A Descriptive Study of Public Alternative Schools in Georgia

Willie James Wiley

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A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY
OF PUBLIC ALTERNATIVE
SCHOOLS IN GEORGIA

Willie James Wiley
A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY
OF PUBLIC ALTERNATIVE
SCHOOLS IN GEORGIA

A Dissertation
Presented to
The College of Graduate Studies of
Georgia Southern University

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education
In
Educational Administration

By
Willie James Wiley

May 2000
April 24, 2000

To the Graduate School:

This dissertation entitled “A Descriptive Study of Public Alternative Schools in Georgia” and written by Willie James Wiley 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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We have reviewed this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

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Department Chair

Accepted for the College of Graduate Studies

[Signature]
Dean, College of Graduate Studies
DEDICATION

I wish to dedicate this dissertation to the Lord Jesus Christ and my faithful family:

Martha, Christie, and Buddy who have been so patient and loving with me at times when

I really did not deserve it.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to express my most sincere and profound gratitude to my Chairperson, Dr. Michael Richardson, and the members of my committees, both past and present. I would also like to acknowledge Dr. John Gooden, Dr. Garth Petrie, Dr. Patricia Lindauer, Dr. Randy Carlson, Dr. Leon Spencer, Dr. Chan and all of the Educational Leadership, Technology, and Human Development staff for being so accommodating and encouraging.
Willie James Wiley, who is married with two children, is a high school Vice-Principal and has worked as Assistant Principal, Teacher and a Principal, at the middle school level. The retired U.S. Army veteran holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Biology from Paine College, a Master of Arts in Public Administration from Webster University, and an Educational Specialist degree from Augusta State University. He became interested in alternative education while working as an At Risk Youth Prevention Education Specialist at the Aiken Center for Alcohol and Drug Abuse. The researcher formerly served as a member of the board of directors for an alternative school and worked closely with a Cities in Schools organization. As an Assistant Principal of a Middle School, the researcher piloted the school’s first At Risk organization for youth which was called the Individuals Committed to Excellence Club (I.C.E.). While Principal at Louisville Middle School, he co-authored a grant to obtain the first Middle School After-School Program for the Jefferson County School System. He is a student advocate who loves working with children. Dr. Michael Richardson directed the completion of his research project.
ABSTRACT
A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF PUBLIC ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS IN GEORGIA
MAY 2000
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The purpose of this study was to identify the types of alternative schools in Georgia, to describe the characteristics of the alternative schools, and their students, and to determine the primary goals of the alternative schools. The descriptive information was collected from 97 public alternative schools. The data collected by a 44 item multiple response survey included the perceptions of Georgia’s alternative school administrators. The survey items were developed from a literature search and site visits to five different models of alternative schools in a large urban school system. The responses were categorized to calculate the range, mean, percentages, and numerical frequencies for selected variables. The data were summarized by categories and arranged in frequency tables to facilitate interpretation of the findings. The results indicate that there are two general types (CrossRoads and Non-CrossRoads) and 11 different models of alternative schools ranging from a class within a school to community-based alternative schools.
Most are rural CrossRoads schools that receive funding to serve chronically disruptive youth, which comprise a majority of the student enrollment. A basic academic curriculum (reading, writing, and mathematics) is emphasized by 64% of schools, a teacher-pupil ratio of 1:15 exists in 73% of the CrossRoads schools and Isolation of Students is the primary role of 61% of schools. Seventy-two percent of the students are from single-parent homes and 75% of the CrossRoads' students qualify for Free or Reduced Lunch. African-American students comprise 59% of the CrossRoads schools' population.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

General Introduction

According to Abbott (1994), the current school reform efforts have endured since the restructuring and reform efforts of the 1960s and the 1970s. He contended that these reform movements were energized by demands for social change, which evolved as a result of the public's disenchantment with the roles of social institutions. Sinclair and Ghory (1987) maintained that as social institutions, schools have been traditionally regarded as forums for social change. They stated that the demands for social change precipitated criticism of the public schools because of the growing perception that schools should assume the role of change agent. Nevertheless, Sinclair and Ghory suggested that, “American public schools will always have an unfinished agenda, for this is their mission in a democratic society, both to transmit the best in culture to our children, and to prepare individuals for critical and creative social change” (p. 10).

Goodlad (1984) suggested that the latest iteration of criticism of public schools has persisted from the 1980s. He stated that this criticism originated from the public's disenchantment with social institutions' inability to curb school violence, truancy, drug abuse, and other social problems. Goodlad proposed that the public endorsed school reform as a method for addressing these and other social issues.
Other social issues included: (a) increased juvenile crime, (b) illiteracy, (c) increased drop out rates, and (d) students' disenchantment with traditional school. Goodlad suggested that many diverse problems that plague public education evolved from the culture.

Public schools have been challenged to minimize the adverse effects on students of single parents, those from blended families, and those who were homeless. Schools have been compelled to combat the effects of social influences such as drug abuse and addiction, sexual promiscuity, teen pregnancy, and high unemployment in order to facilitate learning. These factors and low socioeconomic status have significantly affected the dropout rates of students and subsequently diminished the capacity of educators to address students' academic needs (Sinclair & Ghory, 1987). They posited that the complex needs of students found the traditional public school ill-equipped to address many social needs and incapable of educating students based on societal expectations. Young (1990) asserted that traditional public schools have been scarcely equipped and inadequately structured to autonomously face the challenges of educating America's multicultural population.

Sinclair and Ghory (1987) contended that societal expectations forced school districts to assume the total role of child advocate in educating America's youth. In addition, schools have been required to assume diverse and unfamiliar roles and responsibilities with limited resources. They also suggested that because of the changing demographics and issues that affected students, teachers have been required to expand their roles in order to reach and teach a diverse population.
Goodlad (1984) stated that districts were also expected to implement and maintain other mandated programs without adequate financial support. Young (1990) stated that in striving to meet these demands, school administrators had to consider realigning existing school programs or designing alternative ones.

In addition to the inability of schools to address all of American society's concerns, Erkstrong, Goertz, Pollack, and Rock (1987) proposed a relationship between some of these concerns and the persistent problems of poor school attendance and an increased dropout rate. According to Erkstrong et al. research indicated that high school attrition was related to: (a) social background, (b) student achievement, (c) student attitude, and (d) individual behavior.

Erkstrong et al. (1987) proposed that the two background characteristics most strongly related to dropouts were socioeconomic status (SES) and race/ethnicity. It appeared that dropouts occurred more frequently among Hispanics and blacks from low SES than among those of higher SES. Additionally, they reported that dropouts occurred more often among Hispanics and blacks than whites. However, according to the National Council of Educational Statistics (NCES, 1991), Non-Hispanic whites made up the greatest percentage of all dropouts.

Erkstrong et al. (1987) reported that other background data, such as single parent homes, large families, and living in the south or in a large city, seemed to be significant. Low grades were also consistently associated with attrition. Furthermore, Erkstrong et al. reported that attrition was associated with such critical variables as school performance relating to grades and the extent of behavior problems.
The amount and type of support in the home and the availability of an educational support system affected school performance. Additionally, Erkstrong et al. maintained that no single program or policy could meet the needs of such a diverse dropout population. Nor could one program adequately address the myriad of social concerns that affected students' performance in school.

The research by Erkstrong et al. (1987) concluded that certain social problems might be remedied by programs that (a) facilitated school attendance of pregnant teens, (b) improved students who performed poorly and were dissatisfied with the school environment, and (c) combined work, education, and economic assistance for youth.

Furthermore, the research data generated by Erkstrong et al. (1987) indicated that a number of social factors contributed to poor school attendance or dropout rates and academic achievement of public school students. These factors such as socioeconomic status, family composition, and others are obviously interrelated; however, there was little indication as to which factors most negatively influenced school attendance and academic achievement. Nonetheless, it has become quite apparent that students are at-risk for high school completion or for having their academic progress inhibited by various social influences. The critical role of public school educators was to identify which services that they could provide students, whose success in school was adversely affected by the aforementioned social factors. Furthermore, the infrastructure of the traditional public schools was not conducive to optimizing the chances for success of the at-risk student (Erkstrong, 1987). Consequently, the needs of the at-risk students precipitated a demand for restructuring or reforming the public schools to provide services to enhance student success.
Natriello (1987) acknowledged that conditions or circumstances often hampered the rapid and significant changes needed in schools. These circumstances were restricted budgets, state regulation, union contracts, and public expectations. In regard to the school reform movement, Natriello alluded to the need for developing alternatives to traditional public school. He stated that, “while few recent studies about the condition of secondary schools have advocated alternatives to public schooling as a reform measure, such an option seemed reasonable due to the severe school problems faced by potential dropouts” (p. 87).

Alternative Schools

According to Raywid (1994), the most viable alternative for addressing school reform demands and student needs was considered to be the alternative school. She suggested that, “Alternative schools are the clearest example we have of what a restructured school might look like” (p. 26). She noted that many of the proposed reforms in traditional schools such as: (a) downsizing high schools, (b) authentic assessment, (c) student-teacher choice, and (d) teaching thematic units originated with the concept of alternative schools. She contended that alternative schools increased student achievement for all students.

McDill, Natriello, and Pallas (1987) contended that, “Alternative education programs or alternative schools are the most viable manifestation of this movement for varied learning options” (p. 127). They further stated that much of the impetus for instituting different schooling options stemmed from widespread concerns about discipline problems and victimization in American secondary schools.
Raywid (1994) defined three pure types of alternative schools. Type I, "Popular Innovations Schools", were schools of choice that sought to make school challenging and fulfilling for all. The organization and administration of these schools were considered nontraditional. These schools were structured to meet the unique needs of the students and focused on creating an environment conducive to learning. Raywid suggested that the nature and reason for Type I Schools implied that student problems were caused by the school-student match. Therefore, by altering a school's program and environment, one could alter student response, performance, and achievement.

Type II or "Last Chance Programs" were schools where students were enrolled as one last chance before expulsion. They included In-School Suspension Programs, Time-Out Rooms, and Long Term Placement for the chronically disruptive. According to Raywid, these schools focused on fixing the student. However, she argued that the research indicated that Type II programs made no difference in dropout or referral rates, corporal punishment, suspension or expulsion. Consequently, these programs did not contribute anything toward resolving the problems they were established to solve.

Type III or "Remedial Focus" alternatives were designed for students allegedly in need of academic or social/emotional assistance or rehabilitation. "The assumption has been that after successful treatment, students could return to mainstream programs" (p. 27). Raywid noted that Type III programs have demonstrated the potential to improve student behavior, but once students returned to their regular schools, the problems of disruptive behavior recurred. These programs also focused on fixing the student.
Abbott (1994) stated that the emergence of schools for the chronically disruptive led to the perception, “That alternative schools are primarily schools for the unruly and unmanageable” (p. 23). His position was that this was not the original purpose for alternative schools from their inception in the 1960s.

Neumann (1994) also contended that schools established for punitive purposes have been inappropriately associated with the alternative school movement, even though these schools represented a radical departure from the conventional education model. He also noted however, “There is no typical model of an alternative school” (p. 548). Neumann suggested that successful alternative schools identified with: (a) school, parent, and community collaboration, (b) site-based management as a method of operation, and (c) small-sized schools with a small pupil-teacher ratio. Successful alternative programs also: (a) employed teachers who also acted as counselors, (b) involved students in school governance, (c) enrolled students voluntarily, and (d) minimized or eliminated tracking or ability grouping.

The Georgia Department of Education’s (GDOE) Alternative Schools’ Proposal (1996) indicated that there had been strong legislative support for the establishment of alternative schools for the chronically disruptive, due to the public’s perception that certain students have posed serious threats to the educational process and the school environment. In spite of vocal support, there had been little financial support to fund the programs. Moreover, local boards of education were compelled to subsidize alternative schools and quality instructional programs in traditional public schools. Nevertheless, Abbott (1994) argued that chronically disruptive students did not belong in alternative schools.
Raywid (1994) stated that advocates for and against alternative schools disagreed on the definition of and the purpose for alternative schooling. She contended however, that alternative schools increased achievement for all students. Raywid acknowledged that there was little or no difference between the characteristics of alternative school students who chose the schools and those who were placed by an agency. She argued that despite conflicting views and ambiguous research data, alternative schools were characterized by two consistencies: (a) they were designed to respond to a group that has not been optimally served by traditional schools, and (b) they have represented varying degrees of departure from traditional schools.

In a meta-analysis of delinquency-related outcomes, Cox, Davidson, and Bynum (1995) concluded that alternative programs had a small positive effect on school performance, attitudes toward school, and self-esteem. However, the analysis revealed that alternative programs did not affect juvenile delinquency. Furthermore, the researchers concluded from this analysis that open admission programs were less effective than programs which targeted a specific population of "at-risk" delinquents or students who were marginally successful in academic studies.

Need for the Study

Apparently, the traditionally structured public schools have not provided childcare services, employment service, counseling on substance abuse and addiction or other social services. It was unrealistic to expect that traditional schools could fulfill these social functions or function as social service agencies. In order for schools to fulfill the needs of students with such varied needs, the schools would have to become large multidisciplinary social service agencies.
Nevertheless, the research indicated that socioeconomic background, race, ethnicity, lack of family support and other variables placed students at-risk for high school completion. These variables also significantly impacted students' performance in school.

Dropouts often came from homes with weak educational support systems, few study aids and were often uninvolved in non-school related learning activities. Furthermore, they were less likely to have both parents at home, earned lower grades in school, did less homework, and had more discipline problems in school than others.

The aforementioned social conditions impacted public education and precipitated the need for developing alternative educational paradigms to address those concerns. Child advocates and practitioners have expressed concern about students whose success in traditional schools may be hampered by environmental factors and who are only marginally served because of the way these schools operate. Some practitioners questioned the rationale for establishing and sustaining alternative schools solely for the chronically disruptive, when an undetermined number are pushed out or drop out for other reasons. Consequently, it was necessary to examine the various types of alternative schools, their purposes and the accompanying ambiguities while exploring the options in education (Goodlad, 1984).

According to Sinclair and Ghory (1987) school administrators have been challenged to provide an array of services for students from diverse backgrounds who have vastly different social needs in addition to academic assistance. Furthermore, there had been little or no conclusive evidence to demonstrate that traditional schools have developed the capacity to address these needs with conventional approaches to curriculum, instructional methodologies, and school design.
A review of the literature and assessments of alternative school programs revealed that historically, most of the research had been lacking regarding quantifiable outcomes associated with alternative schooling. Most of the research on alternative schools was anecdotal in content. Heretofore, there was also little documentation indicating which type of alternative school was most effective. (Cox et al. 1995).

In reference to the need for further research on alternative schools, Cox, Davidson, and Bynum (1995) concluded that there were few published studies regarding the effectiveness of alternative schools. They theorized that the lack of published works was a result of the difficulty of publishing non-significant findings. These researchers argued that more emphasis needed to be placed on disseminating alternative education research. Furthermore, Cox et al. stated that little is known about why some alternative programs were more successful than others were.

In their work on the impact of the alternative school structure, Kershaw and Blank (1993) concluded,

In terms of research on alternative schools, it is apparent that a gap exists between ‘what is’ and ‘what ought to be’ in two areas. There is a void in the research base about how schools create optimal learning conditions for all students…. There is also a lack of current research in an area of significant concern to school systems. There is a need to continue to study those schools, teachers, and students who are successful in overcoming obstacles that drive so many students to the margin. Such research has implications for other communities desiring to make traditional school structures more responsive to the needs of all students (p. 3).
Additional research could provide some insight as to what characteristics of alternative schools most significantly affected the achievement of particular stated goals. The lack of a clear definition of the term “alternative school” inhibited the process of categorizing schools as alternatives unless the schools’ goals and purpose were known. In addition, there are so many different types and models of alternative school programs that it was very difficult to characterize one school or program as effective in contrast to another program. For instance, Karlin (1995) in a study of the Georgia CrossRoads Alternative Programs reported that alternative school programs varied from one location to another. She recommended that, “We need to identify the variables which describe Georgia Crossroads Programs and how the programs operating across Georgia vary” (p. 57).

Karlin (1995) suggested that these variables needed to be related to the outcomes of the programs and to the students’ needs and concerns. These unknown variables needed to be correlated to the programs’ outcomes and students’ needs. Such a correlation would aid in determining which combinations of factors maximize the outcomes. These factors included philosophy, structure, curriculum, methods of instruction, operating procedures, staffing, and characteristics of students served. Karlin also proposed that schools should be categorized to distinguish the various approaches used. Karlin also proposed the initiation of a study to determine why certain types of alternative schools work best for some students or communities/schools and other types are best for other students/communities.
A descriptive study of 27 Georgia Secondary Alternative Schools by Chalker (1994) revealed that the majority of programs did not keep written evaluative data showing that predetermined student objectives and needs had been effectively met. Furthermore, program characteristics, the identification of student characteristics, and program evaluation were fairly inconsistent at the time of the study. Chalker’s study also concluded that staff development for teachers was not consistently planned for and that separate alternative schools had little means of funding and resources outside of their locality.

The dearth of conclusive research data on alternative schools demanded that constructive research be conducted to provide administrators definitive evidence for the school reform debate. It was important that quality research be completed to aid policy makers and practitioners in making informed decisions about meeting the needs of students in public education.

A study of the alternative school concept could provide practitioners a paradigm for addressing the problem of meeting students’ needs and for increasing literacy and competency. In addition, data from such a study could be used as a basis for comparing and contrasting the effectiveness of traditional public schools.

The purpose of this study was to identify and categorize Georgia’s public alternative schools, and to describe those schools’ characteristics. In addition, this study was designed to identify and classify the characteristics of students in Georgia’s alternative schools. This study had implications for the students who had been designated “at risk”, by assisting in the identification of a type of alternative school that was prevention oriented, in contrast to one established for the chronically disruptive.
The prevention-oriented alternative school could enhance and increase the success rate of the “at risk” student by providing a model for intervention before students are “pushed out” of school. Traditional schools could also emulate such models.

Statement of the Problem

A preliminary review of literature and research data on Georgia alternative schools indicated little information about alternative education that would aid practitioners in identifying resources for students who were designated at risk. Alternative schools research data identified the prevalence of alternative schools for disruptive students and disclosed little about alternative educational opportunities for students who were otherwise classified. In addition, the research data revealed very little information about the goals and objectives of established alternative schools in relationship to the students they served. Consequently, there existed a shortage of information about the types, characteristics, goals and purposes of Georgia’s public alternative schools; and the characteristics of the students they served.

