signs that students are in danger of dropping out of school. These warning signs include poor academic record, attendance problems, dislike of school, pattern of behavior

problems, little or no participation in extracurricular activities, low self-esteem, and drug or alcohol use on the part of the student. Barrington and Hendricks (1989) made similar conclusions based on a longitudinal study they conducted. They determined that most dropouts have excessive absences, poor grades, and a low grade point average.

Why Alternative Schools?

Kellmayer (1995) evaluated a study conducted by the California Department of Education that compared the most common discipline problems of the 1940s with those of the 1990s. Talking, chewing gum, running in the halls, making noise, wearing improper clothing, and not putting paper in the wastebaskets were among the discipline problems most commonly noted by teachers approximately 50 years ago. The most common problems of the 1990s noted by teachers included truancy and disruptive behavior, including assault, drug and alcohol abuse, pregnancy, and suicide.

The United States Department of Education's Sixth National Education Goal stated that by the year 2000 "every school in the United States will be free of drugs, violence, and the unauthorized presence of firearms and alcohol and will offer a disciplined environment conducive to learning" (U.S. Department of Education, 1993, p. 1). The increase in severity and incidence of discipline problems over the last 50 years, coupled with the high number of students dropping out each year, has created new problems for public schools. The challenge of educating today's youth is further complicated by the desire of educators to reach two goals. The first is to keep at-risk students in school and help them develop into productive citizens. The second is to remove disruptive and violent students from the regular school setting where they often interfere with learning opportunities for others (Furlong & Morrison, 1994; Futrell, 1996; Gable & Bullock, 1995;

Kellmayer, 1995; Knutson, 1996). The results of a survey conducted by the National School Board Association in 729 school districts indicated that 82% of the schools surveyed witnessed an increase in violence over a 5-year period (American School Board Journal, 1994). Hayes (1993) described the extent of the problem:

> According to the National Education Association, an estimated 100,000 students carry guns to class. Some 3 million incidents of street crime (assault, rape, robbery, and theft) take place inside schools or on school property yearly. Nearly 300,000 high school students are physically attacked each month. One teacher in 20 is assaulted annually. (p. 8)

The development of alternative schools offers a strategy for school systems to become more responsive to the needs of at-risk students and the communities the school systems serve. Alternative schools have been defined as independent or shared facilities that offer a nontraditional, full-service school program characterized by their small scale, community atmosphere, and pronounced departure from traditional programs, school organization, and environment (McNabb & Kaufmann, 1994; Raywid, 1994). An additional definition provided by West (1991) pronounced that "alternative schools are usually a district's last effort at resolving the problems of at-risk students" (p. 187).

Yager (1996) in a study of students at 31 public alternative schools in Indiana determined that the best way to keep a student from becoming a high school dropout is to make the school more successful. Paglin and Fager (1997) cited four major benefits commonly attributed to alternative schools. These benefits included (a) a reduction in dropout rates, (b) a reduction in student truancy, (c) a redirection of disruptive students from traditional school settings into more productive and successful learning environments, and (d) a re-engagement with learning and the community that occurs when students are placed in a more flexible and responsive environment. Public alternative

schools are often viewed as stopgap methods to preserve a faltering system of public education and as devices to meet the needs and realize the potential of at-risk students (Arnove & Strout, 1980; Fuller & Sabatino, 1996).

Concerns Raised Regarding Alternative Schools

Many educators agree that at-risk students exhibit similar characteristics, including low academic achievement, low self-esteem, and disruptive behavior. These students differ, however, as to whether alternative school settings are the best option for addressing their needs. Despite the potential of alternative schools to assist students who might otherwise be deemed as failures by school and society, several concerns have been raised about the negative outcomes of such programs. The three concerns most frequently noted are that (a) students attending alternative schools are labeled negatively, (b) students attending these schools are racially isolated, and (c) the schools often appear to be holding tanks for disruptive students (Arnove & Strout, 1980; Cox, Davidson, & Bynum, 1995; Duke & Perry, 1978).

The labeling of students attending alternative schools, according to Duke and Perry (1978), is another serious outcome. They contend that students attending these schools are often perceived as misfits or academically incompetent, and this labeling can have a very negative impact on students. Stevenson and Burger (1989) expressed a similar view when they concluded that isolating students in separate alternative schools could reduce their self-esteem. Many opponents to alternative schools, according to Cox, Davidson, and Bynum (1995), take the position that students attending these schools are often labeled by their peers and society as less capable or as delinquents.

Opponents to alternative schools are concerned that the schools have contributed to racial isolation. They further contended that alternative school students are often tracked into inferior educational programs. Cox, Davidson, and Bynum (1995) conducted studies pertaining to the proportion of minority students in alternative schools relative to the percentage of minority students in the communities where the schools were located. Brian Kintisch of the Center for Children and Education noted that black students make up 37% of Georgia's public school enrollment but 58% of the students sent to alternative schools and 61% of students expelled (Salzer, 1999).

Combs (1991) determined that alternative schools are often used as "holding tanks" for potential dropouts or discipline cases. He further concluded that in many districts these students are sent to inadequate schools staffed by indifferent personnel and treated as inferiors. Kellmayer, (1995) in describing some alternative school programs, noted that

> a great many of these programs are alternative in name only and are in reality "soft jails" designed to isolate difficult students from the mainstream. Unfortunately, the mindset of many of those in positions of authority to create alternative programs is such that punitive programs are common. (p. 12)

Raywid (1994) identified institutions that strive to change the behavior of students exhibiting chronic disruptive behavior as the Last-Chance Program Type II schools. Raywid contended that in many Type II alternative schools the "punitive component outweighs the instructional, and the atmosphere is more openly jail-like than school-like" (p. 27).

While opponents of alternative schools are troubled about the negative outcomes associated with these schools, they also understand that traditional schools are failing to serve the needs of approximately one-fourth of their students (Conant, 1992). They are also concerned, however, that alternative schools have become merely retention facilities

for students who are not functioning within the confines of the traditional school setting (Combs, 1991).

Joyner (1996) concluded from a study of 174 students returning to the regular school environment after 6 months to a year in an alternative school setting that simply relocating students to an alternative site will not in and of itself create an environment where formerly disruptive and unsuccessful students can succeed. If alternative schools are created to meet the needs of students who are unable to function within the confines of the traditional high school, then these schools should be able to show that they have in place a special program that helps these students. The students should also be able to achieve a higher degree of success than they would have in the regular school setting. Ultimately, the goal should be to help students stay in school and graduate, prepare to enter the work force, or continue with higher education (Conant, 1992; Mann & Gold, 1984; Raywid, 1994).

Philosophy and Theoretical Basis for Alternative Schools

Over 50 years ago, Dewey (1938) focused on the need for schools to bring meaning to students' educational experiences. He contrasted the traditional methods of educating students to what was then touted as the progressive education movement. The curriculum, Dewey believed, should be student centered and relevant to the lives of the students. Alternative schools, according to Hessong and Weeks (1987), fit closely with Dewey's interpretation of schools and originally set out to humanize education, to make schools more relevant, and thus to reduce the school dropout rate.

Alternative school programs continued to grow out of research on delinquent behavior in adolescence. Certain kinds of alternative schools, it was argued, would reduce

the delinquent behavior of their students significantly, regardless of other influences in their lives. This theory, according to Gold and Mann (1984), posited that delinquent behavior is defensive in that it provides a way of "avoiding, neutralizing, or counteracting situations which endanger self-esteem" (p. 45). At the same time, they explained, delinquent behavior offers experiences that promise a form of self-enhancement.

The potential harm the tradition of educating all students in the same way was argued by Murphy (1993):

> Currently, we seem to take pride in teaching all young people in the same way. We believe that doing so promotes equality. It does the opposite. What is fair about creating just one kind of school with one kind of teaching when children's interests, learning styles, and developmental levels differ so dramatically. (p. 642)

A desire to retain students in the school system has caused districts across the country to develop programs to meet the needs of students identified as being at risk of dropping out of school at all levels. Since students drop out for many reasons, the structure of programs must be responsive to identified personal and environmental needs of those identified as at-risk (Wells, 1990).

Characteristics of Students Attending Alternative Schools

Students attending alternative school, according to Conant (1992), are underachievers or students with severe behavior problems who have needs that are not being met at their traditional schools. A similar view of these students was expressed by Pallas, Natiello, and McDill (1988), who described at-risk students as demonstrating a broad range of academic and behavioral problems. Academically at-risk students, according to Combs (1981), fail to achieve and are prone to drop out of school. He further concluded

that, when these students remain in a traditional school setting that is not meeting their needs, they often display inappropriate behaviors.

Cox, Davidson, and Bynum (1995) determined that students attending alternative schools have higher self-esteem, more positive attitudes toward school, improved school attendance, higher academic performance, and decreased delinquent behaviors than when they attended traditional schools. Based on these findings, many alternative education programs have targeted delinquent youth.

Many students in alternative schools have experienced repeated failure in regular school settings. Often, they have been retained at least one time and are therefore older than many of their classmates in their current grade. Knutson (1996) described at-risk students attending alternative schools as discouraged learners who did not achieve in the standard high school program. These students, he contended, often exhibit poor attendance and habitual truancy. Research on delinquency has found links between the academic failure of students, low self-esteem, and anti-social behavior. Proponents of alternative schools have determined that for alternative schools to be successful, they must help students improve by addressing these three areas of concern in their programs (Gold & Mann, 1984; Raywid, 1988; Wylie & Hunter, 1991).

Types of Alternative Schools

There are three predominant alternative school models that serve students at risk of dropping out of school or school failure due to behavior problems, poor grades, or habitually truancy. These models include the separate alternative school, the school-within-a school, and the alternative classroom (Barton, 1998; Hefner-Packer, 1991). The most prevalent model is the separate alternative school. With this model, the alternative

school is housed in a separate building. It is considered a school by itself and it has its own administrative unit. Hefner-Packer (1991), in an examination of separate alternatives schools, identified five major goals of these schools. They are the "elimination of academic failure, the creation of a personal family atmosphere, improved social, career, and academic skills, preparation for a return to the regular school setting or graduation, and development of self-esteem, self-discovery, and self-awareness" (p. 11).

Another common model is the alternative-program-within-a-traditional-school approach (also called a school within a school). In this approach the alternative education program is commonly housed within a traditional school setting or has close ties to a particular traditional school (Barton, 1998). The administration of the school may be semiautonomous and utilize a different curriculum and teaching methods from the traditional school. Students attending an alternative school program using the school-within-a-school approach may spend all or part of the day within this setting. They may return to the traditional school for special courses or electives. Students attending this type of program are generally low achievers or unable to adjust to traditional teaching methods. The goals of the school-within-a school, according to Hefner-Packer (1991), reflect the needs of the students they serve and include improving basic skills, increasing attendance, and individualizing the rate of progress for students.

The third model, the alternative classroom, houses an alternative option in a self-contained classroom within a traditional school. Students in these classes are often offered extended instructional time and instruction in basic skills. The goal for the alternative classroom, similar to those for the other two models, is to enhance the self-esteem

of the students and motivate them to improve their academic, vocational, and social skills (Hefner-Packer, 1991).

Characteristics of Successful Alternative Schools

Although there are contradictory views as to whether alternative schools are the most viable option for dealing with at-risk students, there is consensus among researchers as to the important features of successful alternative schools. Successful alternative schools have high numbers of students who eventually earn a high school diploma and gain skills that will allow them to have more successful futures (Arnove & Strout, 1980; Gold & Mann, 1984; Raywid, 1995; Wiseman, 1996; Young, 1990). These common strengths pertain to the environment or school climate, the commitment of teachers, the size of the school, student-to-teacher ratios, counseling services available to students, the leadership of the school, and the curriculum used by the school. Specifically, Wehlage and Rutter (1986) determined that small school and class size, a committed teaching force, and a nontraditional individualized curriculum were among the most important features of successful alternative schools. Specific services to meet the needs of individual students, including health care and childcare services, were found at many but not all successful alternative schools (Paglin & Fager, 1997; Young & Clinchy, 1992).

Supportive Environment

Supportive environments are an integral part of school climate. One of the primary goals of alternative schools is to rebuild students' trust in school as a place to learn and restore the belief that learning is a meaningful activity. Successful alternative schools strive to create a supportive, accepting, and non-competitive learning environment conducive to the needs of the students, where students are able to trust the program

as well as the teaching staff. This congruence between the needs of the students and a supportive learning environment is likely to produce positive outcomes including increased sense of worth and reduced disruptive behavior. This environment allows alternative school students to have more opportunities for positive experiences in a school setting and experience a sense of control over their lives (Arnove & Strout, 1980; DeTurk & Mackin, 1975; Duhon, 1997; Gold & Mann, 1984; Stevenson & Burger, 1989).

Advocates for alternative schools point out that these schools provide a supportive environment where students can gain basic academic and social skills, experience success and social approval, participate in important decision-making, feel good about themselves, and look forward to the future (Raywid, 1983). This can be accomplished only with the assistance of competent and caring teachers and staff who are specially trained to work with these students (Raywid, 1988). Alternative schools must be staffed with teachers trained in the teaching of more than just the basic curriculum. They must be well trained in teaching social skills and in individualizing the curriculum to meet the needs of their students. They must also be well-grounded in behavior management techniques and crisis management. If the teachers are going to be successful with the students, it is critical that they have faith in the potential and ability of their students. Teachers in alternative schools must be committed to the idea that all students can and will be successful (Kaczynski,1989; Watson, 1996).

Results of many studies have indicated that a caring staff is positively related to the success of alternative schools, and the way teachers relate with the students is an essential factor in the classroom. Students should know that their teachers care about them and their academic success and that their teachers hold high expectations for all

students. Teachers must maintain the belief that students deserve renewed opportunities to learn and must understand that their attitude toward the students may be the defining factor with respect to whether or not students are successful in the alternative school setting (McMillan & Reed, 1994; Meixner, 1995; Yager, 1996).

Students have also determined that alternative school teachers have different characteristics than teachers in traditional high schools. Knutson (1996), surveyed at-risk students enrolled in a rural alternative high school who had previously attended a traditional high school. His results indicated that students perceived teachers at the alternative school as more concerned about them and less authoritarian than teachers at the traditional high school. In addition, these students believed that staff allowed students more input in decision-making, treated students more fairly, gave students more positive reinforcement, and were more enthusiastic than teachers at the traditional high school.

Students who have had problems in the regular school setting are often offered the choice of attending an alternative school. Often the choice, however, is either to attend the alternative school or not to attend school in that district (Raywid, 1984). Alternative school programs typically represent the last chance for chronically disruptive students. If the student is successful in the alternative school, he or she, after a stipulated amount of time, earns the right to return to the regular school setting. This, it is often presumed, is what the student needs and desires. Kellymayer (1995) offered a different view, maintaining that successful alternative schools should not necessarily be judged by whether or not students are returned to their regular schools. He stated that,

> if efforts to create a true alternative prove successful, then the majority of students (including those who were assigned to the program against their will) will not wish to leave the program and return to the mainstream after they have been "cured." Many alternative programs operate on the erroneous assumption that

> after a certain period of time in the program, students will want to return to a traditional program. (p. 26)

Effective alternative schools, according to Kellmayer (1995), succeed in creating a sense of family among students, faculty, and administrators. Placing personnel who are unsuited to work with disruptive students, he further contended, creates the potential for chaos and disaster in the classroom. Teachers, Kellmayer maintained, should not be assigned to a program in which they do not wish to teach. Murphy (1993) supported this view when he concluded that too often teachers are assigned to positions based on seniority rather than where they want to teach. He further stated that, if teachers had some choice of venue, "the voluntary nature of such new relationships would make people instant partners and collaborators from the start" (p. 645). This collaboration allows teachers to share their ideas, strategies, and resources with one another. In addition, these teachers strive to create a collaborative climate with parents of students. They keep the lines of communication between the school and home open and routinely report students' progress to parents.

Small Class and School Size

Small schools and low student-to-teacher ratios are identified by many authorities as the most important characteristics for successful alternative school programs (Arnove & Strout, 1980; Kagan, 1988; Kellmayer, 1995; Neumann, 1994; Raywid, 1984; Young, 1990). Raywid (1984) stated that programs must be small enough to permit personalization of the school experience. The schools should ideally serve no more than 100 students. Individual classes should have fewer than 13 students to each teacher. This differs from traditional schools that may have from 25 to 40 students to one teacher (Barton, 1998).

Raywid (1994), in a study of alternative high schools in New York, determined that the more successful alternative schools, with lower dropout rates, were small in size when compared to traditional high schools. Young (1990) reviewed several studies of alternative schools and concluded that small school size was associated with the success of the programs. He further stated that low enrollment, coupled with low student-to-teacher ratios, allowed teachers to individualize instruction more than in traditional schools.

Alternative schools, according to DeBlois (1989), should be small and located in a separate building where students and teachers can develop their own sense of identity. A similar view propounded by Gold and Mann (1984) also noted that small alternative schools permit teachers to learn more about the special needs of their students and the students are generally better behaved. Smallness also permits the human connections that result in strong bonds between students and their schools (Raywid, 1997).

Hahn (1987) determined that schools with lower student-to-teacher ratios (12 to 1 or even lower) had reduced dropout rates when compared to schools with higher ratios. This may be due, according to Cuban (1989) and Paglin and Fager (1997), to the closer relationships that can be fostered between adults and students in schools with lower ratios.

Counseling Services

Several studies have been conducted that determined that students admitted into alternative schools might have emotional or behavioral disorders that require special interventions (Fuller & Sabatino, 1996; Harrington-Lueker, 1994; Stevenson & Burger, 1989). Disruptive and violent students, according to studies conducted by Fuller and

Sabatino (1996), should receive psychological evaluations prior to being placed in alternative schools. Many of these students, they concluded, would be designated as learning disabled, emotionally disturbed, or a combination of both and thus qualify for special education services.

Fuller and Sabatino (1996) further concluded that, to be effective, alternative school programs should utilize intensive individual and group counseling focused on self-esteem, self-concept, personal responsibility, appropriate expressions of feelings, drug/alcohol prevention, and career exploration. They stressed that these students must be convinced of their own self-worth and be able to foresee the consequences of choices they make.

Similar conclusions were drawn from a study by Harrington-Lueker (1994) of an alternative school in Corpus Christi, Texas. Behavior modification techniques were used in this school to alter the undesirable behavior of the students. Students had to go through three levels of behavioral improvement before they could earn their way out of the alternative school and back into the regular school. Psychologists and social workers worked with the students to help them get their behavior under control, remediated their academic deficiencies, and returned them to the regular classroom setting.

Stevenson and Burger (1989) also expressed the importance of students receiving counseling services as a part of the alternative school program. They further determined that counselors should be available to work with parents as well as students. Family counseling, although viewed as a positive factor, may only be included if the participation of the parents or guardians can be obtained (Fuller & Sabatino, 1996).

Supportive Leadership

An additional characteristic relevant to the success of alternative schools pertains to the educational leader of the school. Successful alternative schools have principals who are strong academic leaders (Foley, 1983; Mickens, 1994). Principals of effective alternative schools need to serve as instructional leaders of their schools and encourage teachers to work together to create a curriculum that meets the needs of individual students and an environment where all students believe they can succeed. The principal must also set a climate that maintains constant communication with the teachers regarding student progress.

The importance of an alternative school principal as instructional leader was further explored by Day (1996) who examined the characteristics of successful, practicing alternative school principals in Kentucky. Teachers and principals employed at the alternative schools noted several characteristics common among successful principals. These principals set a climate that was conducive to teaching and learning, built teams of empowered teachers, involved the teachers in decision-making, kept the teachers informed, and enabled these teachers to act. The teachers also indicated a high level of trust in the decisions made by their principals. The principals viewed their most critical duty as the oversight of curriculum development, with innovative curriculum planning being the most critical training need.

The value of strong leadership was further reported by Wiseman (1996) in a study of 21 lead administrators and 107 teachers at alternative schools in North Carolina. Teachers and administrators identified leadership of the school as the most essential determinate of overall school effectiveness. Specifically, administrators indicated believing

in the ability of their staff, establishing a climate conducive to learning, and promoting shared goals and visions to be the most important factors leading to the success of alternative schools. Teachers' perceptions differed only slightly from those of administrators. In addition to the administrators' findings, teachers indicated that the amount of freedom they were allowed in making instructional decisions was also of great importance.

Specialized Flexible Curriculum

Young (1990) concluded that a student-centered curriculum is an important characteristic of successful alternative schools. Tatum (1997) found that flexibility within the curriculum could help reduce the number of students from falling further behind.

Wehlage and Rutter (1986) determined that successful alternative school programs develop and employ a nontraditional curriculum. That curriculum they determined should be individualized. They further concluded that the use of cooperative learning, beginning at the individual's level, a flexible schedule, and the use of real-life examples all help to tailor the curriculum to meet the needs of the students.

