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Examining the Effectiveness of a Site-Based Alternative Education Program for At-Risk High School Students

Keith Wolfe

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EXAMINING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF A SITE-BASED ALTERNATIVE
EDUCATION PROGRAM FOR AT-RISK HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Education

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Education

By

Keith S. Wolfe

August, 2008

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Keith S. Wolfe

2008

EXAMINING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF A SITE-BASED ALTERNATIVE
EDUCATION PROGRAM FOR AT-RISK HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

By

Keith S. Wolfe

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ABSTRACT

EXAMINING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF A SITE-BASED ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAM FOR AT-RISK HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

By

Keith S. Wolfe

August, 2008

Dissertation Supervised by Sarah E. Peterson, Ph.D.

This study sought to examine the effectiveness of an on-site alternative education program for at-risk high school students with regard to improving academic success, attendance, and behavior. A second purpose was to ascertain student perceptions of the program and perceptions of components that were most effective in providing support for at-risk factors and in facilitating success. Participants included high school students who were enrolled or had previously been enrolled in the program who were at risk of dropping out of school. Data was collected from student records and student surveys. Statistically significant effects were found for grades, attendance, and behavior when comparing before placement, during placement, and after placement in the alternative education program. Results indicated that grades and attendance were maintained while in the program but declined after leaving the program. Findings also showed that discipline referrals declined while enrolled in the program and again after exiting the

program. Additionally, students' perceptions of the effects of participation in the program were overwhelmingly positive. Although student perceptions were favorable, statistical results indicated a need for transitional support when students return to the regular education program. An unexpected finding of this study showed that the graduation/retention rate (67%) greatly exceeds the drop-out rate (6%).

Although discrepancies were found between student perceptions of success and the statistical findings, it is believed that this alternative education program provided the support that many of the at-risk students needed to successfully earn their high school diploma.

DEDICATION

I am sincerely grateful for the guidance, encouragement, cooperation, love, and patience of the many people who supported me during the writing of this dissertation. First, my sincere appreciation and respect goes to Dr. Sarah Peterson, the Chairperson of my committee, for her encouragement and support that began as my faculty advisor and continued throughout my doctoral studies.

I thank the other members of my committee, Dr. William Kaufman and Dr. Rodney Hopson, whose guidance and understanding provided me with valuable insights toward the completion of this project.

Special thanks to Mrs. Linda Taylor, a colleague and friend, who so graciously gave of her time and talents to read and edit my writing. A special thank you also goes to Mr. Ray Doolittle for his assistance with the collection of survey data for this project as well as for his friendship and support.

Finally, my deepest love and gratitude goes to my family. Without the love and support of my wife, Patty, my sons, Hunter and Isaac, and my daughter, Ainsley, this dissertation would not have been possible. Each of them has been a great source of strength and instilled in me the desire to complete this project.

This dissertation is written in honor of my father, Dale, and in memory of my mother, Janet, who did not live to see me complete this degree. My parents have instilled in my sister, Kathy, my brother, Kevin, and me the value of education, common sense, and a spirit that a job worth doing is worth doing well.

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CHAPTER 1: OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

Introduction

Every year many students are at risk of dropping out of traditional high schools. This risk can be the result of frustration with poor grades, poor attendance, increased competition among students, lack of connection with teachers and administrators, low socioeconomic status, teen pregnancy, incarceration, or perhaps simply to a lack of interest in the curriculum (Barr & Parrett, 1995; Barr & Parrett, 1997; Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko & Fernandez, 1989; Young, 1990). Whatever the reason, educators must find ways to keep these at-risk students in school so that they can be properly prepared to enter the world of adulthood.

In October 2005, 3.5 million young adults were not enrolled in a high school program and had not completed high school. This number accounted for 9.4 percent of the 36.8 million 16 – 24 year olds in the United States that year (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2007). Further, data from this report indicated that the dropout rates for Pennsylvania public school students have remained fairly consistent between the 1993-1994 school year (3.8 percent) and the 2001-2002 school year (3.3 percent).

Addressing this high dropout rate was important, as students who were at risk of not earning a high school diploma would quite possibly have difficulties with employment (Barr & Parrett, 1995; Wehlage, et al., 1990). Data from a report of *Usual*

Weekly Earnings of Wage and Salary Workers: Second Quarter 2007 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2007) indicated that full-time workers age 25 and over without a high school diploma had median weekly earnings of \$440, compared to \$597 for high school graduates (no college) and \$1,979 for college graduates holding at least a bachelor's degree. Further, the cost of high school dropouts affected more than just those individuals. Vernez, Krop, and Rydell (as cited in a report from the National Center for School Engagement, 2000) asserted that high school dropouts claimed more in government funded social services expenditures than high school graduates, regardless of race or gender. The average dropout costs taxpayers more than \$200,000 in current dollars over the course of his or her lifetime. Oftentimes, dropouts who are unable to secure jobs in which they earned an adequate living resort to illegal behaviors. In turn, taxpayers have underwritten the expense of incarceration. In 1997, approximately 41% of all state and federal prison and jail inmates and 31% of those on probation had not completed high school or its equivalent. In comparison, 18% of the general population age 18 or older had not finished the 12th grade (Harlow, 2003). These statistics, in part, have led educational systems to develop programs and strategies to address the needs of at-risk students to ensure that they earn a high school diploma.

Since the days of the one room schoolhouse, the traditional public school setting has endeavored to meet the needs of its students. Some students in this regular educational setting, however, have not been successful for a variety of reasons such as: drug and/or alcohol abuse, physical/emotional abuse, lack of parental support, or inconsistent living conditions such as moving frequently or different people moving in

and out of the house. These circumstances often lead to academic failure, poor attendance, and increased behavioral problems.

Try as they may, traditional schools are not capable of meeting the needs of all students equally well. Duke and Griesdorn (1999) argued that regular schools could be “hostile and even criminogenic settings for certain young people” because of their “large size, impersonal climate, peer status issues, and lack of individual instructional adjustments for struggling students” (¶ 17). Some researchers believe the single most effective educational program for at-risk youth is a small alternative school (Barr & Parrett, 1997; Wehlage et al., 1989) because these types of schools provide students with a community of support lacking in their lives.

One type of alternative education program for at-risk youth is a stand-alone alternative school facility to which large districts with multiple schools or several smaller school districts join together to form a consortium to send students in need of such a placement. This option enables the sending schools to combine their financial resources to provide a comprehensive program that meets the various needs of the students. Stand-alone AEPs often consist of several teachers, a counselor, and a principal or director. This option tends to work well for school districts that can share resources because of their geographic proximity.

A second type of AEP for at-risk youth is an on-site program. These consist of very individualized district-run programs that are developed specifically to meet the needs of their own at-risk population. Oftentimes, these programs are created for students in need of academic remediation, social/emotional rehabilitation, or both. Further, these

programs tend to have fewer students and staff members, have less curricular flexibility, and are seldom evaluated for effectiveness.

There has been, and continues to be, a growing need for alternative education programs (AEPs) for many students, as these programs can provide the flexibility and the resources needed to address the factors that put the students at risk of dropping out of school. Day (2002) argued that “despite 10 years of research offering plausible strategies for at-risk instruction, classrooms and teaching practice look virtually the same as in the past, and schools wrestle with the same difficulties in teaching at-risk students” (p. 19). Unfortunately, the available research regarding alternative education programs that exist in public education are limited (Barr & Parrett, 1995). This is unfortunate, as failure to adequately educate these students is also a failure to appropriately equip them to be contributing members of society. As was previously stated, the price of poorly educated individuals can be astronomical.

Alternative education can be defined as an educational experience not typically found in a conventional public school setting. Many AEPs provide an opportunity for students to study a curriculum that specifically addresses their areas of interest such as the arts or sciences, while others emphasize behavior modification programs and vocational preparation programs (Watts, 2000). Much of the alternative education literature broadly addresses the topic of AEPs rather than specifically addressing AEPs designed for at-risk youth. The literature includes research and discussion about many types of stand-alone alternative programs, including Continuation Schools, Fundamental Schools, Schools Without Walls (SWS), Montessori schools, vocational schools, multicultural schools, learning centers, magnet schools, charter schools, open schools,

residential alternative schools, and home-based schools (Barr & Parrett, 1997; Duke & Griesdorn, 1999; Morley, 1991; Raywid, 2002; Young, 1990). Further, extensive studies have been conducted on successful stand-alone programs such as the St. Paul Open School, Vocational Village, and the Philadelphia Parkway School whose purpose is to provide support services for students who are at risk of dropping out of school.