The absence of information about Georgia’s public alternative schools posed a serious challenge for public school administrators who were required to facilitate and support the education of students with diverse needs for which traditional public schools have no solutions. In addition, it was important that school administrators have information with which they could develop models of intervention to address issues that adversely affect students’ potential to optimize their success within the traditional public schools. This information was needed so that policy makers and practitioners could create learning opportunities for all students. Such comprehensive information about alternative schools was unavailable in the public domain to school administrators.
The two major studies of Georgia’s alternative schools revealed a variety of alternative programs with various purposes based on the preferences of each school system. One study by Karlin (1995) focused on the CrossRoads program, a state legislature funded initiative which was originally heralded as a program for “at risk” students only. Karlin’s study revealed a need for identifying variables that described Georgia alternative school programs and how the programs operated across the state. She also proposed a study of the correlation of these variables to program outcomes and students’ needs and concerns.

The second study of Georgia’s Secondary Alternative Schools by Chalker (1994) concluded that in different school systems, alternative schools varied significantly in purpose, scope, and structure. He also discovered that there were Non-CrossRoads schools that had little or no funding except that provided by local school districts. This study also disclosed a shortage of evaluative data by which alternative schools could make decisions relative to the achievement of goals and objectives.

Both the Karlin (1995) and the Chalker (1994) studies helped to define the frontier of research on Georgia alternative schools. However, these studies also revealed the lack of conclusive, descriptive data about all Georgia alternative schools. The issue of identifying the types or kinds of Georgia alternative schools warranted further study based on the scarcity of available research and the conclusions of the aforementioned researchers. In addition, missing criteria for classifying alternative schools was needed to ameliorate further research on alternative education in Georgia.
A study of the alternative school concept could provide practitioners a paradigm for addressing the problem of meeting students' needs and for increasing students' achievement in school. This study addressed these issues in facilitating the development of a comprehensive taxonomy of Georgia alternative schools.

Research Questions

This study addressed the following research questions.

(1) What are the different types of alternative schools in Georgia?
   a. What are the goals of each type of alternative school?
   b. What are the characteristics of the different types of Georgia's alternative schools?

(2) What are the characteristics of students served in these alternative schools?

(3) What are the perceptions of Georgia's alternative school administrators towards alternative school issues?

Limitations

The following limitations of this study existed:

(1) Local policy prohibited data collection in certain locations.

(2) Data presented was self-reported.

(3) The Karlin and Chalker studies provided no definitive database for comparison.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following terms were defined.

Administrator – a principal or any person delegated supervisory, leadership, and/or management responsibilities for an alternative school.
At-risk - any juvenile in grade 6-12 whose social, economic, political and/or educational development could be inhibited or affected by factors such as: (a) single family dweller, (b) low socioeconomic status, (c) poor academic performance, (d) chronic behavior problems; or continuous involvement in antisocial behavior.

CrossRoads – A program initiated by the Georgia legislature and monitored by the State Department of Education, to provide funding for alternative school programs that serve primarily chronically disruptive students, students returning from a Department of Children and Youth Services facility, or reclaimed dropouts.

Dropout – “Any student previously enrolled in a school who is no longer actively enrolled as indicated by 15 days of consecutive absences. A former student who has not satisfied local standards for graduation and who has not enrolled in another state-licensed educational institution” (Morrow 1987, p. 49).

Free or Reduced Lunch – a privilege extended to Georgia’s schools’ students who reside in homes where the documented family income places the family at or below the poverty level. The designated amount is based on family size and a base line annual income prescribed by the Department of Human Resources.

Juvenile Delinquency – Antisocial or criminal behavior by children or adolescents (Morris 1976, p.712).

Non-CrossRoads School – Any alternative school or program that does not receive funds solely for serving students described in the CrossRoads’ operational guidelines.

Open Admission Programs – Alternative programs for which students volunteer to enroll, and not as a result of placement or as a consequence for misconduct etc.
Public Alternative School – "Any school that provides alternative learning experiences to those experiences provided by traditional schools and that is available by choice to every family within its community at no extra cost" (Young 1990, p. 2).

Site Based Management – a principle of school governance, which identifies the school’s staff and administration as the primary decision-makers for management of the school. The school’s staff has the autonomy to decide on, plan, and implement strategies relating to: (a) structure (b) curriculum, (c) staffing, (d) instruction, (e) discipline, and (f) the general management of the school.

Student participants - students who are enrolled in an alternative educational setting for reasons such as (a) chronically disruptive, (b) gifted, and (c) intellectually challenged, (d) Physically disabled, (e) social/emotional disorders or (f) other specific needs.

Subjects – alternative school administrators, principals or directors who participated in the study.

Traditional Alternative School – one consisting of: (a) a small pupil teacher ratio, (b) school parent and community collaboration, (c) site based management, (d) voluntary participation by students and staff, (e) student participation in school governance, (f) availability of counseling and other human services based on students’ needs, (g) a diverse and flexible curriculum designed to meet student needs and (h) Instructional strategies commensurate with students' learning styles.

Traditional Public School – a school structured and operated around a fixed curriculum, fixed schedule, and a philosophy that embodies teaching using teacher-focused activities such as lectures supplemented by a textbook and work sheets.
There was little or no emphasis on meeting the affective and cognitive needs of students by addressing students' learning styles, using hands-on techniques or evaluating students based on accomplishment of individual goals.

Summary

The public's interest in alternative schools as a part of the movement for school reform has been revitalized due to negative social factors that inhibit the education of public school students. Some researchers endorsed alternative schools as a viable way of addressing students' needs and society's concerns about discipline problems and victimization in public schools. This study was designed to solicit information from alternative school administrators regarding alternative school operation relative to the infrastructure, curricula, teaching methods, and characteristics of students served.

Despite the renewed interest in alternative education, there was very little empirical data supporting the efficacy of alternative schools in contrast to traditional public schools, considering the reported increase in cost. Opponents of alternative schools contended that the cost of operating alternative schools outweighed the benefits.

Research of Georgia alternative schools conducted by Chalker and Harnish revealed a lack of descriptive data about public alternative schools and significant variances in schools based on their purpose, scope and structure. Furthermore, there was also little evaluative data relative to perceived goals and objectives of existing alternative schools. These researchers concluded that the variances in models and types of alternative school programs further inhibited any comparison of effective alternative programs simply based on the type of students served.
Consequently, the need to classify or categorize alternative schools based on their goals and objectives, the characteristics of the schools and of the students served emerged as a significant research need. Also data from administrators who operated them was needed.

The purpose of this study was to identify and categorize Georgia’s public alternative schools, and to describe those schools’ characteristics. In addition, this study was designed to identify and classify the characteristics of students in Georgia’s alternative schools. Descriptive research methodology was used to collect information by administering surveys to alternative school principals or administrators.

The study focused on collecting information about the different types of alternative schools in Georgia, the goals of each type of alternative school, the characteristics of the different types of Georgia alternative schools, and the characteristics of the students served in these alternative schools. In addition, the study endeavored to elicit the perceptions of alternative schools' administrators regarding alternative school operation relative to the infrastructure, curricula, teaching methods, and characteristics of students served.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The current school reform movement in America allegedly evolved as part of what was characterized as a social revolution during the 1960s and 1970s (Abbott, 1994). The social revolution precipitated public criticism of schools and essentially targeted them as the scapegoat for other failing social systems in society. This tendency of expecting schools to remedy society's ills seemed to be a natural assumption since, according to Sinclair and Ghory (1987), schools had generally been regarded as instruments of social change. The authors stated that as a result of this perception by the public, “American public schools will always have an unfinished agenda which includes the mission of transmitting the best in culture to our children and preparing individuals for critical and creative social change” (p. 10).

Goodlad (1984) suggested that the criticism of public schools had persisted from the 1980s. He stated that this criticism originated from the public's disenchantment with public schools' and other social institutions' inability to resolve school violence, truancy, drug use and abuse, and other social problems. Goodlad proposed that the public demanded school reform as the preferred method for addressing these social issues and others such as increased juvenile crime, illiteracy, increased dropout rates and students' disenchantment with traditional school.
He argued that these issues, which were as numerous as the pluralistic groups of American culture, were too pervasive and diverse for traditional public schools to address. Goodlad also suggested that many of the challenges for public education evolved from the culture and presented a formidable challenge for public schools.

Public schools had been challenged to minimize the negative effects on students of single parents, those from blended families, and those who were homeless. Schools had been compelled to combat the effects of social influences such as drug abuse and addiction, sexual promiscuity, teen pregnancy, and high unemployment in order to facilitate learning. These factors and low socioeconomic status had significantly affected the dropout rates of schools and subsequently diminished the capacity of schools to address students' academic needs (Sinclair & Ghory, 1987). They posited that the traditional public school was impotent to address many social needs and incapable of educating students based on societal expectations. Young (1990) asserted that public schools had been scarcely equipped and inadequately structured to autonomously face the challenges of educating America's multicultural population.

Goodlad (1984) stated that the public's lack of confidence in other failing social institutions led to this albatross being laid at the feet of public schools. The erosion of societal norms, which accompanied the social revolution also, created significantly more demands on public schools. The demands on public schools escalated because the prevailing social issues and conditions seemed to adversely affect the academic achievement and conduct of the public school students. Therefore, schools were expected to do more to counteract the effects of prevalent social issues and conditions that negatively affected teaching and learning.
Challenges for Traditional Public Schools

Public schools were forced to reform or restructure to meet the ever increasing demands of the students whose social environment spawned teen pregnancy, substance abuse or addiction, antisocial behavior and little motivation for traditional education (Ghory & Sinclair, 1987). The changing demographics of American society mandated a change in schools' culture, focus, and strategies for delivering instruction. Raywid (1994) who stated that, "A changing population makes new sorts of schools imperative" echoed this conclusion about the mandate for redirecting public schools (p. 28).

Males (1993) proposed that besides being asked to solve social problems like teen pregnancy, schools were expected to buttress a hidden agenda. This agenda included the desire to reform unwanted behaviors of youth irrespective of the adult behaviors that influenced them. The agenda also included the pressure for schools to expand their role in teaching behaviors and values omitted by fragmented families. Other societal expectations included the search for a quick fix without the sacrifices required to address youth poverty, the lack of opportunity for youth and the widespread desires of many adults to socially corrupt teenagers.

In responding to the persistent clamor for school reform, Stedman (1993) reported that, "In the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s school critics issued a steady stream of reports claiming that the schools were in decline and recommending sweeping reform" (p. 215). He cited a number of reports with supporting and conflicting data regarding the condition of schools in America, which continued to fuel the notion that schools were in dire need of reform. Stedman noted that schools were not as bad as was previously thought, nor were they as good as the reformers envisioned they could be.
Glines and Long (1992) noted that the enormous changes around the globe necessitated a reexamination of personal, institutional, and community lifestyles, values and priorities. They contended that societies would have to create entirely new learning systems. Glines and Long argued that, "Modest reform efforts did not cure the ailing schools" (p. 557). Therefore, in the coming decades, the education system must accommodate a wider range of academic, social, personal, interpersonal, and public service options for all members of the community.

Stedman (1993) suggested that schools might not have to be better but different, in order to meet the needs of students from diverse backgrounds. He added that teachers and educators were well aware of the issues that affected schools and were intimately involved in reform efforts related to: (a) curriculum, (b) pedagogy, (c) school organization, (d) governance, (e) school choice, and (f) evaluation. He concluded that while there was need for national school reform, the reform efforts needed to be coordinated and focused on a comprehensive structural overhaul of school systems.

Characteristics of At-Risk Students

Notwithstanding the inability of schools to address all of American society's concerns, Erkstrong, Goertz, Pollack, and Rock (1987) proposed a correlation between social concerns and the persistent problem of an increased dropout rate. According to Erkstrong et al., some research had indicated that high school attrition was related to social background, student achievement, student attitudes, and individual behavior. They also proposed that the two background characteristics most strongly related to dropouts were socioeconomic status (SES) and race/ethnicity.
It appeared that dropouts occurred more frequently among Hispanics and blacks from low SES than among those of higher SES. Additionally, they reported that dropouts occurred more often among Hispanics and blacks than whites. However, according to the National Council of Educational Statistics (1991), non-Hispanic whites make up the greatest percentage of all dropouts. An earlier report by Natriello (1987) stated that white or Hispanic females were less likely to drop out of school than white or Hispanic males. Conversely, African American females were slightly more likely to drop out than African American males. The majority of dropouts usually did so after entering the ninth grade. Natriello also reported that male students were more likely to leave school because of poor grades and behavior problems.

Natriello (1987) noted that dropouts generally came from homes with weak educational support systems, had fewer study aids, and fewer opportunities for non-school related learning. Additionally, dropouts were less likely to have both parents at home, generally had lower grades in school, did less homework, and had more discipline problems in school. Furthermore, dropouts were more likely to have mothers with a low level of education, mothers that were employed, mothers with low expectations for their offspring, and more likely had parents who were less interested in or rarely monitored both in-school and out-of school activities.

Some other interesting characteristics of dropouts as reported by Natriello (1987) were:

- Most of them were not satisfied with their schooling.
- Most of them envisioned themselves as finishing school.
Most saw school as a place where one got in trouble; suspension, probation, cutting classes were more frequent behaviors of this group.

Most of them pictured high school as a place where teachers were not interested in students and the discipline system was unfair (p. 85).

Erkstrong et al. (1987) reported that other background data, such as single parent homes, large families, and living in the south or in a large city, seemed to be significant. Low grades were also consistently associated with attrition. Furthermore, Erkstrong et al. reported that the critical variables were school performance (grades) and the extent of behavior problems, which were determined by home and the availability of an educational support system. Additionally, they maintained that no single program or policy could meet the needs of such a diverse dropout population. Nor could one program adequately address the myriad of social concerns that affected students' performance in school.

Natriello (1987) cited a correlation between schools with high dropout and truancy rates and the high rate of student disorders and discipline problems. Such schools could be described by the prevalence of certain unfavorable characteristics. These characteristics included lack of good leadership and management, and adequate teacher-administration cooperation. In addition, these schools had teachers who emphasized control in classrooms rather than instructional objectives, and imposed ambiguous sanctions. These schools' students perceived that rules were not fair or clear, and did not believe in conventional school rules. Natriello also stated that certain schools were victimized by urban social disorganization.
Such schools were located in large cities, were large in size, and had a high proportion of minority students. These schools were also located in areas of high unemployment, high crime areas; and were poverty stricken and served students from homes that had many females as the head of the households.

It was unrealistic to expect that the efforts of traditional public schools or alternative schools alone will significantly abate the dropout rate or improve student achievement for the at-risk student. Schools alone, cannot change the socioeconomic status of their students, alter family composition, or change the social backgrounds and environments from which the students emerge. Nevertheless, it was possible that altering certain aspects of schooling could negate or minimize the effects of these variables that place students at-risk for successful school completion.

For instance, Natriello (1987) stated, “if the intent of social policy is to reduce the number of dropouts, then policy and practices of schools will need to respond to the conflicts and estrangement from schools arising out of the social and family background of students” (p. 77). This assertion implied that certain characteristics of schools must change.

The research data indicated that some alterable characteristics of school which positively impacted student success included such factors as a small size (total numbers and pupil-teacher ratio), the structure and content of the curriculum such as an individualized one, and varied instructional strategies to address skill deficits (Natriello, 1987).
Erkstrong et al. (1987) identified three major interventions to address certain characteristics of at-risk populations. These were programs designed to help pregnant teens remain in school, programs directed toward students who performed poorly and were dissatisfied with the school environment and programs to help youth with economic needs such as programs that combined work and education.

The Alternative Schools Movement

According to Kellmayer (1995) some writers suggested that alternative schools evolved from the progressive education movement espoused by John Dewey in the 1920s. Others, like Abbott (1994), reported that the current alternative education movement had its genesis in the social revolution of the 1960s. Kellmayer contended that despite the origin of the education reform movement, alternative schools originated from social trends of the sixties. For example “freedom schools”, which were started to combat racism, and “free schools”, which developed as forums for philosophical expression, emerged with “alternative programs”. These alternative programs provided different learning environments and structures for students who did not “fit in” traditional programs.

Abbott (1994) stated that the alternative school movement was one aspect of educational reform, which evolved as a response to the social upheaval that took place in the late 1960s and 1970s. He proposed that, “Alternative schools tried to harness the rebellious spirit of the times, to be creative, and to teach something” (p. 23). Moreover, a number of alternative school programs were highly innovative, introduced a variety of subjects and methods, and served a diverse population.
Some aspects of successful alternative programs included: (a) seminars, (b) the absence of grades – students earned credit, (c) community service, (d) independent study, (e) work experience, (f) conference attendance, (g) parental involvement, and (h) voluntary student enrollment. Abbott (1994) also acknowledged that there were other alternative programs which were carbon copies of traditional high schools but with smaller class sizes and "watered-down courses for problem students" (p. 23).

Leue (1992) reported that in the mid-1960s, thousands of small alternative schools sprang up across the United States and Canada. These schools appeared to vary widely in programs and policies. Nonetheless, there were common factors associated with the origin of these schools. These factors were: (a) a disenchantment with conventional schooling, (b) a desire to reform education, and (c) often, the belief that schools should be controlled by the population served, including children.

Smink (1997) also acknowledged that alternative schools were not new to the educational community. They emerged as strategies for dropout prevention in the 1950s and 1960s. According to Smink, alternative schools with an emphasis on dropout prevention emerged as primary intervention models, in contrast to those for meeting the needs of students who had already dropped out of school. He stated that such schools had been designed to provide an alternative to dropping out of school, with special attention to the student's individual social needs and the academic requirements for a high school diploma. Smink added that numerous models of alternative schools were developed to serve local needs and operated with varying degrees of success. These alternative schools were basically discontinued as educators concluded that this strategy had little effect on the dropout rate, and as district budgets began to shrink in the 1970s.
Some educators chose not to use the word “alternative” in conjunction with “school” to lend more credence to the notion that the concept of alternatives referred to the entire educational process. In fact, they contended that alternative schools could be models to point the way for reform in all education (Scherer, 1994). For example, Scherer reported that some practitioners who were school reform proponents objected to the use of the term “alternative school” because it implied that traditional education should stay in place. Moreover, it suggested that while regular education worked for most students, alternatives were required for those who were exceptional – who in some way did not fit in. According to Scherer (1994), whether one used the term “alternatives” or “alternative school”, some practitioners agreed that: (a) creating smaller schools, (b) granting parents choice in schools, and (c) dialoguing about what it meant to be an educated person were key elements in designing alternatives to traditional schooling.

Fizzell and Raywid (1997) submitted that since the term “alternative school” had no clear meaning; there was little value in contending for a single definition of alternative schools. They concluded that alternative schools were structured according to the answers to the questions: (a) to which basic problems are alternative education programs designed to respond? and (b) who is alternative education created to serve? Consequently, alternative schools differed according to their philosophies or missions such as: (a) providing a responsive and challenging education, or (b) segregating, containing, and reforming a disruptive population.