The curriculum at successful alternative schools has often been described as integrated. Paglin and Fager (1997), in a study of nine successful alternative school programs determined that curriculum offerings that make connections between the disciplines, as well as between the school and the community or the world of work, are the most successful. Fuller and Sabatino (1996) proposed the use of an integrated-curriculum approach composed of four distinct components. The components included were academic program goals, vocational program goals, social skill development goals, and personal development goals. According to Fuller and Sabatino,

> Academic goals are to coincide with academic ability, vocational interests, and other personal interests. Vocational goals are to be developed based on aptitudes,

> interests, and available programming. Social skill development should promote appropriate relationship skills with peers and authority figures. The goal of personal development is achievement of positive feelings for self. (p. 296)

Opponents of alternative schools contend that the diluted academic programs, often offered in alternative schools, make it difficult for students to return to regular high schools and complete advanced courses successfully (Duke & Perry, 1978). Stevenson and Burger (1989), however, disagree. They state that successful alternative school programs include a challenging academic program tailored to meet the needs of the students. Similarly, Baker, and Weinbaum (1992) concluded that one of the important components of alternative schools is the development of curricula and instructional strategies that engage students in learning that meets their needs. Griffin (1995) maintained that "the curriculum of the school must be responsive to the needs and interests of the learners. Students must be able to see the relevance and importance of material they are learning" (p. 27).

Different viewpoints also exist regarding the type of curriculum that should be offered at alternative schools. A curriculum for at-risk students, according to DeBlois (1989), requires interdisciplinary team projects; a mastery-learning, continuous progress approach; and an emphasis on vocational orientation rather than preparation for college. This view differs from that of Baker and Weinbaum (1992) who concluded that the curriculum should include both training for future employment or preparation for postsecondary education.

Although opinions differ as to the type of programs that should be in place in alternative schools, there is general consensus that the programs must be credible. According to Bierlein and Vandergrift (1993), many educators at traditional schools view

alternative programs as offering an "easy out" for students who have not succeeded in the traditional school setting. They further determined that high academic standards and curriculum must be in place for an alternative school to be effective.

Additional Features

Many successful at-risk programs provide students with more than just a curriculum that meets their educational and emotional needs. Extracurricular activities, availability of health services to students, and childcare for students with children were noted as additional features found at many alternative schools (Young & Clinchy, 1992).

Extracurricular activities according to Oliver (1995), enable at-risk students to explore new interests, develop new peer relationships, and develop a broad range of physical, interpersonal, leadership, and intellectual skills. This, he concluded, strengthened students' bonds with school. Davalos, Chavez, and Guardiola (1999) determined, from a study commissioned by the Department of Health and Human Services concerning after-school activity, that students who did not participate in after-school activities were 57% more likely to drop out by their senior year, 49% more likely to use drugs, and 27% more likely to be arrested.

Infant daycare at the school site for children of students was determined to be more essential at schools specifically designed for teen mothers than at schools that serve predominately disruptive students (Hahn, 1987; Yager,1996; Young & Clinchy, 1992). Routine health services for students at school, according to the New York State Education Department (1987) are an integral part of keeping students in school. Screening for physical defects is an important aspect of improving attendance and preventing dropouts.

Schools are often better able to plan for the instruction of the students based on the results of these health screenings.

While availability of daycare for children of students and availability of medical health care for students have been found to have a positive effect on student attendance at alternative schools, they were found to be of less importance to teachers and administrators at alternative schools in North Carolina than other important features (Wiseman, 1996). These services were also determined to exist less often in North Carolina alternative schools than other features, including individualized counseling, a supportive environment, small class size, and strong leadership.

Measuring the Success of Alternative Schools

The main purpose of alternative schools, according to DeBlois (1994), is to help at-risk students catch up academically and socially and, if feasible, return them to their regular middle or high school. Most alternative schools measure their effectiveness or success based on the number of students who either graduate from their setting or return to their traditional high school (Raywid, 1995). The success of Oasis High School, an alternative education program for at-risk students in Michigan, however, uses an alternative method of measuring the effectiveness of its programs. School administrators determine their success rate by the high number of former students who are either attending college or employed (Meixner, 1995). Using this determination, they were able to conclude that the programs in place at the school assisted students in preparing them to become responsible citizens. Duke and Muzio (1978) reviewed 19 evaluations and reports related to the effectiveness of alternative schools. They noted that student academic progress, graduation rates, attendance and dropout rates, and postgraduate activities have

all been used as indicators of a school's effectiveness. Regular student attendance, they stressed, was essential to the success of an alternative school program.

CrossRoads Alternative Schools

In 1994, the Georgia Department of Education instituted a statewide educational initiative known as *CrossRoads* to "address the needs of chronically disruptive youth in middle schools and high schools across the state" (Harnish & Henderson, 1996, p. 69). According to the Continuous Quality Improvement Plan for Georgia's CrossRoads Alternative School Program (Georgia Department of Education, 1998b), the mission and philosophy of the program reflects the desire of the state department to address the needs of students attending these schools. The goals of the Georgia's CrossRoads Alternative School Program are (a) to create a safe and nurturing alternative learning environment, (b) to provide students with the opportunities and support services needed for their success in school and in the larger community, (c) to recognize, respect, and respond to all students' value and worth, and (d) to help students make appropriate choices.

According to the guidelines for Georgia's Alternative School Program (Georgia Department of Education, 1998b), the CrossRoads Alternative School Program has a threefold purpose:

1. To provide chronically disruptive (including adjudicated youth in grades 6-12) with the social services, individualized instruction, and transitions to other programs in order to become successful students and good citizens in the school and larger community.

2. To make the public schools safer and more secure by removing chronically disruptive students in grades 6-12 from the public classroom.

3. To enable students to complete requirements for their high school diploma. (p. 1)

The 89 CrossRoads school programs served 3,400 students in grades 6-12 in their first year of operation. By 1998, the number of alternative schools funded through the CrossRoads initiative had grown to over 100 programs serving approximately 15,000 students. Students entered the program because they exhibited chronically disruptive behavior (46%), illegal behavior (13%), aggression (10%), dropout recovery (7%), truancy (6%), or a combination of these factors ("Alternative Schools," 1999). The Continuous Quality Improvement Plan from the Georgia Department of Education (1998b) defines individuals displaying chronically disruptive behavior as students who exhibit continuous, willful, and overt undesirable behaviors in the school setting. These behaviors often interfere with the teaching and learning process of the classroom. These behaviors could be violent in nature and would be evident in various settings in the school and exhibited with different teachers and students.

Students in grades 6-12 displaying this behavior are eligible to attend an alternative school in Georgia. In addition, students who have been adjudicated through the juvenile court or have been through the disciplinary procedures of the local school district and have had the advantage of due process are also eligible.

Georgia Governor Roy Barnes has asked the General Assembly to increase the budget for CrossRoads Alternative School Programs for the year 2000. If passed by the General Assembly, the present $13 million budget would approximately double for the year 2000 ("Alternative Schools," 1999). According to the Director of Student Support Services for the Georgia Department of Education, while there are specific guidelines for schools to follow to make themselves eligible for the extra funding provided by the CrossRoads initiative, there are no specific guidelines in place that will ensure Georgia's

alternative schools provide the program features experts deemed necessary for schools to be successful (M. Tolbert, personal communication, May 10, 1998). Chalker (1994) had previously concluded from a study of 27 alternative schools in Georgia that there was no consistency in features among programs.

In response to the findings of a report by the State Board of Education reviewing the progress of Georgia's CrossRoads Alternative School Program, State Superintendent of Schools Linda Schrenko stated that "teachers are telling us the Alternative Schools Program is making Georgia's classrooms safer and more conducive to learning" (personal communication, November 13, 1998). Teachers and administrators at CrossRoads programs realize that their schools may improve the regular schools by removing the disruptive students; however, they reject the idea that their students are criminals. Many see themselves as educators, not wardens, and believe that alternative schools can give problem adolescents the special attention they need. Russell Studevan, principal at a school serving at-risk students in Georgia, summed up the situation when he stated that his school was a second chance to many children who never had a first chance ("Alternative Schools," 1999).

Summary

This chapter presented a review of literature pertaining to the dropout problem as it exists in the United States, along with the problems associated with students dropping out of school. These problems include unemployment, dependence on social programs, and an increase in crime among those with less than the equivalent of a high school education. The characteristics of students prone to dropping out of school were presented. Chronically disruptive or delinquent behavior, poor academic performance, poor

attendance or habitual truancy, strong dislike for school, and pregnancy were behaviors discussed as associated with this group of individuals.

Alternative schools were deemed as necessary interventions to face the new challenges present in society that are reflected in our schools. These challenges included an increase in disruptive and delinquent behavior among young people, as well as an increase in the numbers of students dropping out of school each year. Alternative schools are viewed as serving two primary functions. The first is to remove disruptive students from the regular classroom and the second is to help at-risk students stay in school. The inability of schools to meet the needs of all their students, as well as the increase in disruptive behavior in regular classrooms, justifies, according to many researchers, the need for alternative schools.

Several concerns pertaining to alternative schools were also presented. Those adverse to alternative schools contend that the schools serve as holding tanks for disruptive students, racially isolate students, and have a watered-down curriculum that will not meet the needs of the students.

Many researchers have studied the characteristics of potential dropouts. These characteristics were divided into four main categories, including school-related factors, psychological factors, family-related factors, and economic factors. The characteristics of students attending alternative schools were also discussed. The two most frequently mentioned characteristics manifested by students attending alternative schools were academic underachievement and severe behavior problems.

The types of alternative schools were described. These models include the separate alternative school, the school-within-a school, and the alternative classroom. There

is no common set of features present at all successful alternative schools, however, there is consensus that several features are important to a school's effectiveness. These features include a supportive school climate, committed teachers, small class size, and student-to-teacher ratio, available counseling services, individualized curriculum, and strong leadership.

Georgia's CrossRoads Alternative School program was discussed. This program has three major goals. The first is to provide chronically disruptive students with social services, individualized instruction, and transitions to other programs in order to become successful students and good citizens in the school and larger community. The second is to make the public schools safer and more secure by removing chronically disruptive students in grades 6-12 from the public classroom. The third is to enable students to complete requirements for their high school diplomas.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter describes the methodology that was employed to investigate the perceptions of administrators and teachers at alternative schools in Georgia about the relative importance of key program features and the existence of these features at their respective schools. This chapter describes the procedures used in the study.

Research Questions

The following research question provided the focus for this study: What are the program features of alternative schools in Georgia, as perceived by teachers and administrators?

Subquestions were:

1. What program features do administrators identify as important to alternative schools?
2. What program features do teachers identify as important to alternative schools?
3. What program features do administrators identify as existing in their respective alternative schools?
4. What program features do teachers identify as existing in their respective alternative schools?

5. What differences, if any, are there between administrators' and teachers' perceptions regarding the importance of program features in alternative schools in Georgia?
6. What differences, if any, are there between administrators' and teachers' perceptions regarding the existence of program features in alternative schools in Georgia?
7. What differences, if any, are there between administrators' perceptions pertaining to the existence of program features and the importance of program features in alternative schools in Georgia?
8. What differences, if any, are there between teachers' perceptions pertaining to the existence of program features and the importance of program features in alternative schools in Georgia?

Research Design

This descriptive study utilized a mailed survey instrument to collect data. The investigator collected data pertaining to teachers' and administrators' perceptions of the importance and existence of key program features in alternative schools in Georgia.

Participants

The survey population was derived from a list of alternative schools provided by the Georgia State Department of Education. The list of alternative schools provided the name, address, phone number, and name of the lead administrator at every alternative school that serves at-risk students in Georgia. Participants for this study were composed of 117 administrators and approximately 400 teachers at 117 alternative schools. The Georgia Public Education Directory (Georgia Department of Education, 1998c) provided

the approximate number of teachers working at each school. All participants were mailed surveys. Completed surveys were received from 65 schools (56%). Sixty-three administrators (97%) and 229 teachers returned usable surveys. The percentage of teachers returning surveys was not reported due to discrepancies that existed in several instances between the number of teachers in each school as listed in the Georgia Public Education Directory (1998c) and the number of teachers site administrators said actually worked at their schools.

Instrumentation

The vehicle for data collection was an adapted version of the Perceptions of Alternative Schools Survey (see Appendix A and Appendix B), developed by Deborah Wiseman (1996). Permission was obtained to use and adapt the instrument (see Appendix C). Two versions of the survey instrument were used to collect the data. This questionnaire was designed to survey both administrators and teachers at alternative schools on their perceptions pertaining to the importance of specific features found at alternative schools and the extent of the existence of these features in their respective schools.

Responses on the original version of the Perceptions of Alternative Schools Survey were made on a Likert scale for both the importance of each feature and the existence of that feature in the alternative school program. Responses ranged from 1 (not important or does not exist) to 5 (highly important or consistently exists) and only specified the response associated with an answer of either 1 or 5. Responses ranging from 2-4 fell into an unspecified midrange. This investigator used a modified version of the original survey that included a specific response associated with each number on the rating scale.

Responses to each item for the column labeled Importance I Place on Each Item were ranked as follows:

1. very unimportant
2. somewhat unimportant
3. neither unimportant nor important
4. somewhat important
5. very important

Responses to each item for the column labeled Extent to Which This Item Exists in My School were ranked as follows:

1. to a very small extent
2. to a small extent
3. to neither a small nor large extent
4. to a large extent
5. to a very large extent

The directions were modified to direct participants to complete the column labeled Importance I Place on Each Item before beginning the column labeled Extent to Which This Item Exists in My School. No questions on the survey were substantially altered.

This instrument was designed to measure teachers' and administrators' perceptions about alternative schools on specific categories of program features. The survey contained 40 items which represented six categories of program features. These categories were: Leadership, Student Attitudes, School Climate, Student Needs, General Perceptions About Alternative Schools, and Student Services. Items 9, 10, 11, 24, 25, 26, 35, 36, 38,

and 40 pertained to Leadership. Items 4, 5, 12, 29, and 33 pertained to Student Attitudes. Items 6, 7, 8, 22, 23, and 34 related to School Climate. Items 13, 14, 15, 16, 27, 28, 30, and 31 pertained to Student Needs. Items 1, 2, 3, 21, 37, and 39 related to General Perceptions About Alternative Schools. Items 17, 18, 19, 20, 32 pertained to Student Services.

In addition to the Perceptions of Alternative Schools Survey, both the key administrator at each school and the teachers were asked to provide biographic information. This information included: (a) sex, (b) age, (c) race, (d) the amount of teaching experience or administrative experience at an alternative school, and (e) the total teaching experience or total teaching and administrative experience. The administrators were asked to respond to additional questions pertaining to demographic information about the school and the student body. All questions pertained to the most recently completed school term. This information included: (a) the setting of the alternative school, (b) average student enrollment (c) average student-teacher ratio, (d) the number of full-time counselors, and (e) the number of part-time counselors.

Wiseman (1996) supplied data pertaining to the content validity and reliability for the original survey instrument. According to Wiseman, the content validity of the questions selected for gathering data on the survey were reviewed by five subject-matter experts. The survey instrument was refined based on the recommendations of the subject-matter experts prior to the pilot study. A pilot study was conducted by Wiseman (1996) to obtain information regarding the original instrument's level of internal consistency. This study was conducted at a public alternative school in North Carolina.

The reliability was checked for each individual item on the Wiseman survey. Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha was used to estimate the internal consistency. Researchers consider a measure to have adequate reliability if the Cronbach's alpha coefficient exceeds .70 (Pedhazur & Schmelkin, 1991). The coefficient alpha for the six categories ranged from .86 to .88. The reliability was also checked for the survey as a whole with a Cronbach Alpha of .87.

Pilot Test

A pilot test for this investigator's study was conducted at one selected public alternative school in Georgia. The school was selected for its close proximity to the investigator. Participants in the pilot test included the administrator and all the teachers at the school. The administrator was given the administrator and teacher cover letters and surveys. Participants were asked to complete the surveys, comment on the clarity of the directions on the cover letter, and comment on the clarity of the questions on the survey. The administrator and all nine teachers returned completed surveys. Results of the pilot test indicated that the survey and directions did not need to be refined.

Data Collection

After obtaining approval from the Georgia Southern University Internal Review Board (see Appendix D), each lead administrator of an alternative school in Georgia that serves at-risk students was mailed a packet containing surveys for all teachers and administrators); a letter stating the purpose of the study (see Appendix E and Appendix F); individual business-size envelopes for each teacher to return the survey when completed; and a stamped, self-addressed manila envelope in which to return all the surveys. All participants were assured of complete confidentiality regarding their responses.

Participants were asked to respond within 10 working days. All surveys and envelopes for a specific school had an assigned number on them that corresponded to that particular school. The purpose of the numbering was to maintain accuracy in mailing a follow-up letter to schools that did not return the surveys within 2 weeks. The cover letter explained that the numbers were being used for this purpose only and would not affect the guarantee of confidentiality.

Two weeks from the date of the first mailing, a postcard was sent as a reminder to school administrators who had not returned completed surveys (see Appendix G). This card also served as a note of appreciation to the schools that had returned surveys. Four weeks after the initial mailing, final follow-up letters and new surveys were mailed to schools that had not returned completed surveys (see Appendix H).

Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data. Biographic data pertaining to the participants and demographic data pertaining to the school and the student population were presented in frequencies and percentages. Means were calculated and ranked for the importance and existence of all features for both administrators and teachers. Inferential statistics were used to analyze the data pertaining to each research question. A series of independent *t*-tests were calculated for each item to compare teachers and administrators on importance ratings, and another series of independent *t*-tests were calculated to compare them on existence ratings. Dependent *t*-tests were calculated to compare teachers on their perceptions of the importance and existence for each individual item and administrators on their perceptions of the importance and existence for each individual item.

Reliability

The reliability of the survey instrument used in the present study was calculated with the SPSS program. The coefficient alphas for the survey ranged from .89 to .94. This exceeded the .70 researchers consider necessary for an adequate measure of reliability (Pedhazur & Schmelkin, 1991). The coefficient alpha for the importance of each feature according to teachers was .89, and the coefficient alpha for the existence of each feature according to teachers was .92. The coefficient alpha for the importance of each feature according to administrators was .94, and the coefficient alpha for the existence of each feature according to administrators was .89.

Summary

This chapter described the methodology and analytic tools employed to investigate the perceptions of administrators and teachers at alternative schools in Georgia pertaining to the existence and importance of identified key features. The population for the study included all teachers and administrators at alternative schools in Georgia that serve at-risk students. Completed surveys were received from 65 schools (56%). Sixty-three administrators and 229 teachers returned usable surveys.

An adapted version of the *Perceptions of Alternative Schools Survey* was used to obtain the data. This survey was designed to measure teachers' and administrators' perceptions pertaining to the importance of 40 specific features found at alternative schools and the existence of those features in their respective schools. Each of the 40 features belonged to one of six categories. The categories were Leadership, Student Attitudes, School Climate, Student Needs, General Perceptions About Alternative Schools, and Student Services.

The chapter also described the statistical treatment of the data. Means were calculated and ranked for the importance and existence of all features for both teachers and administrators. Independent t-tests were performed to compare teachers' perceptions on the importance of program features with those of administrators. Independent t-tests were also performed to compare teachers' perceptions of the existence of program features with those of administrators. Dependent t-tests were calculated to compare teachers' perceptions of the importance and existence for each individual item. Dependent t-tests were also calculated to compare administrators on their perceptions of the importance and existence of each individual item. Demographic and biographic data were presented in frequencies and percentages.

CHAPTER IV

REPORT OF DATA AND DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of administrators and teachers regarding the features of alternative schools in Georgia. The analysis of data is presented in this chapter. Responses were sought to the following research questions:

1. What program features do administrators identify as important to alternative schools?
2. What program features do teachers identify as important to alternative schools?
3. What program features do administrators identify as existing in their respective alternative schools?
4. What program features do teachers identify as existing in their respective alternative schools?
5. What differences, if any, are there between administrators' and teachers' perceptions regarding the importance of program features in alternative schools in Georgia?
6. What differences, if any, are there between administrators' and teachers' perceptions regarding the existence of program features in alternative schools in Georgia?

7. What differences, if any, are there between administrators' perceptions pertaining to the importance of program features and the existence of program features in alternative schools in Georgia?
8. What differences, if any, are there between teachers' perceptions pertaining to the importance of program features and the existence of program features in alternative schools in Georgia?

The research instrument was a survey mailed to all administrators and teachers at all alternative schools serving at-risk students in Georgia (see Appendix A and Appendix B). The survey consisted of 40 features of alternative schools. Each feature belonged to one of six categories. These categories were Leadership, Student Attitudes, School Climate, Student Needs, General Perceptions About Alternative Schools, and Student Services (see Table 1).

Administrators and teachers were asked to respond to each item twice. The first time they were to rank each item on a 5-point Likert scale on the importance this item would have for alternative schools. Responses to each item for the column labeled Importance I Place on Each Item were ranked as follows: (1) very unimportant, (2) somewhat unimportant, (3) neither unimportant nor important, (4) somewhat important, and (5) very important.

The second time, administrators and teachers were asked to respond to each item on the existence of the feature in their respective alternative schools. Responses to each item for the column labeled Extent to Which This Item Exists in My School were ranked as follows: (1) to a very small extent, (2) to a small extent, (3) to neither a small nor large extent, (4) to a large extent, and (5) to a very large extent.