The scope of this study was limited to alternative education for at-risk youth. There is no such thing as a “one-size fits all” approach to educating at-risk youth; in fact, it could be argued that no two approaches are exactly alike. In his *Phi Delta Kappan* report based on the 23rd International Conference on Alternative Education, Neumann (1994) claimed that “there is no typical model of an alternative school” (§ 17). For the purpose of this study, the term alternative education program refers to an educational setting in which at-risk students are enrolled.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of an on-site alternative education program for at-risk students with regard to improving academic success, attendance, and behavior. The Intensive Behavioral and Academic Recovery (IBAR) program was developed and implemented at the researcher’s school during the 2001-2002 school year. IBAR was developed as an alternative to the traditional educational environment to provide individualized assistance for at-risk students in an effort to help them be more successful. A second purpose for this study was to ascertain student perceptions regarding the components of the program that were most helpful to them. Student perceptions were important to this study, as they helped to identify specific

components that are helpful and others that are less effective or unnecessary. The fundamental research questions this study sought to answer are:

- How does an on-site alternative education program affect academic success, attendance, and student behavior?
- How does an on-site alternative education program affect student perceptions of their success with regard to academics, attendance, and appropriate school behavior?
- What are the students' perceptions of the helpfulness of various components of the program?

Significance of the Study

Recent research supports the concept that students are best served by instruction that takes into account individual differences (Tomlinson, 2001; Silver, Strong & Perini, 2000). This is not a new concept, as Socrates and Aristotle both promoted the idea of teaching strategically in order to maximize learning. Recent reforms, including No Child Left Behind, demand that schools and teachers must hold high expectations for all learners and must adopt programs and practices that help all students to achieve their true potential.

Each year school districts spend tens of thousands of dollars on staffing, space, and educational materials in an effort to address the unique needs of students who do not perform well in a traditional educational setting. Some districts choose to send these students to alternative schools designed specifically for this type of client. However, rural schools often do not have the option of sending these students to an alternative

school because of distance or cost. This is the case for the Brookville Area School District.

This study was useful to the Brookville Area School District, as findings are being used to guide the decisions and actions of those involved with the Intensive Behavioral and Academic Recovery program. The results of this study may also help other administrators with the development and implementation of strategies and opportunities to better meet the varied needs of the at-risk students served by an AEP. Additionally, this study may be useful to counselors and other staff to gain a better understanding of the effects of their actions and attitudes when working with these students. Finally, this study supplements the limited availability of research-based literature regarding alternative schools *within* a public school district.

Limitations of the Study

This study has explored how one alternative education program impacted students' grades, attendance, and behavior. Participant experiences with and perceptions of the program that led to any changes in these areas are reported. Several limitations to this study were anticipated. First, many students who were enrolled in the program no longer attend this school due to graduation or placement in another program. Therefore, they did not participate in the survey. Second, the sample size was small since typically fewer than 20 students are placed in this program during any given school year. Also, some eligible students have chosen not to participate. Third, only those students who had participated in the IBAR program for 45 or more days were included in this study because it is believed that significant change occurs only after participating students have had enough time to remediate their grades and to build a trusting relationship with the

counselor. Finally, I was instrumental in the creation and advancement of the IBAR program; therefore, the interpretation of the data may reflect bias. While it may be true that the more a researcher is involved in the project, the more subjective he or she may become; it is also true that there is a greater “opportunity for acquiring in-depth understanding and insight” (Gay & Airasian, 2003, p. 223). In an effort to validate findings, triangulation from various sources was used through data collection.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction to the Literature Review

The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature related to the structure and educational components utilized in alternative education programs for at-risk youth and the students enrolled in them. Further, this chapter focuses on two categories of alternative education programs for at-risk youth: stand-alone programs and on-site programs. The components of alternative education programs (AEPs) that lead to student success are also discussed. The first section describes the research methods by which the literature review was conducted. This research included sources such as textbooks, case studies, journal articles, Internet sites, and dissertations. The second section examines the personal, social, family, and school factors that put many students at-risk of failing or dropping out of school. These factors include drug and alcohol use, court involvement, low self-esteem, lack of parental support, low socio-economic status, poor academic performance, and disregard for school rules. The third section describes the means by which students are placed or enrolled in alternative education programs. Oftentimes, students are remanded to alternative programs as a consequence of disciplinary infractions. However, some students request to be enrolled for various reasons that are not discipline related. In section four, different types of AEPs, which include comprehensive stand-alone alternative schools as well as on-site alternative programs

within schools, are examined. Whereas there is an abundance of literature on alternative schools, little research has been found regarding on-site programs that exist within a regular public school setting. This study was designed to help fill this void. Section five provides recommended programmatic components that have proven successful in AEPs. These recommendations include academic components such as curriculum, assessment, instructional approaches, and life skills activities. These are the actual nuts and bolts of the program and can mean the difference between success and failure for all involved. A well-developed program structure that focuses on the specific needs of this population is essential. Program considerations such as geographic location, student enrollment, and funding are also discussed. This section also addresses the importance of adult support systems employed by many AEPs, which include professional counseling and parental involvement. The final section of this chapter provides a summary for the literature reviewed for this project.

Research Methods

A comprehensive search for information on either alternative education or at-risk students provided hundreds of sources. Some of these sources addressed curriculum while others addressed topics such as counseling, discipline, academic success rates, teaching approach, and transition strategies. These were just a sampling of the many topics addressed in the literature that focused on programs and strategies used by schools to meet the needs of at-risk students. Unfortunately, research studies based on the success of alternative education programs for at-risk youth have been minimal. Barr and Parrett (1995) asserted that this lack of focus on program effectiveness can lead not only to failed programs for at-risk youth but also compound their problems.

In this literature review, two types of alternative education programs for at-risk youth were considered. The first type is the stand-alone alternative school run by an individual school district or alternative school to which a consortium of school districts sends at-risk students. The second type of AEP included in this review is that of on-site programs that are run and housed in individual schools or districts.

The majority of available research has been done on stand-alone alternative programs. However, few studies have been found that address the need for smaller on-site alternative education settings for at-risk students within individual schools or districts. Based on their qualitative study of resilient at-risk youth, McMillan, Reed, and Bishop (1992) contended that the issue of “at-risk youth” has moved more and more to the forefront of the American educational conscience and a massive amount of literature on the topic has accumulated. Unfortunately, a great deal of this literature is comprised of secondary sources and opinion papers rather than evaluative research studies.

Although McMillan et al. (1992) asserted that secondary sources are more readily available on this topic than are original studies or sources, attempts were made to retrieve primary sources for all citations in this current study. Secondary sources were used in this study only when necessary. While I made extensive use of texts and other dissertations, much of the information for this study was gathered through database searches via the Gumberg Library website at Duquesne University. These searches included the use of *ERIC*, *EBSCO*, and *ProQuest* document retrieval services as well as web searches through specific sites such as the *Journal of Alternative Education*, *American Journal of Evaluation* and *Google Scholar*. Search terms used in this study included the following: alternative education, alternative programs, alternative education programs, alternative

placements, alternative schools, at-risk, at-risk youth, at-risk students, high-risk youth, high-risk students, student discipline, disciplinary programs, drop outs, and drop out prevention. Other types of alternative programs were excluded from this study, as the focus of this study is on programs designed specifically for at-risk youth.

Reference lists from other studies not only provided information regarding research in this field, but also specific information to find the sources and search ideas. The reference lists also verified that I was citing the top researchers in this field, as I repeatedly saw the same authors' names as those used in my study.

Factors That Put Students At-Risk of Failing or Dropping out of School

As previously noted, there are many types of alternative education programs for school-age students. Those who work in AEPs for at-risk youth, however, must work with students who come to them with one or more issues that could quite possibly keep them from graduating.

Whereas researchers may use different terminology, they tend to agree on the factors that identify students as at-risk (Barr & Parrett, 1995; Barr & Parrett, 1997; Linker & Marion, 1995; McMillan et al., 1992). Table 1 identifies general categories of factors that put students at risk.

Table 1

Factors That Put Students At-Risk

Personal factors that put students at-risk	Social/Family Factors that put students at-risk	School Factors that put students at-risk
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Drug/Alcohol use/abuse ▪ Pregnancy ▪ Member of racial minority ▪ Court involvement ▪ Learning disabilities ▪ Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity disorders ▪ Low self-esteem ▪ Mental illness ▪ Lack of internal motivation ▪ English as a second language 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Dysfunctional family ▪ Lack of parental regard for education ▪ Sibling/Parent dropout ▪ Low socioeconomic status 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Poor academic performance ▪ Attendance/Absenteeism ▪ Lack of respect for authority ▪ Lack of available and adequate counseling opportunities ▪ Poor self-control ▪ Disregard for rules or laws ▪ Grade retention for one or more years

Students placed in AEPs for at-risk youth as well as the issues that result in their placement are unique. Thus, AEPs should address the issues that put these students at-risk instead of attempting to make the student fit the existing program. A problem with many AEPs is that they attempt to use a “one-size fits all” approach just as the traditional school does. Research has found that a major shortcoming of many AEPs was their lack of flexibility and their inability to break from the traditional school structure (Tobin & Sprague, 2000). While many students are placed in alternative programs due to extreme or excessive disciplinary infractions, oftentimes, students are in alternative settings for the very fact that they are unable to be academically successful in a traditional classroom setting. Therefore, schools should either be very flexible with the curriculum in an all-inclusive alternative program or they should offer multiple programs.