In addition, alternative schools differed as to what aspect of education would be addressed to enhance student success. Specific attention to curriculum, instruction, environment, student behavior, or their psychic and academic health could be needed.
Fizzel and Raywid (1997) proposed that alternative schools also differed according to the types of roles they played. For example, some schools were classified as educational and challenging, or based on the curricula they adopted and the level of service they provided. Other alternative schools were more noted for the custodial roles they assumed.

The debate as to the origin, purpose, nature, and efficacy of alternative schools fueled speculation about which population could benefit from their existence. The question of whether alternative school programs should be designed and limited to gifted, special needs, or at-risk students continued to be an issue in school systems with limited resources.

Rationale or Purpose for Alternative Schools

Despite repeated clamoring for school reform, Raywid (1994) posited that the harder and longer one worked at school reform, two important conclusions emerged:

(1) No single practice had the power to transform a failing student or school into a successful one.

(2) There were no fail-safe solutions, or sequences or strategies that were guaranteed to work.

Nonetheless, Raywid concluded, alternative schools were the clearest example of what restructured schools might look like. She proposed that traditional public education necessitated restructuring in order to meet the needs of students in a changing society. This restructuring entailed providing options or alternatives to address students’ needs.
Smink (1997) proposed that alternative schooling opportunities were needed because the traditional school system was no longer serving the needs of the students and family lifestyles common in the 1990s. However, he stated that the most critical issue was which kind of alternative schools should be designed and offered in our public schools. Moreover, what should the alternative programs resemble and how should they be integrated with the regular school programs in each community?

In citing the rationale for alternative schools, Kershaw and Blank (1993) contended that many of these schools were the result of the failure of traditional schools to address the needs of large groups of students. They maintained that school systems in the United States were considering and implementing a variety of organizational structures to address the diverse needs of students. Therefore, numerous types of alternative school structures were added to the traditional public, private, and parochial school settings. They argued that some alternatives offered students more choices while others limited those choices. For example, magnet schools provided expanded offerings and some highly specialized schools offered a narrower perspective. Some of these alternatives existed within the traditional schools while others were distinct entities.

Kershaw and Blank (1993), suggested that, “Alternative schools be viewed as school structures that empowered teachers and students and personalized teaching, and learning rather than as school settings that existed for those who did not ‘fit’ with the traditional school structure” (p. 1). They reported that the candidates for alternative schooling included students who were gifted and talented, poor, of low ability and disruptive types.
In responding to the needs of these disenfranchised students, school systems in our country were scrambling to realign school structures and options to accommodate them. Additionally, Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, and Fernandez (1989) reported that one of the most extensive studies of alternative schools concluded that its recommendations applied equally to students who were or were not at-risk.

General Classification of Alternative Schools

Kellmayer (1995) stated that alternative programs could be classified according to their location, the nature of the program and the problems or discrepancies for which the program was created. For example, alternative programs were developed to serve as magnet schools or to serve disruptive, disaffected, adjudicated, or pregnant youth. Moreover, such programs could be designated to address students' needs that were cognitive, perceptual, affective, social or time-related. Smink (1997) postulated that it was virtually impossible to neatly package practices for effective alternative schools for at-risk students. Nevertheless, successful alternative schools featured: a maximum teacher-student ratio of 1:10, a student base not exceeding 250 students, a clearly stated mission and discipline code, and a caring faculty that received continual staff development. Additionally, such schools had a school staff with high expectations for student achievement, a learning program specific to the students' expectations and learning styles, a flexible school schedule with community involvement and support; and a total commitment to each student's success. Neumann (1994) maintained that, "There is no typical model of an alternative school" (p. 548).
He suggested that successful alternative schools were characterized by: (a) school, parent, and community collaboration, (b) site-based management as a method of operation, and (c) small-school size with a small pupil-teacher ratio. In addition, effective alternative programs: (a) employed teachers who were also counselors, (b) permitted cooperative roles for students who were involved in school governance, (c) advocated voluntary enrollment, and (d) de-emphasized tracking or ability grouping.

How to Sustain an Alternative School

Deblois (1994) reported that one prevalent trend in the alternative school movement was that programs tended to be eliminated depending on the shifts in political emphasis. He suggested that alternative schools generally had a brief life span. However, he maintained that alternative schools could be developed despite shifts in political emphasis or changes in economic conditions.

Deblois (1994) noted that consistency was one way to insure longevity of alternative programs. Another way was collaboration between the district schools, and independence. He listed the following survival strategies for alternative school programs:

• Consider the school's location. An alternative school that is large enough to survive autonomously might have a better chance of developing its own mission and culture.

• Determine an appropriate size. A good range is from 100-160 students. A smaller size may not be able to justify its existence. A larger size runs the risk of becoming a dumping ground for students who may not be able to get help there.
• Create a program that is as free as possible from administrative dictates and union contracts. Staff the program with teachers who will take responsibility for the program's failures as well as its successes.

• Establish direct lines of communication with parents and counselors in regular schools.

• Seek out financial assistance and volunteers from community groups and local businesses.

• Publicize the successes of the school and relate those successes to the school's mission.

• Monitor per-pupil costs in the alternative program versus those in the district.

• Make sure most of the school's money comes from local tax dollars (p. 34).

General Types of Alternative Schools

Raywid (1994) reported that some educators scoffed at the idea that alternative schools offer anything of value for learning. She suggested that a primary reason was that several distinct types of alternatives existed and not all were models for emulation. Moreover, Raywid posited that alternative schools were usually identified as one of three types with particular programs emulating a mixture of the three types. She described these three types as follows.

Type I, "Popular Innovations" were schools of choice, which sometimes resembled magnet schools, and were likely to reflect programmatic themes or emphases related to content or instructional strategy. These schools usually reflected organizational design and administrative procedures, which were markedly different from traditional public schools.
According to Raywid, these were today’s clearest examples of “restructured” schools. Type I schools were reportedly less costly than Type III programs.

Type II, “Last Chance Programs” were programs to which students were usually sentenced as one last chance prior to expulsion. These programs focused on behavior modification, and rarely stressed modification of the curriculum or pedagogy.

Some Type II programs required students to perform the work of the regular classes from which they were removed while others simply focused on the basics, emphasizing rote, skills, and drill. An analysis of Florida schools’ Type II programs indicated that such programs made no difference in dropout or referral rates, corporal punishments, suspension, or expulsion. Therefore, little could be stated about the success rate of these schools.

Type III, “Remedial Focus” alternatives were designed for students needing remediation or rehabilitation – academic, social/emotional or both. These programs often focused on remedial work and on stimulating social and emotional growth – often through emphasizing the school itself as a community. These programs were said to be more costly than the others, and the success experienced in the improvement of student behavior was temporary. The problems of truancy, disruptive behavior, or lack of effort recurred when students returned to their regular schools.

In her taxonomy of alternative school programs, Raywid (1997) incorporated the nature and purpose of alternative programs and emphasized the importance of clearly identifying the needs of the students served. For example, she stated that Types II and III programs focused on fixing the student while Type I programs focused on changing the environment of education.
Raywid concluded that three sets of factors contributed to the success of alternative schools. First, the schools generated and sustained community within them. Second, they made learning engaging. And third, they provided the school organization and structure needed to sustain the first two.

Models of Alternative Schools

Smink (1997) described five basic models of alternative schools:

- The alternative classroom, designed as a self-contained classroom within a traditional school, simply offering varied programs in a different environment.

- The School-within-a-School, housed within a traditional school but having semi-autonomous or specialized education programs.

- The Separate Alternative School, separated from the regular schools and having different academic and social adjustment program.

- The Continuation School, developed for students no longer attending traditional schools, such as street academies for job-related training or parenting centers for teenage mothers who want to graduate from high school; and

- The Magnet School, a self-contained program offering an intensified curriculum in one or more subject areas, such as math or science.

Smink (1997) suggested that the most common form of alternative school for at-risk youth was one that was part of a school district’s dropout prevention program. He added that there were additional patterns of organizational and administrative types of alternative schools.
Smink listed some organizational types of alternative schools as:

- Schools without Walls, which were designed for students requiring educational and training programs, delivered from various locations within the community. These usually required flexible student schedules.

- Residential Schools, which were designed for students, usually placed by the courts or the family, with special counseling and educational programs.

- Separate Alternative Learning Centers, which were designed for students who needed a special curriculum, such as (a) parenting skills, (b) special job skills, and (c) a separate location from the traditional school. These schools might have been located in business environments, churches, or remodeled retail centers with excellent transportation services.

- Charter Schools, which were autonomous educational entities operating under a contract negotiated between the state agency and the local school sponsors.

- College-Based Alternative Schools, which were designed for students who needed high school credits and were operated by public school staff, but used college facilities to enhance students’ self-esteem and offered other services that benefitted their growth.

- Summer Schools, which were designed to be either remedial for academic credits or to enhance a student’s special interests in areas such as science or computers (p. 66-67).

**Nontraditional Alternative Schools**

Kellmayer (1995) argued that the original alternative schools were not designed for disadvantaged, disruptive or distasteful students as judged by society.
He reported that of the estimated 5,000 alternative schools throughout the United States, a significant percent of them did not represent the philosophy embodied by the original alternative school concept. Instead, these schools or programs, which were created within the past 20 years to deal with chronically disruptive students, represented ineffective and often punitive approaches that isolated and segregated difficult students from the mainstream.

Abbott (1994) stated that the emergence of schools for the chronically disruptive led to the perception, “That alternative schools are primarily schools for the unruly and unmanageable” (p. 23). His position was that this was not the original purpose for alternative schools from their inception in the 1960s.

Neumann (1994) also contended that schools established for punitive purposes have been inappropriately associated with the alternative school movement. Nevertheless, these schools represented a radical departure from the conventional education model.

The School Safety Update (1996) noted that alternative schools did not evolve as a natural outgrowth of their own positive philosophy, but from a reaction to what were viewed as negative features of conventional schools. As a result, alternative schools often did not meet the expectations of the students and communities they served, gaining the unfair reputation in some cases as hangouts for disruptive or criminal youth. This report emphasized that some critics maintained that these schools for the disruptive were little more than youth prisons, which encouraged class distinction and alienation.
Others pointed to a relaxing of standards, short class periods, diversion of financial resources from regular classes, and a lack of objective evaluation data as reasons to question continued support for alternative programs.

Kellmayer (1995) contended that programs for “at risk” students were not considered real alternatives because: (a) They were punitive, (b) did not differ significantly from the main stream, and (c) the students and staff were assigned. He equated such programs that advocated punishment, isolation, and segregation to “soft jails”.

Despite Kellmayer’s (1995) contention that the original alternative schools were not designed for the chronically disruptive, various school districts embraced the alternative school concept to accommodate the demands of society and students. For instance, a Safe and Drug–Free Schools (SDFS) Report (1996) cited alternative education programs as a panacea for addressing the public’s perception of increased school violence. The report reflected that school districts across the United States reported significant increase in the number of students expelled and the length of time they were excluded from their schools. The SDFS report stated that the consensus among educators and others concerned with at-risk youth is that it is vital for expelled students to receive educational counseling or other services to help modify their behavior and possibly other support services while they are away from their regular schools.

In responding to the needs of these at-risk students, school systems nationwide expected alternative education programs to deliver educational and other services to expelled students. Some school systems reportedly modified their existing programs or started new ones.
Such “alternative” programs allegedly differed from the regular schools’ program in certain ways. For example, teacher-student ratio, presentation of academic subjects, program objectives and the linkage of the school to the community or workplaces varied among these schools. These schools also differed based on the emphasis on behavior modification, emphasis on counseling for conflict resolution and anger-management, and the availability of comprehensive support services.

The addition or exclusion of various features to these alternative programs for at-risk youth obviously implied tailoring the program to meet the perceived needs of this population. The goals of these schools varied from preparing students to return to their regular schools, to preparing students for high school graduation and entry into the workforce or post secondary education directly from the alternative program.

The SDFS Report (1996), in comparison to the proponents of the traditional alternative school concept, also cited the following components of effective alternative programs:

- Lower student-to-staff ratio
- Strong and stable leadership
- Highly trained and carefully selected staff
- A vision and set of objectives for the program that are shared by all staff and integrated into how staff and administration interact with the program.
- District support of programs.
- Innovative presentation of instructional materials with an emphasis on real-life learning.
• Working relations with all parts of the school system and with other collaborating agencies that provide critical services to youth.

• Linkages between schools and workplaces.

• Intensive counseling and monitoring.

The SDFS Report touted three alternative programs for at-risk youth, which demonstrated some measure of success. These programs were:

A City As School Program, which placed students as interns in sites across the city. Students earned academic credits for the work they performed, such as English credit for work involving the theater, a newspaper, or other type of communications. The students rotated through three or four different internships each semester while their progress was monitored by the onsite supervisor and program teachers. The students attended seminars on a college campus to expose them to the possibilities of post secondary education. Sixty-five percent of the students maintained 100 percent attendance for at least two years, completed all their internships and graduated from high school. This success rate was reported to be higher than that of comparable students from regular district schools.

The Borough Academies were designed to help students develop positive behavioral skills and to prepare them for entrance into college or a job. Students could also earn credits through vocational internships with employers. The program provided students with academic and behavior management skills. The academies were reported to have an 86 percent graduation rate.
The Community Academy was designed to provide students with a safe and challenging academic environment, and focused on modifying inappropriate behavior while enhancing academic potential. The program provided a vocational component and an advanced placement program where students could earn dual enrollment credits at area colleges and universities. Community partnerships established with businesses, civic organizations, and social service agencies provided ancillary services to the students. Forty-five percent of the enrollees were judged ready to return to the regular school after one year instead of the two years for which the program was designed. In addition, fewer than 15 percent of the students failed to complete the program while more than 25 percent completed some college work before leaving.

These alternative programs cited in the SDFS Report were inner city schools with resources, which may not be accessible to students in rural or suburban districts. However, the focus was on identifying the students’ needs and meeting those needs.

Regardless of the original intention of alternative programs, Kellmayer (1995) stated that in order to address the needs of the at-risk students, the alternative school curriculum should integrate the cognitive and affective domains of learning across subject areas. In addition, the teaching strategies should focus on hands on activities, and nurturing by the work itself. Academic assignments should be related to the real world.

Characteristics of Effective Alternative Schools

Raywid (1994) maintained that because alternative schools were designed to serve a group not optimally served by a regular program, they were often associated with unsuccessful students – those considered “at-risk” whose chances for success in a regular program setting were considered marginal.
She also contended that since the alternative concept embodied flexibility of structure, curricula, instructional strategies and components to address the diverse needs of students, the focus of alternatives also vacillated between the programs for the “exceptional” students and innovative, creative ones.

Some key characteristics of effective alternative programs cited by Kellmayer (1995) were:

1. Size - 100-125 students for most programs.
2. Site – students had access to the same level of academic and support services as traditional schools.
3. Cost - the cost per pupil should be comparable.
4. Staff and students - students and staff volunteered for participation as much as practical.
5. Participatory decision-making – parents and community were involved in program planning and operation.
6. Operation - students and staff had a voice in the day-to-day operation such as a student advisory council.
7. Curriculum - basic skills and experiential emphasis such as community service, internships, and school-to-work transitions were emphasized.
8. Administrative unit – a separate administrative unit from the regular school.
10. Roles - flexible teacher roles and program autonomy.
Technology is used as a tool for instruction.

In her analysis of Rural Alternative Schools, Bates (1993) argued that four characteristics of successful urban alternative schools also appeared in rural communities. She stated that the key features of: (a) size, (b) a caring staff, (c) school as a community, and (d) flexibility were observed in the rural at-risk alternative school programs in South Carolina. In addition, Bates argued that the principal or administrator was a pivotal component of a successful alternative program, because she or he sets the direction, supported and guided the faculty, encouraged innovation, and served as the liaison with parents and community agencies. Bates asserted that the focal point of the program should be academic achievement. She suggested that “Emotional support or any other program emphasis ultimately is deluding students into false hope. The program if it is to succeed, must provide content which will enable students to improve their educational levels and thus change their circumstances” (p. 34).

Characteristics of Ineffective Alternative Schools

According to Morley (1991), various studies of alternative programs reflected agreement on some of the key components of successful programs. Likewise, these studies seem to conclude that the presence of certain design features in alternative schools proved equally disastrous. Morley reported the following features as deleterious to the success of alternative school programs:

- Administrators, not its staff, designed it.
- It was “imported” from somewhere else and set into operation pretty much intact.
- Most were referral programs to which students were assigned.
• The alternative was a “last chance” program which a student must “choose” in order to avoid suspension or expulsion.
• The program was punitive in orientation.
• The alternative was built around a single cluster of new elements—perhaps a new curriculum or a new set of activities, but held all other features of school operation intact and unmodified.
• The alternative was treated like any new department or school within the district might be. It was expected to conform to all existing regulations, operating procedures and arrangements.
• Staff was assigned by other administrators or by automatic processes such as contract rights.
• The alternative was intended for the “toughest” case and designed to reflect the absolute minimal departures from traditional school practices.
• No one in the district was told very much about the new program and guidance counselors were left feeling lukewarm to negative about it.

Program Evaluation of Alternative Schools

Kellmayer (1995) listed key problems associated with evaluation of alternative programs of the 1970s. For example, (a) record keeping was poor, (b) data on program dropouts were not reported, and (c) there was a lack of follow up on dropouts and early graduates in some programs. He also indicated that previous studies: (a) lacked a control or comparison group, (b) were characterized by the absence of pre-post test comparisons, and (c) involved no randomized sampling of student, teacher, and parent subjects.
Critics and proponents of the alternative school movement cited the absence or shortage of supporting empirical data on alternative programs as critical evidence, which could substantiate claims of the schools' efficacy. For instance, Natriello (1987) argued that a significant amount of the evaluative literature on the efficacy of alternative schools was anecdotal and/or testimonial rather than containing systematic scientific evidence.

Research Findings on Alternative Schools

Morley (1991) stated that research on alternative schools was not comprehensive but did indicate positive results for students who would not have otherwise benefitted from conventional schooling. Some positive results indicated:

- Increased attendance
- Decreased dropouts
- Decreased truancy
- Fewer student behavior problems
- Completion of high school program/increase in earned credits
- Maintenance of academic achievement to increased achievement
- High satisfaction of social needs, self-esteem, security and self actualization
- Positive attitudes toward school
- Productivity in the community after graduation
- Increased parent involvement

Cox's (1995) study on alternative education programs for at-risk juveniles focused on disruptive and failing students who were given more specialized and individual instruction. The goals of this intervention were to increase school retention and to decrease the likelihood of participation in delinquent and criminal behavior.
Cox reported that many of the programs failed to achieve the desired goals. His study found that the programs produced small indirect effects on future delinquency for students who attended the alternative school but who were not in the target population. Also, a higher percentage of the targeted students who attended the school reported a long-term decrease in self-reported delinquency than students in the other research groups.