Table 1

Features of Alternative Schools by Category

Category	Item	Feature
Leadership	9	Faculty and staff share school goals and visions.
Leadership	10	Teachers have the freedom to make instructional decisions.
Leadership	36	The supervisor/principal sets a climate that supports teaching and learning.
Leadership	24	Faculty work in teams to plan instruction.
Leadership	25	Alternative school program was organized based on faculty and staff input.
Leadership	11	The supervisor/principal believes in the ability of his/her staff.
Leadership	35	There was a schoolwide effort to develop curriculum for the alternative school program.
Leadership	26	The supervisor/principal provides teachers with materials they need in order to teach effectively.
Leadership	38	There is communication between teachers and supervisor/principal regarding student progress.
Leadership	40	Faculty shares resources, ideas, and strategies with each other.
Student Attitudes	4	Students can choose traditional or alternative school.
Student Attitudes	5	Students' attendance at the alternative school is regular.

Table 1 (continued)

Category	Item	Feature
Student Attitudes	12	The curriculum provides students with the skills they will need to be productive members of society.
Student Attitudes	29	The alternative school has become the step between a traditional school and dropping out.
Student Attitudes	33	Students speak positively about the alternative school.
School Climate	6	There is trust between students and teachers.
School Climate	7	Teachers and students speak freely with each other.
School Climate	8	Class size is maintained at 12 or fewer students per adult.
School Climate	22	Students and teachers have mutual respect.
School Climate	23	Teachers are responsive to students' academic and social needs.
School Climate	34	Students willingly share their ideas with faculty and staff.
Student Needs	13	Teachers accommodate students' learning styles.
Student Needs	14	Peer group counseling sessions are scheduled regularly.
Student Needs	15	Teachers provide positive reinforcement to students.
Student Needs	16	Students are grouped according to instructional needs rather than by grade level.

Table 1 (continued)

Category	Item	Feature
Student Needs	27	Curriculum is individualized for each student.
Student Needs	28	Students with like ability are grouped together for instruction.
Student Needs	30	The alternative school provides extracurricular activities.
Student Needs	31	School policies and procedures support nongraded, multiage classes.
General Perceptions	1	Teachers choose to work within the alternative program.
General Perceptions	2	Teachers meet regularly with students to provide academic help and support.
General Perceptions	3	Teachers believe students can achieve.
General Perceptions	21	Teachers routinely monitor and report student progress to students.
General Perceptions	37	Teachers provide opportunities in which students will succeed.
General Perceptions	39	Teachers routinely monitor and report student progress to parents.
Student Services	17	Daycare is provided for children of students.
Student Services	18	There is ongoing availability of medical health care
Student Services	19	Students receive individualized academic guidance on a regular basis.
Student Services	20	Individual personal counseling is available as needed.
Student Services	32	Flexible scheduling is available to students.

Teachers and administrators were also asked to complete biographic information related to their sex, age, race, administrative or teaching experience at an alternative school, and total teaching and administrative experience. Administrators were also asked to respond to questions pertaining to the setting, student enrollment, student-teacher ratio, and the number of counselors at their schools. This information was collected to assist in establishing a profile on Georgia's alternative schools, their administrators, and teachers.

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used for all statistical analysis. Frequencies and percentages were calculated for biographic and demographic data. Means and standard deviations were calculated for the *importance* and *existence* of each item for teachers and administrators. A comparison of teachers' and administrators' responses for each item was calculated using independent t-tests. A comparison of teachers' responses on the importance and existence of each item and administrators' responses on the importance and existence of each item were calculated using dependent t-tests.

Administrators' and Teachers' Biographic Data

The population for this study was derived from a list of alternative schools obtained from the Georgia Department of Education. One hundred seventeen administrators at alternative schools in Georgia that serve disruptive students were mailed surveys for this study. Completed surveys were received from 65 schools (56%). Sixty-three administrators and 229 teachers returned usable surveys. To analyze responses pertaining to biographic data, frequencies and percentages were determined for each item. Table 2 displays the frequencies and percentages for each group included in the study.

Table 2

Biographic Data on Georgia Alternative School Administrators and Teachers

Variable/Group	Teachers f	Teachers %	Administrators f	Administrators %
Sex				
Female	136	59.4	30	47.6
Male	92	40.2	33	52.4
Age				
Below 30	30	13.1	3	4.8
30-35	34	14.8	2	3.2
36-40	37	16.2	3	4.8
41-50	69	30.1	30	47.6
Over 50	57	24.9	25	39.7
Race				
African American	59	25.8	17	27.0
White	163	71.2	46	73.0
Other	4	1.7		
Total experience at an alternative school				
1 Year	53	23.1	5	7.9
2-5 Years	138	60.3	41	65.1
6-10 Years	26	11.4	8	12.7
11-20 Years	8	3.5	5	7.9
Over 20 Years	2	.9	4	6.3
Total Teaching and/or administrative years of experience				
1 Year	14	6.1	0	0
2-5 Years	55	24.0	5	7.9
6-10 Years	45	19.7	4	6.3
11-20 Years	55	24.0	21	33.3
Over 20 Years	57	24.9	33	52.4

Note: Because of rounding, percentages do not always total 100%.

Of the 63 administrators who returned survey instruments, 52.4% were male. Of the 229 teachers who returned surveys, more than half (59.4%) were female. A large percentage of administrators (87.3%) were over 40. Over half of the teachers (55%) were also over 40. Almost three-quarters of both administrators (73%) and teachers (71.2%) were white.

Three-fifths of reporting administrators (65.1%) and teachers (60.3%) had between 2 to 5 years experience at an alternative school. Approximately half of the administrators (52.4%) had over 20 years total experience in teaching and school administration. The total teaching experience of teachers varied, with fairly equal distributions for 2 to 5 years (24.0%), 11 to 20 years (24.0%), and over 20 years in the profession (24.9%). Approximately 19% of alternative school teachers had 6 to 10 years teaching experience, and first-year teachers comprised only 6.1% of alternative school teachers in Georgia.

Based on the data collected, the typical alternative school administrator in Georgia is male, over 40, and white, with 2 to 5 years experience at an alternative school, and over 20 years total teaching and administrative experience. The typical alternative school teacher is female, over 40, and white, with 2 to 5 years experience at an alternative school, and total teaching experience that varies from 2 to over 20 years, but not less than 2 years.

Demographic Data

Descriptive statistics for grade, school setting, current student enrollment, and the number of full-time and part-time counselors are presented in Table 3. Two administrators did not provide demographic information.

Table 3

Demographic Data on Georgia Alternative Schools

Variable	f	%
Grades		
6-12	50	76.9
9-12	5	7.6
Other	8	15.3
School setting		
Mostly urban	6	9.5
Mostly suburban	12	19.0
Mostly rural/small town	45	71.4
Current student enrollment		
Under 20	14	22.2
20-40	16	25.4
41-60	18	28.6
61-80	3	4.8
81-100	6	9.5
Over 100	6	9.5
Student/teacher ratio		
12 or fewer	34	54.0
More than 12	29	46.0
Full-time counselors		
None	42	66.6
1	17	26.9
2	4	6.3
Part-time counselors		
None	29	46.0
1	27	42.8
2	4	6.3
3	3	4.7

Note: Because of rounding, percentages do not always total 100%.

The majority of alternative schools surveyed (76.9%) serve students in grades 6 through 12. About 7 of 10 schools (71.4%) were located in mostly rural or small town settings. Student enrollment information varied, with 22.2% of the schools serving fewer than 20 students, 25.4% serving 20-40 students, and 28.6% serving 61-80 students. Only six schools (9.5%) had an enrollment greater than 100 students. Over half of the schools (54.0%) had fewer than 12 students to one teacher.

Forty-two schools (66.6%) had no full-time counselors, 17 schools (26.9%) had one full-time counselor, and four schools (6.3%) had two full-time counselors. Forty-six percent of the administrators indicated their schools had no part-time counselors. Twenty-seven of the 65 schools (42.8%) had one part-time counselor, four schools had two part-time counselors, and three schools had three part-time counselors.

Based on the data collected, the typical alternative school in this study was located in a rural or small town setting, served between 20 and 80 students in grades 6 through 12, and had approximately 12 or fewer students to one teacher. In addition, the school may have a part-time counselor, but was less likely to have a full-time counselor.

Research Questions

Research Question 1

Research question 1 was: *What program features do administrators identify as important to alternative schools?* Table 4 displays administrators' perceptions pertaining to the importance of 40 specific features of alternative schools. The means for each feature are ranked from most to least important. The ranking, item number, mean, standard deviation, and category are presented for each feature.

Table 4

Administrators' Perceptions of the Importance of Features in Alternative Schools

Rank	Item	Feature	M	SD	Category
1	36	The supervisor sets a climate that supports teaching and learning.	4.92	.41	Leadership
2	37	Teachers provide opportunities in which students will succeed.	4.91	.53	General Perceptions
3	40	Faculty shares resources, ideas, and strategies with each other.	4.89	.55	Leadership
4	39	Teachers routinely monitor and report student progress to parents.	4.89	.45	General Perceptions
5	11	The supervisor/principal believes in the ability of his/her staff.	4.87	.52	Leadership
6	22	Students and teachers have mutual respect.	4.87	.58	School Climate
7	5	Students' attendance at the alternative school is regular.	4.87	.46	Student Attitudes
8	3	Teachers believe students can achieve.	4.87	.38	General Perceptions
9	21	Teachers routinely monitor and report student progress to students.	4.86	.50	General Perceptions
10	26	The supervisor/principal provides teachers with materials they need in order to teach effectively.	4.84	.57	Leadership
11	38	There is communication between teachers and supervisor/principal regarding student progress.	4.82	.53	Leadership

Table 4 (continued)

Rank	Item	Feature	M	SD	Category
12	12	The curriculum provides students with the skills they will need to be productive members of society.	4.81	.67	Student Attitudes
13	6	There is trust between students and teachers.	4.81	.54	School Climate
14	1	Teachers choose to work within the alternative program.	4.79	.65	General Perceptions
15	9	Faculty and staff share school goals and visions.	4.78	.52	Leadership
16	15	Teachers provide positive reinforcement to students.	4.78	.61	Student Needs
17	20	Individual personal counseling is available as needed.	4.73	.83	Student Services
18	23	Teachers are responsive to students' academic and social needs.	4.73	.79	School Climate
19	2	Teachers meet regularly with students to provide academic help and support.	4.73	.83	General Perceptions
20	13	Teachers accommodate students' learning styles.	4.70	.71	Student Needs
21	8	Class size is maintained at 12 or fewer students per adult.	4.68	.74	School Climate
22	10	Teachers have the freedom to make instructional decisions.	4.63	.68	Leadership

Table 4 (continued)

Rank	Item	Feature	M	SD	Category
23	29	The alternative school has become the step between a traditional school and dropping out.	4.63	.85	Student Attitudes
24	19	Students receive individualized academic guidance on a regular basis.	4.62	.79	Student Services
25	25	Alternative school program was organized based on faculty and staff input.	4.57	.80	Leadership
26	7	Teachers and students speak freely with each other.	4.57	.76	School Climate
27	27	Curriculum is individualized for each student.	4.48	.82	Student Needs
28	34	Students willingly share their ideas with faculty and staff.	4.48	.82	School Climate
29	33	Students speak positively about the alternative school.	4.46	.78	Student Attitudes
30	24	Faculty work in teams to plan instruction.	4.44	.93	Leadership
31	35	There was a schoolwide effort to develop curriculum for the alternative school program.	4.33	.88	Leadership
32	14	Peer group counseling sessions are scheduled regularly.	4.16	1.05	Student Needs

Table 4 (continued)

Rank	Item	Feature	M	SD	Category
33	16	Students are grouped according to instructional needs rather than by grade level.	4.08	1.13	Student Needs
34	28	Students with like ability are grouped together for instruction.	4.05	1.07	Student Needs
35	32	Flexible scheduling is available to students.	3.75	1.36	Student Services
36	31	School policies and procedures support nongraded, multiage classes.	3.42	1.44	Student Needs
37	18	There is ongoing availability of medical health care	3.37	1.34	Student Services
38	4	Students can choose traditional or alternative school.	3.36	1.23	Student Attitudes
39	30	The alternative school provides extracurricular activities.	3.29	1.51	Student Needs
40	17	Daycare is provided for children of students.	2.56	1.28	Student Services

N = 63.

Findings

Thirty-four of the 40 features were reported by administrators as at least somewhat important to alternative schools, with means of 4.00 or greater. Sixteen features were rated by administrators with means greater than 4.50 indicating they were somewhat important to very important to alternative schools. The feature that received the highest mean from administrators (M=4.92), the principal sets a climate that supports teaching

and learning, was in the Leadership category. All features in the Leadership, General Perceptions, and School Climate categories received means of 4.00 or greater, indicating that administrators considered the features to be at least somewhat important to alternative schools. Four of the five features in the Student Attitudes category and six of the eight features in the Student Needs category had means greater than 4.00. Three of the other 10 most important features, according to administrators, also pertained to Leadership. These items were, item 40, the faculty shares resources, ideas, and strategies with each other (M=4.89), item 11, the supervisor/principal believes in the ability of his/her staff (M=4.87), and item 26, the supervisor/principal provides teachers with materials they need in order to teach effectively (M=4.84).

The feature with the second highest mean, item 37, teachers provide opportunities in which students will succeed (M=4.91), was in the General Perceptions category. Three of the 10 most important features were also in the General Perceptions category. These items were item 39, teachers routinely monitor and report student progress to students (M=4.89), item 3, teachers believe students can achieve (M=4.87), and item 21, teachers routinely monitor and report student progress to students (M=4.86). Item 22, students and teachers have mutual respect (M=4.87), from the School Climate category, and item 5, students' attendance at the alternative school is regular (M=4.87), from the Student Attitudes category, were also included in the 10 most important features.

The feature that received the lowest mean, item 17, daycare is provided for children of students (M=2.56), was in the Student Services category. Administrators indicated that this feature was somewhat unimportant to alternative schools. Two other features in this category also received means of less than 4.00. Those two features were,

item 32, flexible scheduling is available for students (M=3.75), and item 18, there is ongoing availability of medical health care (M=3.37). Two features in the Student Needs category, item 30, the alternative school provides extracurricular activities (M=3.29), and item 31, school policies and procedures support nongraded, multiage classes (M=3.42), received means of less than 4.00. Administrators indicated these features were neither important nor unimportant to alternative schools. Only one feature in the Student Attitudes category, item 4, students can choose to attend either a traditional or alternative school (M=3.36), was rated by administrators as neither important nor unimportant to alternative schools.

Discussion

The features administrators indicated were important to alternative schools appeared to pertain predominately to areas that are usually controlled by a lead administrator. Administrators may have placed less importance on features where they would generally have the least amount of school-based control.

Several of the features that received high ratings appeared to be directly related to administrator and teacher interactions. School administrators, generally in a position that interviews and recommends the hiring of personnel, placed a high level of importance on teachers choosing to work within the alternative school program. The desire of administrators to empower teachers was evident in the high level of importance administrators placed on principals believing in the ability of their staffs and teachers having the freedom to make instructional decisions.

Several additional features that received high ratings of importance from administrators pertained to interactions between teachers and students. These features included:

teachers meeting regularly with students, teachers monitoring and reporting student progress both to students and parents, trust between teachers and students, and teachers being responsive to the needs of students.

Administrators placed less importance on providing daycare for the children of students attending the alternative school, medical health care for students, flexible scheduling, and extracurricular activities. One may conclude that administrators placed less importance on these features, because they were not priority items for their particular schools. It is also conceivable that administrators placed less importance on these features because they would require extra resources including additional funding, personnel, or facilities.

Research Question 2

Research question 2 was: *What program features do teachers identify as important to alternative schools?* Table 5 displays teachers' perceptions pertaining to the importance of features of alternative schools. A list of program features of alternative schools from most to least important was developed from the responses of teachers surveyed in this study. The rank, item number, mean, standard deviation, and category, are listed for each feature.

Findings

Thirty-four of the 40 features were reported by teachers as at least somewhat important to alternative schools, with means ranging from 4.02 to 4.90. Twenty-three features were rated by teachers with means equal to or greater than 4.50, indicating these features were somewhat important to very important to alternative schools.

Table 5

Teachers' Perceptions of the Importance of Features in Alternative Schools

Rank	Item	Feature	M	SD	Category
1	11	The supervisor/principal believes in the ability of his/her staff.	4.90	.32	Leadership
2	3	Teachers believe students can achieve.	4.86	.51	General Perceptions
3	37	Teachers provide opportunities in which students will succeed.	4.84	.53	General Perceptions
4	22	Students and teachers have mutual respect.	4.83	.42	School Climate
5	21	Teachers routinely monitor and report student progress to students.	4.81	.47	General Perceptions
6	36	The supervisor/principal sets a climate that supports teaching and learning.	4.81	.13	Leadership
7	38	There is communication between teachers and supervisor/principal regarding student progress.	4.81	.51	Leadership
8	2	Teachers meet regularly with students to provide academic help and support.	4.80	.55	General Perceptions
9	9	Faculty and staff share school goals and visions.	4.80	.52	Leadership
10	10	Teachers have the freedom to make instructional decisions.	4.80	.51	Leadership
11	15	Teachers provide positive reinforcement to students.	4.79	.50	Student Needs

Table 5 (continued)

Rank	Item	Feature	M	SD	Category
12	26	The supervisor/principal provides teachers with materials they need in order to teach effectively.	4.77	.54	Leadership
13	5	Students' attendance at the alternative school is regular.	4.76	.64	Student Attitudes
14	12	The curriculum provides students with the skills they will need to be productive members of society.	4.76	.53	Student Attitudes
15	20	Individual personal counseling is available as needed.	4.76	.51	Student Services
16	1	Teachers choose to work within the alternative program.	4.75	.72	General Perceptions
17	8	Class size is maintained at 12 or fewer students per adult.	4.75	.67	School Climate
18	40	Faculty shares resources, ideas, and strategies with each other.	4.75	.51	Leadership
19	23	Teachers are responsive to students' academic and social needs.	4.72	.47	School Climate
20	39	Teachers routinely monitor and report student progress to parents.	4.72	.52	General Perceptions
21	13	Teachers accommodate students' learning styles.	4.69	.53	Student Needs
22	6	There is trust between students and teachers.	4.65	.65	School Climate

Table 5 (continued)

Rank	Item	Feature	M	SD	Category
23	19	Students receive individualized academic guidance on a regular basis.	4.55	.69	Student Services
24	29	The alternative school has become the step between a traditional school and dropping out.	4.55	.82	Student Attitudes
25	7	Teachers and students speak freely with each other.	4.47	.73	School Climate
26	25	Alternative school program was organized based on faculty and staff input.	4.45	.89	Leadership
27	27	Curriculum is individualized for each student.	4.27	.83	Student Needs
28	14	Peer group counseling sessions are scheduled regularly.	4.26	3.47	Student Needs
29	16	Students are grouped according to instructional needs rather than by grade level.	4.23	.96	Student Needs
30	34	Students willingly share their ideas with faculty and staff.	4.21	.95	School Climate
31	24	Faculty work in teams to plan instruction.	4.14	.95	Leadership
32	35	There was a schoolwide effort to develop curriculum for the alternative school program.	4.13	1.12	Leadership
33	33	Students speak positively about the alternative school.	4.10	1.07	Student Attitudes

Table 5 (continued)

Rank	Item	Feature	M	SD	Category
34	28	Students with like ability are grouped together for instruction.	4.02	1.11	Student Needs
35	18	There is ongoing availability of medical health care	3.52	1.30	Student Services
36	31	School policies and procedures support nongraded, multiage classes.	3.47	1.29	Student Needs
37	32	Flexible scheduling is available to students.	3.42	1.41	Student Services
38	4	Students can choose traditional or alternative school.	3.39	1.36	Student Attitudes
39	30	The alternative school provides extracurricular activities.	3.10	1.43	Student Needs
40	17	Daycare is provided for children of students.	2.70	1.43	Student Services

N = 229.

The feature that received the highest mean (M=4.90), item 11, the supervisor/principal believes in the ability of his/her staff, was in the Leadership category. Four of the other 10 most important features also pertained to Leadership. These items were, item 36, the supervisor/principal sets a climate that supports teaching and learning (M=4.81), item 38, there is communication between teachers and supervisors regarding student progress (M=4.81), item 9, faculty and staff share school goals and visions

(M=4.80), and item 10, teachers have the freedom to make instructional decisions (M=4.80).

The feature with the second highest mean, item 3, teachers believe students can achieve (M=4.86), was in the General Perceptions category. Three of the 10 most important features were also in the General Perceptions category. These features were, item 37, teachers provide opportunities in which students will succeed (M=4.84), item 21, teachers routinely monitor and report student progress to students (M=4.81), and item 2, teachers meet regularly with students to provide academic support (M=4.80). Item 22, students and teachers have mutual respect (M=4.83) was also included in the 10 most prevalent features. This feature pertained to School Climate.

The feature that received the lowest mean (M=2.70), item 17, daycare is provided for children of students, was in the Student Services category. This was the only feature teachers indicated was somewhat unimportant to alternative schools. Two other features in this category also received means of less than 4.00. Those two features were, item 32, flexible scheduling is available for students (M=3.42), and item 18, there is ongoing availability of medical health care (M=3.52). Two features in the Student Needs category, item 30, the alternative school provides extracurricular activities (M=3.10) and item 31, school policies and procedures support nongraded, multiage classes (M=3.47), received means of less than 4.00. Teachers indicated these features were neither unimportant nor important to alternative schools. Only one feature in the Student Attitudes category, item 4, students can choose to attend either a traditional or alternative school (M=3.38), was rated by teachers as neither important nor unimportant to alternative schools.