Placement in Alternative Education Programs for At-Risk Students

Compulsory Participation

In their book *Hope at Last for At-Risk Youth*, researchers Barr and Parrett (1995) explained that in study after study, alternative schools have been shown to take students who more conventional schools either could not or perhaps would not teach, documenting remarkable educational success. For many years, students who displayed outward signs of being at-risk were dealt with through detentions, suspensions, and even corporal punishment. Continued behavioral problems displayed by at-risk youth following one or more punitive responses indicated the ineffectiveness of this strategy and the necessity for a different approach. In his book *How to Establish an Alternative School*, Kellmayer (1995) explained that even though statistics have shown that this approach is ineffective, punishment continued to be used in response to inappropriate behavior. He contended that ever-increasing numbers of at-risk students needed to be placed in alternative education programs not as a punishment but as a means for them to receive the services they needed.

Researchers such as Barr and Parrett (1995; 1997) indicated that at-risk students become more successful with regard to academics, behavior, attendance, social interaction, or a combination thereof, when removed from the regular education program and placed in an alternative education program. One example is a study conducted by Turpin and Hinton (2000) that employed both qualitative and quantitative data collection. Fifty-eight of the 153 schools surveyed provided usable responses. Nearly all of these alternative schools were self-contained programs with 81 percent being housed in stand-alone facilities. Participants included students who displayed disruptive/violent behavior

and/or academic failure in a traditional educational setting and were moved to an alternative education program. Results indicated that 91% of the students did, in fact, improve their grades while placed in an alternative setting.

Participation by Choice

One key component that leads to individual success when enrolled in an alternative education program is the opportunity to choose to participate. While many at-risk students are placed in alternative programs as a result of disciplinary infractions, researchers have contended that students and teachers alike are much more successful when given the choice to participate (Barr & Parrett, 1997; Young, 1990). The ability to choose often leads to a greater sense of belonging, a desire to learn, and a willingness to attend school. Choosing to attend an alternative education program can also mean the difference between graduation and dropping out of school.

Barr and Parrett (1995) asserted that the ability for students and parents to decide to participate in alternative education carries significant power, as these individuals feel invested in the program and put forth greater effort. Further, the authors explained that teachers who choose to work in an AEP do so out of personal concern for this type of student.

In her synthesis of research, Raywid (1994) outlined 11 features that marked an alternative program in Spanish Harlem as successful. The fifth item on this list addressed the fact that students had an opportunity to choose to participate in the program.

Flexibility of Scheduling

Many students are placed in alternative programs because of behavioral problems and are required to “serve” a specific number of days. Oftentimes, this placement is used

in lieu of suspension from school. Other students, however, are placed in alternative settings because of failing grades, attendance problems, or other social behaviors that need to be addressed. In these cases, flexibility is a consideration that cannot be taken lightly as these students might be in need of counseling services. A stay that is too short could limit the effectiveness of the counseling and lead to a continued display of inappropriate behaviors. A stay that is too long could limit a student's ability to properly perform in a regular school setting.

To better serve the needs of alternative education students, districts must be flexible in determining the amount of time that a student spends in an AEP. Research indicates that scheduling flexibility is very important in order to accommodate the individual circumstances of the students enrolled. Duke and Griesdorn (1999) completed a study of Virginia school systems that ran multiple alternative education programs, including school-within-a-school programs, a stand-alone district AEP, a regional AEP, and an evening G.E.D. program. Eighteen of the thirty-two AEPs studied included both middle and high school students. The largest of these schools enrolled 310 students and the smallest 8. Some of these schools operated on a traditional schedule; others ran several shifts. Duke and Griesdorn (1999) cited childcare and salaried jobs as reasons for the necessity of scheduling flexibility. This study also included schools in which the scheduled day is reduced, as many at-risk students have difficulty focusing on instruction for the length of a normal day. Although flexible schedules permit schools to better accommodate the needs of its students, most school districts continue to use a single rigidly established meeting time per day.

The use of predetermined lengths of stay for students was an indicator of the rigidity in many alternative education programs. Regardless of the students' individual problems and reasons for being removed from the traditional school setting, they were usually assigned to a pre-established and inflexible time period (Duke & Griesdorn, 1999). Few alternative programs build in allowances for variations in the length of an alternative school day or in the total length of the stay.

Barr and Parrett (1995) claimed that some students have serious problems that require long-term support. For example, difficulties such as depression or drug abuse cannot be adequately addressed swiftly. Instead, programs should be set up in a fashion that allows an appropriate amount of time for the staff and students to build trusting relationships which foster beneficial intervention.

Wehlage et al. (1989) asserted that most students enrolled in alternative education would not be able to return to the regular education program in their schools. The accuracy of this assertion for some students in AEPs demonstrates a need for a comprehensive and continuing program that teaches skills needed to transition either to employment or continuing education. However, the goal of an alternative education program for at-risk students should be to provide skills needed to be successful within the "mainstream." Once these students graduate from high school, they will rely on these skills to be successful in whatever career paths they choose. This is a very important aspect of successful alternative education programs, as employers do not offer an alternative program for at-risk workers.

Barr and Parrett (1995) contended that many alternative programs had not yet been developed to provide significant assistance to at-risk youth. Rather, these programs

were being used to remove these individuals from regular classrooms where they made teaching and learning difficult for others. Whether a student is placed in an alternative educational setting for a few days or for several years, those running the program must make that decision based on what is in the best interest of that individual student.

Research on the Effectiveness of Two Types of Alternative Education Programs

As previously noted, two types of alternative education programs were considered in this literature review. The first is the stand-alone alternative schools run by an individual school district or alternative schools to which a consortium of school districts sends at-risk students. The second type of AEP discussed in this study is the smaller, on-site alternative education settings for at-risk students within individual schools or districts. Based on this literature review it appeared as though most alternative education research has focused on stand-alone AEPs rather than smaller on-site programs. In either instance, research showed that many students enrolled in AEPs were able to achieve the success they were not able to achieve in a traditional educational setting.

Raywid (1994) recognized that some educators believe that what is learned in an AEP is of little value. She thought this perception to be somewhat true, as there are several distinct types of alternatives and all are not models for emulation. Therefore, she has identified “three pure types which individual programs approximate to varying degrees” (Raywid, 1994, p. 27). The two “types” of AEPs discussed in this literature review relate to the settings of the programs. Conversely, Raywid’s three types of programs focused on the theoretical framework of the programs. Her three types are as follows:

Popular Innovations. Type I alternatives seek to make school challenging and fulfilling for all involved. These programs are usually popular among students and are attended by choice. Additionally, they sometimes resemble magnet schools, as the curriculum and instruction is often based on programmatic themes.

Last-Chance Programs. Type II alternatives are programs to which students are sentenced. These programs are a last chance prior to expulsion.

Remedial Focus. Type III alternatives are for students who are presumed to need remediation – academic, social/emotional, or both. The assumption and goal is that students can return to a traditional program after completing treatment successfully.

Raywid (1994) explained that Type I programs are based on the belief that student difficulties are a result of a mismatch between the student and the school. By altering the program and environment, she claimed that student response, performance, and achievement would improve. The premise of Type II and Type III programs is that the problems lie within the individuals and those problems are addressed within the program.

Whether housed in either a stand-alone facility or an on-site location, an AEP should offer one or a combination of programs outlined by Raywid. The program for which this study was conducted is housed on-site at the Brookville Area Jr/Sr High School in Brookville, Pennsylvania and employs the Remedial Focus format described by Raywid.

Effectiveness of Stand-Alone AEPs

Many stand-alone AEPs conform to one or more of Raywid's (1994) models, or variations thereof. However, as was previously stated, most of the related literature is comprised of secondary sources and opinion papers rather than evaluative research studies. Therefore, the number of research-based studies described in this literature review is somewhat limited. Fortunately, they provided valuable information that related directly to the purpose of this study.