Joyner (1996) investigated attendance rates, behaviors, and grades of 174 students who were assigned to an alternative school in a large urban school district in Florida. The students, who had been expelled from their regular schools, were returning after attending the alternative school from six months to one year.

An analysis of the data by Joyner (1996) revealed that the overall percentage of success as measured by attendance, behavior, and grades was low and follow-up data revealed a similarly low percentage of success for students after they had returned to regular school. The ability to predict success at the alternative school based on the knowledge of previous attendance, behavior, grade point average, reading level, mobility, home language, and socioeconomic status was statistically significant. This raised the question as to whether current interventions were effective.

Joyner (1996) concluded that simply relocating students to an alternative school setting would not alone create an environment of success for formerly disruptive and unsuccessful students. Furthermore, alternative school students should be evaluated prior to enrollment and attendance was critical in insuring success in alternative schools. Community-based projects increased the opportunities for formerly successful students who would be successful after enrollment in alternative schools, and in regular school.
Blake (1995) conducted a three-part case study of a Georgia alternative school program designed to improve attendance, academic achievement, and social achievement in adjudicated juveniles with disabilities. His study disclosed that participation in the program did not significantly influence attendance, academic achievement, or social achievement. Furthermore, similar effects were observed in the comparison group. The first sample demonstrated some success in attendance.

Blake (1995) concluded that this alternative education program was no more effective in improving attendance, academic achievement, and social achievement than a traditional special education program. He also attributed any noticeable effect on attendance in the first sample to interagency collaboration. Blake recommended that the interagency collaboration model be replicated in all schools.

One critical challenge for administrators was how to restructure or reform schools to accommodate students' needs with inadequate resources and minimal public support. A second issue was how to accommodate those needs and provide the type of education expected by the public and mandated by law (Abbott, 1994).

Raywid (1994) noted that many of the proposed reforms in traditional schools such as: (a) downsizing high schools, (b) authentic assessment, (c) student-teacher choice, and (d) teaching thematic units originated with the concept of alternative schools. She contended that alternative schools increased student achievement for all students.

McDill, Natriello, and Pallas (1987) contended that, “Alternative education programs or schools are the most viable manifestation of this movement for varied learning options” (p. 127).
They further stated that much of the impetus for instituting different schooling options stemmed from widespread concerns about discipline problems and victimization in American secondary schools.

DeBlois (1994) noted that the number of students who need the special academic and social attention was increasing, especially in urban areas. Consequently, there should be a renewed effort to establish and maintain alternatives for those students.

Glass (1995) reported that many school districts had used alternative school settings to isolate problem students and offer them an academic environment targeted to their special needs. He contended that such programs had higher per-pupil costs because of the need for emphasis on design and program.

Raywid (1994) argued that these programs focused on fixing students and returning them to regular school rapidly. She also asserted that the benefits of such programs did not justify the cost.

CrossRoads Alternative Schools

The School Safety Update (1996) reported that the number of alternative schooling programs for disruptive youth were on the increase. These types of schools increased in proportion to the public’s level of tolerance for disruptive youth. Presumably such schools increased in number and quality. It was also reported that state legislatures, courts, and elected officials were expanding the role of alternative schools to improve student attendance, intervene in violent behaviors, enhance interagency intervention efforts and increase educational opportunity.
According to the School Safety Update (1996), legislation or court decisions prompted some of these alternative education options. However, school districts, community participants, and youth serving professionals who recognized the need for an alternative education process to achieve safe learning and community environments voluntarily established the majority of alternative placement programs.

The research on Georgia alternative programs indicated the prevalence of programs with a focus on serving disruptive students. Local school systems funded a few alternative school programs, while others such as the CrossRoads Programs were funded by state government grants administered through the Georgia Department of Education.

In a personal interview with the researcher, Dr. M. Tolbert of Georgia's Department of Education (GDOE) stated that among the original 127 Georgia alternative schools on record, there could be a number of different types. This number was growing based on the interest of local school districts in addressing the various unmet needs of students. She noted however, that the Georgia Department of Education provided funding only for CrossRoads programs, the focus of which was on serving chronically disruptive students. Furthermore, the Georgia Department of Education maintained data only on CrossRoads school programs for the purpose of insuring compliance with the funding requirements.

In addition, there was limited comprehensive data on the number and type of "other" alternative schools because the GDOE had no responsibility to manage locally funded programs. Therefore, there was limited information in the public domain pertaining to alternative schools that were not designed for chronically disruptive students.
According to Karlin and Harnish (1995), Georgia instituted a statewide educational initiative to address the needs of chronically disruptive, committed and/or non-attending youth in grades 6-12. The program known as CrossRoads was created with $16.5 million dollars appropriated to the Georgia Department of Education by the legislature from general and lottery funds (GDOE, 1995). The purpose of the CrossRoads Program was to: (1) provide social services to chronically disruptive, committed, and/or non-attending students, (2) provide individualized instruction and/or transitions to other programs (3) facilitate student success and to promote good citizenship in the school and larger community, and (4) make the public schools more safe and secure by removing chronically disruptive students from the regular classroom (GDOE, 1995).

In their assessment of two Georgia CrossRoads Programs, Karlin and Harnish (1995) recommended using the following characteristics to optimize the chances for success in CrossRoads Programs:

(1) Select staff members who wanted to work with the chronically disruptive student population.

(2) Community involvement was an essential component of a successful program.

(3) Operate from a preventive rather than a punitive paradigm to enhance success.

These researchers concluded that little was known about successful transitions from the CrossRoads Programs back to the regular schools. They recommended that an extensive study in the transition process be conducted to determine how best to facilitate the transitions and aid students in continuing to succeed.
The current movement for the establishment of alternative programs for disruptive or rebellious students in Georgia gained legislative support when Georgia’s Governor, Roy Barnes made safe schools a campaign issue and promised to provide relief for school districts with a number of students in these categories (The Augusta Chronicle, 1999). The political solution to the ever-increasing problem of school discipline was to create alternative schools for students who would not or could not comply with school rules. These types of alternatives known as CrossRoads schools increased in popularity as districts endeavored to find funding for educating students with diverse needs who were not benefitting from traditional schooling.

The Augusta Chronicle (1999) reported that in fiscal year 1998, 14,753 students went through the CrossRoads Programs statewide. Moreover, disruptive or rebellious behavior was the top reason, followed by illegal behavior and aggression or fighting. The article stated that some of the students in CrossRoads programs were expelled or suspended, and given the option of going to an alternative school to keep up academically. Others were assigned to alternative programs before being expelled from school. The Augusta Chronicle article also stated that about 5,100 or 40 percent of CrossRoads students returned to the regular classroom and 21 percent were still enrolled in 1998. Furthermore, almost 14 percent were expelled or dropped because of a lack of attendance. More than 77 percent of the 1998 attendees had never been in an alternative program before, while almost 16 percent were returning for the second time, and about 5 percent were returning for the third time.
Even though the funding sources varied and subsequently dictated student eligibility, the focus in some alternative programs varied in attempts to meet the needs of the students. For example, Davis (1994) reported on "Gateway", a Georgia alternative program that was established in the belief that many antisocial behaviors were symptoms of underlying social/emotional conflicts. The members of this program chose a therapeutic model of intervention because of this belief. The program's design included academic study, daily group counseling, writing in a personal journal, and a system for earning privileges.

Davis (1994) indicated that a tribunal committee, which was independent of the students' host school and the Gateway program, assigned students to the program because of disruptive behavior. The length of stay for these students was from eleven days to one semester. Davis' analysis of the program revealed the following conclusions:

1. Student assignment to the program by an independent committee reduced potential conflict.
2. The program's philosophy, mission, and procedures were articulated to system and school leadership and teachers.
3. Active support of various community agencies proved to be mutually beneficial.
4. An administrator, teacher or counselor from the students' host school visited regularly.
5. Staff members of the program recognized the value of the individual skills each member possessed. (p. 19)
The limited research revealed that even CrossRoads Programs in different school systems varied in design, mission and focus in terms of students served. As a result of these differences, the perceptions of the efficacy of CrossRoads programs also varied.

In an evaluation of an alternative program in Bulloch (Georgia) County Schools, Parrish (1997) concluded that: (1) There was a need for consistency in determining what students were classified as “chronically disruptive” for placement. (2) If holding power were a criterion for success, then CrossRoads programs were not meeting the students’ needs, (3) and, the space was inadequate based on the projected number of students who would have need for alternative programs. Parrish also recommended that a study of the current alternative programs be undertaken from a broader perspective.

In a qualitative study of the Georgia CrossRoads Alternative Schools, Karlin (1995) concluded that there were sufficient differences in the administration of these alternative programs throughout the state to warrant further study. One of the cited differences related to variances in placement of students who were placed in alternative schools that were incapable or reluctant to serve them based on their specific needs.

Non-CrossRoads Alternative Schools

A descriptive study of 27 Georgia Secondary Alternative Schools by Chalker (1994) revealed significant discrepancies. These discrepancies related to data collection, program evaluation, and standardization of operating procedures at these schools.
Chalker reached the following conclusions from his study:

(1) The typical separate secondary alternative school featured disciplinary suspension and/or expulsion intervention for chronically disruptive students and program characteristics compatible with the criteria of Georgia’s Alternative School Program (CrossRoads) for 1994-1995.

(2) The majority of separate secondary alternative schools did not use a profile of student characteristics tracked as a means of problem diagnosis, development of intervention strategies, or meeting individual needs of students in alternative placement.

(3) The majority of programs did not keep written evaluative data showing that predetermined student objectives and needs had been met effectively.

(4) Program characteristics, the identification of student characteristics, and program evaluation would become standardized and consistent due to established criteria of Georgia’s Alternative School Program.

(5) Existing separate secondary alternative schools in Georgia did not appear to be a structured, unified entity with a group identity.

(6) Existing separate secondary alternative schools in Georgia appeared to follow local guidelines for planning, development, implementation, and evaluation without any input from the state.

(7) Existing alternative schools had unique qualities and ideas on an individual basis, but had no way of sharing and networking them with other alternative schools.
(8) Existing separate alternative schools had little means of funding and resources outside of their locality, and staff development for teachers was not consistently planned.

(9) The 1994-1995 Georgia Alternative School Program would strengthen alternative schools both individually and as a group due to criteria and structured components for operation and funding.

(10) Beginning in 1994-1995, the incidence of alternative schools in Georgia with a disciplinary focus would drastically increase, while the number of programs serving students with other problems might decrease due to how the Georgia Alternative School Program was defined. (p. 106)

As a result of his study of Georgia Secondary Alternative Schools, Chalker (1994) recommended that:

(1) Program characteristics include components for meeting the needs of students other than chronically disruptive ones.

(2) Student characteristics be identified to diagnose, assess, evaluate, and plan for the education of alternative students.

(3) Data assessing program effectiveness and meeting of program objectives be collected and disseminated.

(4) Directors begin networking with other alternative educators to share resources, ideas, and strategies to continue to meet effectively the needs of the students they served. (p. 107)
Previous studies of Georgia alternative schools were limited in scope and did not compare or contrast the CrossRoads Programs with other existing schools in the state. In addition, there was very little data that could be used to identify the types of alternative schools. Consequently, the development of some taxonomy for categorizing Georgia Alternative Schools had import for extending the frontier for future research.

Summary

It seems somewhat apparent that the school reform movement was in some respects, a response to the public's demands for social change. As the school reform movement escalated, various school systems sought to address the public's concerns with the establishment of alternative schools.

Some were alternative schools and programs that sought to address the diverse needs of students from various backgrounds by modifying their: (a) philosophy, (b) structure, (c) curriculum, (d) methods of instruction, (e) operating procedures, (f) staffing, and (g) targeting of certain at-risk students.

Conceptually, these alternative schools endeavored to maintain a small student population, retain a small pupil-teacher ratio, allow student participation in school governance and curriculum development, involve parents and the community, and to teach in such ways as to address the specific needs of the students. The demonstrated success of this alternative school concept gave credence to the notion that such an approach could be useful in addressing other social problems. These social problems included dropout prevention, escalating teen pregnancies, chronically disruptive youth and increasing juvenile crime.
There were also other alternative school programs that embraced some aspects of successful alternative schools but endeavored to target chronically disruptive students for intervention. As the public’s concern for violence in schools and increased juvenile delinquency heightened, more alternative schools of this type developed. The efficacy of such schools or programs is yet undetermined due to the absence of reliable research data.

The proliferation of alternative schools emphasized providing services to chronically disruptive youth or those who are said to "not fit" in a traditional school setting. Previously cited sources indicated that a number of such institutions had been established throughout Georgia. The imminent danger appeared to be that too much emphasis on only the chronically disruptive students could exclude a substantial portion of the at-risk students who also needed an alternative to the education that they received.

While there were still a number of schools in the state of Georgia that addressed the needs of the chronically disruptive, there was an unknown segment of the at-risk population of students, which could be only marginally served. In order to create learning opportunities to include all of Georgia’s students, information about students’ needs or characteristics and the schools that strive to meet those needs was essential.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Sinclair and Ghory (1987) contended that education in traditional public schools had been hampered by societal expectations that schools should resolve social issues. In addition, these expectations forced school districts to assume the total role of child advocate in educating America's youth. Furthermore, Sinclair and Ghory suggested that teachers had been compelled to expand their roles to teach a diverse population because of the changing demographics and issues that affected students. Young (1990) stated that in striving to meet those demands, local administrators had to consider realigning existing school programs or adding alternative ones. In addition, Goodlad (1984) stated that districts were also expected to implement and maintain mandated alternative programs with inadequate financial support.

According to Raywid (1994), the viable alternative for addressing school reform demands and student needs was considered to be the alternative school. She stated that the definitions and purpose for alternative schools varied but alternative schools increased student achievement for all students.

In a meta-analysis of delinquency-related outcomes, Cox, et al. (1995) concluded that alternative programs had a small positive effect on student achievement, attitudes toward school, and self esteem. Also programs that targeted a specific population of "at-risk" students had a greater effect on student achievement than other programs.
Neumann (1994) suggested that despite the absence of a model of typical alternative schools, effective ones exhibited the following characteristics:

1. collaboration between schools, parents, and community,
2. a site-based management approach as a method of operation,
3. a small pupil-teacher ratio,
4. teachers who also performed as counselors,
5. cooperative roles for students who were involved in school governance,
6. voluntary student enrollment and,
7. little or no tracking or ability grouping.

In a study of the Georgia Crossroads Alternative Programs, Karlin (1995) reported that programs across Georgia varied from one location to another. She cited the need to identify variables or characteristics of Georgia's alternative programs and to demonstrate how the programs differed. The researcher also proposed categorizing schools to distinguish the various approaches used and relating the characteristics to the outcomes of the programs to determine which combination of factors such as staffing, structure, philosophy, and curriculum were most effective.

Furthermore, the dearth of research data on Georgia alternative schools demanded that descriptive research be conducted to provide administrators definitive evidence to constructively engage in the school reform debate. Additional research could provide invaluable insight as to what characteristics of alternative schools significantly affected the achievement of particular stated goals.

This descriptive study of Public Alternative Schools in Georgia focused on identifying and categorizing Georgia's public alternative schools and describing those schools' characteristics. This study was also designed to identify and classify the characteristics of students in Georgia's alternative schools. The collection of alternative schools' administrators' perception is also a goal of this study.
Research Questions

The following research questions were addressed.

1. What are the different types of alternative schools in Georgia?
   a. What are the goals of each type of alternative school?
   b. What are the characteristics of the different types of Georgia alternative schools?

2. What are the characteristics of students served in these alternative schools?

3. What are the perceptions of Georgia's alternative school administrators towards alternative school issues?

Research Design

Isaac and Michael (1990) stated that descriptive research was the accumulation of a database that was used to describe situations or events. Descriptive research was designed to collect detailed factual information that described existing phenomena, identified problems or justified current conditions and practices, and to make comparisons and evaluations. Descriptive research was also used to determine what others were doing with similar problems or situations.

This descriptive study used survey research as the primary means of identifying criteria used to define: (1) the types of alternative schools, (2) the characteristics of alternative schools, (3) the goals of alternative schools, and (4) the characteristics of alternative school students. The researcher developed the survey instrument to include the majority of the characteristics of alternative schools cited in the literature. The instrument was designed after site visits to seven alternative schools located in a major urban school system in Georgia.
The survey was developed and tested by a group of school administrators with knowledge and expertise in the area of alternative school operation. The data collected by the survey research were used to develop a comprehensive description of Georgia's public alternative schools.

Subjects

The Georgia Department of Education (GDOE) provided the researcher a list of 200 Georgia alternative schools for the 1998-1999 school year. The list consisted of the name, address, telephone number, and principal of each alternative school. The original list of alternative school administrators did not include Georgia’s charter and magnet schools. Moreover, charter and magnet schools were not listed as alternative schools under the Georgia Department of Education directory. These schools were added to the study because by definition, they are considered alternative schools.

Given that the alternative school administrators were largely responsible for data collection at the schools, and were asked to provide their perceptions about their alternative schools’ operation, they were regarded as subjects. Consequently, the subjects included the alternative schools and their respective administrators. Due to administrators’ perceptions about the inclusion of magnet and charter schools as alternative schools, only 97 administrators responded favorably to the survey. The 97 alternative school administrators comprised the population of Georgia alternative schools’ principals or administrators of this study. In order to increase the chance of all subjects participating, every alternative school principal or administrator was sent a survey and asked to participate in the research.
Instrumentation

The development of the survey instrument (see Appendix C) used in this study was aided by an extensive review of the literature, telephone interviews with GDOE and alternative school personnel, and selected site visits to different types of alternative schools. The instrument was developed by the researcher from alternative school characteristics described in the literature and as a result of information obtained from alternative school site visits. The survey questions were grouped into subheadings and arranged so that the administrators could respond if the information were available. Each survey item was aligned to a research question. The survey design required positive and negative responses (Yes or No), percentages and raw numbers for various data fields. This was developed to facilitate computation and quantifying data upon collection.

The researcher contacted the director of a large urban school system and obtained permission to visit seven alternative schools to refine the survey instrument. The researcher toured each school and observed students at work, interviewed the school administrator and was provided written information pertaining to the characteristics of each school and students. The selected alternative school site interviews were designed to elicit information to develop survey questions about the characteristics of alternative schools and their students.