Discussion

Teachers appeared to give high ratings of importance to features that directly related to their interactions with their administrators. Teachers determined that their principal believing in the ability of the staff, the principal setting a climate that supports teaching, and communication between the principal and teacher were all very important to alternative schools.

Teachers gave high ratings of importance to features related to their interactions with the students they teach. Teachers are generally thought to have considerable influence on whether or not these features would exist to a great extent in their classrooms, making it conceivable they would place more importance on them. These features included (a) believing in their students' abilities, (b) providing opportunities for their students to be successful, (c) developing mutual respect between teachers and students, (d) meeting with students to provide academic support, and (e) providing positive reinforcement to students.

It also appeared that features pertaining to areas where teachers usually have less control and less involvement in decision-making were given lower ratings. This included features pertaining to health care for students, school choice, daycare, grouping procedures, extracurricular activities, and school policies regarding nongraded classrooms.

Research Question 3

Research question 3 was: *What program features do administrators identify as existing in their respective alternative schools?* A list of program features of alternative schools ranked from existing to the largest extent to existing to the smallest extent was developed from the responses of administrators surveyed in this study (see Table 6).

Table 6

Administrators' Perceptions of the Existence of Features in Alternative Schools in Georgia

Rank	Item	Feature	M	SD	Category
1	36	The principal sets a climate that supports teaching and learning.	4.63	.68	Leadership
2	11	The principal believes in the ability of his/her staff.	4.62	.73	Leadership
3	10	Teachers make instructional decisions.	4.57	.73	Leadership
4	21	Teachers monitor and report student progress to students.	4.57	.78	General Perceptions
5	40	Faculty shares resources, ideas, and strategies with each other.	4.42	.55	Leadership
6	15	Teachers provide positive reinforcement to students.	4.40	.80	Student Needs
7	37	Teachers provide opportunities in which students will succeed.	4.40	.53	General Perceptions
8	3	Teachers believe students can achieve.	4.35	.81	General Perceptions
9	9	Faculty and staff share school goals and visions.	4.32	.84	Leadership
10	2	Teachers meet regularly with students	4.32	1.05	General Perceptions
11	39	Teachers monitor and report student progress to parents.	4.31	1.02	General Perceptions

Table 6 (continued)

Rank	Item	Feature	M	SD	Category
12	26	The principal provides teachers with materials to teach	4.29	.94	Leadership
13	38	Communication between teachers and principal	4.29	1.11	Leadership
14	7	Teachers and students speak freely with each other.	4.25	.92	School Climate
15	23	Teachers are responsive to students' academic and social needs.	4.25	.90	School Climate
16	13	Teachers accommodate students' learning styles.	4.13	.92	Student Needs
17	1	Teachers choose to work within the alternative program.	4.13	1.29	General Perceptions
18	22	Students and teachers have mutual respect.	4.11	.58	School Climate
19	29	Alternative school is the step between a traditional school and dropping out.	4.10	.85	Student Attitudes
20	6	There is trust between students and teachers.	4.06	.86	School Climate
21	20	Individual personal counseling is available as needed.	4.05	1.25	Student Services
22	12	The curriculum provides skills for students to be productive citizens	4.00	.97	Student Attitudes
23	33	Students speak positively about the alternative school.	4.00	.93	Student Attitudes
24	5	Students' attendance at the alternative school is regular.	3.98	.89	Student Attitudes

Table 6 (continued)

Rank	Item	Feature	M	SD	Category
25	19	Students receive individualized academic guidance	3.94	1.16	Student Services
26	27	Curriculum is individualized for each student.	3.84	.82	Student Needs
27	25	Alternative school program was organized based on faculty and staff input.	3.79	1.29	Leadership
28	34	Students willingly share their ideas with faculty and staff.	3.79	1.03	School Climate
29	8	Class size is maintained at 12 or fewer students per adult.	3.78	1.49	School Climate
30	24	Faculty work in teams to plan instruction.	3.76	1.30	Leadership
31	16	Students are grouped according to instructional needs.	3.27	1.42	Student Needs
32	28	Students with like ability are grouped together for instruction.	3.21	1.07	Student Needs
33	35	Schoolwide effort to develop curriculum	3.21	.88	Leadership
34	14	Peer group counseling sessions are scheduled regularly.	3.19	1.42	Student Needs
35	32	Flexible scheduling is available to students.	2.94	1.51	Student Services
36	31	Policies and procedures support nongraded, multiage classes.	2.92	1.44	Student Needs

Table 6 (continued)

Rank	Item	Feature	M	SD	Category
37	4	Students can choose traditional or alternative school.	2.29	1.46	Student Attitudes
38	30	The alternative school provides extracurricular activities.	2.17	1.51	Student Needs
39	18	There is ongoing availability of medical health care	2.06	1.18	Student Services
40	17	Daycare is provided for children of students.	1.38	.88	Student Services

N = 63.

Findings

Administrators at alternative schools in Georgia determined that 23 of 40 specific features of alternative schools existed to at least a large extent within their schools. Only five features were found to exist to a small extent, while only one feature was found to exist to a very small extent.

Administrators of alternative schools in Georgia determined that five features in the Leadership category were among the 10 most prevalent features in their respective schools. The feature that received the highest mean (4.63), item 36, the principal sets a climate that supports teaching and learning, was in the Leadership category. The four other features in this category were, item 11, the principal believes in the ability of his/her staff (M=4.62), item 10, teachers have the freedom to make instructional

decisions (M=4.57), item 40, the faculty shares resources, ideas, and strategies with each other (M=4.42), and item 9, faculty and staff share school goals and visions (M=4.32).

Administrators further indicated that four features in the General Perceptions category were among the 10 features that existed to the largest extent at their schools. These features were, item 21, teachers monitor and report student progress to students (M=4.57), item 37, teachers provide opportunities in which students will succeed (M=4.40), item 3, teachers believe students can achieve (M=4.35), and item 2, teachers meet regularly with students to provide academic help and support (M=4.32). One feature of the 10 most prevalent features existing in alternative schools pertained to the needs of students. This feature (item 15), teachers provide positive reinforcement to students, had a mean of 4.40.

Features in two categories, Student Services and Student Needs comprised 8 of the 10 features that existed less often than other features in alternative schools in Georgia. The feature that received the lowest mean (M=1.38) was item 17, daycare is provided for children of students. This item was in the Student Services category. Two additional features in the Student Services category were also rated by administrators as existing to only a small extent in their schools. These features were item 18, pertaining to health care for students (M=2.06), and item 32, concerning flexible scheduling (M=2.94).

Administrators further indicated that two features in the Student Needs category existed to only a small extent in their schools. These items were, (item 30) the alternative school provides extracurricular activities (M=2.17), and (item 31) policies and procedures support nongraded, multiage classes (M=2.92). Only one feature of the least prevalent features of alternative schools in Georgia was in the Student Attitudes category. Item 4,

students can choose to attend either a traditional or alternative school, had a mean of 2.28.

Discussion

Administrators appeared to give consistently high ratings on the existence of features they would have direct control over in their roles as instructional leaders of their schools. These features pertained to relationships between administrators and teachers and included, setting a positive school climate, believing in the ability of their staffs, and allowing teachers to make instructional decisions.

Positive interactions between teachers and students were also noted by administrators as existing within their schools. Administrators indicated that their teachers, (a) provided opportunities for student success, (b) believed their students could be successful, and (c) worked closely with their students in meeting their academic and social needs.

Instructional practices and special services geared to meeting individual needs of students appeared to be less prevalent in Georgia's alternative schools. According to administrators, availability of daycare for children of students, health services, flexible scheduling, and extracurricular activities, all items that could require additional funding to support, existed less frequently in Georgia's alternative schools.

Research Question 4

Research question 4 was: *What program features do teachers identify as existing in their respective alternative schools?* A list of program features ranked from existing to the largest extent to existing to the smallest extent was developed from the responses of teachers surveyed in this study (see Table 7).

Table 7

Teachers' Perceptions of the Existence of Features in Alternative Schools in Georgia

Rank	Item	Feature	M	SD	Category
1	11	The principal believes in the ability of his/her staff.	4.50	.90	Leadership
2	21	Teachers monitor and report student progress to students.	4.44	.82	General Perceptions
3	10	Teachers have the freedom to make instructional decisions.	4.37	.99	Leadership
4	3	Teachers believe students can achieve.	4.29	.90	General Perceptions
5	37	Teachers provide opportunities in which students will succeed.	4.28	.91	General Perceptions
6	1	Teachers choose to work within the alternative program.	4.25	2.27	General Perceptions
7	39	Teachers monitor and report student progress to parents.	4.23	.93	General Perceptions
8	38	Communication between teachers and principal regarding student progress.	4.22	1.12	Leadership
9	36	The principal sets a climate that supports teaching and learning.	4.20	1.12	Leadership
10	2	Teachers meet regularly with students.	4.17	1.13	General Perceptions

Table 7 (continued)

Rank	Item	Feature	M	SD	Category
11	15	Teachers provide positive reinforcement to students.	4.13	.99	Student Needs
12	23	Teachers are responsive to students' academic and social needs.	4.09	.92	School Climate
13	29	Alternative school has become the step between a traditional school and dropping out.	4.09	1.11	Student Attitudes
14	40	Faculty shares resources, ideas, and strategies with each other.	4.09	1.11	Leadership
15	9	Faculty and staff share school goals and visions.	4.00	1.17	Leadership
16	20	Individual personal counseling is available as needed.	3.91	1.35	Student Services
17	12	The curriculum provides skills to be productive members of society.	3.87	1.10	Student Attitudes
18	26	The principal provides teachers with materials they need to teach effectively.	3.85	1.24	Leadership
19	13	Teachers accommodate students' learning styles.	3.83	1.08	Student Needs
20	22	Students and teachers have mutual respect.	3.80	1.08	School Climate
21	7	Teachers and students speak freely with each other.	3.75	1.09	School Climate

Table 7 (continued)

Rank	Item	Feature	M	SD	Category
22	6	There is trust between students and teachers.	3.71	1.01	School Climate
23	19	Students receive individualized academic guidance	3.56	1.25	Student Services
24	5	Students' attendance at the alternative school is regular.	3.55	1.25	Student Attitudes
25	25	Alternative school program was organized based on faculty and staff input.	3.43	1.43	Leadership
26	34	Students willingly share their ideas with faculty and staff.	3.39	1.26	School Climate
27	33	Students speak positively about the alternative school.	3.33	1.23	Student Attitudes
28	27	Curriculum is individualized for each student.	3.31	1.30	Student Needs
29	8	Class size is maintained at 12 or fewer students per adult.	3.21	1.51	School Climate
30	24	Faculty work in teams to plan instruction.	3.09	1.44	Leadership
31	16	Students are grouped according to instructional needs	3.02	1.49	Student Needs
32	35	There was a schoolwide effort to develop curriculum.	2.85	1.50	Leadership
33	28	Students with like ability are grouped together for instruction.	2.83	1.36	Student Needs

Table 7 (continued)

Rank	Item	Feature	M	SD	Category
34	14	Peer group counseling sessions are scheduled regularly.	2.65	1.39	Student Needs
35	31	Policies and procedures support nongraded, multiage classes.	2.48	1.42	Student Needs
36	4	Students can choose traditional or alternative school.	2.44	1.43	Student Attitudes
37	32	Flexible scheduling is available to students.	2.43	1.43	Student Services
38	18	There is ongoing availability of medical health care	2.29	1.30	Student Services
39	30	The alternative school provides extracurricular activities.	1.75	1.18	Student Needs
40	17	Daycare is provided for children of students.	1.67	1.21	Student Services

N = 229.

Findings

Fifteen of the 40 features were reported by teachers as existing to a large extent within alternative schools in Georgia. The feature that received the highest mean (M=4.50), item 11, the principal believes in the ability of his/her staff, was in the Leadership category. Three of the other 10 most prevalent features also pertained to Leadership. These features were, item 10, teachers have the freedom to make instructional decisions (M=4.37), item 38, there is communication between teachers and principals regarding

students' progress, and item 36, the principal sets a climate that supports teaching and learning (M=4.20).

Six additional features that existed to the greatest extent in alternative schools in Georgia were in the General Perceptions category. These features were, item 21, teachers monitor and report student progress to students (M=4.44), item 3, teachers believe students can achieve (M=4.29), item 37, teachers provide opportunities in which students will succeed (M=4.28), item 1, teachers choose to work within the alternative program (M=4.25), item 39, teachers monitor and report student progress to parents (M=4.29), and item 2, teachers meet regularly with students (M=4.17).

Features in two categories, Student Services and Student Needs comprised eight of the nine features that teachers perceived existed to a small or very small extent in alternative schools in Georgia. The feature that received the lowest mean was item 17, daycare is provided for children of students, with a mean of 1.67. Item 18, there is ongoing availability of health care (M=2.29), and item 32, flexible scheduling is available to students (M=2.43), were also in the Student Services category.

Six features in the Student Needs category had means ranging from 1.75 and 2.85, indicating they existed to a small or very small extent in Georgia's alternative schools. These features were, item 30, the alternative school provides extracurricular activities (M=1.75), item 31, policies and procedures support nongraded, multiage classes (M =2.48), item 14, peer group counseling sessions are scheduled regularly (M=2.65), item 28, students with like ability are grouped together for instruction (M=2.83), and item 35, there was a schoolwide effort to develop the curriculum (M=2.85). Only item 4,

with a mean of 2.44, students can choose to attend either a traditional or alternative school, was in the Student Attitudes category.

Discussion

The features teachers determined existed to the greatest extent in their schools primarily concerned experiences teachers have control of within their own classrooms. These features pertained to monitoring and reporting student progress to students, believing students can achieve, providing opportunities in which students will be successful, and meeting regularly with students.

The features teachers determined were less prevalent in their schools appeared to pertain to situations where they have less control. Daycare for children of students, health care for students, school choice, availability of extracurricular activities, and scheduling and grouping procedures, are all areas where teachers traditionally have had less control.

Research Question 5

Research question 5 was: *What differences, if any, are there between administrators' and teachers' perceptions regarding the importance of program features in alternative schools in Georgia?* The responses of teachers and administrators on the importance of each item in their respective schools were compared using independent t-tests and presented by category in tables 8 through 13.

Importance of Leadership Features

Table 8 displays a comparison of administrators' and teachers' perceptions pertaining to the importance of Leadership features of alternative schools. The item number, mean, standard deviation, and t-value are presented for each feature.

Table 8

Comparison of Administrators' and Teachers' Perceptions on the Importance of Leadership Features

Item	Feature	Administrators N	Administrators M	Administrators SD	Teachers N	Teachers M	Teachers SD	t
9	Faculty and staff share school goals and visions.	63	4.78	.52	229	4.80	.52	-.35
10	Teachers have the freedom to make instructional decisions.	63	4.63	.68	229	4.80	.51	-1.83
11	The supervisor/principal believes in the ability of his/her staff.	63	4.87	.55	229	4.90	.32	-.57
24	Faculty work in teams to plan instruction	63	4.44	.93	229	4.14	.95	2.23*
25	The alternative school program was organized based on faculty and staff input.	63	4.57	.80	228	4.45	.89	1.00
26	The supervisor/principal provides teachers with materials they need in order to teach effectively.	63	4.84	.57	229	4.77	.54	.93
35	There was a schoolwide effort to develop curriculum for the alternative school program	63	4.33	.88	227	4.13	1.12	1.32
36	The supervisor/principal sets a climate that supports teaching and learning.	63	4.92	.41	227	4.81	.13	1.82
38	There is communication between teachers and supervisor/principal regarding student progress.	62	4.82	.53	229	4.81	.51	.14
40	Faculty shares resources, ideas, and strategies with each other.	62	4.89	.55	229	4.75	.51	1.76

*$p \leq .05$.

Findings. Administrators and teachers indicated that all features in the Leadership category were at least somewhat important to alternative schools. Administrators indicated, with a mean of 4.92, that item 36, the supervisor/principal sets a climate that supports teaching and learning, was the most important Leadership feature of an alternative school. Teachers ranked this feature as the second most important to alternative schools, with a mean of 4.81. Teachers indicated with a mean of 4.90 that item 11, the supervisor/principal believes in the ability of his staff, was the most important Leadership feature of alternative schools. Administrators ranked this feature second, with a mean of 4.87.

Seven of the 10 features in this category received higher ratings from administrators than teachers. Results of the t-test indicated a difference between administrators' and teachers' perceptions on item 24, the faculty works in teams to plan instruction. Administrators rated this feature higher (M=4.44) than teachers (M=4.14). This difference was statistically significant at the .05 level, however, both teachers and administrators indicated the feature was somewhat important to alternative schools.

Discussion. Administrators and teachers shared similar views on the importance of Leadership features, indicating all features were important to alternative schools. The impact each of the features has on the ability of a teacher to perform his or her duties makes these features important to both teachers and administrators.

Importance of Student Attitude Features

Administrators and teachers were asked to respond to items regarding the importance of Student Attitude features. Table 9 displays a comparison of administrators' and teachers' perceptions pertaining to the importance of student attitude features of

alternative schools. The item number, mean, standard deviation, and t-value are presented for each feature.

Table 9

Comparison of Administrators' and Teachers' Perceptions on the Importance of Student Attitude Features

Item	Feature	Administrators N	Administrators M	Administrators SD	Teachers N	Teachers M	Teachers SD	t
4	Students can choose to attend either a traditional or alternative school.	62	3.36	1.23	227	3.39	1.36	-.15
5	Students' attendance at the alternative school is regular.	63	4.87	.46	229	4.76	.64	1.37
12	The curriculum provides students with skills they will need to be productive members of society.	63	4.81	.67	229	4.76	.53	.67
29	The alternative school has become the step between a traditional school and dropping out	62	4.63	.85	229	4.55	.82	.71
33	Students speak positively about the alternative school.	63	4.46	.78	229	4.10	1.07	2.53*

*$p \leq .05$.

Findings. Teachers and administrators rated four of the five features in the Student Attitude category as somewhat important to very important to alternative schools. Item 5, students' attendance at the alternative school is regular, was rated as the most important by both administrators (M=4.88) and teachers (M=4.76).

Teachers also ranked item 12, the curriculum provides students with skills they will need to be productive members of society, equally important as item 5 (M=4.76).

Administrators also rated this item as very important (M=4.81). Administrators rated the importance of item 33, students speak positively about the alternative school (M=4.46), higher than did teachers (M=4.10). This difference was significant at the .05 level.

The only feature that was not rated as at least somewhat important to alternative schools was item 4, students can choose to attend either a traditional or alternative school. Both administrators (M=3.35) and teachers (M=3.38) indicated that this feature was neither unimportant nor important to alternative schools.

Discussion. Both teachers and administrators perceived that students attending school regularly, the curriculum providing students with skills they will need to be productive members of society, and the alternative school becoming the step between a traditional school and dropping out, as important to alternative schools. Teachers and administrators also determined that positive comments from students about the alternative school were at least somewhat important. Teachers, however, rated this feature lower than did administrators. The significant difference may have been due to the closer working relationship teachers have with students. Alternative school teachers may have observed that their students do not verbalize their positive feelings about school, or the students may just dislike their placement at the alternative school.

Importance of School Climate Features

Administrators and teachers were asked to respond to items regarding the importance of features pertaining to School Climate. Table 10 displays a comparison of administrators' and teachers' perceptions pertaining to the importance of Student Attitude features of alternative schools. The item number, mean, standard deviation, and t-value are presented for each feature.

Table 10

Comparison of Administrators' and Teachers' Perceptions on the Importance of School Climate Features

Item	Feature	Administrators			Teachers			t
		N	M	SD	N	M	SD	
6	There is trust between students and teachers.	63	4.81	.54	229	4.65	.65	1.99*
7	Teachers and students speak freely with each other.	63	4.57	.76	228	4.47	.73	.79
8	Class size 12 or fewer students per adult.	63	4.68	.74	229	4.75	.67	-.66
22	Students and teachers have mutual respect	63	4.87	.58	229	4.83	.42	.66
23	Teachers are responsive to students' academic and social needs	63	4.73	.79	229	4.72	.48	.07
34	Students willingly share their ideas with faculty and staff.	63	4.48	.82	228	4.21	.95	2.02*

*$p \leq .05$.

Findings. Administrators and teachers rated the importance of features pertaining to the School Climate of alternative schools. They indicated that all of the features were at least somewhat important to alternative schools. Item 22, students and teachers have mutual respect, was rated highest by administrators (M=4.87) and teachers (M=4.72). Item 6, there is trust between students and teachers, was also rated high by both administrators (M=4.81) and teachers (M=4.65). The difference, however, was significant at the .05 level.

A significant difference was also found for item 34, students willingly share their ideas with faculty and staff. Administrators had a mean of 4.48 for this item and teachers had a mean of 4.21. This difference was also significant at the .05 level.

Discussion. All features in the School Climate category pertained to relationships between teachers and students. The analysis of data for this chapter consistently indicated a high level of importance on features that pertained to relationships between administrators and teachers.

Although two of the differences between the responses of the administrators and teachers were statistically significant, they were not of practical significance. The importance of trust between students and teachers was rated as very important, with means greater than 4.50, from both administrators and teachers. The importance of students willingness to share their ideas with the faculty and staff was rated as somewhat important to alternative schools by both administrators and teachers.