Linker and Marion (1995) conducted a quantitative research study in which they determined the effectiveness of participation in the Options Alternative Educational Program of the Allegheny County Public Schools (North Carolina) on future success and productivity. This multi-year study included forty-four students, ranging in age from 10 to 15. The four groups in this study were comprised of the participants served by Options from the 1990-1991 school year to the 1993-1994 school year. The researchers developed a method by which they could track the success rate of individual students during the school year in which they were enrolled in the Options program as well as in subsequent years through the 1994-1995 school year. Effectiveness predictors were set at a standard rate of 65% in four categories including: attendance, court involvement, academic achievement, and school disciplinary action. Therefore, if 65% of a group improved its academic achievement, that category was considered successful. Data were collected through portfolios, report cards, assessment tests, disciplinary reports, and administrative records (p. 9).

During the 1994-1995 school year, Linker and Marion (1995) collected data on students from all four groups to enable a correlational study with the year in which each

group was enrolled in the Options program. The researchers used the Pearson's Product Correlation at a significance level of $<.05$ to determine the validity of the four indicators predicting student success. A mean frequency distribution for each group's data indicated significance for the entire scope of the Options Alternative Educational Program. However, a *t*-test on all indicators provided no cumulative significance to indicate that demonstrated success in the Options program was indicative of future success and productivity (Linker & Marion, 1995). The researchers contended that results of this quantitative study supported the original hypothesis that demonstrated success rates on the four major performance predictors "can be used as a reliable predictor of future success and productivity" (Linker & Marion, 1995, p. 22). Whereas the data supported the fact that students from all four groups met the 65% success rate during the 1994-1995 school year, there was a difference among the groups with regard to the success rates. The data showed that for each year beyond the Options participation year, the success rate declined in each of the four categories of this study. This indicated that the effects the remediation students received while enrolled in the program tended to decline over time. However, it does appear that the lessons and skills learned in the Options program were instrumental in keeping many of these students from dropping out of school.

Young (1990) described the success that at-risk students achieved at Vocational Village, an alternative learning center located in the Portland School District. Vocational Village serves approximately 260 students, ages 16-21, who had been unsuccessful in a traditional learning environment. The curriculum included eight vocational and nine academic areas taught by a staff of twenty-four teachers. Highly motivated students were able to earn credits toward graduation faster than they could in a traditional program

because achievement was based on criteria other than letter grades. In addition to the regular curriculum, students were able to train in modern computerized laboratories, take classes at a local community college, earn credits through internships, and participate in drug counseling. Portland school district officials considered this program to be quite successful as approximately 60 students, who could have been dropouts, received diplomas or high school equivalency certificates annually. Additionally, student absentee rates were cut in half. Vocational Village also had a positive impact on school attitude and behavior, because students became more polite and well behaved. Graduates have also returned to assist in classrooms and serve as role models for other students.

In addition to the Vocational Village program, Young discussed several other research studies that had been carried out on stand-alone alternative schools. However, not all of these studies presented sufficient data to determine program effectiveness. For example, he cited a 1982 study completed by Raywid in which 1,200 secondary alternative schools responded to a 31-question survey related to the size and growth of the program, characteristics of students enrolled, cost, attendance, learning activities, student and staff perspectives, and accomplishments and challenges. Whereas the survey revealed high staff morale, increased student attendance, good student-teacher relationships, small class size, and choice to participate as qualities characterized by these programs, no attempt was made to evaluate the effectiveness of these schools in improving student attitudes or achievement.

Gold and Mann (as cited by Young, 1990, p. 41) conducted a study similar to the one presented here, in which academic achievement and attitudes of at-risk students were analyzed. These authors compared sixty at-risk students from three secondary alternative

education programs with sixty students from traditional secondary schools in the same districts. The comparisons were based on pre- and post-test results conducted over a school year. Results indicated that the alternative education students were significantly less disruptive than traditional students at the end of the study, teacher ratings indicated that alternative education students returning to the traditional school were better behaved than conventional students, alternative education students were significantly more positive about school than conventional students, and alternative education students earned slightly higher grades when they reenrolled in the traditional schools. However, achievement test scores of the alternative education students did not improve and were not significantly different from those of conventional students.

Two studies conducted by Foley and McConnaughey and Foley and Crull (as cited in Young, 1995, pg. 42) are similar to the one presented here, as their focus was on student achievement and attendance. Participants in both studies included 300 students attending eight alternative high schools designed to serve at-risk students with poor attendance and underachievement. Results from both studies indicated that the alternative education programs decreased student absences by 40% and increased credits earned by 60%. Whereas significant improvement was identified in attendance and credits earned, graduation rates did not improve as a result of the alternative education program. The researchers asserted that this was because many of the students did not enter the program until later in their high school careers with very few credits earned. Therefore, the authors suggested providing alternative education to students at an earlier age, ideally immediately after junior high before they fall behind in credit accumulation.

The results of these studies were similar in that improvement was seen in academic achievement, attendance, behavior, and attitudes about school. Although these studies were based on large stand-alone programs, the same successes were expected to be found in the much smaller IBAR program discussed in this study.

In addition to the three discussed here, as outlined by Young (1989), Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, and Fernandez (1989) discussed 14 stand-alone schools located in large cities. These schools included Alcott Alternative Learning Center in Wichita, Kansas, Lincoln High School in Atlanta, Georgia, The Minneapolis Federation of Alternative Schools in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and Orr Community Academy in Chicago, Illinois. Unlike Young, Wehlage et al. (1989) did not provide any discussion regarding the success of these programs. Brief descriptions of the student participants and how the programs were structured was all that was included.

While collecting data for his doctoral dissertation, Jones (1999) conducted case studies of students transitioning from the Central City Learning Academy (CCLA), an alternative education program located in southwestern Virginia, back into their sending high school. The purpose of this study was to identify critical elements that were reported by the students as having impacted their transition from the alternative program to their base high school. Jones examined data collected from the students, their teachers, administrators, counselors, and parents. Research questions investigated (a) the critical elements reported by students as having impacted their success or failure in transitioning back to their high school, (b) what, if any, intervention strategies were in place when they returned to their high school, and (c) student achievement in terms of grades, attendance, and behavior after returning to their base high school. Jones claimed the results of this

study indicated that a positive relationship with adults in the school, parental involvement, and positive peer assistance were key factors for successful transitions from the AEP to the base high school. Further, the factors that had a negative impact on this transition were lack of counselor-initiated support, lack of student involvement in school activities, and the absence of a formal transition program. Jones went on to explain that since returning to their base high school, all students consistently received lower grades than when they were enrolled in the CCLA. Several students in this study were failing due to poor class attendance. In fact, three students cut a total of 161 classes after returning to their base high school. Unfortunately, the only improvement seen after the AEP placement was evident by a decrease in the number of disciplinary referrals from teachers. The implications of this study pointed to a need for a formal transition program. Otherwise, these students would continue to repeat patterns of failure.

Munoz (2002) conducted a study at Liberty High School, a stand-alone urban school in Kentucky, which analyzed the non-academic impact of a program for at-risk students. His contention was that attendance, behavioral, and social problems were issues common among students who chose to drop out of school. The study evaluated attributes of student participants, features of the range of services provided, and causes for student participation. The curriculum at Liberty included a program for 9th graders at risk of dropping out of school, a program for 8th graders who would be attending the high school, and a life skills/learning habits program for all students. Attendance and discipline data were obtained through the use of the school's computerized student management system. Results indicated that the alternative school program did have a positive impact on attendance and behavioral problems. However, the author indicated

that additional research on other issues was needed to make more conclusive decisions regarding the effectiveness of the program.

Turpin and Hinton (2000) conducted a study in which they hoped to assess whether or not students at-risk for academic failure were achieving academic success in the alternative school environment. The researchers used a combination of both qualitative and quantitative analysis in this study.

Because of the lack of available research on the correlation between at-risk students and academic success, a researcher-developed instrument was constructed and distributed to all 153 established AEPs in Kentucky. Additional data were collected through surveys and interviews to determine whether academically challenged students graduated, quit, or returned to their mainstream school after placement in the AEP. The survey also collected data on hours of operation, sources of curriculum design, students' behavior or attitude change, grade level organization, strategies used to motivate students academically and behaviorally, student gender ratio, and district dropouts in an effort to understand whether or not alternative education programs help students achieve academic success.

Results of the survey indicated that ninety-one percent of the respondents reported grade improvement for at-risk students while enrolled in the AEP. Unfortunately, the results regarding the graduation rate of at-risk students following alternative education intervention were inconclusive because many of the programs in the study did not permit either graduation or dropping out of school from the AEP. Instead, students had to return to their mainstream school first, "thereby skewing any academic success rate comparisons with graduation percentages" (Turpin & Hinton, 2000, p. 13).