The site visits provided the information to develop and refine other questions relative to characteristics of the alternative schools and alternative school students. These characteristics were used to develop the survey, which was designed to incorporate the majority of the characteristics reported in the literature and those identified through the site visits.
The alternative school administrators were asked questions about characteristics relating to: (a) student and community demographics (b) school programs, (c) school structure, and (d) methods of intervention used in the different types of schools. Items 11-14, page 2, items 28-31, page 3, and items 2-3, page 5, of the survey were developed as a result of the site visits. Questions one through eight of the survey were designed to capture data about the existing types of alternative schools and to identify characteristics associated with the schools' structure and goals. Questions nine through twenty-three were included to collect information about the characteristics of the students served at each alternative school.

Questions 24 through 28 pertain to staff and faculty selection and training. Questions 29 through 32 relate to student services. Questions 33 and 34 identify student evaluation and methods of instruction. Questions 35 and 36 relate to the alternative schools' structure and operating procedures in contrast to other district schools. Question 37 relates to the curriculum and 38 through 39 pertain to program evaluation.

Questions 40 through 44 with the Likert scale represent the subjects' perceptions of school autonomy relative to curriculum, staffing, governance, community involvement, teacher training, student achievement, staff training, and methods of instruction.

The final survey form was developed as a result of combining the characteristics cited in the literature with data observed and collected during the site visits. The survey consisted of 39 multiple response questions, 11 questions with Likert Scale responses, and a request for schools to write in descriptive characteristics that were not included in the instrument. This format was chosen to facilitate coding and to ensure consistency in reporting by the respondents.
Wallen and Fraenkel (1991) defined content validity as the nature of the content included within an instrument and the specification of the research used to formulate the content. They concluded that the validity of an instrument was enhanced when: (a) there was an adequate sampling of the domain of content it is supposed to represent and (b) the format was clear which included printing, size of type etc. Wallen and Fraenkel also stated that face validity relied on the subjective judgment of the researcher.

The survey was initially distributed to a diverse panel of educators to establish validity of the instrument. The panel consisted of a Regional Educational Service Agency (RESA) Psychometrician, a RESA Reading Specialist, an elementary school principal, an alternative school principal, a school system’s alternative program director, the director of the Georgia Department of Education (GDOE) Alternative Schools Program, and a former GDOE alternative program worker. These members were asked to comment on the instrument’s clarity, printing, size, and type (see Appendix A). The panel members were asked to provide feedback on the adequacy of the survey in sampling alternative school data relating to the research questions. The panelists were also asked to comment on the readability of the survey items and the perceived degree of difficulty in completing the form with the required information available. Some panelists made recommendations for improvement, which were incorporated in the pilot survey.

Another version of the survey was administered to a seven-member panel of alternative school experts who were alternative school administrators. The survey was distributed to the panel asking them to review it for consistency, clarity and content validity.
The panel members were also asked to complete the survey, to inform the researcher about administration time, and to make recommendations for improvement of the instrument. All panel members concurred that the survey adequately addressed the domain of content relating to alternative schools. The alternative school experts and panelists further concluded that the survey could consistently elicit the desired responses from alternative school administrators with minimum difficulty. The researcher refined the survey questions based on the input received from the panelists. This procedure was conducted to evaluate and to establish validity of the instrument.

The researcher did not ask the alternative school administrators who were members of the panels for field testing and validating the survey to participate in the study. Consequently, there was no attempt to collect data from their respective schools to use in compiling the results of the study.

**Procedures**

The Georgia Department of Education (GDOE) was notified of the researcher's intentions to conduct the study in order to facilitate the gathering of data. The GDOE provided the researcher a list of all Georgia public alternative schools. The list was matched with the 1998 Georgia Public Education Directory to ensure that the list of administrators and schools was current and accurate. For the purpose of this study, the list of 200 public alternative schools was used to identify the population of principals and administrators who participated in the study.
Surveys were mailed to the principals of all alternative programs in Georgia except the ones who participated in the pilot studies. The materials sent to each principal included the cover letter of intent and instructions (Appendix B), survey instrument (Appendix C), and a self-addressed stamped envelope. The return envelopes were numbered so as to track the receipt of surveys returned. This facilitated efficient collection of data for all public alternative schools and the students they serve.

A post card reminder (see Appendix D) was mailed to emphasize the importance of the requested information to subjects who did not return their surveys within two weeks. Non-respondents were sent a postcard and a replacement survey for any lost ones.

A 10% sample of the subjects who did not return the surveys within the established time frame, were telephoned to render assistance in completing them and to obtain data on the characteristics of the alternative school and the students. The researcher targeted 70% of the respondents on the original list as an acceptable return rate. Even though the data collected included respondents self-reporting, some of the information such as school name, address, phone numbers and schools' administrators was verified through the Georgia Public Schools Directory obtained from the GDOE.

Of the 200 surveys mailed to all alternative school administrators, 115 were returned with information. However, only 97 surveys were useable because 18 of those returned did not contain sufficient data to compile. Despite the fact that a second letter of inquiry and explanation was mailed to magnet and charter schools' administrators, most of them elected not to participate citing that they were not alternative schools.
Of the surveys mailed, 58 magnet schools and 27 charter schools did not respond or stated that they were not alternative schools. The lack of participation by magnet and charter schools made it impractical to consider them in the population of alternative schools.

Analysis of Data

Survey responses collected as raw data from the Georgia public alternative school principals were first separated by category – CrossRoads and Non-CrossRoads. Alternative schools, urban, rural, and suburban; student characteristics, and program characteristics. The data were then organized in a spreadsheet that delineated the characteristics of the schools. Analysis of the data was conducted by coding the responses for each item in the survey. After the answers were coded, the coded data were entered into a computer program entitled, Statistical Package for Social Studies (SPSS, 1999). The computer program was used to summarize the coded data by categories, and to classify and to arrange it in the form of frequency tables and means. Treatment of the data included the calculation of the range, mean, and median for the purpose of summarizing the data and drawing conclusions concerning the findings.

The standard deviation (SD) was used as an index of variability in the study. The standard deviation and the mean were used because they provided a useful way to interpret and compare the data. The researcher compared and contrasted the characteristics of urban, suburban, and rural alternative schools and the characteristics of the alternative school students.
Summary

The researcher chose to use the survey method to collect data from Georgia’s alternative school administrators. The survey questions were developed from alternative school information found in the literature, and from site visits to different alternative schools in a large district. The survey instrument was initially field-tested by various experts in the field of education to determine reliability. The survey was then sent to alternative school authorities to gather additional information about its reliability and validity. The final survey was then printed for distribution after the necessary modifications.

The researcher notified a representative of the Georgia Department of Education about the study and was provided a list of the alternative schools that were monitored by the department. The alternative school survey (see Appendix C) was distributed to the administrators of all Georgia Alternative Schools. The administrators were reminded by postcard if they did not respond within two weeks of the first mailing. Those who did not respond were then sent another survey and a postcard. Ten percent of the administrators were also contacted by telephone.

The results of the study were then collated using a spreadsheet of fifty variables representing the data collected. The frequencies were then summarized using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), a computer program. The researcher examined the output from SPSS and arranged the data in tables based on the responses to questions or items outlined in the survey. The output relating to student and school characteristics was reviewed for detection of patterns or trends within data sets. Student characteristics were compared to schools’ goals and inferences made.
CHAPTER IV
FINDINGS

Introduction

This descriptive study of Georgia public alternative schools in Georgia was conducted to systematically identify and categorize Georgia’s public alternative schools and to describe those schools’ characteristics. Also, the study was designed to identify and classify the characteristics of students in Georgia’s alternative schools. This study was not designed to examine variables associated with a hypothesis about alternative schools, but to collect and to analyze data and to report the findings to school administrators and the general public.

The researcher developed a cross-sectional survey by collecting information about alternative schools from a literature review and from interviews with seven different alternative school administrators. After field testing and piloting the survey, the final instrument was distributed to all alternative school administrators in Georgia using a list of schools supplied by the Georgia Department of Education. The survey contained 44 multiple response questions, which were constructed to gather data about the types, and characteristics of alternative schools and their students from the schools’ administrators.

The subjects of the study were Georgia’s alternative schools and the schools’ administrators because the administrators were the ones who could provide the most reliable information about the alternative schools. All alternative school administrators except the ones who piloted the survey were asked to participate in this study.
Surveys were mailed to 200 Georgia alternative school administrators with an explanation of the purpose for the survey and a request to assist in the data collecting process. The population included all magnet and charter schools although they are not listed as alternative schools in the directory of public schools in Georgia. These schools' administrators were asked to participate because by definition, charter and magnet schools represent a type of alternative school.

Nevertheless, 18 of the returned surveys were not complete, 27 charter school surveys and 58 magnet school surveys were not completed because the administrators chose not to participate as alternative schools. The majority of the charter and magnet school administrators chose not to participate citing that they were not alternative schools even after a follow up explanation of the study was mailed to them. Therefore, only 115 surveys were returned with only 97 being useable because of insufficient or incomplete data. Of the 115 returned surveys, 85 were designated as CrossRoads schools and 12 were Non-CrossRoads schools.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to identify and categorize Georgia public alternative schools and to describe those schools' characteristics. In addition, this study focused on identifying and classifying the characteristics of students in Georgia's alternative schools. This study addressed the following research questions.

1. What are the different types of alternative schools in Georgia?
   a. What are the goals of each type of alternative school?
   b. What are the characteristics of the different types of Georgia alternative schools?
2. What are the characteristics of the students served in these alternative schools?

3. What are the perceptions of Georgia's alternative school administrators towards alternative school issues?

Findings

This section was organized so that the survey items, which were subsumed within the aforementioned research questions, would be addressed in categorical and sequential order. The findings were presented in tabular form with accompanying narrative to illustrate and clarify data reported in response to the Georgia Alternative School Survey contained in Appendix C. The aggregated responses to all of the survey items of Georgia alternative schools were included in tables I-XXVIII to facilitate interpretation. Furthermore, the data were grouped under subheadings, which correlate to the research questions outlined in the previous chapter. The items in the survey instrument in Appendix C also related to these subheadings. These subheadings were: (a) types of alternative schools (b) goals of alternative schools (c) characteristics of alternative schools (d) characteristics of alternative school students, and (e) administrators' perceptions.

The tables and the accompanying narrative summarized the findings of this descriptive study of Georgia alternative schools. For ease of identification with the research questions, the subheadings represent the questions investigated. The following information summarized the findings under the appropriate subheadings.
Types of Alternative Schools

According to the data on Georgia alternative schools, CrossRoads and Non-CrossRoads schools are the two major types found in the state. Of the 97 surveys scored, 85 alternative schools were identified as CrossRoads schools. The remaining 12 schools are described as Non-CrossRoads. Schools designated as CrossRoads alternative schools received additional funds for serving chronically disruptive students and Non-CrossRoads alternative schools did not, even though the infrastructure, curricula, students served, and methods of operation could be similar. This study also revealed that there was a number of magnet and charter schools which were by definition, alternative schools but were not perceived as such because of the widespread association of alternative schooling with only disruptive students. Nonetheless, as per Table I, there were 11 different models such as schools within schools, separate alternative schools, community based schools, magnet schools, charter schools and schools for pregnant teenagers.

As depicted in Table I, the major kind of alternative school reported by the school administrators was the discipline-oriented CrossRoads school for chronically disruptive students. In contrast, magnet schools comprised the largest number of Non-CrossRoads schools despite the small sample of respondents. Table I also portrayed other alternative school models with a different focus.
Table 1

Georgia Alternative School Types and Models

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Models</th>
<th>Crossroads</th>
<th>Non-CrossRoads</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Class (in School Suspension)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apprenticeship (Vocational)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavior Modification</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charter School</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community-Based Education</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disciplinary</td>
<td>72</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juvenile Justice</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magnet</td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School within a School</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teen Parenting</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Goals of Alternative Schools

The overarching purpose of all schools should be to increase academic achievement. However, alternative schools targeted and served a select group of students whose behavior and other variables could prevent them from optimizing their chances for success in traditional public schools. Therefore, the goals of any alternative school should correlate with the type of students served. The research disclosed that the primary goal of over half of the Georgia alternative schools was to temporarily isolate students. Thirty of the alternative schools listed Dropout Prevention as a primary goal and 32 schools listed increasing academic achievement as a goal.

The alternative school administrators selected the primary goals of their schools from a list of goals provided in the survey. The respondents were also asked to write-in goals not listed on the survey. As illustrated in Table II, the focus of 56 of the CrossRoads schools was on “temporarily isolating students,” while the largest number of Non-CrossRoads schools emphasized “increasing academic achievement.” Dropout prevention was the focus of 28 CrossRoads schools and 23 of them responded with a focus on “increasing academic achievement.” Special needs and other categories provided by the participants comprise the remaining number of responses listed in Table II. Some respondents listed more than one goal for their school.
Table II

Goals of Georgia Alternative Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Goals</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CrossRoads</td>
<td>Non-CrossRoads</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporary Isolation of Students</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase Academic Achievement</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dropout Prevention</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Needs</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fine Arts *</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Studies *</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* = Responses submitted by administrators.
Characteristics of Alternative Schools

The structure, purpose, curriculum, location, and operation of an alternative school should relate to the needs of the students served. The following characteristics were disclosed by the research.

Table III outlined the physical locations of the alternative schools. The table also showed that a majority of Georgia’s CrossRoads alternative schools were rural and the majority of Non-CrossRoads schools were categorized as suburban.

Most Georgia alternative schools were located in a separate facility as shown in Table IV. Seventy-four percent of the CrossRoads schools and almost half of the Non-CrossRoads schools were located on individual campuses as separate facilities. The remaining alternative schools were located with types of public schools such as elementary, middle, high schools, or vocational education facilities.

Table IV indicated that the majority of the CrossRoads schools were located in separate facilities. The Non-CrossRoads schools were more evenly distributed in contrast to the CrossRoads schools although this could be attributable to the small response of the Non-CrossRoads schools. The Non-CrossRoads schools most resemble traditional public schools in length of existence and student enrollment.

According to Table V, the Non-CrossRoads schools had existed longer and had a higher enrollment capacity and average student enrollment than the CrossRoads schools. The CrossRoads Alternative Schools had existed for an average of five years and the Non-CrossRoads schools had been in service for an average of 10 years.
The years of existence for all alternative schools as outlined in Table V, ranged from 1 to 20 years. The average enrollment of CrossRoads schools was less than the enrollment capacity while the reverse was true for the Non-CrossRoads schools.

The enrollment capacity for all alternative schools ranged from 12 to 1900. This range was so large because of the presence of the charter and magnet schools, which had student enrollments equivalent to those of traditional public schools. The calculation of the average enrollment for the Non-CrossRoads schools was influenced by the inclusion of the magnet and charter schools with large enrollment numbers. Table VI indicated that a majority of the CrossRoads alternative school programs served students in middle and high schools. The Non-CrossRoads schools served students in elementary through high school as well.

Table VII illustrated that 84% of CrossRoads schools had a teacher-pupil ratio of 1:15 or less. This statistic was below the State Department of Education’s goal of 1:22 for the traditional public school. Even when the Non-CrossRoads schools were considered, the teacher pupil ratios were below Georgia’s maximum allowable standard of 1:33 for students in the traditional public schools. The teacher-pupil ratio was less than that of the traditional public school because of the smaller enrollment of most alternative schools.

Table VIII contained responses to four different areas of alternative school operation. These factors related to the administrators’ perceptions about pupil cost, the schools’ physical structure (enrollment capacity), methods of instruction, and curriculum.
The numbers represented the individual responses of the alternative schools' administrators. Slightly more than one half of the CrossRoads schools' administrators perceived the per-pupil cost for alternative schools' students was higher than that of other schools in their respective districts. Furthermore, the majority of them (over 50%) stated that their curricula relative to academics and discipline were similar to those of other schools in the respective districts.

Table VIII depicted that in response to the enrollment capacity, 82% of the CrossRoads schools responded "YES" to adequacy compared to 86% of the Non-CrossRoads schools. Almost 33% of the CrossRoads participants and 41% of the non-CrossRoads participants did not reply to this survey item. The researcher calculated the percentages reported.

According to the responses from the CrossRoads schools, approximately one third of them (reference Table IX) reported that independent evaluators conducted evaluations of their programs. Alternative school or district/system personnel evaluated the programs of almost two-thirds of the CrossRoads schools. As Table IX depicted, the majority of CrossRoads and Non-CrossRoads schools were evaluated annually. Table X denotes that individual student and criterion-reference were the major types of student performance assessments in the alternative schools. The preferred method of assessing CrossRoads students' academic performance was reported to be Individual by 54% of the schools. This method specified that student performance was measured against expectations for the individual student.
Table III

**Location of Georgia Alternative Schools**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>CrossRoads</th>
<th>Non-CrossRoads</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>85</strong></td>
<td><strong>12</strong></td>
<td><strong>97</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table IV

**Physical site of Georgia Alternative Schools**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site of Schools</th>
<th>CrossRoads</th>
<th>Non-CrossRoads</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary School</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle School</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separate Location</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational School</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Reports</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>85</strong></td>
<td><strong>12</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table V

Demographic Characteristics of Georgia Alternative Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>CrossRoads</th>
<th>Non-CrossRoads</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average years of Existence</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of Existence (Range)</td>
<td></td>
<td>1-19</td>
<td>1-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrollment Capacity</td>
<td></td>
<td>67</td>
<td>467</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Enrollment</td>
<td></td>
<td>63</td>
<td>611</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrollment Range</td>
<td></td>
<td>10-350</td>
<td>40-1860</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table VI

Grades served by Georgia Alternative Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grades</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>CrossRoads</th>
<th>Non-CrossRoads</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-5</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-8</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-9</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-12</td>
<td></td>
<td>65</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-12</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-12</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td></td>
<td>85</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table VII

Teacher – pupil ratio of Georgia Alternative Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ratio</th>
<th>CrossRoads</th>
<th>Non-CrossRoads</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1:10</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:15</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:20</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:25</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:30</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table VIII

Operating Factors of Georgia Alternative Schools as reported by administrators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>CrossRoads</th>
<th>Non-CrossRoads</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enrollment capacity is adequate</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>69 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching to learning styles is emphasized</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>78 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per-pupil expense higher than others</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>42 41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academics similar to other district schools</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>69 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline similar to other district schools</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>55 34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table IX

**Program Evaluation of Georgia Alternative Schools**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluators</th>
<th>CrossRoads</th>
<th>Non-CrossRoads</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative School Personnel</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District/System Personnel</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (out of District Personnel)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Annually</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every two years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less Frequent</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table X

**Student Evaluation Methods used by Georgia Alternative Schools**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation</th>
<th>CrossRoads</th>
<th>Non-CrossRoads</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparative</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criterion</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table X also showed that about 35% of the CrossRoads schools used a criterion-reference method of assessing students. With this method, student performance was measured against predetermined educational objectives. The comparative method was used when student performance was compared to that of other students.