Importance of Student Needs Features

Administrators and teachers were asked to respond to items regarding the importance of features pertaining to Student Needs in their respective alternative schools. The item number, mean, standard deviation, category, and t-value, are presented in Table 11.

Findings. Administrators rated six of the eight features in the Student Needs category as at least somewhat important to alternative schools. Both teachers and administrators rated item 15, teachers provide positive reinforcement to students, highest (administrators, M=4.78; teachers, M=4.79). Item 13, teachers accommodate students' individual learning styles, received the second highest ranking from both administrators (M=4.70) and teachers (M=4.69).

Table 11

Comparison of Administrators' and Teachers' Perceptions on the Importance of Student Needs Features

Item	Feature	Administrators N	Administrators M	Administrators SD	Teachers N	Teachers M	Teachers SD	t
13	Teachers accommodate students' individual learning styles.	63	4.70	.71	229	4.69	.53	.10
14	Peer group counseling sessions are scheduled regularly.	63	4.16	1.05	229	4.26	3.47	-.22
15	Teachers provide positive reinforcement to students.	63	4.78	.61	229	4.79	.50	-.11
16	Students are grouped according to instructional needs rather than by grade level.	63	4.08	1.13	229	4.23	.96	-1.04
27	Curriculum is individualized for each student.	63	4.48	.82	229	4.28	.83	1.74
28	Students with like ability are grouped together for instruction	63	4.05	1.07	229	4.02	1.11	.19
30	The alternative school provides extracurricular activities	63	3.29	1.51	229	3.10	1.43	.69
31	School policies and procedures support nongraded, multiage classes.	63	3.42	1.44	225	3.47	1.29	-.29

Only two features in this category, item 30, the alternative school provides extra-curricular activities (administrators, M=3.24; teachers, M=3.10) and item 31, school policies and procedures support nongraded, multiage classes (administrators, M=3.41; teachers, M=3.47) were found to be neither unimportant nor important to alternative schools. No differences were statistically significant.

Discussion. Administrators and teachers responded similarly regarding the importance of features in the Student Needs category. These features primarily addressed curriculum and instruction, and one feature concerned peer group counseling. Six of the eight features were rated as important to alternative schools.

The only features teachers and administrators both determined were neither important nor unimportant to alternative schools pertained to extracurricular activities and nongraded, multiage classrooms. Teachers and administrators may have placed less importance on these features, since, as an analysis of the data revealed, these features existed to only a small extent in Georgia's alternative schools.

Importance of General Perception Features

Administrators and teachers were asked to respond to items regarding the importance of General Perception features in their respective schools. Table 12 displays a comparison of administrators' and teachers' perceptions pertaining to the General Perceptions of alternative schools. The item number, mean, standard deviation, and t-value are presented for each feature.

Findings. Administrators and teachers rated all six features in this category as somewhat important to very important to their schools. Item 37, teachers provide opportunities in which students will succeed, was rated highest by administrators, with a mean of 4.91. This item was rated second highest by teachers (M=4.84). Teachers rated item 3, teachers believe students can achieve, highest (M=4.86), while administrators rated this item third highest (M=4.86). Item 36, teachers routinely monitor and report students progress to parents, received a mean of 4.89 from administrators and 4.72 from teachers. This difference was significant at the .05 level.

Table 12

Comparison of Administrators' and Teachers' Perceptions on the Importance of General Perception Features

Item	Feature	Administrators N	Administrators M	Administrators SD	Teachers N	Teachers M	Teachers SD	t
1	Teachers choose to work within the alternative program.	63	4.79	.65	229	4.75	.72	.42
2	Teachers meet regularly with students to provide academic help and support.	63	4.73	.83	228	4.80	.55	-.82
3	Teachers believe students can achieve.	63	4.87	.38	229	4.86	.51	.25
21	Teachers routinely monitor and report student progress to students	63	4.86	.50	229	4.81	.47	.66
37	Teachers provide opportunities in which students will succeed.	63	4.91	.53	229	4.84	.53	.89
39	Teachers routinely monitor and report student progress to parents.	62	4.89	.45	229	4.72	.52	2.58*

*$p \leq .05$.

Discussion. All features in the General Perception category pertained to relationships between students and teachers. Both administrators and teachers determined that all of the features were very important to alternative schools.

The only feature where teachers and administrators differed significantly in their responses pertained to teachers monitoring and reporting student progress to parents. This difference, however, was not of practical significance, since it was perceived by both groups to be very important to alternative schools.

Importance of Student Services Features

Administrators and teachers were asked to respond to items regarding the importance of Student Services features in their respective alternative schools. The item number, mean, standard deviation, and category are presented in Table 13.

Table 13

Comparison of Administrators' and Teachers' Perceptions on the Importance of Student Services Features

Item	Feature	Administrators			Teachers			
		N	M	SD	N	M	SD	t
17	Daycare is provided for children of students	63	2.56	1.28	229	2.70	1.43	-.72
18	There is ongoing availability of medical health care for students	63	3.37	1.34	229	3.52	1.30	-.83
19	Students receive individualized academic guidance on a regular basis.	63	4.62	.79	229	4.55	.69	.72
20	Individual personal counseling is available as needed.	63	4.73	.83	229	4.76	.51	-.30
32	Flexible scheduling is available to students.	63	3.75	1.36	229	3.42	1.41	1.62

Findings. Administrators and teachers rated two features in this category as at least somewhat important to alternative schools. Administrators and teachers indicated that item 20, individual personal counseling is available as needed, was the most important feature in this category (administrators, M=4.73; teachers, M=4.76). Item 19, students receive individualized academic guidance on a regular basis, was also found by

administrators (M=4.62) and teachers (M=4.55) to be at least somewhat important to alternative schools.

The least important feature in this category, according to administrators and teachers, was item 17, daycare is provided for children of students. This feature received a mean of 2.56 from administrators and 2.70 from teachers, indicating it was somewhat unimportant to alternative schools.

Discussion. Teachers and administrators both determined that only two features in the Student Services category were important to alternative schools. Both of these features addressed counseling services for students. Educators at alternative schools may have observed the need for students to receive personal counseling to assist them in eliminating certain behaviors and academic counseling to help students plan appropriate class schedules.

Research Question 6

Research question 6 was: *What differences, if any, are there between administrators' and teachers' perceptions regarding the existence of program features in alternative schools in Georgia?* The responses of teachers and administrators on the importance of each item in their respective schools were compared using independent t-tests and presented by category. The results are presented in Table 14 through Table 19.

Existence of Leadership Features

Table 14 displays a comparison of administrators' and teachers' perceptions pertaining to the existence of Leadership features of alternative schools. The item number, mean, standard deviation, and t-value are presented for each feature.

Table 14

Comparison of Administrators' and Teachers' Perceptions on the Existence of Leadership Features

Item	Feature	Administrators			Teachers			t
		N	M	SD	N	M	SD	
9	Faculty and staff share school goals and visions.	63	4.32	.84	228	4.00	1.17	2.43*
10	Teachers have the freedom to make instructional decisions	63	4.57	.73	228	4.37	.99	1.79*
11	The supervisor/principal believes in the ability of his/her staff.	63	4.62	.73	229	4.50	.90	.95
24	Faculty work in teams to plan instruction.	62	3.79	1.30	229	3.09	1.44	3.31**
25	The alternative school program was organized based on faculty and staff input.	63	3.79	1.29	228	3.43	1.43	1.87
26	The supervisor/principal provides teachers with materials they need in order to teach effectively.	63	4.29	.94	229	3.85	1.24	2.59**
35	There was a schoolwide effort to develop curriculum for the alternative school program.	63	3.21	1.53	227	2.85	1.50	1.64
36	The supervisor/principal sets a climate that supports teaching and learning.	63	4.63	.68	229	4.20	1.12	3.83**
38	There is communication between teachers and supervisor/principal regarding student progress.	62	4.29	1.11	229	4.22	1.12	.42

Table 14 (continued)

Item	Feature	Administrators N	Administrators M	Administrators SD	Teachers N	Teachers M	Teachers SD	t
40	Faculty shares resources, ideas, and strategies with each other.	62	4.42	.95	228	4.09	1.11	2.15*

*p ≤ .05. **p ≤ .01.

Findings. Administrators and teachers indicated that 6 of the 10 Leadership features existed to a large extent within Georgia alternative schools, with means ranging from 4.00 to 4.63. Item 11, the supervisor/principal believes in the ability of his/her staff, received the highest mean from both administrators (M=4.62) and teachers (M=4.51).

The differences between administrators and teachers responses for item 9, faculty and staff share school goals and visions (administrators, M=4.32; teachers, M=4.00), item 10, teachers have the freedom to make instructional decisions (administrators, M=4.57; teachers, M=4.37), and item 40, faculty shares resources, ideas, and strategies with each other, were significant at the .05 level.

Administrators determined that three features, item 26, the supervisor/principal provides teachers with materials they need in order to teach effectively (administrators, M=4.29; teachers, M=3.85), item 24, the faculty works in teams to plan instruction, and item 36 (administrators, M=3.76; teachers, M=3.09), the principal sets a climate that supports teaching and learning (administrators, M=4.63; teachers, M=4.20), existed to a greater extent than did teachers. These differences were significant at the .01 level.

Discussion. Three features in the Leadership category pertained to the unity of the staff. Administrators rated each feature significantly higher than teachers, however, teachers and administrators determined that two of the three features existed to a large extent in Georgia's alternative schools. These features were, (a) the faculty and staff share school goals and visions and (b) the faculty shares resources, ideas, and strategies with each other. Both teachers and administrators indicated that the third feature, the faculty works in teams to plan instruction, existed to neither a small nor large extent in their schools.

Administrators and teachers differed in their perceptions of teachers receiving the materials they need to teach effectively. Administrators rated this feature higher than did teachers. Although administrators may have determined the materials the teachers receive are adequate, the teachers indicated they would like access to more teaching materials.

Existence of Student Attitude Features

Administrators and teachers were asked to respond to items regarding the existence of student attitude features. Table 15 displays a comparison of administrators' and teachers' perceptions pertaining to the existence of student attitude features of alternative schools. The item number, mean, standard deviation, and t-value are presented for each feature.

Findings. Administrators (M=4.10) and teachers (M=4.09) indicated that item 29, the alternative school as a step between the traditional school and dropping out, existed to a large extent within alternative schools in Georgia. This difference was not significant. Administrators (M=3.99) and teachers (M=3.54) believed that item 5, concerning school

attendance, existed to neither a small nor large extent in Georgia's alternative schools. This difference, however, was significant at the .01 level. There was a significant difference in administrators' and teachers' perceptions of the existence of item 33, students speak positively about the alternative school. Administrators rated this feature with a mean of 4.08 and teachers rated it with a mean of 3.37. The difference was also significant at the .01 level.

Table 15

Comparison of Administrators' and Teachers' Perceptions on the Existence of Student Attitude Features

Item	Feature	Administrators			Teachers			
		N	M	SD	N	M	SD	t
4	Students can choose to attend either a traditional or alternative school.	63	2.29	1.46	227	2.44	1.43	-.80
5	Students' attendance at the alternative school is regular.	63	3.98	.89	229	3.55	1.25	3.08**
12	The curriculum provides students with skills they will need to be productive members of society.	63	4.00	.97	229	3.87	1.10	.03
29	The alternative school has become the step between a traditional school and dropping out.	63	4.10	1.19	227	4.09	1.11	.04
33	Students speak positively about the alternative school.	63	4.00	.93	229	3.33	1.23	4.70**

**$p \leq .01$.

Discussion. Administrators determined that regular school attendance existed frequently in their schools. Teachers, however, did not perceive students as attending regularly. Teachers, may have concluded from taking attendance in their classes, that particular students do not attend regularly. Administrators, may have perceived that attendance at their schools is regular based on total school attendance.

Teachers and administrators both indicated that school choice existed to only a small extent in alternative schools in Georgia. The low rating suggests that most students are assigned to an alternative school. Their only choice may be to either attend the alternative school or not attend school at all. Both teachers and administrators, regarded their alternative schools as a step between the traditional school and dropping out. Their positions within the school would afford the opportunity for making these determinations.

Existence of School Climate Features

Administrators and teachers were asked to respond to items regarding the existence of features pertaining to School Climate within their respective alternative schools. Table 16 displays a comparison of administrators' and teachers' perceptions pertaining to the existence of School Climate features of alternative schools. The item number, mean, standard deviation, and t-value are presented for each feature.

Findings. Only one feature in this category was perceived by both administrators and teachers to exist to a large extent within their alternative schools. Administrators (M=4.25) and teachers (M=4.09) both gave item 23, teachers are responsive to students' academic and social needs, the highest means in this category. Administrators determined that item 6, there is trust between students and teachers, was present to a large extent (M=4.06), while teachers perceived that the feature existed to neither a large nor

small extent (M=3.71). The difference was significant at the .01 level. Administrators also determined that item 7, teachers and students speak freely with each other (M=4.25) existed to a large extent in their schools. Teachers, however, determined this feature existed to a lesser extent (M=3.80). Item 22, students and teachers have mutual respect, also received a higher mean from administrators (M=4.11) than teachers (M=3.80). This difference was significant at the .05 level.

Table 16

Comparison of Administrators' and Teachers' Perceptions on the Existence of School Climate Features

Item No.	Feature	Administrators			Teachers			t
		N	M	SD	N	M	SD	
6	Trust between students and teachers	63	4.06	.86	229	3.71	1.01	2.80**
7	Teachers and students speak freely with each other.	63	4.25	.92	228	3.75	1.09	3.33**
8	12 or fewer students per adult	63	3.78	1.49	229	3.21	1.51	2.65
22	Students and teachers have mutual respect.	63	4.11	.95	229	3.80	1.08	2.04*
23	Teachers are responsive to students' academic and social needs.	63	4.25	.90	229	4.09	.92	1.25
34	Students willingly share their ideas with faculty and staff.	63	3.79	1.03	228	3.39	1.26	2.61**

*$p \leq .05$. **$p \leq .01$.

Discussion. Teachers concluded that four features pertaining to student and teacher relationships existed less frequently than did administrators. These features were, (a) there is trust between students and teachers, (b) teachers and students speak freely with each other, (c) students and teachers have mutual respect, and (d) students willingly share their ideas with faculty and staff. Administrators, unless they also teach in the alternative school, may be in a position that allows them to only observe teachers and students together and interpret their relationships based on these observations. Teachers, however, who work closely with their students every day, may be in a better position to determine the existence of these features.

Existence of Student Needs Features

Administrators and teachers were asked to respond to items regarding the existence of features pertaining to Student Needs in their respective alternative schools. The mean, standard deviation, and t-value are presented in Table 17.

Findings. Only one feature in the Student Needs category was perceived by administrators to exist to a large extent within their alternative schools. Administrators, with a mean of 4.13, rated item 13, teachers accommodate students' individual learning styles, as the Student Needs feature that existed to the greatest extent in their schools. Teachers also gave this feature the highest ranking with a mean of 3.83. The difference was significant at the .05 level. Item 16, students are grouped according to instructional needs rather than grade level, was perceived by both administrators (M=3.27) and teachers (M=3.02) as existing to neither a small nor large extent in their schools. Item 27, the curriculum is individualized for each student was also found by administrators (M=3.84)

and teachers (M=3.34) to exist to neither a small nor large extent. This difference, however, was significant at the .01 level.

Table 17

Comparison of Administrators' and Teachers' Perceptions on the Existence of Student Needs Features

Item	Feature	Administrators N	Administrators M	Administrators SD	Teachers N	Teachers M	Teachers SD	t
13	Teachers accommodate students' individual learning styles.	63	4.13	.92	229	3.83	1.08	2.00*
14	Peer group counseling sessions are scheduled regularly	63	3.19	1.42	229	2.65	1.40	2.71*
15	Teachers provide positive reinforcement to students.	63	4.40	.80	228	4.13	.99	1.97
16	Students are grouped according to instructional needs rather than by grade level.	63	3.27	1.42	228	3.02	1.49	1.18*
27	Curriculum is individualized for each student.	63	3.84	1.22	229	3.31	1.30	2.90**
28	Students with like ability are grouped together for instruction.	63	3.21	1.35	229	2.83	1.36	1.92
30	The alternative school provides extracurricular activities.	63	2.17	1.45	228	1.75	1.18	2.11*
31	School policies and procedures support nongraded, multiage classes.	63	2.92	1.65	225	2.48	1.42	1.93

*$p \leq .05$. **$p \leq .01$.

Teachers and administrators gave the lowest ranking to item 30, the alternative school provides extracurricular activities. Administrators indicated this item existed to a small extent (M=2.17), while teachers indicated this item existed to a very small extent (M=1.75). This difference was significant at the .05 level. Item 14, peer group counseling sessions are scheduled regularly, was significant at the .05 level, with a mean of 3.19 for administrators and 2.65 for teachers.

Discussion. Administrators' and teachers' perceptions differed significantly on several features in the Student Needs category. Features related to activities that would occur within the classroom were rated as existing less frequently from teachers than from administrators. These features related to instruction and included teachers accommodating students' individual learning styles, grouping students for instruction, and individualizing the curriculum to meet the needs of each student.

Existence of General Perception Features

Administrators and teachers were asked to respond to items regarding the existence of General Perceptions features in their respective alternative schools. Table 18 displays a comparison of administrators' and teachers' perceptions pertaining to the General Perceptions of features of alternative schools. The mean, standard deviation, and t-value, are presented for each feature.

Findings. Administrators and teachers rated all of the six features in this category as existing to a large extent in their schools. The feature that received the highest means from both administrators (M=4.57) and teachers (M=4.44) was item 21, teachers routinely monitor and report student progress to students.

Table 18

Comparison of Administrators' and Teachers' Perceptions on the Existence of General Perception Features

Item	Feature	Administrators N	Administrators M	Administrators SD	Teachers N	Teachers M	Teachers SD	t
1	Teachers choose to work within the alternative program.	63	4.13	1.29	229	4.25	2.27	-.41
2	Teachers meet regularly with students to provide academic help and support.	63	4.32	1.05	228	4.18	1.13	.92
3	Teachers believe students can achieve.	63	4.35	.81	229	4.29	.90	.45
21	Teachers routinely monitor and report student progress to students.	63	4.57	.78	228	4.44	.82	1.11
37	Teachers provide opportunities in which students will succeed.	63	4.40	.73	229	4.28	.91	.90
39	Teachers routinely monitor and report student progress to parents.	62	4.31	1.02	229	4.23	.93	.59

The other five items that existed to a large extent were item 1, teachers choose to work within the alternative program (administrators, M=4.13; teachers, M=4.25), item 2, teachers meet regularly with students to provide academic help and support (administrators, M=4.32; teachers, M=4.17), item 3, teachers believe students can achieve (administrators, M=4.35; teachers, M=4.29), item 37, teachers provide opportunities in which students will succeed (administrators, M=4.40; teachers, M=4.28), and item 39, teachers

monitor and report students' progress to parents (administrators, M=4.31; teachers, M=4.23).

Discussion. The features in the General Perceptions category all pertained to teacher and student relationships. Administrators and teachers determined that all features in this category existed to at least a large extent in their schools. Teachers appeared to have faith in the students they teach, they consistently work with students to assist them academically by providing opportunities for students to be successful, and they discuss the progress of the students with the parents in addition to the students.

Existence of Student Services Features

Administrators and teachers were asked to respond to items regarding the existence of Student Services features in their respective alternative schools. Table 19 displays a comparison of administrators' and teachers' perceptions pertaining to the Student Services features of alternative schools. The mean, standard deviation, and t-value are presented for each feature.

Administrators rated one feature in this category, item 20, individual personal counseling is available as needed, as existing to a large extent within their schools. Administrators gave this feature a mean of 4.05. Teachers rated this item closely to that of administrators with a mean of 3.91. The difference was not significant.

Significant differences were reported for three features in the Students Services category. One feature, item 19, students receive individual academic guidance on a regular basis, was rated by administrators (M=3.94) and teachers (M=3.56) as existing to neither a small nor large extent in their schools. This difference was significant at the .05 level.

Table 19

Comparison of Administrators' and Teachers' Perceptions on the Existence of Student Services Features

Item	Feature	Administrators N	Administrators M	Administrators SD	Teachers N	Teachers M	Teachers SD	t
17	Daycare is provided for children of students.	63	1.39	.88	228	1.67	1.21	-2.11*
18	There is ongoing availability of medical health care for students.	63	2.06	1.18	228	2.29	1.30	-1.32
19	Students receive individualized academic guidance on a regular basis.	63	3.94	1.16	228	3.56	1.25	-2.16*
20	Individual personal counseling is available as needed.	63	4.05	1.25	229	3.91	1.35	.74
32	Flexible scheduling is available to students.	63	2.94	1.51	229	2.43	1.43	2.47*

*$p \leq .05$.

Item 32, flexible scheduling is available to students, was rated by administrators (M=2.94) and teachers (M=2.48) as existing to a small amount in their schools. This difference was significant at the .05 level. Item 17, daycare is provided for children of students, received the lowest means from both administrators (M=1.39) and teachers (M=1.68).

Discussion. Teachers and administrators indicated that three of five features in the Special Services category existed to only a small to very small extent in their schools.