Additionally, data collected for this study showed “a two prong diverse representation” (Turpin & Hinton, 2000, p. 35) of AEPs; one, a true educational alternative and two, as an alternative discipline program. Fifty-seven percent of the programs included students displaying violent or disruptive behavior as a main factor for enrollment, while thirty-one percent included students at-risk of academic failure as a main factor. The researchers contended that students in these two categories should be separated, as their educational needs and instructional methods were significantly different. Further, they claimed that mixing these students together “exposes academic-needs students to additional factors threatening long term success” (p. 37). Although it may have been true that it would have been in the best interest of the academically at-risk students to be separated from those who demonstrated violent or disruptive behavior, schools having the resources to run separate programs were highly unlikely.

As evidenced in the studies cited above, it was possible for at-risk students to achieve success in a stand-alone AEP whose sole focus was meeting the needs of an at-risk population. Common themes among these alternative education programs were improved academic performance, improved attendance, improved behavior, reduced drop-out rates, and positive response to counseling. What these studies did not address, with the exception of Jones (1999), was how placement in an alternative education program affected these areas after the students returned to the regular education program.

Not all at-risk students have an opportunity to attend a stand-alone AEP. Many students are limited to whatever type of alternative program their local district is able to offer while meeting the traditional educational needs of most of its population. In some cases, this may be nothing more than available space in which a student is placed to keep

him or her away from the rest of the population. There are, however, quality on-site AEPs that are able to meet the varying needs of the at-risk students served thus ensuring their success.

Effectiveness of On-Site AEPs

Whereas stand-alone programs are an option for some school districts, other districts are not large enough to have or need a stand-alone facility to house an alternative education program. Although these schools may not have enough at-risk students to justify a stand-alone program, they may have enough students for a classroom or two. Likewise, many districts do not have the option of forming or joining an alternative education consortium for a variety of reasons. Schools oftentimes have limited space, funding, or personnel to provide adequate academic, social, or behavioral support for this population. Additionally, rural school districts encompass several hundred square miles. Consequently, the transportation budget could be exhausted quickly for trips that take one or more hours each direction. For such districts, a second type of AEP for at-risk youth is an on-site program, (also known as a school within a school), which tends to utilize strategies from both a traditional program and those of a stand-alone school program. Typically, on-site programs are designed to simply remove the troubled students from the regular educational setting. These programs also tend to have fewer teachers and counselors than traditional schools, as fewer students are typically enrolled since they are coming from that district only. Barr and Parrett (1997) contended that the per-pupil cost and pupil-teacher ratio for AEPs should be consistent with other schools; however, this is a nearly impossible task to achieve due to much lower enrollments and the types of counseling and academic intervention required by at-risk students. Although some stand-

alone programs have several employees, many on-site programs often employ only one teacher to oversee the program and others simply assign regular education teachers to the program for one or two periods of their day.

When sending students to a stand-alone AEP is not an option, district-run on-site programs provide a viable education for at-risk students. A program within a district enables continuity between the AEP and the regular education classrooms. This is important, as one main goal for AEPs is to instill in students a positive attitude and appropriate behavioral approach necessary to successfully return to the regular educational setting with their peers, as these same skills will assist them in being successful in society after their high school years. Unfortunately, few studies have been published on the effectiveness of on-site AEPs. It is believed that this is due to the fact that most schools spend available resources on running the programs rather than evaluating them. Several notable on-site programs are discussed in the literature such as the Options program described by Linker and Marion (1995) and the technology lab program described by Day (2002). As was the case with the studies previously mentioned on stand-alone alternative education programs, on-site programs also tend to assist at-risk youth with regard to academic success, appropriate behavior, counseling needs, and individualized attention.

Watts (2000) completed a qualitative research study in which she investigated how motivational, curricular, and instructional needs of at-risk students were accommodated by an alternative education program located within a conventional high school in northern Louisiana. The author contended that the success of the program qualified it to be used as a model for other on-site AEPs to follow. The three guiding

questions for the Watts study addressed the motivational needs of the at-risk students and how the structure of the program accommodated those needs, the curricular needs of the at-risk students and how the structure of the program accommodated those needs, and the instructional needs of at-risk students and how the structure of the program accommodated those needs.

This program described by Watts (2000) had five teachers and an administrator/counselor that serve a population of 75 students. Data were collected through documents, classroom observations, and interviews with teachers, students, and the administrator/counselor. Data analysis resulted in the emergence of common themes for each different data source. Distinctive sets of themes came from the interviews with the program administrator, classroom observations, teacher interviews, and student interviews.

Results of this study suggested that low self-esteem contributes to the failure that students experience in the conventional school setting and that continued failure leads to further low self-esteem, which is then manifested in undesirable behaviors. Additionally, she concluded that tracking students according to ability levels and hiring additional personnel to keep class sizes small would effectively meet the academic and behavioral needs of at-risk students. She asserted that without programs to address their needs, at-risk students would “continue to fail and eventually drop out of school” (Watts, 2000, p. 23). Further, Watts contended that establishing AEPs within existing schools would allow students to take advantage of programs in the conventional school. This would be a better utilization of resources as well because additional facilities would not need to be financed. While the findings of Watts’ study may have been accurate, they were little

more than assertions based on responses from individual interviews. She presented no supportive data to indicate that this program was truly successful and worthy of replication by other school districts in need of an effective alternative education program.

Day (2002) described a study in which at-risk middle school students had an opportunity to participate in a technology based curriculum provided by Synergistic Systems, a student-centered learning environment developed and marketed by Pitsco, Inc. The purpose of the study was to show how learning experiences in a technology lab could facilitate research-based approaches to student instruction to reduce students' risk of failure and help them face the future. The author asserted the students' perceptions of participating in this alternative learning environment provided "interesting insight into the difficulties they faced and what made a classroom a worthwhile place for them" (p. 20). Three research-based approaches to student instruction were used to create the framework for this study. These approaches were cooperative, student-centered learning; authentic tasks and assessment; and appropriate use of technology.

The technology lab described by Day (2002) was housed in a renovated space that had served as an industrial arts classroom. The carpeted and air-conditioned classroom included 16 workstations set up similar to an office. Each workstation incorporated a television and VCR for instruction, a computer with software for projects and assessments, and lab equipment specific to each learning module. The instructional modules were virtually self-contained as the material was delivered via recorded videos. This enabled the students to rewind as needed to repeat concepts that they did not understand the first time. Review and assessment were computer guided based on student readiness. The classroom teacher served as a facilitator rather than a traditional instructor.

Data were collected through interviews with all 18 students involved in the study as well as 2 administrators, 1 guidance counselor, 10 parents, the technology lab facilitator, and 12 instructors who taught these students in other classroom settings. Data were also collected via observations of the regular technology lab classes (Day, 2002).

Interview responses were separated into three categories, determined by like answers. These categories were Technology: A Motivational Tool, Responsibility, and An Authentic Reason to Learn. Based on further analysis of the responses, the author indicated that there were two principal outcomes from this study: motivation to learn and student empowerment. Motivation, he claimed, was evident during classroom observations as students were “completely absorbed in tasks at their workstations” (Day, 2002, p.28). Additionally, Day explained that the interesting activities and a perceived privilege to work in such an environment were motivating factors. Although the focus of this study centered on student perceptions rather than academic success, these at-risk students earned better grades in the technology lab than they did in their traditional classrooms. For example, a student who had previously received B and C grades improved steadily and received an A as a final grade. Additionally, Day (2002) claimed that the students became motivated to complete their work in a way that an employee would.

Day (2002) claimed that the feeling of empowerment came from the ability of the students to control the pace of their learning and the latitude to make choices about how they worked through a module. This self-administered pace also removed the performance pressure that some students felt in a regular classroom.

Technological advances have dramatically changed the world in which we live, including the workplace and schools. Students in alternative educational settings must be afforded the same opportunities to learn to use computer technology, as are the students in traditional programs. Barr and Parrett (1997) asserted, "Failing to teach the skills needed to use this technology would be commensurate with schools of the past ignoring the availability of the printed word" (p. 48). The method of instructional delivery made available through the Synergistic Systems technology lab provided a great deal of flexibility that is common among other alternative education programs. The success that students experienced while in this program "gave them feelings of pride and accomplishment they did not feel elsewhere" (Day, 2002, p.28).

Day (2002) concluded that the use of technology gave the students an opportunity to learn in a manner that was similar to working at a job. They were given a task, the tools to complete the task, and deadline for when it had to be done. Motivation to succeed came from the students' ability to have more control over their learning than they would have in a traditional classroom.