As shown in Table XI, 58% of the CrossRoads schools reported that the staff receives from 1-10 days of specialized training to work with the students. The non-CrossRoads schools reported similar results. Data on specialized training of staff and faculty were lacking with 64% of the respondents not reporting the amount of staff training conducted. The percentage of Non-CrossRoads respondents that provided no feedback equaled 33%.

Table XII illustrated the number of full-time and part-time staff and also depicted the number of personnel that volunteered for assignment to the position (s) versus the ones who were involuntarily assigned. In the CrossRoads schools, the ratio of full-time to part-time administrators was 4:1 in contrast to the 24:1 ratio of the Non-CrossRoads schools. The ratio of full-time to part-time teachers also varied significantly because of the difference in the nature and purpose of the types of schools. The number of persons who volunteered for assignment to alternative schools was higher in the CrossRoads schools in contrast to the Non-CrossRoads schools' staff. This finding could be attributable to the large number of CrossRoads schools reporting in contrast to the number of Non-CrossRoads schools.
Fourteen percent of CrossRoads school administrators were involuntarily assigned compared to four percent of the Non-CrossRoads administrators. Eleven percent of the counselors of CrossRoads schools were involuntarily assigned to the schools while four percent of the Non-CrossRoads counselors were likewise assigned.

Tables XIII and XIV included the types of social service agencies that frequently visited the different alternative schools. This data provided some indication as to the diversity of services required for addressing the needs of the alternative school students. Only five percent of the CrossRoads Schools and less than 20% of the Non-CrossRoads schools reported that social service agencies never visited the campuses.

Juvenile Justice representatives were the most frequent social service visitors to the CrossRoads schools followed by Department of Family and Children Services and Mental Health employees respectively. Only five percent of the CrossRoads schools reported never receiving visits from social service personnel. The type of social service agency visiting the schools was probably indicative of the needs of the students served by these schools.

Tables XV and XVI depicted the results of the administrators’ ranking of the curricula emphasis of their schools. All alternative school participants were asked to rank from 1 to 9 with one being the highest, the curriculum most emphasized in each school. In most instances, the basic reading, writing, and mathematics curriculum was more often ranked as the number one curriculum emphasized in both types of alternative schools. Moreover, the CrossRoads and Non-CrossRoads schools’ respondents ranked a basic curriculum (reading, writing, and math) higher than the other curricula choices.
The individual responses were weighted to more vividly illustrate the differences in the responses in that the numerical total of the rankings was very close after the first two places. The totals for each curriculum area in Tables XV and XVI were obtained by multiplying the individual rankings by the number of responses within each rank and summing the products to get a total for each curriculum emphasized.

For example, in Table XV, 44 administrators ranked a basic education curriculum as the one most emphasized. The number 44 was multiplied by 1 and equaled 44. Only five administrators ranked the basic education curriculum as number two, which was multiplied by five to get 10. In that example, the products 44, 10, 18, 30... were summed to obtain 143.

Alternative school administrators indicated the frequency by which students with specific or diverse needs were availed of individual or group counseling respectively, to facilitate instruction. The availability of counseling was critical because of the need to aid students in dealing with social issues that affect academic success in school. An alternative school or social service counselor could conduct individual or group counseling. The nature and type of counseling provided depended on the needs of the students.

The data in Table XVII were so relevant because the success of any educational program was contingent on the availability of counseling and related services. Fifty percent or more of all alternative schools reported that students were provided individual and group counseling daily or weekly. Counseling is a critical aspect of the educational process because of the myriad of social factors that affect school success.
Table XI

Amount of specialized staff training provided by Georgia Alternative Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Days</th>
<th>CrossRoads</th>
<th>Non-CrossRoads</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 Days</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-5 Days</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10 Days</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Report</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table XII

Methods of assignment and work status of Georgia Alternative Schools' Staff

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School &amp; Staff</th>
<th>Full-time</th>
<th>Part-time</th>
<th>Volunteers</th>
<th>Non-volunteers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CrossRoads</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrators</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>341</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>454</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselors</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Workers</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>33</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Staff</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total/CrossRoads</td>
<td>599</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>776</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-CrossRoads</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrators</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>408</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>427</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselors</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Workers</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Staff</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total/NonCrossRoads</td>
<td>499</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>521</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table XIII

Social services provided in Georgia Alternative Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>CrossRoads</th>
<th>Non-CrossRoads</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boy Scouts</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communities (Cities) In Schools</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dept. of Family and Children Services</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dept. of Public Health</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dept. of Labor</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dept. Of Human Resources</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County Extension Services</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Connection</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dept. of Juvenile Justice</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dept. of Mental Health</td>
<td>31</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Library</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Secondary Education Institutions</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Corporations</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YMCA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YWCA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table XIV

**Social service visits to Georgia Alternative Schools**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>CrossRoads, N=81</th>
<th>Non-CrossRoads, N=12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occasionally</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table XV

Rank of Curricula emphases in Georgia (CrossRoads) Alternative Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ranking</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basic Education</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict Resolution</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision Making</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Solving</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communications</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character Education</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life Planning</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational Education</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic Duty</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The ranked responses of Table XV are weighted. The numbers in the left column under each ranking represent the actual number of responses.
Table XVI

Rank of curricula emphases in Georgia (Non-CrossRoads) Alternative Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ranking</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Problem Solving</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character Education</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic Education</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life Planning</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict Resolution</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communications</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision Making</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic Duty</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational Education</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The ranked responses of Table XVI are weighted. The numbers in the left column under each ranking represent the actual number of responses.
Table XVII

**Individual and Group Counseling provided in Georgia Alternative Schools**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School and Counseling</th>
<th>Daily</th>
<th>Weekly</th>
<th>Monthly</th>
<th>Upon Request</th>
<th>No Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CrossRoads N=80</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-CrossRoads N=12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Characteristics of Alternative School Students

An important area of interest in this study was the characteristics of alternative school students. These characteristics were useful in identifying the goals, curriculum and methods of instruction of alternative schools. If these characteristics were correlated to the nature and purpose of the schools, an objective assessment of school effectiveness was feasible. Tables XVIII-XXVII graphically illustrated the data concerning students in Georgia alternative schools.

Table XVIII illustrated that 70% of the students at CrossRoads schools were assigned by administrative or tribunal action while 78% of Non-CrossRoads school students volunteered for enrollment. A total of 87% of CrossRoads' students were assigned. The statistical information for both schools was not meaningfully compared because of the small sample of responses from Non-CrossRoads schools. In addition, 71% of the students served at CrossRoads schools are classified as chronically disruptive with another 12% of them listed as dropouts, as shown in Table XIX. There was no information available from the Non-CrossRoads schools.

The data in Tables XX and XXI indicated that the races and genders of the student population at different schools vary. In regard to race and gender of the students, all schools reported a percentage of students as African American, Caucasian, Hispanic, and Asian. African American students represented the largest percentage of alternative schools' students in both CrossRoads and Non-CrossRoads schools. The CrossRoads schools' student population consisted of 59% African American and the Non-CrossRoads schools' population equated to 63%.
Caucasians represented 38% and 32% respectively of the student population in CrossRoads and Non-CrossRoads schools. The remaining alternative student population was comprised of Hispanics and Asians. Less than one percent of the alternative schools’ students were listed in any other race or ethnic group.

According to Table XXI, three-fourths of the population of CrossRoads schools were males, but in the Non-CrossRoads schools, the male-female ratio was much closer to being equal. Again, the percentages of the Non-CrossRoads schools were not to be generalized because of the small sample of this type alternative. Socio-economic factors such as family composition and poverty were often cited in research as risk factors for students’ success in traditional public schools. The number of students subsisting at or below the poverty level equated to the number of students eligible for free or reduced cost lunches in Georgia’s public school systems.

Table XXII illustrated that in the CrossRoads schools, the percentage of students residing with one or no parent was higher in contrast to that of the Non-CrossRoads schools’ students. In the CrossRoads schools, 72% of the students were from single-parent homes and 22% of them lived with both parents. Only 39% of the Non-CrossRoads schools’ students lived in single-parent homes and 59% of them live with both parents. Thirty-five percent (35%) of the students qualified for free/reduced lunch, which was a good indication of the number of students below the poverty level.

The percentage of students eligible for free or reduced lunch was also higher in the CrossRoads schools (Table XXII). Furthermore, 75% of the students enrolled were eligible for free/reduced lunch.
The students' eligibility was based on a minimum annual family income. This baseline income of less than $15,000 for a family of four, fluctuated but was determined by the Georgia Department of Health and Human Resources.

School attendance and dropout rates are accepted indicators of students' attachment to school and were also regarded as barometers of school effectiveness. Table XXIII illustrated that the average length of stay was greater than the required length of attendance in both CrossRoads and Non-CrossRoads schools. Additionally, there was little difference between the required length of stay and the average enrollment periods for student in both alternative schools. However, the range of stay implied a longer period of enrollment for students of CrossRoads schools.

According to the data, administrators of both types of alternative schools believed that the attendance rate of their students had increased since the students enrolled in the respective schools. Table XXIV denoted 51 CrossRoads schools and six of the Non-CrossRoads school respondents indicated that the student attendance rates had increased during the students' enrollment in the respective schools. Nearly 33% of the CrossRoads schools provided no response to the survey item requesting data on the rate of increase in student attendance.

A student with 11 or more illegal absences was in danger of failing to be promoted according to Georgia's standards. Notwithstanding, Table XXV portrayed the number of CrossRoads students with 11 or more illegal absences ranged from zero to ninety and from zero to twenty-five in the Non-CrossRoads schools.
Of the CrossRoads and Non-CrossRoads respondents, 23% and 28% respectively failed to respond to the survey items relating to attendance rate. Of the CrossRoads students, an average of 16 students per school accumulated 11 or more days of illegal absences.

As referenced in Table XXVI, 11 CrossRoads schools' students per school dropped out before returning to their regular school. Of the CrossRoads school administrators, 38% and 33% respectively gave no response to the items pertaining to the number of dropouts before reassignment, and concerning students with illegal absences.

The percentage of students returning to alternative schools for a second time had major implications for the effectiveness of schools in addressing students' needs. The percentage of students who return to the alternative schools was only available for CrossRoads schools because only they had a responsibility for temporarily enrolling students and returning them to their host school.

The data in Table XXVII reflected that 40% of the alternative schools had 20% to 75% of the students enrolling in alternative schools for a second time. A combined 54% of the schools have a minimum of 10% of the student population returning for a second time. In this category, 25% of the reporting schools did not respond to this survey item. Missing data notwithstanding, this was an alarming indicator of school ineffectiveness.
Table XVIII

**Enrollment procedures by percentages of Georgia Alternative School students**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Procedures</th>
<th>CrossRoads</th>
<th>Non-CrossRoads</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assigned by Tribunal</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referred by Juvenile Justice</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referred by Social Services</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referred by other e.g. Student Support Team</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteered for Enrollment</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table XIX

**Types of students served in Georgia Alternative Schools**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>N=63</th>
<th>CrossRoads</th>
<th>Non-CrossRoads</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chronically Disruptive</td>
<td></td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>No Report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dropouts</td>
<td></td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>No Report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectant Mothers</td>
<td></td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>No Report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Achievers</td>
<td></td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>No Report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Needs</td>
<td></td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>No Report</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table XX

**Race of students in Georgia Alternative Schools**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>CrossRoads</th>
<th>Non-CrossRoads</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N= 76</td>
<td>N= 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table XXI

**Gender of students in Georgia Alternative Schools**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>CrossRoads</th>
<th>Non-CrossRoads</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N=76</td>
<td>N=11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table XXII

Socio-economic status of Georgia Alternative Schools' students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students' Status</th>
<th>CrossRoads, N=66</th>
<th>Non-CrossRoads, N=9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reside with one Parent/Guardian</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reside with two Parents/Guardians</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reside with no Parent/Guardian</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eligible for Free/Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table XXIII

Duration of enrollment in Georgia Alternative Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Duration of enrollment by Day</th>
<th>CrossRoads</th>
<th>Non-CrossRoads</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Minimum Required Length of Stay</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range/Required Length of Stay</td>
<td>10-324</td>
<td>3-180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Length of Stay</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table XXIV

Attendance rate increase as perceived by Georgia Alternative School administrators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Administrators' Response</th>
<th>CrossRoads</th>
<th>Non-CrossRoads</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table XXV

Number of students in Georgia Alternative Schools with 11 or more illegal absences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>CrossRoads</th>
<th>Non-CrossRoads</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>0-90</td>
<td>0-25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table XXVI

Number of Georgia Alternative Schools’ students who dropped out before reassignment to regular school

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statistics</th>
<th>CrossRoads</th>
<th>Non-CrossRoads</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>0-70</td>
<td>0-17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table XXVII

Students returning to Georgia CrossRoads Alternative Schools for the second time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percent of Students</th>
<th>N=64</th>
<th>Number of Schools</th>
<th>Percent of Schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20% - 75%</td>
<td></td>
<td>34</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10% - 19%</td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0% - 9%</td>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Report</td>
<td></td>
<td>21</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td></td>
<td>85</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Administrators’ Perceptions

Table XXVIII showed that the CrossRoads school administrators disagreed on the school staffs’ autonomy to hire staff and the Non-CrossRoads administrators split 50-50 on whether the schools’ staff had the freedom to decide what would be taught. The Non-CrossRoads schools’ administrators also split over the staffs’ autonomy to develop a protocol for student counseling.

The administrators’ responses to the questions regarding community and parent involvement, staff training and student achievement were also depicted in Table XXVIII. For the CrossRoads administrators, there was little difference of opinion between those who agreed and disagreed about school autonomy in hiring staff and determining the length of stay of students. Slightly more than half of all alternative schools’ administrators agreed that their schools had complete autonomy in hiring staff, and a majority of them agreed that schools could determine the length of stay of the students. An equal number of Non-CrossRoads school administrators agreed and disagreed on the statement of whether the school staff had complete autonomy in deciding what would be taught. The same ratio of agreement to disagreement existed for the survey response relating to staff freedom on developing a protocol for student counseling.
Table XXVIII

Principals’ perceptions of Georgia Alternative School operations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principals’ Perceptions</th>
<th>CrossRoads</th>
<th></th>
<th>Non-CrossRoads</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N=79</td>
<td>N=12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff has complete autonomy in:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Deciding what will be taught.</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Selecting teaching/learning activities.</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Hiring staff.</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Developing student behavior rules.</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Developing student evaluations.</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Determining the length of stay.</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. Developing a protocol for counseling students.</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community is strongly involved in schools’ operation</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents are highly involved in schools’ operation</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers/Staff receive adequate specialized training</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student achievement below district’s norms.</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Response to Research Questions

In response to the question of whether there were different types of alternative schools in Georgia, the data indicated that there were at least two major types: CrossRoads and Non-CrossRoads schools. CrossRoads schools were illustrated as alternative class, apprenticeship, behavior modification, charter school, community-based education, disciplinary, juvenile justice, technology, and teen parenting models. NonCrossRoads schools were listed as charter school, magnet school, school-within-a school models.

The goals of the various Georgia alternative schools were in some cases multifaceted. For example, some schools listed “Increasing Academic Achievement” and “Dropout Prevention” as goals. Other alternative schools listed two or more goals while some listed only one goal. Nevertheless, the primary goal of the majority of the schools focused on “Temporarily Isolating Students”. The characteristics of the Georgia alternative schools related to the infrastructure, curricula, methods of instruction, and students served. Most of the alternative schools were designated CrossRoads indicating that they were recipients of additional funds for serving chronically disruptive students. A majority of these schools were located in separate facilities of rural communities, and had existed for an average of five years.

The Georgia alternative schools served a variety of student needs in grades one through twelve and have a teacher – pupil ratio smaller than the traditional public school. Most of the staff of these schools volunteered for the assignments; however, there was some question as to the adequacy of the amount of training that the staffs received.
Most alternative schools emphasized a basic academic oriented curriculum (reading, writing, and mathematics). Teaching to different learning styles was reportedly stressed at a majority of the alternative schools. Student assessment was based on the capabilities of the students or on predetermined criteria. The schools' programs were evaluated frequently although only about 35% of them were evaluated independently.

The Georgia alternative school students were reported as being from four basic races or ethnic groups – African American, Asian, Caucasian, and Hispanic. African American students comprised 59% of the CrossRoads schools and Caucasians represented 38% of the students. In the Non-CrossRoads schools, 32% of the students were Caucasians and 63% were African American. The Asian and Hispanic students represented less than four percent of the alternative school population.

Seventy-two percent of the students of the CrossRoads schools resided in single-parent homes and 75% of them were eligible for free/reduced lunch. A majority (70%) of alternative school students were assigned by tribunal or based on some identified need while only 13% volunteered for enrollment. Students classified as chronically disruptive comprised 71% of the alternative school population.

The students at alternative schools were frequently availed of individual and group counseling. Also, a number of social service agencies provided assistance at the alternative schools. Juvenile Justice, Department of Family and Children Services, and Mental Health professionals were listed as the most frequent visitors at alternative schools. However, there was some evidence that other organizations in the private sector interfaced with alternative schools.
The recidivism rate, which was the percentage of students that enrolled in the alternative schools for a second time or more, was a source of concern. Fifty-three percent of the alternative schools reported having 20% - 75% of their student population returning for a second time. The average number of students who dropped out before returning to their regular school ranged from 0 to 70 students in some schools.

Summary

The research on Georgia public alternative schools indicated that the two major types of alternative schools, CrossRoads and Non-CrossRoads, were not classified as such solely because of their goals. These types of alternative schools were also identifiable based on the method of funding allocated to the schools because of the classification of students served. CrossRoads schools were alternative schools that received additional funding for serving students who were chronically disruptive. Non-CrossRoads schools could also cater to chronically disruptive students and did not receive additional funds accordingly. The majority of the schools on which data were collected were rural – based CrossRoads schools that served students who were largely designated as chronically disruptive. Most of these schools operated in separate facilities.

Most of these schools were at least five years old and had an average student enrollment that was slightly less than the schools' enrollment capacity. The teacher-pupil ratio of most alternative schools was 1:15 and the per-pupil cost was reported to be higher than that of other schools in the district/school system.