Teachers rated this feature significantly lower than administrators, however, administrators' and teachers' responses both indicated that very few schools in Georgia provide daycare for children of students. They also indicated that very few schools offer medical health care or flexible schedules for students attending the alternative schools.

Administrators implied that individualized personal counseling was available for their students to a large extent. Teachers, however, indicated this feature existed to neither a small nor large extent, but more frequently than individualized academic guidance.

Research Question 7

Research question 7 was: *What differences, if any, are there between administrators' perceptions pertaining to the importance of program features and the existence of program features in alternative schools in Georgia?* The responses of administrators on the importance and existence of each item in their respective schools were compared using dependent t-tests. A mean difference was calculated for each feature to determine the difference between the importance mean and the existence mean. The mean differences were ranked, from greatest difference to least difference.

Findings

In all cases, administrators perceived that the importance of each feature was greater that the existence of that feature within their respective schools. Of the 40 items on the survey, administrators indicated that the differences between the importance of the features and the existence of the features within their respective schools for 34 of the items were significant at the .001 level. Three were significant at the .01 level, and one was significant at the .05 level.

The features with the largest differences between what administrators perceived as important to alternative schools and what existed at their respective schools were items 18, 35, 30, and 4. All these features had mean differences greater than –1.00. Item 18, there is ongoing availability of medical health care, had a mean difference of –1.30. Item 35, schoolwide effort to develop curriculum for the alternative school program, had a mean difference of –1.13. Item 30, the alternative school provides extracurricular activities, had a mean difference of –1.06. Item 4, students can choose the traditional or alternative school, had a mean difference of –1.05. All these differences were significant at the .001 level.

The features with the smallest differences between what administrators perceived as important to alternative schools and what existed at their respective schools were items 10, teachers have the freedom to make instructional decisions, with a mean difference of -.06, and 36, the supervisor/principal sets a climate that supports teaching and learning, with a mean difference of -.11. These differences were not significant. Item 17, daycare is provided for children of students, received a small mean difference of -.17. Although this difference was significant at the .001 level, administrators had previously indicated that this feature was of little importance to alternative schools and existed to only a very small extent within Georgia's alternative schools.

Discussion

In all cases, administrators perceived that the importance of each feature was greater than the existence of that feature within their respective schools. Administrators indicated that of the 34 features they rated as important to alternative schools, 11 did not

exist to a large extent in their schools. These features concerned the grouping of students for instruction, students' attendance, peer group counseling, and class size.

Of the 10 features with the smallest mean differences, only one, item 17, pertaining to day care, was not regarded as important to alternative schools by administrators. Although the difference was statistically significant, the indication that the feature was both unimportant and existed to only a small extent, makes the difference of little practical significance. The other nine features were regarded as important to alternative schools and existing to a large extent within Georgia's alternative schools.

The mean differences for only two features, both directly under the control of a lead administrator, were not significant. Administrators viewed their setting a climate that supports teaching and learning and teachers having the freedom to make instructional decisions as both important and existing in their schools.

The feature with the greatest mean difference, item 18, there is ongoing availability of health care, was rated by administrators as neither unimportant nor important to alternative schools. They further perceived that this feature existed to only a small extent in their schools.

Of the 10 features with the greatest mean differences, seven features were rated by administrators as at least somewhat important to alternative schools. Only one of these 10 features, however, existed to a large extent in Georgia's alternative schools. Administrators perceived that a curriculum that provides students with skills they will need to be productive members of society, is both important and does exist in their schools. The other six features existed to neither a small nor large extent in the schools.

Research Question 8

Research question 8 was: *What differences, if any, are there between teachers' perceptions pertaining to the importance of program features and the existence of program features in alternative schools in Georgia?* The responses of teachers on the importance and existence of each item in their respective schools were compared using dependent t-tests. A mean difference was calculated for each feature to determine the difference between the importance mean and the existence mean. The mean differences were ranked, from greatest difference to least difference.

Findings

In all cases, teachers perceived that the importance of each feature was greater that the existence of that feature within their respective schools. Fourteen of the 40 features had mean differences equal to or greater than –1.00. The features with the greatest differences between what teachers perceived as important to alternative schools and what existed at their respective schools were items 8, 14, 30, 35, 18, 5, 16, 28, 24, 22, 25, 17, 21, and 32 with mean differences ranging from –1.00 to –1.54. All differences were significant at the .001 level.

The feature with the greatest difference between what teachers thought was important to alternative schools and what existed at their respective schools was item eight, class size is maintained at 12 or fewer students per adult, with a mean difference of -1.54. Teachers previously indicated that they felt this item was important to alternative schools but existed to neither a small nor large extent within their schools. Seven additional features of the 10 features with the greatest mean differences received high ratings of importance, but were rated by teachers as existing to neither a small nor large extent.

These features included: (a) peer group counseling sessions are scheduled regularly, with a mean difference of –1.39, (b) there was a schoolwide effort to develop curriculum for the alternative school program, with a mean difference of –1.28, (c) students' attendance at the alternative school is regular, with a mean difference of –1.20, (d) students are grouped according to instructional needs rather than by grade level, with a mean difference of –1.20, (e) the faculty works in teams to plan instruction, with a mean difference of –1.06, and (f) students and teachers have mutual respect, with a mean difference of –1.03. The teachers perceived that the importance of each of these features was greater than the existence of the feature in their respective schools. All differences were significant at the .001 level.

The 10 features with the smallest mean differences were rated by teachers as important to alternative schools and existing to a large extent in their schools. The features had mean difference ranging from -.40 through -.63. The feature with the smallest mean difference, the principal believes in the ability of his staff, was in the Leadership category. This implied that teachers placed a high level of importance on this feature and the feature existed to a large extent in their schools. Only one feature, item 23, teachers are responsive to students' academic and social needs, was rated as important to alternative schools but existed to neither a small nor large extent.

Discussion

In all cases, teachers perceived that the importance of each feature was greater that the existence of that feature within their respective schools. Teachers indicated that of the 34 features they rated as important to alternative schools, 19 did not exist to a large extent in their schools. Two of these features, one addressing the need for a schoolwide

effort to develop the curriculum and another feature concerning the grouping of students by ability for instruction, were viewed by teachers as existing to only a small extent in their schools.

Additional features rated by teachers as important but existing less frequently than other features in their schools concerned student attendance, trust and respect between teachers and students, student and teacher communication, class size, the curriculum, learning styles, peer group counseling, and academic guidance. Teachers further indicated that, although important, students did not always share their ideas with the staff or speak positively about the alternative school.

The investigator observed that teachers shared similar views on the importance and existence of features pertaining to teacher and student relationships and relationships between teachers and principals. Teachers placed a high level of importance on their principals believing in the abilities of their staffs and teachers having the freedom to make instructional decisions. The responses of teachers indicated that both of these features existed to a large extent in Georgia's alternative schools.

Summary

This chapter presented the analysis of the data collected. Biographic and demographic data were presented in frequencies and percentages. Based on the data collected, the typical alternative school administrator in Georgia is male, over 40, and white, with two to five years experience at an alternative school, and over 20 years total teaching and administrative experience. The typical alternative school teacher is female, over 40, and white with two to five years experience at an alternative school, and total teaching experience that varies from two to over 20 years but not less than two years. The typical

alternative school may have no full-time counselors and possibly one part-time counselor, is located in a mostly small or rural town, and serves between 20 and 80 students in grades 6 through 12.

Research question one concerned the program features administrators identified most to least important to alternative schools. Administrators indicated that 34 of the 40 features were at least somewhat important to alternative schools. The Leadership category contained four of the most important features. Administrators placed the most importance on the supervisor setting a climate that supports teaching and learning. Three other features addressing Leadership were also included in the 10 most important to alternative schools. These items pertained to the faculty sharing resources, ideas, and strategies with each other, the supervisor/principal believing in the ability of his/her staff, and the principal providing teachers with materials they need in order to teach effectively.

Four features from the General Perceptions of alternative schools category were also included by administrators in the 10 most important features. These features concerned teachers providing opportunities in which students will succeed, teachers routinely monitoring and reporting student progress to parents, teachers believing students can achieve, and teachers routinely monitoring and reporting student progress to students. Administrators indicated that providing daycare for children of students was least important of the 40 features.

Research question two addressed the program features teachers identified most to least important to alternative schools. Thirty-four of the 40 features were reported by teachers as at least somewhat important to alternative schools. The feature that received the highest ranking was, the principal believes in the ability of his/her staff. This feature

was in the Leadership category. Four of the other 10 most important features also had to do with Leadership. These features pertained to the principal setting a climate that supports teaching and learning, communication between teachers and supervisor/principal regarding student progress, faculty and staff sharing school goals and visions, and teachers having the freedom to make instructional decisions.

Four features from the General Perceptions category were also included by teachers in the 10 most important features. These features concerned teachers believing students can achieve, teachers providing opportunities in which students will succeed, teachers routinely monitoring and reporting student progress to students, and teachers meeting regularly with students to provide academic help and support.

Teachers rated the same six features as did administrators, as the least important features to alternative schools. The feature that received the lowest ranking pertained to daycare being provided for children of students. The school providing medical health care, extracurricular activities, students choosing to attend the alternative school, flexible scheduling, and nongraded, multi-age classrooms, were also viewed by teachers as least important to alternative schools.

Research question 3 addressed the program features administrators identified as existing most often to least often at their respective alternative schools Administrators at alternative schools in Georgia determined that 23 of 40 specific features of alternative schools existed to at least a large extent within their schools. Only five features were found to exist to a small extent, while only one feature was found to exist to a very small extent.

Administrators of alternative schools in Georgia determined that five features in the Leadership category were among the 10 most prevalent features in their respective schools. The feature that received the highest ranking, item 36, the principal sets a climate that supports teaching and learning, was in the Leadership category. Four of the other 10 most prevalent features also pertained to Leadership. These items had to do with the principal believing in the ability of his/her staff, teachers having the freedom to make instructional decisions, the faculty sharing resources, ideas, and strategies with each other, and the faculty and staff sharing school goals and visions. Administrators further indicated that four features pertaining to General Perceptions of alternative schools existed to at least a large extent at their schools. These features included teachers monitoring and reporting student progress to students, teachers providing opportunities in which students will succeed, teachers believing students can achieve, and teachers meeting regularly with students to provide academic help and support. One feature regarding teachers providing positive reinforcement to students was also included in the 10 most prevalent features of alternative schools in Georgia. The features that administrators perceived existed to a lesser extent in Georgia's alternative schools pertained to daycare, medical health care, students choosing a traditional or alternative school, and the alternative school providing extracurricular activities.

Research question 4 addressed the program features teachers identified as existing most often to least often at their respective alternative schools. Teachers at alternative schools in Georgia determined that 15 of 40 specific features of alternative schools existed to at least a large extent within their schools. Seven features were found to exist to a small extent, and two features were found to exist to a very small extent.

Teachers of alternative schools in Georgia determined that four features in the Leadership category were among the 10 most prevalent features in their respective schools. The feature that received the highest ranking, item 11, the principal believes in the ability of his/her staff, was in the Leadership category. Three additional prevalent Leadership features pertained to teachers having the freedom to make instructional decisions, communication between teachers and supervisor/principal regarding students' progress to parents, and the principal setting a climate that supports teaching and learning. Teachers further indicated that six features regarding General Perceptions of alternative schools existed to at least a large extent at their schools. These features were teachers monitor and report student progress to students, teachers provide opportunities in which students will succeed, teachers believe students can achieve, teachers meet regularly with students to provide academic help and support, and teachers choose to work within the alternative program.

The features that teachers perceived existed to lesser amounts in Georgia's alternative schools were daycare is provided for children of students, the alternative school provides extracurricular activities, there is ongoing availability of medical health care, flexible scheduling is available to students, and students can choose traditional or alternative school.

Research question 5 pertained to the differences, if any, between administrators' and teachers' perceptions regarding the importance of program features of alternative schools. Administrators and teachers indicated that all the features in the Leadership, School Climate, and General Perceptions categories were important to alternative schools. Administrators and teachers indicated that four of the five features in the Student

Attitude category were important to alternative schools. Only one feature, students can choose to attend either a traditional or alternative school, was perceived by both administrators and teachers as neither important nor unimportant.

Administrators and teachers indicated that six of the eight features in the Student Needs category were also important to alternative schools. Two features, the alternative school provides extracurricular activities and school policies and procedures support nongraded multiage classes, were perceived by both teachers and administrators as neither important nor unimportant.

Administrators and teachers indicated that only two of the five features in the Student Services category were important to alternative schools. Both of the features pertained to counseling services. The other three features were neither important or unimportant or of little importance.

Research question 6 pertained to the differences, if any, between administrators' and teachers' perceptions regarding the existence of program features in alternative schools in Georgia. Results of the analysis indicated a significant difference between administrators' and teachers' perception on 13 features at the .05 level. Administrators' perceptions were higher than teachers for 11 of the 12 features. Results of the analysis indicated a significant difference between administrators' and teachers' perception on seven features at the .01 level. Administrators' perceptions were higher than teachers for all seven features.

Research question 7 pertained to the differences, if any, between administrators' perceptions of specific program features of alternative schools and the extent of the existence of these features in alternative schools in Georgia. In all cases, administrators

perceived that the importance of each feature was greater than the existence of that feature within their respective schools. Of the 40 items on the survey, administrators indicated

that the differences between the importance of the features and the existence of the features within their respective schools for 34 of the items were significant at the .001 level, three were significant at the .01 level, and one was significant at the .05 level.

Research question 8 pertained to the differences, if any, between teachers perceptions of the importance of specific program features of alternative schools and the extent of the existence of these features in alternative schools in Georgia. In all cases, teachers perceived that the importance of each feature was greater than the existence of that feature within their respective schools. All differences were significant at the .001 level.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

This study examined the perceptions of Georgia's alternative school administrators and teachers regarding the importance of program features of alternative schools and the existence of these features in their respective schools. A review of literature pertaining to the dropout problem as it exists in the United States, along with the problems associated with students dropping out of school, was presented. According to the U.S. Department of Education, approximately 25% of America's youth drop out of school each year (U.S. Department of Education, 1997). The dropout problem in Georgia was also presented. Over 32,000 students in grades 6-12 dropped out of school during the 1996-1997 school year (Georgia Department of Education (1998b).

Problems associated with dropping out included unemployment, dependence on social programs, and an increase in crime among those with less than the equivalent of a high school education (Peck, Law, & Mills, 1987). The characteristics of students prone to dropping out of school, including chronically disruptive or delinquent behavior, poor academic performance, poor attendance or habitual truancy, strong dislike for school, and pregnancy were also presented (Gavin, 1997; Hahn, Danberger, & Lefkowitz, 1987; Knutson, 1996, Neumann, 1994).

Alternative schools were deemed as necessary interventions to face the new challenges present in society that are reflected in our schools. These challenges included an increase in disruptive and delinquent behavior among young people, as well as an

increase in the numbers of students dropping out of school each year (Furlong & Morrison, 1994; Futrell, 1996; Gable & Bullock, 1995). Alternative schools were viewed as serving two primary functions. The first is to remove disruptive students from the regular classroom and the second is to help at-risk students stay in school. The inability of schools to meet the needs of all their students, as well as the increase in disruptive behavior in regular classrooms, justifies, according to many researchers, the need for alternative schools (Knutson, 1996; Stevenson & Burger, 1989).

Many researchers have studied the characteristics of potential dropouts. These characteristics were divided into four main categories, including school-related factors, psychological factors, family-related factors, and economic factors (Fagon & Pabon, 1990; Janosz, LeBlanc, Boulerice, & Tremblay, 1997; Rumberger, 1983; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986; Wells, 1990). The characteristics of students attending alternative schools were also discussed. The two most frequently mentioned characteristics manifested by students attending alternative schools were academic underachievement and severe behavior problems (Conant, 1992).

From a review of the literature, the present researcher identified several common features associated with effective alternative schools. These features included establishing an environment and curriculum conducive to students' needs, reducing class size, establishing faculties composed of teachers with the desire and the specialized training to work with at-risk students, individualizing teaching strategies and the curriculum, providing specialized counseling services, strong leadership, and health services for students (Hefner-Packer, 1991; Knutson, 1996).

Georgia's CrossRoads Alternative School program was discussed. This program has three major goals. The first is to furnish chronically disruptive students with social services, individualized instruction, and transitions to other programs in order to become successful students and good citizens in the school and larger community. The second is to make the public schools safer and more secure by removing chronically disruptive students in grades 6-12 from the public classroom. The third is to enable students to complete requirements for their high school diplomas.

The method that was employed to investigate the perceptions of administrators and teachers at alternative schools in Georgia pertaining to the importance and existence of identified key features was presented. An adapted version of the Perceptions of Alternative Schools Survey, developed by Deborah Wiseman (1996), was used to obtain the data. This survey was designed to measure teachers' and administrators' perceptions pertaining to the *importance* of 40 specific features found at alternative schools and the *existence* of those features in their respective schools. Each of the 40 features belonged to one of six categories. The categories were Leadership, Student Attitudes, School Climate, Student Needs, General Perceptions About Alternative Schools, and Student Services. The population for the study included all teachers and administrators at alternative schools in Georgia that served at-risk students. Administrators and teachers at 56% of the schools returned usable surveys.

The statistical treatment of the data was also presented. Means were calculated and ranked for the importance and existence of all features for both administrators and teachers. Independent t-tests were performed to measure teachers' perceptions of the importance of program features with those of administrators. Independent t-tests were also

performed to measure teachers' perceptions of the existence of program features with those of administrators. Dependent t-tests were calculated to compare teachers' perceptions of the importance and existence for each individual item. Dependent t-tests were also calculated to compare administrators on their perceptions of the *importance* and *existence* of each individual item. Demographic and biographic data were presented in frequencies and percentages.

Analysis of Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of administrators and teachers regarding features at alternative schools in Georgia. Biographic data pertaining to the administrators and teachers and demographic data pertaining to the schools were also collected.

Responses were sought to the following research questions:

1. What program features do administrators identify as important to alternative schools?
2. What program features do teachers identify as important to alternative schools?
3. What program features do administrators identify as existing in their respective alternative schools?
4. What program features do teachers identify as existing in their respective alternative schools?
5. What differences, if any, are there between administrators' and teachers' perceptions regarding the importance of program features in alternative schools in Georgia?

6. What differences, if any, are there between administrators' and teachers' perceptions regarding the existence of program features in alternative schools in Georgia?
7. What differences, if any, are there between administrators' perceptions pertaining to the importance of program features and the existence of program features in alternative schools in Georgia?
8. What differences, if any, are there between teachers' perceptions pertaining to the importance of program features and the existence of program features in alternative schools in Georgia?

Biographic and Demographic Data

Biographic data collected indicated that the typical alternative school administrator in Georgia has a slightly higher probability of being male than female and is over 40, white, with 2 to 5 years experience at an alternative school, and over 20 years total teaching and administrative experience. The typical alternative school teacher is female, over 40, and white with 2 to 5 years experience at an alternative school, and total teaching experience that varies from 2 to over 20 years but not less than 2 years.

Based on the data collected, the typical alternative school is located in a rural or small town setting, serves between 20 and 80 students in grades 6 through 12, and has approximately 12 or fewer students to one teacher. In addition, the school may have a part-time counselor, and is less likely to have a full-time counselor.

Research Question 1

Research question 1 pertained to the program features administrators identified most to least important to alternative schools. Administrators indicated that 34 of the 40

features were at least somewhat important to alternative schools. Administrators indicated that four of the most important features pertained to Leadership. Administrators placed the most importance on the supervisor setting a climate that supports teaching and learning. Three other Leadership features were also included in the 10 most important features of alternative schools. These items were (a) faculty shares resources, ideas, and strategies with each other, (b) the supervisor/principal believes in the ability of his/her staff, and (c) the supervisor/principal provides teachers with materials they need in order to teach effectively. Four features from the General Perceptions category were also included by administrators in the 10 most important features. These features were (a) teachers provide opportunities in which students will succeed, (b) teachers routinely monitor and report student progress to parents, (c) teachers believe students can achieve, and (d) teachers routinely monitor and report student progress to students. One item in the School Climate category, item 22, students and teachers have mutual respect, and one item in the Student Attitudes category, item 5, students' attendance at the alternative school is regular, were also included in the 10 most important features.

Administrators indicated that providing daycare for children of students was least important of the 40 features. The school providing extracurricular activities, students choosing to attend the alternative school, and the availability of medical health care for students were also viewed by administrators as less important to alternative schools than other features.

Research Question 2

Research question 2 addressed the program features teachers identified most to least important to alternative schools. Thirty-four of the 40 features were reported by

teachers as at least somewhat important to alternative schools. The feature that received the highest ranking was item 11, the supervisor/principal believes in the ability of his/her staff. This feature was in the Leadership category. Four of the other 10 most important features also pertained to Leadership. These features included (a) the supervisor/principal sets a climate that supports teaching and learning, (b) there is communication between teachers and supervisor/principal regarding student progress, (c) faculty and staff share school goals and visions, and (d) teachers have the freedom to make instructional decisions. Four features from the General Perceptions of alternative schools category were also included by administrators in the 10 most important features. These features were (a) teachers believe students can achieve, (b) teachers provide opportunities in which students will succeed, (c) teachers routinely monitor and report student progress to students, and (d) teachers meet regularly with students to provide academic help and support. One item in the School Climate category, students and teachers have mutual respect, was also included by teachers as 1 of the 10 most important features in alternative schools.