Day's (2002) study provided a detailed description of how technology is used in a laboratory setting to assist at-risk students in achieving academic success. However, the results can only be generalized to the study site and perhaps other similar laboratory settings. Another shortcoming of this study is that it focused only on academic approaches to student instruction to reduce students' risk of failure. Alternative education opportunities should be available to students who display a variety of at-risk behavior as was previously mentioned. Additionally, the author provides no indication of how long the students were in this program. It appears as though the students were in the computer

lab for only one period each day. If that is the case, this fact should be outlined as a limitation of the study, as there is no real sense of this being an alternative education program. Rather, it is one resource period in which the students learn through alternative educational delivery. One cannot assume that these students would continue to perform as well if they worked at computer stations all day with little or no socialization with other students. Finally, Day (2002) encouraged schools with technology programs to “reduce the disparity between lab settings and regular classrooms in order to increase the overall motivation and empowerment of students who are at risk of failure” (p.29); however, he did not provide any specific recommendations as to how this can be accomplished.

As he did with stand-alone programs, Young (1990) discussed the framework as well as successes of an on-site program located in Indianapolis, Indiana. The Learning Unlimited (LU) alternative education program was located in North Central High School. With an enrollment of over 3,200 students, North Central was the largest high school in Indiana. Learning Unlimited served approximately 250 students who were admitted into the program based on an application and an interview. All students were enrolled on a part-time basis and were able to participate in as few as one of the seven periods per day or as many as six periods per day. Of the eight teachers who served this program, only three were there for the full day. The other five teachers split their time between the alternative education program and the regular program. One of these teachers also served as the program director and took on both administrative and teaching responsibilities. The primary focus of LU was community experience and volunteer service; therefore, available coursework in this program was limited to social sciences, English,

photography, film study, art, and physical education. Students who wished to earn credits in foreign languages, mathematics, or science had to do so through the regular education program at North Central. Documented successes of this program came from an independent external study conducted in 1986. This study found that 92% of graduates rated LU as more effective in preparing them for the future than any other high school experience. Additionally, 96% of the graduates rated LU more effective in developing personal skills than any other high school experience. The study also indicated that students who participated in the LU program had average combined SAT scores that were 69 points above the average for other North Central students. In addition to the academic successes of the LU students, they also indicated that the flexibility, smallness, and relaxed atmosphere helped them to develop better social and interpersonal skills.

The Media Academy in Fremont High School, Oakland, California and the School-Within-A-School at James Madison Memorial High School in Madison, Wisconsin were two additional alternative education programs discussed by Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, and Fernandez (1989). As was the case previously discussed, there was no indication that any research was conducted to ascertain the level of success for either of these programs.

The Media Academy served African-American and Hispanic students who were interested in electronic and print media as possible careers. Participation in this program was limited to 50 students from each year's sophomore class. Students were required to take the normal sequence of classes necessary to earn a high school diploma (Wehlage et al., 1989). However, courses such as journalism, social studies, and English focused on media related skills. Also, a community advisory committee provided additional

resources such as access to their employees and work sites such as television and radio stations, advertising agencies, and newspaper offices.

The School-Within-A-School program at James Madison Memorial High School in Madison, Wisconsin was designed to assist high school students who had fallen behind in their credits after two years of high school and were likely to drop out. Most of the students were academically capable of completing their coursework but found it difficult to be successful in the larger, more traditional high school. Approximately 65 students were enrolled in this program annually (Wehlage et al., 1989). The successful completion of the required academic, vocational, and extra credit courses enabled the students to earn a high school diploma at the end of this four-semester program. Three full-time academic teachers, several part-time vocational teachers, and a half-time secretary ran the program with academic progress, attendance, and improved behavior as primary points of focus. In addition to academic coursework, students were required to complete a vocational training program. For juniors, this meant completing training in four vocational areas: building trades, childcare, health services and business. During their senior year students had to study either marketing or food services and secure paid part-time employment in the area of their choice. Unfortunately, Wehlage et al. (1989) provide no evidence regarding the effectiveness of this program.

After extensive research of the literature available regarding alternative education programs for at-risk students, those discussed here were the only studies I was able to find in the literature regarding on-site alternative education programs. Of the on-site programs discussed here, the School-Within-A-School program in Madison, Wisconsin (Wehlage et al., 1989) appears to have the most similarities as the IBAR program

discussed in this study, as both programs addressed academic success, attendance, and behavior as their primary focus. Unfortunately, Wehlage et al. (1989) do not provide evidence regarding the impact that participation in the program has on academics, attendance, or behavior. However, the “success” that some programs have in these areas is generally defined by terms such as “improved grades”, “earned credits”, “reduced truancy”, “improved behavior” (Day, 2002; Turpin & Hinton, 2000). The study conducted by Linker and Marion (1995) was the only one I was able to find in the literature that identified success with a specific percentage increase. In that study, “successful participation was determined by meeting a 65% standard in each of the following predictors while in the program: reduced truancy, decreased court involvement, improved academic achievement, and improved school discipline” (p. v).

It appears as though Watts’ (2000) findings were more closely related to the findings from the stand-alone AEPs previously mentioned than were the results from Day’s (2002) study. However, neither of these studies specifically addresses the ideas of academic success, improved attendance, appropriate behavior, or student perceptions regarding the importance of a quality education.

The programs outlined here provide evidence of the lack of research studies with regard to on-site alternative education programs. Therefore, a study such as the one presented here was necessary to attempt to fill this void in the literature. It was hoped that the procedures used in this study would be accessible and appropriate for other school administrators, alternative program directors, or alternative education teachers to evaluate the effectiveness of a program with which they work.

In conclusion, whether an AEP was located at a stand-alone facility or in an on-site classroom at a traditional school, a common theme that emerged in the literature was the need for instructional flexibility to accommodate the varying needs displayed by at-risk students. Some students may need more academic support while others need counseling to assist with emotional, social, or behavioral issues. A schedule that works for one student might not work for another. The means by which at-risk students show success are as varied as the ways in which each of these students is able to learn. Students may excel through one-on-one tutoring, hands-on technical training, self-guided computer preparation, completion of an internship with a local business, or any other of the multitude of options. A curriculum that is appropriate for a student hoping to enter the military does not necessarily prepare another student who wishes to attend college. Therefore, alternative education teachers and administrators must think “outside of the box” to meet the needs of their students. Barr and Parrett (1995) argued that schools must meet the challenges of reorganizing the curriculum, school calendar and daily schedule; providing professional development for the faculty; integrating community services; and enhancing school climate in an effort to provide appropriate learning opportunities for all students.

As is evidenced by the literature, the main goal for all AEPs, whether stand-alone or on-site, was to identify the factors that put students at risk and provide appropriate support to enable them to be successful. This objective cannot be met unless students strive for academic achievement, consistent attendance, and appropriate behavior. In addition to these three areas of concern, appropriate social interaction, authentic learning, and critical transition skills were common among most, if not all, AEPs.

Recommended Components and Strategies That Lead to Effective AEPs

The following topics stood out in the literature as having led to success for students enrolled in an AEP. It was recommended that these issues be considered for the overall success of any AEP.

Academic Components Identified with Successful AEPs

A review of the literature revealed several main academic components that were common among successful alternative education programs. These components were classified into three program categories: curriculum and assessment, supplemental academic activities, and program structure.

Characteristics of Effective Curricula in Successful AEPs

All students, whether in a traditional educational setting or in an alternative setting, must exhibit a certain level of competence based on academic standards in the core academic areas (English, math, social studies, and science) because at-risk students often tend to be unsuccessful in these traditional classes for a multitude of reasons. Therefore, researchers have maintained that an alternative education approach curriculum must be innovative (Barr & Parrett, 1997; McMillan et al., 1992; Neumann, 1994; Watts, 2000). This often translates into ways in which instruction is delivered. For example, some schools focus on individualized learning via on-line coursework through programs such as PLATO, Study Island, Nova Net, SuccessMaker, or blendedschools.net. Other programs utilize the same curriculum that is being used in the traditional program. And in others still, the curriculum is developed specifically for each individual student.

Peterson, Bennet, and Sherman (1991) found that successful teachers of at-risk students provided academic activities that are tied to the needs and interests of students.

Curricula and instructional programs found to be common among successful programs of at-risk students include flexible strategies that meet the various learning styles of their students. According to experts in alternative education, teachers and administrators of alternative education programs must design their AEPs to meet the complex needs of at-risk youth (Raywid, 1983; Wehlage, et al., 1989; Young, 1990). To that end, the curricula of AEPs must differ from those of traditional programs. This type of specialized curriculum is based on the realization that the students unsuccessful in a traditional program were at-risk of failing or dropping out. As a result, the curriculum for many AEPs focuses on career training or vocational skills that ready the students for employment immediately following graduation. However, Barr and Parrett (1995) asserted that some vocational programs did not serve as a deterrent for dropping out of school, as they were based on skills that were no longer needed, such as auto mechanics and wood and metal shops. Even though Barr and Parrett are experts in the field of alternative education and I concur with most of their claims, I disagree with this one. It may be true that formal vocational training has become more of an anomaly. However, I believe that vocational education is a much under-appreciated aspect of public education. It is difficult to find qualified and competent people to provide these very services they discuss as well as someone to come to one's home to make necessary repairs. Additionally, the hands-on learning provided in a vocational education setting could possibly be the way to keep an at-risk student interested in learning and in school. In their literature review regarding the impact of vocational education on student retention, Hill and Bishop (1993) claimed that although there was some evidence that vocational programs did assist in keeping some students in school; other research indicated that

vocational education improved retention only when coordinated with work experience. To this end, the coordination of work-study or internship programs between the AEP and local businesses could be beneficial to both parties. Whether or not one believes that career and vocational education for at-risk youth have merit, the bottom line that must be remembered and considered is what is in the best interest of each individual student.