The goal of 61% of the alternative schools was to temporarily isolate students. However, “Drop Out Prevention” and “Increasing Academic Achievement” were listed as goals among the schools that listed the aforementioned goal.
Three-fourths of the schools served students in grades 6-12 and more than half emphasized a basic reading, writing, and mathematics curriculum. Better than 50% of the schools acknowledged that their academic and discipline programs operated similarly to those of other schools in the districts. As many as 15 different social service or community agencies provided services to the alternative schools. Ninety-five percent of the schools reported that occasionally and more often, social service agencies visited the schools. Individual and group counseling were frequently provided for students at more than 66% of the schools.

For full-time to part-time alternative schools' staff, the ratio was 3:1 or better in every area except for counselors and social workers. The majority of alternative schools' staff was comprised of people who volunteered for their assignments. The number or percentage of school staff that received specialized training was unknown because 64% of the schools did not respond to the survey item pertaining to staff training. School district or alternative school personnel annually evaluated the programs of more than half of the alternative schools.

A majority of the Georgia alternative school students were assigned to the schools by a tribunal or an administrative panel that decided what should be done for students with various needs. More than one half of the students was regarded as chronically disruptive and remained in the alternative schools from 10-324 days.

Roughly 50% of the students were African American and two thirds of all of the students were male. Seventy-two percent of the CrossRoads' students lived in single-parent homes and 75% of them were eligible for free/reduced lunch, which was based on the economic level of the family.
Even though 59% of the schools reported that students' attendance rate increased at the alternative schools, the average number of students with eleven or more illegal absences ranged from 0-90 and the number who dropped out before reassignment to their regular schools ranged from 0-70. Finally, some 40% of the schools reported that 20% to 75% of the students were enrolled in alternative school for a second time or more.
CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

Lawmakers and educators are becoming more reliant on alternative schools to educate students who are adversely affected by social issues, which diminish their opportunities for academic success in traditional public schools. Previous studies of Georgia’s alternative schools indicate that the majority of alternative schools were discipline-oriented ones, which served chronically disruptive students. These studies also highlight a scarcity of empirical data to validate the efficacy of Georgia alternative schools. Moreover, the research discloses a shortage of program data and evaluative information relative to the characteristics of the schools and the students served by the alternative schools.

This descriptive research was conducted to identify and categorize Georgia public alternative schools and to describe those schools’ characteristics. In addition, this study was designed and implemented to identify and classify the characteristics of students in Georgia’s alternative schools. A perceived residual benefit was to determine what others are doing in alternative education and to obtain their perspectives on how alternative education is implemented in Georgia.
This research addresses questions pertaining to the different types of alternative schools in Georgia, goals of each type of alternative school, characteristics of the different types of alternative schools, and the characteristics of the students served in these alternative schools.

The researcher designed a survey to collect data about alternative schools from every alternative school in Georgia. The survey was designed to obtain information about the types of alternative schools, the goals of the alternative schools, the characteristics of the alternative schools, and the characteristics of the alternative school students and to solicit the perceptions of the school administrators regarding school operation. The survey items were developed from information collected during site visits to seven different alternative schools and from data obtained from an extensive literature review.

A survey consisting of 44 multiple response items and a cover letter was mailed to 200 Georgia alternative school administrators with a self-addressed envelope in which to return the results. After ten work days had elapsed, a post card was mailed to remind the participants who had not returned the surveys of the importance of the study. Telephone interviews were made to 10% of the participants to expedite and to facilitate the collecting of information. One hundred fifteen surveys were returned. However, only 97 of them were useable because the majority of charter and magnet school administrators chose not to participate as alternative schools. The participating schools consisted of 85 CrossRoads schools and 12 Non-CrossRoads schools. The returned survey data were collected, aggregated and the following findings resulted.
Discussion of Research Findings

Characteristics of Georgia Alternative Schools

The major types of alternative schools are the same types referred to in earlier studies by Chalker (1994) and Karlin (1995). The two types of alternative schools identified in the survey are those designated as CrossRoads schools and Non-CrossRoads schools. The CrossRoads schools are classified as such because they receive additional state allocated funds for serving students categorized as chronically disruptive. Both CrossRoads and Non-CrossRoads students serve chronically disruptive students and students in other categories.

There are at least 11 models of alternative schools that are identified according to their mission or the needs of the students served. The list of Georgia alternative school programs exemplifies some of the models of alternative schools outlined in the literature. These schools range from the simple alternative class within a school to the complex community-based alternative school.

One component of effective alternative schools referenced in the literature is that these schools should have a clearly stated mission, goals and objectives. Some CrossRoads and Non-CrossRoads alternative school administrators report more than one goal for their school. While 67% of the CrossRoads schools list temporary isolation of students as a goal the Non-CrossRoads schools as anticipated, list focusing on increasing academic achievement as their primary goals.
The goals listed by the administrators may be based on the type of students served and not necessarily because one is designated a CrossRoads or a Non-CrossRoads school. For example, an alternative school that lists academic achievement as one of its goals may have a primary goal of serving pregnant teens or focusing on drop out prevention.

The literature on CrossRoads schools states that these schools are designed to provide educational opportunities to students who are chronically disruptive. This strategy presumably addresses the antisocial behavior often exhibited by these students.

According to Kellmayer (1995) these nontraditional alternatives represent ineffective and often punitive approaches which segregate and separate students from the mainstream. This is an important observation since 67% of Georgia’s CrossRoads school administrators list temporary isolation of students as a goal. Moreover, 71% of the CrossRoads’ students are characterized as chronically disruptive.

Kellmayer (1995) defined an effective alternative school curriculum as one that emphasizes basic and experiential skills such as community service, internships, and school to work transition. This study illustrates that some Georgia alternative schools emphasize such a curriculum. The CrossRoads schools ranked their top five curricular emphases as basic education, character education, communications, vocational education and life planning. The CrossRoads schools’ academic and discipline programs (74% and 63% respectively) are designed and operate similarly to those of other schools in the respective districts. This is a significant finding since the term alternative school implies the implementation of programs of instruction and curricula tailored to the needs of the students instead of duplicating the service provided by traditional public schools.
The Non-CrossRoads schools rank basic education, civic duty, conflict resolution, decision-making and communications as the top five curricula emphasized in their alternative programs. A basic education curriculum (reading, writing, and mathematics) ranks as the primary area of emphasis by a majority of both CrossRoads and Non-CrossRoads schools.

The location of an alternative school as a separate administrative unit is also cited in effective schools' research as a way of optimizing a school's potential for success. The research on Georgia's alternative schools indicates that CrossRoads schools are primarily located in separate facilities in contrast to the Non-CrossRoads schools. The majority of CrossRoads schools are primarily located in rural communities. The Non-CrossRoads schools have existed longer and have a higher student enrollment capacity than CrossRoads schools because they are essentially traditional public schools. Since most of Georgia's CrossRoads alternative schools are located as separate schools, this optimizes their potential for success in accordance with the successful alternative schools models.

A Safe and Drug-Free Schools (SDFS) Report (1996) emphasized that effective alternative schools typically employed highly trained and carefully selected volunteer staff and are characterized by intensive counseling and monitoring. The data from this research indicates that a majority of both types of alternative school staff volunteered for their job assignments and some type of social service agencies visit 95% of the CrossRoads schools and 80% of the Non-CrossRoads schools.
The data revealed in this study are consistent with Neumann's (1994) contention that successful alternative schools operate using site-based management, have small enrollments and a maximum teacher-pupil ratio of 1:10. For example, more than 50% of Georgia alternative school administrators report that their schools have complete autonomy in hiring staff. Additionally, 84% of CrossRoads schools have a teacher-pupil ratio of 1:15 or less and 67% of the Non-CrossRoads schools have a teacher-pupil ratio of 1:25 or less.

Neumann (1994) also stated that successful schools are staffed with teachers who are also counselors, and personnel who volunteer for assignment to these schools. These schools advocate voluntary enrollment, and are characterized by school, parent, and community collaboration. This Georgia alternative school data illustrates that Georgia's CrossRoads and Non-CrossRoads schools utilize both teachers and counselors. Social service agents also visit more than 80% of the alternative schools at least on an occasional basis. However, there is no indication as to what the social service agents do when they visit the schools. Nevertheless, Juvenile Justice is the social service agency that visits most frequently to alternative school campuses. The Department of Family and Children Services (DFACS) and mental health agents are other social service agencies that visit alternative schools frequently.

Characteristics of Georgia Alternative School Students

In describing features of ineffective alternative schools, Morley (1991) notes that most are punitive in nature and represent referral programs to which students are assigned. In regard to the characteristics of Georgia's alternative school students, 71% are classified as chronically disruptive.
It is worth noting that, 70% of CrossRoads students are involuntarily assigned by administrative action such as a tribunal (hearing) or referred by Juvenile Justice agencies. By contrast, 78% of the Non-CrossRoads students volunteer for enrollment.

Erkstrong, Goertz, Pollack and Rock (1987) state that social factors affect students' academic achievement and behavior in school. Moreover, attendance, grades and school completion are significantly influenced by socioeconomic status (SES), race or ethnicity, family composition and size, and living in the south or a large city.

The Georgia alternative schools survey indicates that of the CrossRoads students, 52% are African American, 75% are males, 72% reside with one parent, and 75% are eligible for free or reduced lunch. Of the Non-CrossRoads students, 39% reside with one parent, and 35% are eligible for free or reduced lunch. In addition, 49% of the students are Caucasian and 53% are males.

The number or percentage of students who are eligible for free or reduced lunch represents the portion of the student population from families that live at or below the poverty level. Nonetheless, the CrossRoads school students represent the largest percentage of students from single parent homes that subsist at or below the poverty level.

One disturbing trend observed in the data on Georgia alternative schools is indicated by the percentage of alternative school students who return to alternative schools for a second time after being readmitted to their host school. Some 40% of CrossRoads schools reported that from 20% to 75% of their students return for a second time. Data on this research item was incomplete for 25% of the schools.
The shortage of information has implications for program evaluation because the number of students returning to alternative schools for a second time may be significantly greater than that (20% to 75%) reported by 40% of schools responding. This finding is significant in that it addresses the efficacy of alternative school programs in meeting the needs of the students. The high rate of recidivism implies that some Georgia alternative schools may lack the capacity to address students’ needs or that the specific needs of some students are not clearly discernible.

The number of students who drop out before returning to regular school ranges from 0-71 in CrossRoads schools and from 0-17 in Non-CrossRoads schools. The figure for Non-CrossRoads is more indicative of the range of dropouts because the Non-CrossRoads school is the regular school for the students assigned. Students from grades 1-12 are served in both types of alternative school.

The non-responses or incomplete data that were provided by some Georgia alternative schools are significant because previous studies by Chalker (1994) and Karlin (1995) alluded to inconsistencies in the reporting of alternative school data. For example, Chalker referred to the inadequacy of data about training or staff development for alternative schools’ staff. In this study, 64% of CrossRoads schools and 33% of Non-CrossRoads schools did not respond to the survey item pertaining to the amount of staff development training received. In addition, responses to the following data items were incomplete or not addressed.

- Thirty-three percent of CrossRoads schools provided no response to the number of students with 11 or more illegal absences.
Thirty-eight percent of the CrossRoads schools did not respond to the survey question pertaining to the number of students who drop out before reassignment to their host schools.

Approximately 33% of CrossRoads schools did not indicate whether the enrollment capacity was adequate, and 41% of the Non-CrossRoads schools provided no response.

No response was provided by 27% of the CrossRoads schools regarding whether administrators observed an increase in the schools' attendance rates.

In reference to Non-CrossRoads schools' responses, the sample size was extremely small in contrast to CrossRoads schools. Therefore, the data cannot be generalized to the population of Non-CrossRoads schools. This finding also applies in other areas where a comparison between CrossRoads and Non-CrossRoads schools is not feasible.

Conclusions

A majority of Georgia's alternative schools primarily focus on segregating, containing, and reforming what is reported to be a disruptive student population. This and previous research data on Georgia alternative schools are insufficient to determine whether the aforementioned goal enhances or inhibits students' success in school. The perception that alternative schools are primarily schools for unruly and unmanageable students is pervasive among Georgia's charter and magnet school administrators. The majority of them (over 85%) chose not to participate in this study stating that they were not alternative schools.
In contrast to the perception that alternative schools’ students should consist of the gifted and talented students, poor, low-ability and disruptive types, there is more evidence to support Chalker’s prediction of an increase in schools for the disruptive. Nevertheless, the poor are well represented in the schools for the chronically disruptive.

According to this alternative school research data, Raywid’s “Popular Innovation” or Type I alternative programs are underrepresented in Georgia’s alternative schools. The CrossRoads schools, which receive state financial support for student services are the predominant type (88%) of alternative school except for the magnet and charter schools, which are not considered alternative schools by many. Despite the lack of evidence supporting the efficacy of “Last Chance” programs, Georgia has embraced this concept of alternative schooling.

Most alternative schools are located as separate schools, which optimizes their potential for success in accordance with the successful alternative schools model. However, it is difficult to determine how effective they are in the absence of reliable and complete data.

Furthermore, a majority of the alternative schools are rural schools. They serve students from grades 1-12. The schools serve students in all grades but most primarily serve students in grades six through eight. Georgia's alternative schools have existed for an average of 5 years or more.

Currently alternative schools’ population does not exceed the enrollment capacity. The low average enrollment and small teacher-pupil ratio are conducive to improving student achievement.
The establishment of program objectives geared toward meeting needs of the students seems in some cases to be inconsistent. For example, given the large population of disruptive students, Georgia’s alternative schools’ curricula emphases should represent a balance between teaching affective and cognitive skills. Instead, a basic curriculum (reading, writing and mathematics) is emphasized by a majority of both types of alternative schools. In contrast, decision-making, character education, and problem solving curricula are ranked number one in emphasis by few respondents.

In addition, the academic and discipline programs of most alternative schools are designed and operate similarly to the traditional public school programs. In establishing a rationale for alternative schools, this data appears to countermand the perception that alternative schools are necessary. Without further explanation, one might conclude that if the similarities in academic curricula and discipline procedures reflect those of the traditional public schools, there is no need for an alternative school.

In comparing and contrasting the literature with this research, one trend in student evaluation which benefits students is that 85% of Georgia’s alternative schools report that individual expectation or predetermined criteria are the basis for evaluating Georgia’s alternative school students. In addition, a majority of these schools report that teaching to individual learning styles is emphasized as a method of instruction. This highlights the need to explore the question of how much Georgia alternative schools differ in curricula, methods of instruction and infrastructure from the traditional public school.
The fact that individual and group counseling are accessible to students at most of Georgia's alternative schools exemplify attempts to address students' needs and is indicative of the concept of caring and supporting students. Consequently, Georgia’s alternative schools have the capacity and commitment to address various social issues that impact students' academic achievement. The capacity to do so is evidenced by the availability of individual and group counseling on a regular basis or upon request. The frequency of social service agency visits to 95% of the schools implies an effort to address the needs of Georgia's alternative schools students.

The research on Georgia alternative school students illustrates that the characteristics of alternative school students vary depending on the type of school. The student populations of alternative schools are diverse with representation from African American, Asian, Caucasian, and Hispanic races. A large percentage of CrossRoads alternative school students live at or below the poverty level and reside in single parent homes.

In contrast to the literature, which states that alternative schools should serve an array of students with various needs, there is an overrepresentation of students with behavior problems in Georgia's alternative schools. Specifically, 71% of the students served are classified as chronically disruptive, and 70% of the CrossRoads' students are assigned or administratively placed in the schools. Most alternative school students are not voluntarily enrolled and are assigned as a result of some administrative or judicial process due to problems that they experience in the regular schools.
An inordinate number of students are enrolled in alternative schools for a second time or more. Forty percent of the alternative schools have from 20% to 75% of the student population returning for a second time or more, and the average number of CrossRoads schools’ dropouts who do not return to regular school is 11 students with a range of from 0 to 70. The unusually high percentage of students who are repeating the alternative school experience for a second time or more implies that some Georgia alternative schools experience little success in achieving program objectives relating to the students served.

There are social factors that have adverse implications for the achievement of Georgia’s alternative school students. One such factor is illustrated by the fact that a majority of CrossRoads alternative schools’ students reside in single-parent homes and subsist at or below the poverty level. This suggests that in the case of a working parent, there may be little available family support to facilitate academic success in school.

Factors attributable to successful alternative school operation are evident in the research on Georgia’s public alternative schools. Specifically, most alternative school administrators acknowledge having adequate community support and parental involvement. In addition, most acknowledge having some control in the selection and hiring of staff, deciding curriculum issues and methods of instructions. One ambiguous area in administrators’ perceptions is related to whether the cost of operating alternative schools is higher than that of other schools in the respective districts or systems. Slightly more than half report that the per-pupil cost is higher in contrast to traditional public schools.
Given the variety and quantity of needs that alternative schools are expected to meet, this should not be a significant issue. However, it raises the issue of feasibility in establishing separate alternative schools versus creating alternative learning experiences within existing public schools. This has implications for extending the capacity to serve students with diverse needs in the absence of available resources.

Although throughout this report, continuous reference is made to CrossRoads and Non-CrossRoads alternative schools, any attempt to statistically compare or contrast data between the schools would be inappropriate. The sample of Non-CrossRoads schools' students was too small to make any comparisons between students from the two types of schools. The research instrument was not designed to measure staff commitment or expectations of students.

Even though there are two distinct types of Georgia alternative schools, 74% are disciplinary models, which resemble the Type II or “Last Chance” programs that focus on fixing the students or expelling them. An apparent shift in focus on behavior versus a basic education for all students is supported by the fact that more than half of the alternative schools report temporary isolation of students as a primary goal. There is little evidence that the alternative schools’ low teacher-pupil ratio contributes significantly to student success while assigned there.

The time line for intervention to address student behavior may be too long to meet the needs of students and to effect positive behavior changes. For example, the antisocial behavior patterns of disruptive students are not identified and addressed early enough before the assignment of students to alternative schools as a last resort.
Unfortunately, this study does not identify prevention-oriented alternative schools as the researcher had envisioned. Nevertheless, the information should provide practitioners some insight as to the necessity for developing contingencies within traditional public schools to address student needs precipitated by social factors beyond the scope of schools' influence.

Despite the evidence of the good things that are being accomplished by Georgia alternative schools, this research and prior research efforts continue to highlight common inconsistencies in the quality and accuracy of information reported. The shortage or absence of some evaluative data persists and the need to relate and articulate student characteristics to the goals and program objectives of the schools is evident. As per previous research studies, a majority of CrossRoads schools and 33% of the Non-CrossRoads schools provided incomplete or no data on training being provided to staff. This dearth of information raises the issue as to whether such data is available within the schools. The shortage of data on dropouts and the attendance rate also warrant review by practitioners. These inconsistencies have far-reaching implications in terms of the practitioners' ability to evaluate the efficacy of alternative school programs. Furthermore, the lack of credible data may seriously hamper one's ability to obtain the resources to establish and sustain alternative school programs.