The feature that received the lowest ranking was item 17, daycare is provided for children of students. The school providing extracurricular activities, students choosing to attend the alternative school, and students choosing to attend the traditional or alternative school, were also viewed by teachers as less important to alternative schools than other features.

Research Question 3

Research question 3 pertained to the program features administrators identified as existing most often to least often at their respective alternative schools. Administrators at

alternative schools in Georgia determined that 23 of 40 specific features of alternative schools existed to at least a large extent within their schools. Only five features were found to exist to a small extent, while only one feature was found to exist to a very small extent.

Administrators of alternative schools in Georgia determined that five features in the Leadership category were among the 10 most prevalent features in their respective schools. The feature that received the highest ranking, the principal sets a climate that supports teaching and learning, was in the Leadership category. Four of the other 10 most important features, also pertained to Leadership. These items were (a) the principal believes in the ability of his/her staff, (b) teachers have the freedom to make instructional decisions, (c) the faculty shares resources, ideas, and strategies with each other, and (d) faculty and staff share school goals and visions. Administrators further indicated that four features pertaining to General Perceptions existed to at least a large extent at their schools. These features were (a) teachers monitor and report student progress to students, (b) teachers provide opportunities in which students will succeed, (c) teachers believe students can achieve, and (d) teachers meet regularly with students to provide academic help and support. One feature pertaining to teachers providing positive reinforcement to students was also included in the 10 most prevalent features of alternative schools in Georgia.

The features that teachers perceived existed less frequently in Georgia's alternative schools were (a) daycare is provided for children of students, (b) there is ongoing availability of medical health care, (c) students can choose traditional or alternative school, and (d) the alternative school provides extracurricular activities.

Research Question 4

Research question 4 pertained to the program features teachers identified as existing most often to least often at their respective alternative schools. Teachers at alternative schools in Georgia determined that 15 of 40 specific features of alternative schools existed to at least a large extent within their schools. Seven features were found to exist to a small extent, and two features were found to exist to a very small extent.

Teachers of alternative schools in Georgia determined that four features in the Leadership category were among the 10 most prevalent features in their respective schools. The feature that received the highest ranking, item 11, the principal believes in the ability of his/her staff, was in the Leadership category. The other three features pertaining to Leadership with the highest means were (a) teachers have the freedom to make instructional decisions, (b) there is communication between teachers and supervisor/principal regarding students progress to parents, and (c) the principal sets a climate that supports teaching and learning.

Teachers further indicated that six features pertaining to General Perceptions of alternative schools existed to at least a large extent at their schools. These features were (a) teachers monitor and report student progress to students, (b) teachers provide opportunities in which students will succeed, (c) teachers believe students can achieve, (d) teachers meet regularly with students to provide academic help and support, and (e) teachers choose to work within the alternative program.

The features that administrators perceived existed to lesser amounts in Georgia's alternative schools were (a) daycare is provided for children of students, (b) the alternative school provides extracurricular activities, (c) there is ongoing availability of medical

health care, (d) flexible scheduling is available to students, and (e) students can choose traditional or alternative school.

Research Question 5

Research question 5 pertained to the differences, if any, between administrators' and teachers' perceptions regarding the importance of program features of alternative schools. The responses of teachers and administrators on the importance of each item in their respective schools were compared using independent t-tests and presented by category. Results of the analysis indicated a significant difference between administrators' and teachers' perception on five features. These differences, however, were not of practical significance.

Administrators and teachers indicated that all features in the Leadership, School Climate, and General Perceptions categories were important to alternative schools. Administrators and teachers indicated that four of the five features in the Student Attitudes category were important to alternative schools. Only one feature, item 4, students can choose to attend either a traditional or alternative school, was perceived by both administrators and teachers as neither important nor unimportant.

Administrators and teachers indicated that six of the eight features in the student needs category were important to alternative schools. Two features, item 30, the alternative school provides extracurricular activities, and item 31, school policies and procedures support nongraded multiage classes, were perceived by both teachers and administrators as neither important nor unimportant. Administrators and teachers indicated that only two of the five features in the Student Services category were important to alternative schools. Both of the features pertained to counseling services.

Research Question 6

Research question 6 pertained to the differences, if any, between administrators' and teachers' perceptions regarding the existence of program features in alternative schools in Georgia. The responses of teachers and administrators on the existence of each item in their respective schools were compared using independent t-tests and presented by category.

Administrators' perceptions were significantly higher than teachers for 12 features. Three of the features were in the Leadership category: (a) faculty and staff share school goals and vision, (b) teachers have the freedom to make instructional decisions, and (c) faculty share resources, ideas, and strategies with each other. Two were in the Student Attitudes category: (a) students' attendance at the alternatives school is regular, and (b) students speak positively about the alternative school. One was in the School Climate category: students and teachers have mutual respect. Four were in the Student Needs category: (a) teachers accommodate student's learning style, (b) peer group counseling sessions are scheduled regularly, (c) students are grouped according to instructional needs rather than by grade level, and (d) the alternative school provides extracurricular activities. Two were in the Student Services category (a) students receive individualized guidance on a regular basis and (b) flexible scheduling is available to students. Only one of the features, daycare is provided for children of students, received a higher mean from teachers than it did from administrators; however, both determined this item existed to a very small extent within their schools. These differences were all significant at the .05 level.

Results of the analysis indicated a significant difference between administrators' and teachers' perception on seven features. Administrators' perceptions were higher than

teachers for all seven features. Three were in the Leadership category: (a) faculty work in teams to plan instruction, (b) the supervisor/principal provides teachers with materials they need in order to teach effectively, and (c) the supervisor/principal sets a climate that supports teaching and learning. Three were in the School Climate category: (a) there is trust between students and administrators, (b) teachers and students speak freely with each other, and students willingly share their ideas with faculty and staff. One was in the Student Needs category: the curriculum is individualized for instruction. These differences were all significant at the .01 level.

Research Question 7

Research question 7 pertained to the differences, if any, between administrators' perceptions of specific program features of alternative schools and the extent of the existence of these features in alternative schools in Georgia. In all cases, administrators perceived that the importance of each feature was greater than the existence of that feature within their respective schools. Of the 40 items on the survey, administrators indicated that the differences between the importance of the features and the existence of the features within their respective schools for 34 of the items were significant at the .001 level, three were significant at the .01 level, and one was significant at the .05 level.

The features with the largest differences between what administrators perceived as important to alternative schools and what they perceived as existing at their respective schools were, (a) there is ongoing availability of medical health care, (b) there was a schoolwide effort to develop curriculum for the alternative school program, and (c) students can choose traditional or alternative school. All differences were significant at the .001 level.

The features with the smallest difference between what administrators perceived as important to alternative schools and what existed at their respective schools were item 10, teachers have the freedom to make instructional decisions, and item 36, the supervisor/principal sets a climate that supports teaching and learning.

Research Question 8

Research question 8 pertained to the differences, if any, between teachers' perceptions of the importance of specific program features of alternative schools and the extent of the existence of these features in alternative schools in Georgia. Teachers perceived that the importance of each feature was greater than the existence of that feature within their respective schools. Differences were significant at the .001 level.

Fourteen of the 40 features had mean differences between –1.00 and –1.54. The features with the largest differences between what teachers perceived as important to alternative schools and what they perceived as existing at their respective schools were: (a) class size is maintained at 12 or fewer students per adult, (b) peer group counseling sessions are scheduled regularly, (c) the alternative school provides extracurricular activities, (d) there was a schoolwide effort to develop curriculum for the alternative school program, (e) there is ongoing availability of medical health care, (f) students' attendance at the alternative school is regular, (g) students are grouped according to instructional needs rather than by grade level, (h) students with like ability are grouped together for instruction, (i) faculty work in teams to plan instruction, (j) students and teachers have mutual respect, (k) alternative school program was organized based on faculty and staff input, (l) daycare is provided for children of students, (m) teachers routinely monitor and report student progress to students, and (n) flexible scheduling is available to students.

The feature with the largest difference between what teachers thought was important to alternative schools and what existed at their respective schools was, item 8, class size is maintained at 12 or fewer students per adult with a mean difference of -1.54. Teachers previously indicated that this item was important to alternative schools but existed to neither a small nor large extent within their schools.

Discussion of Findings

Each of the 40 features included on the survey used to collect data for this study belonged to one of six categories. These categories, Leadership, Student Attitudes, School Climate, Student Needs, General Perceptions, and Student Services were used to organize the Discussion of Findings.

Leadership

Of the 40 items on the survey used to collect data for this study, 10 pertained to Leadership factors. Both administrators and teachers indicated that all features in the Leadership category were at least somewhat important to alternative schools. Of these eight features, they further agreed that six existed to a large extent within Georgia's alternative schools. These features pertained to teachers having the freedom to make instructional decisions, the faculty and staff sharing school goals and visions, the supervisor believing in the ability of his staff, the supervisor setting a climate that supports teaching and learning, the need for communication between teachers and students regarding student progress, and the faculty sharing resources, ideas, and strategies.

The value of strong leadership is supported in the literature by Wiseman (1996). She concluded, from a study of administrators and teachers at alternative schools in North Carolina, that leadership of the school was the most essential determinate of overall

effectiveness of the school. Specifically, administrators and teachers indicated supervisors believing in the ability of their staff, establishing a climate conducive to learning, and promoting shared goals and visions to be the most important factors leading to the success of alternative schools. Wiseman further concluded that the amount of freedom teachers are allowed in making instructional decisions was of great importance.

Administrators and teachers in Georgia indicated that although faculties working in teams to plan instruction was of great importance, it did not exist to a large extent within alternative schools in Georgia. The importance of this feature is supported by the results of a study of the characteristics of successful, practicing alternative school principals in Kentucky conducted by Day (1996). These principals, Day concluded, built teams of empowered teachers, involved the teachers in decision-making, kept the teachers informed, and enabled these teachers to act.

Foley (1983) and Mickens (1994) determined that principals of effective alternative schools need to serve as instructional leaders of their schools and encourage teachers to work together to create a curriculum that meets the needs of individual students and an environment where all students believe they can succeed. While the administrators and teachers surveyed in this study determined that working in teams to develop a curriculum is important, they indicated that this does not exist to a large extent within alternative schools in Georgia. They further concluded that faculty and staff members do not have a great deal of input into the organization of the alternative school program or working in teams to plan for instruction.

Administrators and teachers both determined that communication between teachers and administrators regarding students' progress is important and exists to a large

extent in Georgia's alternative schools. These results are consistent with the views of Foley (1983) and Mickens (19940 who maintained that the principal must set a climate that maintains constant communication with the teachers and administration regarding student progress.

Student Attitudes

Administrators and teachers determined that four features in the Student Attitudes category were important to alternative schools, but only one existed to a large extent within Georgia's alternative schools. The feature that ranked the highest in terms of importance was item 5, students' attendance at the alternative school is regular. The importance of this feature is supported by Duke and Muzio (1978). Results of their study indicated that regular student attendance was essential to the success of an alternative school program. Cox, Davidson, and Bynum (1995) determined that students attending alternative schools had higher self-esteem, more positive attitudes toward school, improved school attendance, higher academic performance, and decreased delinquent behaviors than when they attended traditional schools.

The importance of alternative schools providing students with the skills they will need to become productive members of society was supported by Raywid (1994). She determined that alternative schools can only be viewed as effective if they are able to assist students in either successfully returning to the traditional school setting or are instrumental in helping students graduate from high school and become productive citizens. Administrators and teachers in Georgia's alternative schools also determined this role was important and that it existed within Georgia's alternative schools.

The alternative school in Georgia, according to teachers and administrators surveyed, has become the step between a traditional school and dropping out. This was the only feature in the Student Attitudes category that administrators and teachers indicated existed to a large extent in Georgia. Arnove and Strout (1980) and Fuller and Sabatino (1996) described alternative schools as stopgap methods to preserve a faltering system of public education and as devices to meet the needs and realize the potential of at-risk students.

Administrators and teachers in Georgia did not place as much importance on students choosing to attend either a traditional or alternative school as they did other features. They further indicated that school choice for students existed to only a small extent in Georgia. Raywid (1984) contended that students are often offered a choice, but the choice is either to attend the alternative school or not to attend school in that district. Kellymayer (1995) examined the choice situation from a different perspective. He concluded that students should have the choice to stay in the alternative school rather than return to the traditional school, if they so desire. He maintained that in successful alternative schools the majority of students (including those who were assigned to the program against their will) will not want to leave the program and return to the traditional school.

School Climate

Administrators and teachers were asked to respond to items regarding the importance of six features pertaining to School Climate and whether these features existed within their respective alternative schools. All six features pertained to relationships between students and teachers. These features were (a) there is trust between students and teachers, (b) teachers and students speak freely with each other, (c) students and teachers have

mutual respect, (d) there are 12 or fewer students per adult, (e) teachers are responsive to students' academic and social needs, and (f) students willingly share their ideas with faculty and staff. Both administrators and teachers indicated that all of the features were important to alternative schools. Teachers, however determined that five of the six features existed to neither a small nor large extent within their schools. Only one feature, teachers are responsive to students' academic and social needs, was rated by both teachers and administrators as existing to a large extent.

The importance of these features, as indicated by their high ratings from Georgia's administrators and teachers, are consistent with the results of studies by McMillan and Reed (1994), Yager (1996), and Meixner (1995). These researchers stressed that a caring staff is positively related to the success of alternative schools, and the way teachers relate with the students is an essential factor in the classroom. Students should know that their teachers care about them and their academic success, and that their teachers hold high expectations for them. Teachers must maintain the belief that students deserve renewed opportunities to learn and must understand that their attitude toward the students may be the defining factor with respect to whether or not students are successful in the alternative school setting.

Teachers and administrators in Georgia rated small class size as one of the most important features of alternative schools; however, they indicated that their class size often exceeds the 12 students. The importance of low student-to-teacher ratios are identified by many authorities as the most important characteristic for successful alternative school programs (Arnove & Strout, 1980; Kagan, 1988; Kellmayer, 1995; Neumann, 1994; Raywid, 1984; Young, 1990). Raywid (1994) stated that programs must be small

enough to permit personalization of the school experience and that the more successful alternative schools, with lower dropout rates, were small in size when compared to traditional high schools. Smallness also permits the human connections and trust that result in strong bonds between students and their schools (Raywid, 1997).

Supportive environments are an integral part of School Climate. One of the primary goals of alternative schools is to rebuild students' trust in school as a place to learn and restore the belief that learning is a meaningful activity. Successful alternative schools strive to create a supportive, accepting, and noncompetitive learning environment conducive to the needs of the students, where students are able to trust the program as well as the teaching staff. This congruence between the needs of the students and a supportive learning environment is likely to produce positive outcomes, including increased sense of worth and reduced disruptive behavior. This environment allows alternative school students to have more opportunities for positive experiences in a school setting and experience a sense of control over their lives (Arnove & Strout, 1980; DeTurk & Mackin, 1975; Duhon, 1997; Gold & Mann, 1984; Stevenson & Burger, 1989).

Advocates for alternative schools point out that these schools provide a supportive environment where students can gain basic academic and social skills, experience success and social approval, participate in important decision-making, feel good about themselves, and look forward to the future (Raywid, 1983).

Student Needs

Administrators and teachers rated the importance of eight features pertaining to the School Climate of alternative schools. They indicated that six of the eight features were important to alternative schools. These features were: (a) teachers provide positive

reinforcement to students, (b) students' attendance at the alternative school is regular, (c) curriculum is individualized for each student, (d) students are grouped according to instructional needs, (e) students with like ability are grouped together for instruction, (f) schoolwide effort to develop curriculum and (g) peer group counseling sessions are scheduled regularly.

Although teachers and administrators indicated a high level of importance for most of the features in this category, only one of the eight features existed to a large extent within their respective schools. That feature pertained to teachers providing positive reinforcement to students. Knutson (1996), in a survey of at-risk students attending an alternative high school determined that teachers at the school allowed students more input in decision-making, treated students more fairly, and gave students more positive reinforcement than teachers at the traditional high school.

The importance of accommodating students' learning styles and individualizing the curriculum are substantiated by studies conducted by Wehlage and Rutter (1986). They determined that successful alternative school programs develop and employ a non-traditional, individualized curriculum. Stevenson and Burger (1989) and Baker and Weinbaum (1992) add further support when they concluded that one of the important components of alternative schools is the development of a challenging academic program and curriculum and instructional strategies that engage students in learning that meets their needs.

Teachers and administrators in Georgia indicated that peer-group counseling sessions are important to students in alternative schools. Although both groups agreed as to the importance of this feature, administrators rated this item as existing to neither a large

nor small extent, and teachers indicated that peer group counseling sessions existed to only a small extent within their schools. Fuller and Sabatino (1996) concluded that, to be effective, alternative school programs should include intensive individual and group counseling focused on self-esteem, self-concept, personal responsibility, appropriate expressions of feelings, drug/alcohol prevention, and career exploration. They stressed that these students must be convinced of their own self-worth and be able to foresee the consequences of choices they make.

General Perceptions

Six features on the survey were included in the General Perceptions category. Teachers and administrators indicated that all six features were important to alternative schools. Teachers further concluded that all six features existed to a large extent within their schools. Only one feature, teachers meet regularly with students to provide academic help and support, was rated by administrators as existing to neither a large nor small extent.

Both teachers and administrators determined that teachers should choose to work within the alternative program. This is in agreement with Kellmayer (1995) who maintained that teachers should not be assigned to a program in which they do not wish to teach. This view was further substantiated by Murphy (1993) when he concluded that teachers should have some choice of venue. Mayer further concluded that teachers who want to work in a school strive to create a collaborative climate with parents of students. They keep the lines of communication between the school and home open and routinely report students' progress to parents. This is similar to the view taken by Georgia's

administrators and teachers who concluded that teachers routinely monitoring students' progress to parents was important to alternative schools.

The importance of teachers providing opportunities in which students will be successful is supported by Foley (1993) and Mickens (1994). They determined that an environment where all students believe they can achieve and be successful is very important to alternative schools. Teachers must maintain the belief that students deserve renewed opportunities to learn and must understand that their attitude toward the students may be the defining factor with respect to whether or not students are successful in the alternative school setting (McMillan & Reed, 1994; Meixner, 1995; Yager, 1996).

Special Services

Administrators and teachers determined that only two of the four features in the Student Services category were important to alternative schools. Both of these features pertained to availability of counseling services. Administrators and teachers indicated that individualized academic counseling existed to neither a large nor small extent within their schools; however, administrators determined that individual personal counseling did exist to a large extent. Teachers believed it to exist to a slightly lesser extent. The difference was not significant. The importance of individual counseling is supported by Fuller and Sabatino (1996). They concluded that effective, alternative school programs include intensive individual group counseling to help students increase their self-esteem and make positive choices, both academically and socially. Harrington-Lueker (1994) further argued for the need for counseling. In a study of an alternative school in Corpus Christi, Texas, students received counseling in both their behavior and academics before returning them to the regular classroom setting.

Teachers and administrators also placed less importance on the need for flexible scheduling within the alternative school. This feature existed to only a small extent in their respective schools. This is in contrast to the views of Wehlage and Rutter (1986). They determined that successful alternative school programs develop and employ a non-traditional curriculum that should include an individualized approach to instruction. They further concluded that beginning at the individual's level and offering a flexible schedule would help to tailor the curriculum to meet the needs of the students.

Ongoing availability of health care and daycare for children of students were less important than other features to administrators and teachers in Georgia. They also existed to a lesser extent than did other features. These views are consistent with those of Hahn (1987) who determined that infant daycare at the school site for children of students was determined to be more essential at schools specifically designed for teen mothers than at schools that serve predominately disruptive students. Wiseman (1996) concluded from a study of alternative schools in North Carolina that, while daycare for children of students and medical health care for students have been found to have a positive effect on student attendance at alternative schools, they were found to be of less importance to teachers and administrators than other features. The New York State Education Department (1987) stressed the importance of routine health services for students at school, stating that they are an integral part of keeping students in school. Screening for physical defects is an important aspect of improving attendance and preventing dropouts.

Implications

In her review of literature, the investigator uncovered no examples of studies on the perceptions of Georgia administrators and teachers on the importance of specific

program features and the existence of these features in Georgia's alternative schools. In this area, therefore, this study provides baseline data for further research. The present researcher further intends that the results of this study will assist in expanding the existing knowledge base regarding the program features in alternative schools in Georgia.

Recognized experts on alternative schools, as reviewed in chapter 2, have identified all the features listed on the survey instrument used in this study as important if these schools are to meet the needs of all the students they are designed to serve. The investigator believes that the results of this study will assist alternative school administrators in evaluating their programs in relationship to the importance they and their teachers place on features and the existence of these features in their respective schools. She further hopes that the results of this study will help to increase the existence of features teachers and administrators perceived to exist to only a small extent at their respective schools.

Conclusions

Based on the this study's findings, the following conclusions are drawn:

1. Alternative schools in Georgia are not meeting the needs of students that may require a nontraditonal approach to instruction. Administrators and teachers participating in this study indicated that certain features important in meeting the needs of some at-risk students, including flexible scheduling, nongraded, multiage classrooms, individualized curriculum, and an individualized method of instruction, do not exist to the extent they should in alternative schools.