Assessment Strategies in Successful AEPs

Authentic assessment, now gaining more support in traditional programs, is an approach that has been utilized by alternative programs for decades. Rather than assessing learning based on grades, credits earned, or time in class, alternative schools have pioneered new approaches to assess progress toward graduation (Barr & Parrett, 1997). For instance, rather than using multiple choice, true/false, and fill in the blank tests, instructors in successful alternative education programs assess student achievement through portfolios, projects, graduation competencies, community service, and narrative appraisals.

The use of multiple means of assessment is an effective way to determine the success students are having in achieving curricular objectives. Further, assessment should be ongoing to better determine specific student needs as instruction continues. Based on assessment results, learning experiences should be developed and implemented to improve learning for all students. McMunn, Schenck, and McColskey (2003) discussed a study completed in the Bay District Schools of Panama City, Florida in cooperation with the SERVE Regional Educational Laboratory. The study focused on teachers making changes in the classroom to support standards-based assessment, grading practices, and reporting procedures. It included 241 educator participants over a 3-year period of the

evaluation. Qualitative and quantitative data indicated that the teachers were making efforts to implement changes in their classrooms with support from the school district and its professional development activities. Among the findings, McMunn et al., (2003) explained that “multiple assessment methods give a more complete and accurate view of each student and where that student is in achieving stated targets” (p. 30).

Multiple assessments provide an opportunity for at-risk and traditional students alike to demonstrate knowledge gained and their ability to apply that knowledge. The ability to demonstrate knowledge gained varies for individual students.

Effective Instructional Approaches

As educators, our continuing quest is to determine how we can best ensure that all students learn and then succeed to their highest potential. For students identified to be at-risk for failure, this success is even more elusive. During the 1990s educational reforms required educators to rethink “traditional” methods of instructional delivery components, especially for those deemed at-risk. In their ten-year study of school effects (as cited in Barr & Parrett, 1995, p. 36) Teddlie and Stringfield asserted, “There is now general agreement among researchers that the following factors should be found in all schools that are effective with at-risk youth: (a) clear academic mission, (b) orderly environment, (c) high academic engaged time on task, (d) frequent monitoring of student’s profile.”

Differentiated Instruction.

All students, whether at-risk or not, learn in different ways. Therefore, it is important to develop curricula and teaching strategies that will meet the needs of verbal, aural, visual, logical, and tactile learners. To accomplish this task, more consideration must be given to the what, where, why, and how of instruction. Especially in relation to

at-risk students, much emphasis must be placed on individual strengths and the opportunities provided to capitalize upon them. Teaching to the middle is no longer an acceptable practice. Educators such as Tomlinson (2001) promoted the concept of differentiated instruction for *all* students. She asserted that proper differentiated instruction includes providing students with multiple options for taking in information, making sense of ideas, and expressing what they learn.

The research concerning the services offered to at-risk students provides important information on the concept of differentiation of program components and their importance to this population. Educators in these programs must contend with the essential challenge of how to reach students who span the spectrum of learning readiness, personal interest, backgrounds, and experiences in "their world." Students in alternative education programs enter with an array of needs; therefore, teachers must be willing and able to engage students in instruction through different learning modalities by addressing differing interests and using varied rates of instruction along with varying degrees of complexity. These strategies, coupled with providing differentiated support services, allow for the differences that students in alternative education programs bring with them and which must be addressed (Guerin & Denti, 1999; Ellis, Hart & Small, 1998; Gregg, 1999; Tobin & Sprague, 1999, 2000). The agreement appeared to be that the at-risk student who was removed from the traditional classroom to an alternative setting needed more than the same instruction in a different place. When at-risk students fail in the traditional educational setting, determinations must be made as to the reasons for this failure and compensatory steps be taken. Providing a differentiated curriculum, support

services, and length of stay requirements for students placed in alternative education settings are necessary for success.

It is evident that to achieve the expectations placed on educational institutions in relation to students at-risk, the components of these programs must be given the utmost consideration. Guerin and Denti (1999), as well as Tobin and Sprague (1999) and Cox, Davidson and Bynum (1995), examined the elements of alternative education programs that provided the best opportunity for at-risk students to achieve their potential. There was agreement among these researchers that alternative education programs were generally designed to create a more positive learning environment through the use of individualized attention to student needs in relation to instruction and assessment.

Relevance of Instruction.

The current emphasis on “leaving no child behind,” combined with the responsibility of preparing students to compete in a global economy, is viewed by many educators as a daunting task. Among the factors that contribute to the likelihood of disruption in the classroom climate and the learning process are poverty, violence, and erosion of the nuclear family (Harnish & Henderson, 1996). For students who are considered to be at-risk, alternative education programs may provide their “last best chance” to obtain an education that meets their needs and provides them with the skills necessary to become contributing members of society. Lawrence-Brown (2004) asserted that all students benefited from the use of a variety of teaching strategies and an appropriate balance of challenge and success. The structure and approaches utilized in these programs must be of concern in the evaluation of their success.

The issue of relevance must be taken into consideration for alternative education programs. At-risk students believe school is not for them; it is not their place. Well-meaning educators often attempt to reassure with clichés such as “it will all pay off someday.” These students need to see immediately the relevance of what they are learning. The effective alternative education program will make each day compelling for that day. It would appear that an alternative education program seeking to provide successful opportunities for students, would strive to make the curriculum, both academic and support aspects, relevant by differentiating these programs to meet the needs of individual students. In their book, Barr and Parrett (1997) included this quote by a middle school student to illustrate the need for relevant instruction:

All I’m saying is that I know what I want to do someday. I want to be an engineer. I’m great at math and wish that I could take some courses that relate to engineering. Wood shop is all right. It’s kind of fun. But I guarantee you that I’m never going to be a carpenter when I grow up. I may be only a kid, but I can figure that out. Come on, give me a break. Let me study something that’s relevant (p. 46).

Along these same lines, consideration should be given to the idea of raising the bar of expectations. Students who spend most, if not all, of their day attempting to remediate their problems and areas of learning difficulty have little time to explore and celebrate their strengths. AEPs should challenge students academically by building upon areas in which they have previously shown success as well as support them in areas of weakness.

Life-Skills Activities

Whereas the curriculum of any alternative education program is certainly a factor critical to its success, so too are the supplemental academic opportunities that can and should be provided to the students. It is imperative that the at-risk students in an alternative program have a foundational understanding and knowledge of the core academic subject areas. It is also essential for these students to gain “life-skills” knowledge so that they can be active, contributing, and self-supporting adult members of society. Successful alternative education programs provide additional opportunities such as individual and group counseling, community service/mentor programs, self-esteem building, and basic job preparation. Many traditional students gain these skills through elective courses offered in school; others learn these skills from their immediate and extended families. Oftentimes, at-risk students, for one reason or another, do not have or do not seize the opportunity to learn these basic skills.

Barr and Parrett (1997) asserted that to enrich student learning and increase motivation, out-of-school learning experiences should be an important part of any alternative school. They described how the Philadelphia Parkway School and the Chicago Metro School demonstrated the power and relevance of learning in real-life settings. Students in these programs participated in internships in which their classrooms were located throughout the city in banks, museums, hospitals, government offices, and boardrooms.

Many students, whether at-risk or not, can often be heard to say that they are bored or frustrated because “this stuff doesn’t apply to me.” Vocational education and social and life skill training appeared to bring many of the at-risk students back into

engagement with the school (McMillan et al., 1992). Successful alternative education programs provide students with the opportunity to learn job preparation skills. If and when these students graduate, the next likely step for most of them will be to enter the workforce.

Daggett (1992) described New York's Career Preparation Validation Study, which illustrated the kind of information needed to close the gap between workplace requirements and school preparation. Results from the study indicated that schools could better prepare entry-level workers by emphasizing Reading for Information, Reading for Critical Analysis and Evaluation, Writing for Information, Writing for Critical Analysis, Basic Mathematical Operations, Logic, Probability, and Measurement. Additionally, another area identified as needing to be addressed in the secondary curriculum was coded as "Expanded Basics," which consists of interpersonal skills, thinking skills, human relations, information systems, and personal skills.