It may become more difficult to justify support for operation of alternative schools without evidence of increased or sustained student achievement based on specific alternative schools' performance objectives. The academic and discipline programs of most alternative schools may be ineffective in achieving the desired results because the curricula and methods of operation are similar to those of traditional public schools.
A majority of the schools (84%) reported that their academic programs are designed and operate similarly to programs of other district schools. The obvious question raised by this finding is “how are alternative school programs different”?

Implications

This research information can benefit the Georgia legislature and the Department of Education because both have the responsibility for funding, and developing policy and procedures for the establishment and maintenance of Georgia alternative schools. In order to demonstrate the cost effectiveness of such programs, a paradigm and procedures for evaluating all alternative program objectives must be developed and implemented.

The dropout and recidivism rates have the gravest implications for evaluating the efficacy of alternative schools. The information pertaining to the average number of alternative schools' dropouts and the percentage of students who return for a second time or more may erode public confidence in the alternative school concept.

Local school superintendents can use this information to assist in the formulation of policy and procedures for operating alternative schools. The information pertaining to characteristics of effective alternative programs and the characteristics of alternative school students can provide a basis for developing tools to measure current interventions within alternative schools.

It is apparent that alternative schools cannot “fix the students” and return them with no ill effects to their regular schools. This is apparent based on the rate of recidivism or the number of students who repeat the alternative school experience for a second time or more. The current process of assessing and identifying students' needs before, during and after alternative school placement is in need of review and revision.
This process has serious implications for practitioners and school administrators because of the growing demand to demonstrate success in helping students to complete school and to show progress towards reduction of disruptive behavior in traditional public schools. The Georgia legislative standards and law require school systems to meet the educational requirements of each student under 16 years old.

The research suggests that other than providing a place to isolate students, the alternative schools are not addressing the needs of the students in the time frame allotted for interventions. There is a lack of continuity between the established goals and objectives of alternative schools and their ability to meet needs of the students they serve.

Parents and students can benefit from this research information in that through regular interaction with the schools, both can acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to enhance students’ success. Parents and students who have an understanding of the purpose, structure, and goals of alternative schools can make good decisions about how to assist in improving or sustaining student achievement.

Dissemination

Georgia’s governor has formed a committee to study and make recommendations for improving the quality of education throughout the state. The governor supports funding for CrossRoads Alternative Schools that provides interventions for disruptive students in public education. This position only addresses part of the alternative school issue in that it does not include funding for students with other needs that alternative education could address. I plan to provide a copy of this dissertation to the Committee on Georgia Educational Improvement and the alternative school coordinator for the Georgia Department of Education.
I will also advocate posting the abstract of the dissertation on the Georgia Department of Education’s web site, which will provide information to practitioners and Georgia school administrators. In addition, I plan to present the findings to my school system and to follow up with articles relating to the directionality of alternative education in Georgia.

Recommendations

Based on the survey research, some student-centered interventions in Georgia’s alternative schools are being implemented to address specific needs of targeted students. However, due to the large percentage of students who return for a second time or more, it is imperative that a system of continuous program evaluation be established and maintained. I recommend that the Georgia Department of Education (GDOE) establish a database and a process to facilitate program evaluation of CrossRoads and Non-CrossRoads alternative schools.

I recommend that the GDOE policy makers review funding guidelines and coordinate with state legislators to modify them to avail all alternative schools of sufficient funds to serve all students who need alternative education.

The current CrossRoads program guidelines do not provide for self-referral to alternative schools by students, and are structured similarly to “last chance” programs, which have been shown to be ineffective.

I recommend that the GDOE modify alternative school guidelines to facilitate voluntary enrollment of students in alternative schools based on an agreement among the parents or guardians, students, and school officials.
I further recommend that the GDOE study existing CrossRoads schools to
determine what program goals and objectives are established and accomplished in
relation to the types of students served. The study should also compare the curricula,
teaching methods and alternative schools' infrastructure to similar characteristics of
traditional public schools.

In addition, I recommend that the Georgia Department of Education and local
school systems or districts collaborate to:

(1) Standardize evaluation methods and record keeping for all Georgia
    Alternative schools. This would aid in monitoring and evaluating all schools
    based on some uniform standard or performance level.

(2) Develop an evaluation instrument that correlates the schools' objectives to the
    intervention strategies implemented for students. This would also facilitate
    the evaluation of schools to assess the accomplishment of stated goals and
    objectives.

(3) Establish procedures to assess student achievement upon enrollment and after
    completion of an alternative program when the enrollment period exceeds ten
    days. This pretest-post test process would give practitioners a tool with which
    to measure student progress during their enrollment in alternative schools.

(4) Provide technical assistance to alternative school administrators and staff in
    establishing and managing a database and prescribed records. This process
    could also facilitate standardizing reporting procedures and give
    administrators the concept and technical knowledge required for data
    collection.
I recommend that local school districts or systems form a multidisciplinary committee to develop a Needs Assessment and comprehensively compile student information, to make recommendations for alternative means of addressing issues that adversely affect student achievement.

Local systems and the GDOE should conduct more research on the effectiveness of different models of alternative schools based on student characteristics and institutional goals and objectives. This could lead to the implementation of strategies that actually meet the needs of the students served.

Local systems and the GDOE should explore reasons for the high recidivism rate of alternative school students in schools where 10% or more of the students return for a second time. This information will prove useful in the alternative schools debate. This will be significant as alternative schools are in competition with traditional public schools for resources.

Local school systems and the GDOE should collaborate to establish a mechanism for tracking students beyond the alternative school experience. This would provide useful information as to the success rate of alternative school intervention over time.

The GDOE should collaborate in conducting research to compare and contrast the program objectives and student characteristics of alternative schools with those of other district schools including magnet and charter schools. This process would produce more quantifiable data with which to assess school effectiveness.
I recommend that more alternative schools emphasize or adopt curricula relative to decision-making, problem solving, conflict resolution, character education and interpersonal communication skills because 71% of the students served are labeled chronically disruptive.

I further recommend that the alternative schools' academic and discipline curricula be tailored to address the needs of the students as opposed to mirroring the curricula of traditional public schools.

Finally, the GDOE and local school systems should explore opportunities and methods to incrementally modify the structure, curricula, and pedagogical practices of traditional public schools to accommodate the alternative educational needs of students.

Summary

This study extends the frontier for research of Georgia alternative schools in that it is a first step towards developing a model for classifying all alternative schools. Even though this study yielded data from a small sample of Non-CrossRoads schools, the information collected can be of benefit for future studies of Georgia public alternative schools because of the type of information collected from a total sample size that is three times that of any previously known study. As fore stated, this was a descriptive study with a purpose of gathering information with which to identify the types and characteristics of Georgia’s public alternative schools and the students they serve.

The survey instrument used in this study was not designed to capture data on the perceptions of alternative schools’ students and staff, which could be very beneficial to future studies of Georgia’s alternative schools.
I would like to have been able to include additional survey items or to develop another instrument to gather information from alternative school students. I would like to participate in a study of alternative schools using traditional public schools as the control group.

A separate study of magnet and charter schools could be of tremendous value in gauging the efficacy of alternative schools that serve other than chronically disruptive students. It is my guess that the make up and operation of magnet and charter schools most resembles that of the historical Popular Innovation alternative schools referred to in the literature. A comparative study between CrossRoads and magnet or charter schools could provide additional information about the efficacy of alternative programs in Georgia. This study would have provided a lot of the information had a larger sample of magnet and charter school administrators participated.

One lesson learned in conducting this research is that the greatest opportunity for eliciting the cooperation of Georgia school administrators is prior to December of each school year. This is a factor because annual school activities such as standardized testing and reporting requirements take precedent over all other requests. Consequently, research conducted in the fall further minimizes the chance of getting incomplete or insufficient data.

The information in this study provides a platform from which practitioners at all levels may review and evaluate policies, programs, and procedures for the effective operation of Georgia’s alternative schools. The data collected and not provided, highlight the need for further study on Georgia’s alternative schools to insure prudent distribution of resources and to optimize the opportunities for students’ success in schools.
References


Alternative schools try to turn lives from wrong path. (1999, January 24), The Augusta Chronicle, p. 6C.


Leue, M. M. (1992), Challenging the giant: *The best of SKOLE, the journal of alternative education*. 


APPENDICES
Appendix A

Sample Letter to Pilot Study Participants
Appendix A

Sample Letter to Pilot Study Participants

Willie J. Wiley
747 Baker Place Road
Grovetown, Ga. 30813

Date

SUBJECT: Request for Review of Survey

Dear Colleague:

Despite your busy schedule, I respectfully request assistance in validating the attached survey, which will be used as a data collection instrument for dissertation research. Please complete the survey, answer the following statements by circling the desired response, and return only this cover letter in the enclosed envelope. You may also fax your response to me at (912) 625-3120

1. The survey questions/statements are comprehensible.  ____yes  ____no
2. The format is clear.  ____yes  ____no
3. The printing and size of type are adequate.  ____yes  ____no
4. The contents of the survey adequately address alternative school issues.  ____yes  ____no
5. The survey responses provide a comprehensive description of Georgia alternative schools.  ____yes  ____no
6. The survey was completed in _____ minutes.

Please include any additional comments that you want to make about the survey. 

_________________________________________________________

Your assistance in completing this work is most appreciative.

Sincerely,

Willie J. Wiley
Principal
Appendix B

Cover Letter for Survey
Appendix B

Cover Letter for Survey

Willie J. Wiley
747 Baker Place Road
Grovetown, Georgia 30813

E-mail – wwiley@bellsouth.net

Dear Colleague:

I am a middle school principal and a doctoral student, conducting an educational research project under the direction of Dr. Patricia Lindauer of Georgia Southern University. The purpose of this descriptive study of Georgia alternative schools is to provide research data that can be useful to practitioners and researchers who are interested in the nature, purpose, and types of alternative school programs in Georgia.

I realize that your time is valuable therefore, I have designed a short survey to facilitate data collection about alternative schools. Your participation in this study is voluntary, but necessary to insure quality research data results. The information concerning individual schools will be treated as confidential and the data will be aggregated such that no individual respondents (schools or programs) will be identified. Please take a few minutes (estimated 20 minutes) to complete the attached survey and return it to me in the enclosed envelope by May 7, 1999. If you desire a copy of the results, please contact me at the above address. NOTE: There is no penalty for refusing to answer certain questions, or for withdrawing from participation. However, completion and return of the survey will indicate permission to use the data in the study.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, please contact me during the day at (912) 625-7764, evenings at (706) 556-6539. Any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant in this study should be directed to the IRB coordinator at the Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs at (912) 681-5465.

I thank you in advance for your assistance in conducting this study. The results should provide very useful information about alternative schools in Georgia.

Sincerely,

Willie J. Wiley
Appendix C

Georgia Alternative School Survey
Appendix C

GEORGIA ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL SURVEY

PLEASE respond to the following inquiries and return the form in the enclosed envelope. CIRCLE, CHECK, or WRITE IN the applicable response(s)

1. Cross Roads Alternative School  Other Alternative School (specify)

2. This school is best described as __ urban __ suburban __ rural

3. This school has been an alternative school for _____ years.

4. This school is located on the same site as (circle the type school)
   a. Elementary  b. Middle  c. High School  d. Vocational  e. College  f. none

4. This school’s primary goals focus on:
   ___ dropout prevention ___ temporary isolation of students
   ___ increasing academic achievement ___ serving special needs
   ___ other (please specify objective) ____________________________

5. This school serves (indicate the percent of students served) ___ dropouts,
   ___ truants, ___ low achievers, ___ disruptive, ___ special needs,
   ___ gifted / talented, ___ expectant mothers, ___ dissatisfied students with different
   expectations, ___ unmet needs of students, ___ other (specify) _____.

6. This school serves grades ___ 6-8 ___ 9-12 (please specify other)

7. The enrollment capacity for this school is ___ students.

8. This school’s enrollment capacity meets the district’s needs. ___ yes ___ no

9. The average enrollment of this school for the 98-99 school year was ___ students.

10. Our approximate teacher-pupil ratio is 1: ______.
11. Our per-pupil expense is higher than that of other district schools that serve the same age level students. _____ yes _____ no

12. The percentage of students by race for this year is

_____ Caucasian
_____ African-American
_____ Hispanic
_____ Asian
_____ Other (please specify). ______

13. The percentage of students by gender for this school year is

_____ female _____ male.

14. The percentage of students who reside with only one parent/guardian is ____.

15. The percentage of students who do not reside with any parent/guardian is _____.

16. The percentage of students who are eligible for free/reduced lunch is ____.

17. The required length of stay for students is _____ days and/or _____ months.

18. The average length of stay for students ranges from _____ to _____ months.

19. Please list the percentage of students returning for the:

second time ______, third time or more ________.

20. The percentage (s) of students by category enrolled at this school was/were:

_____ volunteered for enrollment. _____ referred by social services

_____ assigned by school tribunal. _____ referred by Juvenile Services

_____ referred by another agency (please identify) _____________.

21. The number of students that dropped out before reassignment to their regular school was ______.
22. Our students' attendance rate has increased since their enrollment at this school.
   ____ yes  ____ no

23. The number of students with 11 or more illegal absences this school year is ____.

24. Please indicate the number of faculty & staff occupying full-time positions.
   ____ administrator  ____ teachers  ____ counselors  ____ social worker
   ____ other staff (identify) __________

25. Please indicate the number of persons occupying part-time positions.
   ____ administrator  ____ teachers  ____ counselors  ____ social worker
   ____ other staff (identify) __________

26. Please indicate the number of persons who chose to be assigned to this school.
   ____ administrator  ____ teachers  ____ counselor
   ____ other staff (identify) __________

27. Please indicate the number of persons who (s) were involuntarily assigned to this school.
   ____ administrators  ____ teachers  ____ counselor
   ____ Other staff (identify) __________

28. The teachers receive ____ (circle one) days, weeks, months of special training.

29. Individual counseling is scheduled for students with specific needs on a ____ daily,
   ____ weekly, ____ monthly basis; ____ upon request (check all that apply).

30. Group counseling is scheduled for students with diverse needs on a ____ daily,
   ____ weekly, ____ monthly basis; ____ upon request (check all that apply).

31. Social service agencies i.e. mental health, DFACS etc. provide services on the school's campus ____ daily, ____ weekly, ____ occasionally, ____ never.
32. Please list the agencies and the type of service(s) provided the students.

____________________________________________________________________

33. The most commonly used method of student evaluation is (check only one)

___ Comparative (students’ performance is weighed against that of others).

___ Criterion - referenced (performance is measured against predetermined educational objectives).

___ Individual (performance is measured against expectations for that student).

___ other (specify) __________

34. Teaching to students with various learning styles is emphasized at this school.

____ yes ______ no

35. This school’s academic program is designed and operates similar to other schools in the district/system. _____ yes _____ no

36. This school’s discipline program is designed and operates similar to other schools in the district/system. _____ yes _____ no

37. With 1 being the highest, rank the following skills that the curriculum emphasizes.

___ Vocational ___ Character Education ___ Life Planning ___ Civic Duty ___

Interpersonal Communications ___ Decision-Making ___ Conflict Resolution ___

Basic (Reading, Writing, Math) ___ Problem Solving ___ other (specify) __________

38. Formal evaluation(s) of the program is/are conducted by

____ independent evaluators

____ alternative school personnel

____ district/system personnel

____ other (specify) __________.
39. The program is evaluated

   ____ annually
   ____ every two years
   ____ other (please specify)

PLEASE RATE YOUR PROGRAM USING THE FOLLOWING SCALE

1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Disagree, 4 = Strongly Disagree

40. The school staff has complete autonomy in:

   A. ____ deciding what will be taught
   B. ____ selecting teaching/learning activities
   C. ____ hiring staff
   D. ____ developing student behavior rules
   E. ____ developing student evaluations.
   F. ____ determining the length of stay per student.
   G. ____ developing a protocol for student counseling services.

41. ____ The community is strongly involved in the operation of our school.

42. ____ Parents are highly involved in the operation of our school.

43. ____ Our teachers and staff receive adequate specialized training to work with the students.

44. ____ Our students function below the district’s academic achievement norms when reassigned to regular schools.

Please describe characteristics that distinguish your school from the other schools in your district/system.

THANKS FOR YOUR TIME AND EFFORT!
Appendix D

Sample Post Card Mailed to Subjects
Appendix D

Sample Post Card mailed to Subjects

Willie J. Wiley
747 Baker Place Road
Grovetown, Georgia 30813

Dear Director/Administrator/Principal:

Two weeks ago you were mailed a survey of Georgia alternative schools and asked to complete it for collection of data about alternative schools. Thanks again for your time and effort if you have completed and forwarded the survey. If you have not and cannot locate it, please complete the attached one and forward it to me in the enclosed envelope. I am most grateful for your participation and assistance.

Sincerely,

Willie J. Wiley
Principal
Louisville Middle School
Appendix E

Institutional Review Board Approval Letter
Appendix E

Office of Research Services & Sponsored Programs
Georgia Southern University
Institutional Review Board (IRB)
Memorandum

Phone: 681-5465 P.O. Box 8005 Fax: 681-0719
ovrsight@GaSoU.edu -- or -- ngarret@GaSoU.edu

To: Willie James Wiley
Leadership, Technology, & Human Development

From: Neil Garretson, Coordinator
Research Oversight Committees (IACUC/IBC/IRB)

Date: April 14, 1999

Subject: Application for Approval to Utilize Human Subjects in Research

On behalf of Dr. Howard M. Kaplan, Chair of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I am writing, to inform you that we have completed the review of your Approval to Utilize Human Subjects in your proposed research, "A Descriptive Study of Public Alternative Schools in Georgia." It is the determination of the Chair, on behalf of the Institutional Review Board, that your proposed research adequately protects the rights of human subjects. Your research is approved in accordance with the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects (45 CFR §46101(b)(1)), which states:

(1) Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices, such as (i) research on regular and special education instructional strategies, or (ii) research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.

However, this approval is conditional upon the following revisions and/or additions being made:

This IRB approval is in effect for one year from the date of this letter. If at the end of that time, there have been no changes to the exempted research protocol, you may request an extension of the approval period for an additional year. Please notify the IRB Coordinator immediately if a change or modification of the approved methodology is necessary. Upon completion of your data collection, please notify the IRB Coordinator so that your file may be closed.

Cc: Dr. Patricia Lindauer, Faculty Advisor