2. Administrators in Georgia's alternative schools provide their faculties with high levels of leadership and set a climate that supports teaching and learning. Teachers gave consistently high ratings to features directly under the control of administrators.

3. Teachers in Georgia's alternative schools are dedicated to their profession and the students they teach. This is indicated by the consistently high ratings of features pertaining to teacher and student relationships as perceived by alternative school administrators.

4. Teachers placed less importance on features where teachers traditionally have less control and less involvement in decision-making. This included features pertaining to health care for students, school choice, daycare, grouping procedures, extracurricular activities, and school policies regarding nongraded classrooms.

5. Instructional practices and special services geared to meeting individual needs of students were perceived by teachers and administrators not to be prevalent in Georgia's alternative schools. Daycare for children of students, health services, flexible scheduling, and extracurricular activities, all items that could require additional funding to support, existed to only a small extent in Georgia's alternative schools.

6. Administrators and teachers shared similar views concerning the least important features of alternative schools. Both perceived that daycare for children of students; availability of medical health care; extracurricular activities; nongraded, multiage classrooms; school choice for students; and flexible scheduling were comparatively unimportant.

7. Administrators placed a high level of importance on features that currently existed to a greater extent in their schools. This included having a faculty that shares resources, ideas, and strategies and the principal setting a climate that supports teaching and learning. Features related to positive student and teacher relationships were also considered critical to alternative schools.

8. Administrators placed a high level of importance on features directly under their control. They also perceived that these features existed to a large extent in their schools. This included features pertaining to the climate of the school, interactions between administrators and teachers, and interactions between teachers and students.

9. The typical alternative school administrator in Georgia has a high level of confidence in the abilities of his or her teachers. This is documented by the high existence ratings that administrators gave to believing in the abilities of their staffs and teachers to make instructional decisions.

10. Features related to activities reserved for administrators or district policies were perceived by teachers to be of less importance and existed less often than other features. Teachers appeared to place less importance on features normally controlled mostly or exclusively by administrators and school boards.

11. Teachers and administrators in Georgia agree on the importance of teachers providing opportunities for students to be successful. They also agree on the importance of keeping both students and parents updated on students' progress at the alternative school.

12. Teachers in Georgia have, to a large extent, the opportunity to choose an alternative school as their teaching assignment. Both teachers and administrators also indicated that teachers choosing to teach at an alternative school is important.

13. It is difficult to ascertain the level of existence of many features of alternative schools in Georgia. This circumstance is attributed to the discrepancies between the responses of the administrators and the teachers. Administrators' and teachers' perceptions differed significantly pertaining to the existence of 20 of the 40 program features of alter-

native schools. These 20 items spanned all categories with the exception of the General Perceptions category.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are offered for further investigation:

1. While this study produced biographic information to establish a school profile, no attempt was made to correlate this information to individual participants' responses. A study should be conducted to determine if a relationship exists between the biographic data and the responses of the participants to the survey items. This would help to establish whether the sex, race, age, and job experience of the administrators and teachers affect the way they perceive the importance and existence of the 40 features.

2. Research indicated that there are no established methods of determining alternative school effectiveness in the state of Georgia. A study should be conducted to establish the criteria schools use to determine if they are effective. This information may be useful to educators in establishing a uniform measurement of effectiveness for these schools.

3. Once a standard measurement has been established for gauging the effectiveness of an alternative school program, a study should be conducted to determine whether or not alternative schools in Georgia are effective.

4. The relationship among the sex and race of students, the sex and race of administrators and teachers at alternative schools, and the effectiveness of the schools should be investigated. An examination of the literature revealed a disproportionate number of male minority students attending alternative schools. Based on the results of

this study, the majority of teachers at alternative schools in Georgia are white females. The majority of administrators are also white, but only slightly over half are male.

5. This study should be replicated in several years' time to determine if the proposed changes in funding for alternative school programs in Georgia will increase the existence of any of the 40 features Deborah Wiseman (1996) identified from the professional literature as essential for alternative schools serving at-risk students.

6. The perceptions of students attending alternative schools were not addressed in this study. A study should be conducted to determine the perceptions of students in relationship to the importance and existence of the features research indicated as important to the overall effectiveness of an alternative school program. This study should have a qualitative aspect to document the voices of the students attending these schools.

7. Research should be conducted that will examine the curriculum offered at alternative schools in Georgia and whether instruction is individualized to meet the needs of each student. Additionally, it is important to determine what mode of instruction works best for at-risk students. The importance of a curriculum and mode of instruction that meets the needs of at-risk students was stressed throughout the literature. The responses from the teachers and administrators participating in this study indicated that there is further need to explore the quality of instruction taking place at alternative schools.

8. Administrators and teachers indicated that extracurricular activities were not very important to alternative schools and existed to only a small extent within their schools. Alternative school administrators should consider increasing the availability of

extracurricular activities for at-risk students to help them develop social and leadership skills.

9. Administrators at alternative schools should evaluate the importance that both they and their teachers place on features examined in this study and the extent to which these features exist within their schools. More resources, if possible, should be devoted to those features that were deemed important but did not exist to a large extent. Additionally, administrators should consider investigating the need for features they did not perceive to be important to their schools. Further investigation may reveal that a need does in fact exist.

10. The importance of individualized personal and academic counseling was suggested both in the literature and in the results of this study. A study should be conducted to determine the size of the school relative to the counseling services provided, the extent of the counseling services offered to students, the qualifications of the individuals performing these services, and the effectiveness of the services rendered to the students.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Survey Instrument:

Administrator

Perceptions of Alternative Schools

Administrator's Survey

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. This survey contains forty items that may or may not be found at the alternative school where you are employed. You will be rating each item twice.

Your responses to the left side of this survey, labeled *Importance I Place on Each Item,* will rate the importance you place on each item whether or not the item exists at your school.

Your responses to the right side of this survey, labeled *Extent to Which This Item Exists in my School,* will rate the extent to which each item is found at your school.

Please complete the biographic and demographic data section on the back of this sheet.

Thank you for your assistance!

Importance I Place on Each Item

This item is:

1. very unimportant
2. somewhat unimportant
3. neither unimportant nor important
4. somewhat important
5. very important

- Please circle your response for each item.
- Please complete the ***Importance I Place on Each Item*** column in its entirety before completing ***Extent to Which This Item Exists in my School*** column.

Extent to Which This Item Exists in my School

This item is found in my school:

1. to a very small extent
2. to a small extent
3. to neither a small nor large extent
4. to a large extent
5. to a very large extent

1	2	3	4	5	1. Teachers choose to work within the alternative program.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	2. Teachers meet regularly with students to provide academic help and support.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	3. Teachers believe students can achieve.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	4. Students can choose to attend either a traditional or alternative school.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	5. Students attendance at the alternative school is regular.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	6. There is trust between students and teachers.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	7. Teachers and students speak freely with each other.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	8. Class size is maintained at 12 or fewer students per adult.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	9. Faculty and staff share school goals and visions.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	10. Teachers have the freedom to make instructional decisions.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	11. The supervisor/principal believes in the ability of his/her staff.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	12. The curriculum provides students with skills they will need to be productive members of society.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	13. Teachers accommodate students' individual learning styles.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	14. Peer group counseling sessions are scheduled regularly.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	15. Teachers provide positive reinforcement to students.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	16. Students are grouped according to instructional needs rather than by grade level.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	17. Daycare is provided for children of students.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	18. There is ongoing availability of medical health care for students.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	19. Students receive individualized academic guidance on a regular basis.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	20. Individual personal counseling is available as needed.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	21. Teachers routinely monitor and report student progress to students.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	22. Students and teachers have mutual respect.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	23. Teachers are responsive to students' academic and social needs.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	24. Faculty work in teams to plan instruction.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	25. The alternative school program was organized based on faculty and staff input.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	26. The supervisor/principal provides teachers with materials they need in order to teach effectively.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	27. Curriculum is individualized for each student.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	28. Students with like ability are grouped together for instruction.	1	2	3	4	5

(Continued on Back)

Perceptions of Alternative Schools (Continued)

Importance I Place on Each Item
This item is:
1. very unimportant
2. somewhat unimportant
3. neither unimportant nor important
4. somewhat important
5. very important

- Please circle your response for each item.
- Please complete the ***Importance I Place on Each Item*** column in its entirety before completing ***Extent to Which This Item Exists in my School*** column.

Extent to Which This Item Exists in my School
This item is found in my school:
1. to a very small extent
2. to a small extent
3. to neither a small nor large extent
4. to a large extent
5. to a very large extent

1	2	3	4	5	29. The alternative school has become the step between a traditional school and dropping out.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	30. The alternative school provides extracurricular activities.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	31. School policies and procedures support nongraded multiage classes.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	32. Flexible scheduling is available to students.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	33. Students speak positively about the alternative school.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	34. Students willingly share their ideas with faculty and staff.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	35. There was a schoolwide effort to develop curriculum for the alternative school program.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	36. The supervisor/principal sets a climate that supports teaching and learning.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	37. Teachers provide opportunities in which students will succeed.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	38. There is communication between teachers and supervisor/principal regarding student progress.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	39. Teachers routinely monitor and report student progress to parents.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	40. Faculty shares resources, ideas, and strategies with each other.	1	2	3	4	5

Biographic and Demographic Data

Instructions: Please respond to the items in this section about yourself and your school. In each instance place a checkmark (✓) or number (depending on the question) in the appropriate blank.

1. **Sex:**

   _____ Male _____ Female

2. **Age:**

   _____ Below 30 _____ 30-35 _____ 36-40 _____ 41-50 _____ Over 50

3. **Race:**

   _____ African American _____ White _____ Other

4. **Administrative experience at an alternative school (count the current year as one year):**

   _____ 1 Year _____ 2-5 Years _____ 6-10 Years _____ 11-20 Years _____ Over 20 Years

5. **Total teaching and administrative years of experience (count the current year as one year):**

   _____ 1 Year _____ 2-5 Years _____ 6-10 Years _____ 11-20 Years _____ Over 20 Years

6. **Setting of my alternative school:**

   _____ Mostly urban _____ Mostly suburban _____ Mostly rural/small town

7. **Current student enrollment at my school:**

   _____ Under 20 _____ 20-40 _____ 41-60 _____ 61-80 _____ 81-100 _____ Over 100

8. **Current student-teacher ratio at my school:**

   _____ 12 or fewer students to one teacher _____ More than 12 students to one teacher

9. **Counselors in my school:**

   _____ Number of full time _____ Number of part time

APPENDIX B

Survey Instrument:

Teacher

Perceptions of Alternative Schools

Teacher's Survey

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. This survey contains forty items that may or may not be found at the alternative school where you are employed. You will be rating each item twice.

Your responses to the left side of this survey, labeled *Importance I place on Each Item,* will rate the importance you place on each item whether or not the item exists at your school.

Your responses to the right side of this survey, labeled *Extent to Which This Item Exists in my School,* will rate the extent to which each item is found at your school.

Please complete the biographic data section on the back of this sheet.

Thank you for your assistance!

Importance I Place on Each Item

This item is:
1. very unimportant
2. somewhat unimportant
3. neither unimportant nor important
4. somewhat important
5. very important

- Please circle your response for each item.
- Please complete the ***Importance I Place on Each Item*** column in its entirety before completing ***Extent to Which This Item Exists in my School*** column.

Extent to Which This Item Exists in my School

This item is found in my school:
1. to a very small extent
2. to a small extent
3. to neither a small nor large extent
4. to a large extent
5. to a very large extent

Importance						Extent				
1	2	3	4	5	1. Teachers choose to work within the alternative program.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	2. Teachers meet regularly with students to provide academic help and support.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	3. Teachers believe students can achieve.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	4. Students can choose to attend either a traditional or alternative school.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	5. Student attendance at the alternative school is regular.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	6. There is trust between students and teachers.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	7. Teachers and students speak freely with each other.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	8. Class size is maintained at 12 or fewer students per adult.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	9. Faculty and staff share school goals and visions.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	10. Teachers have the freedom to make instructional decisions.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	11. The supervisor/principal believes in the ability of his/her staff.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	12. The curriculum provides students with skills they will need to be productive members of society.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	13. Teachers accommodate students' individual learning styles.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	14. Peer group counseling sessions are scheduled regularly.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	15. Teachers provide positive reinforcement to students.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	16. Students are grouped according to instructional needs rather than by grade level.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	17. Daycare is provided for children of students.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	18. There is ongoing availability of medical health care for students.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	19. Students receive individualized academic guidance on a regular basis.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	20. Individual personal counseling is available as needed.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	21. Teachers routinely monitor and report student progress to students.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	22. Students and teachers have mutual respect.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	23. Teachers are responsive to students' academic and social needs.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	24. Faculty work in teams to plan instruction.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	25. The alternative school program was organized based on faculty and staff input.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	26. The supervisor/principal provides teachers with materials they need in order to teach effectively.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	27. Curriculum is individualized for each student.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	28. Students with like ability are grouped together for instruction.	1	2	3	4	5

(Continued on Back)

Perceptions of Alternative Schools (Continued)

Importance I Place on Each Item
This item is:
1. very unimportant
2. somewhat unimportant
3. neither unimportant nor important
4. somewhat important
5. very important

- Please circle your response for each item.
- Please complete the ***Importance I Place on Each Item*** column in its entirety before completing ***Extent to Which This Item Exists in my School*** column.

Extent to Which This Item Exists in my School
This item is found in my school:
1. to a very small extent
2. to a small extent
3. to neither a small nor large extent
4. to a large extent
5. to a very large extent

1	2	3	4	5	29. The alternative school has become the step between a traditional school and dropping out.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	30. The alternative school provides extracurricular activities.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	31. School policies and procedures support nongraded multiage classes.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	32. Flexible scheduling is available to students.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	33. Students speak positively about the alternative school.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	34. Students willingly share their ideas with faculty and staff.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	35. There was a schoolwide effort to develop curriculum for the alternative school program.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	36. The supervisor/principal sets a climate that supports teaching and learning.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	37. Teachers provide opportunities in which students will succeed.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	38. There is communication between teachers and supervisor/principal regarding student progress.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	39. Teachers routinely monitor and report student progress to parents.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	40. Faculty shares resources, ideas, and strategies with each other.	1	2	3	4	5

Biographic Data

Instructions: Please respond to the items in this section about yourself. In each instance place a check mark (✓) in the appropriate blank.

8. Sex:

_____ Male _____ Female

9. Age:

_____ Below 30 _____ 30-35 _____36-40 _____ 41-50 _____ Over 50

10. Race:

_____ African American _____ White _____ Other

11. Teaching experience at an alternative school (count the current year as one year):

_____ 1 Year _____ 2-5 Years _____ 6-10 Years _____ 11-20 Years _____ Over 20 Years

12. Total teaching experience (count the current year as one year):

_____ 1 Year _____ 2-5 Years _____ 6-10 Years _____ 11-20 Years _____ Over 20 Years

APPENDIX C

Permission to Use Instrument

E Mail received from Deborah Wiseman
Formal permission letter has been requested

Date Sun, May 10, 1988 15:55:31 - 0700 (PDT)
From: d_wiseman<d_wiseman98@yahoo.com
Subject: Alternative Schools
To: dmcaffee@groupz.net

LESLIE:

IN REFERENCE TO USING MY INSTRUMENT IN YOUR RESEARCH, I WOULD BE HONORED. YOU HAVE MY PERMISSION TO MAKE ADAPTATIONS AS NECESSARY. PLEASE USE THE PROPER CITATIONS. I WISH YOU MUCH SUCCESS WITH YOUR RESEARCH AND FEEL FREE TO WRITE IF YOU HAVE ANY FURTHER QUESTIONS.

DEBBIE

Deborah Wiseman, Ed.D.
Work:
Deyton Primary
Spruce Pine, NC, 28777
828-765-2504

Home:
Rt. 3 Box 228
Spruce Pine, NC, 28777
828-765-6683

APPENDIX D

Internal Review Board

Approval Letter

APPENDIX E

Survey Cover Letter:

Administrator

ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE
GEORGIA SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
DEPARTMENT OF LEADERSHIP, TECHNOLOGY, & HUMAN DEVELOPMENT
POST OFFICE BOX 8131
STATESBORO, GEORGIA 30460-8131
(912) 681-5307 / 5301

ADULT EDUCATION
COUNSELOR EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP
HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENT SERVICES
INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNOLOGY
SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY
SPECIAL EDUCATION

March 11, 1999

Dear Administrator:

My name is Leslie McAffee. I am the assistant principal at Blakeney Elementary School in Waynesboro, Georgia. I am currently involved in the research and writing of my dissertation at Georgia Southern University in Statesboro, Georgia. I am conducting a study titled *The Perceptions of Teachers and Administrators Regarding Features of Alternative Schools in Georgia*. I am interested in determining the perceptions of administrators and teachers concerning the existence of specific program features at alternative schools in Georgia and the importance administrators and teachers place on these program features.

This letter is to request your assistance in collecting data for this study. As an educator myself, I am aware of the demands of your workload. It should take no more than 10 to 15 minutes to complete the attached survey titled *Perceptions of Alternative Schools,* constructed by Deborah Wiseman. I have also enclosed cover letters and copies of the survey for each of your teachers. In addition, I have attached to each teacher's survey a white business envelope. Your teachers will be asked to place their completed surveys in the white business envelopes and seal the envelope before returning it to you. Please return all sealed white envelopes and the administrator's survey in the large brown postage-paid, pre-addressed envelope within 10 days. The code on each survey and envelope will be used for follow-up purposes only. Please be assured that your responses will be kept confidential. **If you serve as both an administrator and teacher at your school, please complete only the administrator's survey**.

While participation is strictly voluntary, your input is vital to this study. Completion and return of the surveys will indicate permission to use the information provided in this study. The results of the study will be made available. If you have any questions, concerns, or comments pertaining to this study, please call me at 706/554-2265. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant in this study, they should be directed to the IRB coordinator at the Office for Research Services and Sponsored Programs at 912/681-5465.

Thank you in advance for your time and assistance with this study. Please return all surveys as soon as possible.

Respectfully

Leslie McAffee

Leslie McAffee
Doctoral Candidate
Georgia Southern University

APPENDIX F

Survey Cover Letter:

Teacher

ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE
GEORGIA SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
DEPARTMENT OF LEADERSHIP, TECHNOLOGY, & HUMAN DEVELOPMENT
POST OFFICE BOX 8131
STATESBORO, GEORGIA 30460-8131
(912) 681-5307 / 5301

ADULT EDUCATION
COUNSELOR EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP
HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENT SERVICES
INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNOLOGY
SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY
SPECIAL EDUCATION

March 11, 1999

Dear Alternative School Teacher:

My name is Leslie McAffee. I am the assistant principal at Blakeney Elementary School in Waynesboro, Georgia. I am currently involved in the research and writing of my dissertation at Georgia Southern University in Statesboro, Georgia. I am conducting a study titled *The Perceptions of Teachers and Administrators Regarding Features of Alternative Schools in Georgia.* I am interested in determining the perceptions of administrators and teachers concerning the existence of specific program features at alternative schools in Georgia and the importance administrators and teachers place on these program features.

This letter is to request your assistance in collecting data for this study. As an educator myself, I am aware of the demands of your workload. It should take no more than 10 to 15 minutes to complete the attached survey titled *Perceptions of Alternative Schools,* constructed by Deborah Wiseman. Attached to your survey is a white envelope. Please place your completed survey in the white envelope and give the sealed envelope to your administrator. Your administrator will mail all surveys to me in a large brown postage-paid, pre-addressed envelope. The code on each survey and envelope will be used for follow-up purposes only. Please be assured that your responses will be kept confidential.

While participation is strictly voluntary, your input is vital to this study. Completion and return of the surveys will indicate permission to use the information provided in this study. The results of the study will be made available. If you have any questions, concerns, or comments pertaining to this study, please call me at 706/554-2265. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant in this study, they should be directed to the IRB coordinator at the Office for Research Services and Sponsored Programs at 912/681-5465.

Thank you in advance for your time and assistance with this study. Please return the survey to your administrator as soon as possible.

Respectfully,

Leslie McAffee

Leslie McAffee
Doctoral Candidate
Georgia Southern University
Enclosures

APPENDIX G

Follow-up Postcard

POSTCARD

Leslie McAffee
P.O. Box 451
Waynesboro, GA 30830
March 15, 1999

Dear _____:

Recently, I sent you a survey concerning the perceptions of administrators and teachers at alternative schools. If you have mailed back the completed survey, I appreciate your promptness. If not, this card might serve as a reminder. Thank you for your valuable time in making this study a success.

Sincerely,

Leslie McAffee

Leslie McAffee

APPENDIX H

Final Reminder

March 29, 1999

Dear _____,

Recently, I sent a postcard reminding you of a survey pertaining to the perceptions of administrators and teachers of alternative schools. While the majority of the surveys have been returned, your response to the survey has not been received as of this date. It would be greatly appreciated if you would complete the survey and mail it to me within the week. I have included another postage-paid envelope for your convenience. I appreciate your assistance in this matter. Your participation and responses are very important to this study.

Sincerely,

Leslie McAffee

Leslie McAffee
Doctoral Candidate