For many at-risk students, gaining simple job skills such as how to write a cover letter, complete a resume and application, dress for an interview, and converse in an interview are all useful. Further, learning the responsibilities necessary to keep a job is important as well. Getting to work on time, consistent attendance, appropriate attire, interaction with co-workers, and putting in a full-day's work are all concepts about which these students might have never thought but will certainly improve their ability to sustain a job and to be responsible adults.

Program Accountability

Teachers and administrators who work in an AEP for at-risk youth may feel as though they are so committed to "fixing" the problems that these students have, that they

do not need to be held accountable for their academic achievement as well. Due to the therapeutic nature of these programs, teachers and students often develop such close bonds that the relationship can prevent the teachers from insuring that the instructional rigor and expectations are equal to that of a traditional school setting. For example, when students are dealing with at-risk behaviors such as drug and alcohol use, pregnancy/promiscuity, anti-social behavior, and juvenile delinquency; skill development in reading, writing, and math are sometimes not a priority. Teachers may feel pressure to award academic credit for inferior or even incomplete work, as they do not want their students to fail in any respect.

Kellmayer (1995) explained that some alternative education teachers have argued that there is little reason to judge the effectiveness of AEPs based on the same criteria used to assess conventional educational programs. Instead, their focus should be on assisting the students with the issues that put them at risk such as suicidal ideation, substance abuse, runaway behavior and acts of juvenile delinquency. However, academic achievement and performance remains one of the primary functions of an AEP. Kellmayer contended, however, that “rescuing an at-risk teenager from social pathologies is not enough...teachers and administrators must take responsibility for both the affective and cognitive development of their students” (p. 124). To this end, it is imperative for program administrators to perform ongoing evaluations to insure equal accountability for all students.

Much of the alternative education literature addresses accountability in a broader sense than that of looking specifically at AEPs designed for at-risk youth. The literature includes research and discussion about many types of stand-alone alternative programs,

including: Continuation Schools, Fundamental Schools, Schools Without Walls (SWS), Montessori schools, vocational schools, multicultural schools, learning centers, magnet schools, charter schools, open schools, residential alternative schools, home-based schools, (Barr & Parrett, 1997; Duke & Griesdorn, 1999; Morley, 1991; Raywid, 2002; Young, 1990). Further, extensive studies have been conducted on successful stand-alone programs such as the St. Paul Open School, Vocational Village, and the Philadelphia Parkway School. Regrettably, as has been made clear, there is a shortage of evaluative research in the literature regarding on-site AEPs.

Program Considerations

Whether a district chooses to participate in a consortium or to design a program for itself, several considerations must be made including geographic location, enrollment, funding, and students' needs.

Geographic Location

Geographic location is an essential consideration for an AEP. The distance that schools must transport students should be a primary concern, as it affects the time of day that students must be picked up in the morning and the time that they return after the school day ends. The longer students are on busses, the higher the likelihood that there will be disciplinary infractions. Further, proximity to the sending school(s) is a must as transportation costs continue to increase each year. Another factor that varies with regard to geographic location is that the types of problems facing students could vary greatly. For example, AEPs located in inner-city areas might have to contend with gang related issues while AEPs located in rural areas might not face this problem.

Student Enrollment and Staffing

Enrollment is another consideration that must be made by school districts when forming an AEP. Classes with too few students become an issue of cost effectiveness. Classes that contain too many students severely limit the opportunity to provide the individual attention required by these students. Based on her study of how an alternative education program accommodates the motivational, curricular, and instruction needs of at-risk students, Watts (2000) claimed that research overwhelmingly supported small class size as a criterion for the organization of alternative programs. Peterson et al. (1998) claimed that it became very difficult to monitor, instruct, acknowledge, and communicate with students when a group grew to more than twelve.

Districts with a very small student body may graduate only 20 to 50 students per year. These districts will undoubtedly have fewer students in need of an AEP than a district that is graduating 150 or more students annually. In their journal article, Duke and Griesdorn (1999) asserted that care should be taken that classes are not too small or too large. When enrollment drops below 50 students, it can become cost prohibitive to provide a large enough staff certified in all necessary academic areas as well as role models with diverse backgrounds. Additionally, when the number of staff members is too small, finding substitute teachers becomes difficult when regular teachers are absent. In larger AEPs, teachers can simply cover for each other. Those in charge of school finances may argue that the cost of running AEPs is too great, because the programs target specific individuals and divert limited financial resources from the rest of the student body. Although the short-term cost of educating these students may be higher than that of a “traditional” student, the skills and lessons learned in such a program oftentimes enable

them to be self-sufficient following graduation. Thus, the cost of providing long-term assistance for these individuals may be reduced. Referring to a study of AEPs in Iowa, Morley (1991, p. 25) asserted, “Financial investment in alternatives does benefit the state compared to other long-term potential costs of dropouts.”

Funding

The source of funds needed to subsidize an alternative placement for at-risk youth is an extremely crucial consideration. Whether sending students to a stand-alone AEP or providing an on-site AEP, per-pupil cost must be calculated and funding made available. At this point many districts decide that sending their at-risk students to another facility is out of the question. The next consideration is whether or not the district can afford to create and maintain its own AEP. Important factors in making this determination are the number of district students in need of such a program and the types of at-risk issues they face.

Barr and Parrett (1997) claimed that, to be successful, AEPs should be funded by local school districts in the same manner that other schools are funded. This may be partially true, as funding is largely based on the enrollment of a set number of students per classroom. There is a difference, however, in an appropriate class size for a traditional program compared to the smaller class sizes recommended for AEPs. Research had shown that smaller class sizes were essential to the success of AEPs (Watts, 2000; Peterson et al., 1998). A smaller teacher-to-student ratio would therefore increase the per-pupil cost.

Many states provide schools opportunities to access grant money specifically designated to support the needs of at-risk youth. However, districts should not rely solely

on grant monies to subsidize programs because their AEPs may not be able to continue once a grant expires (Barr & Parrett, 1997).

Student Needs

Regardless of a school's financial situation, enrollment, or geographic location, at-risk students need special attention not readily available in a traditional school environment. It is, therefore, imperative that school officials design and implement alternative programs that meet the needs of these students. While one alternative program may focus on small student grouping to address specific academic needs, another program may include appropriate social-behavior counseling, drug and alcohol counseling, community service projects, or life skills experiences as its centerpiece. The program developers are responsible for customizing the instructional program based on the specific needs of the students. By focusing on a highly customized approach rather than a "one size fits all" program, school districts can be assured that students are getting the help they need to be successful during their school years as well as after graduation.

Whereas the alternative education programs discussed in this chapter indicated that AEPs could be successful in meeting the needs of at-risk students and were perhaps the only reason that many stayed in school through graduation, factors such as financial constraints, size, or geographic location were also considered when creating AEPs.

Counseling as an Important Support Systems

Individual and group counseling is an integral component of any successful alternative education program. Traditional guidance counselors spend much of their time addressing issues such as scheduling, standardized testing, college entrance assistance, and career counseling. It has been my experience that alternative education counselors

need to have expertise in areas such as drug and alcohol addiction, teen pregnancy, depression, and physical and mental abuse as these topics relate to adolescents.

In their *Phi Delta Kappa* study of students at-risk, Frymier, Barber, Carriedo, Denton, Bansneder, Johnson-Lewis, and Robertson suggested that “before we focus on solutions, we have to understand the problem of students at-risk, and some people do not understand the problem” (1992, p. 49). A “get tough” approach may be successful in motivating some students, but it is not appropriate for all. Instead, many at-risk students respond well to a counselor experienced in dealing with the types of issues that these students face.

One key contributor to discipline problems among at-risk students is low self-esteem. Page and Chandler (1994) stated that counselors should lead structured groups with these students to improve their self-concepts when deemed necessary. According to Combs and Avila (as cited in Page & Chandler, 1994, ¶ 4), “[C]ounseling groups can help adolescents to increase their levels of self-esteem by providing appropriate support to others when they begin to deal appropriately with their personal problems.” Raywid (1994) reasoned that AEPs were successful because considerable attention typically went into cultivating a strong sense of connection among students and between students and teachers.

An AEP should also include counseling for sexual and physical abuse, dysfunctional families, sex-related issues, and drug and alcohol problems (Barr & Parrett, 1995). Increasingly, at-risk students need counseling support for drug and alcohol use. Kellmayer stated that “one half of all high school students are considered regular drinkers, one third drink heavily at least once a week, one quarter have a serious drinking

problem, and four million youth under the age of 17 are alcoholics” (1995, p. 85).

Statistics indicated that there has been a significant increase between 2003 and 2004 in use of cocaine other than crack among 10th-graders (National Institute of Drug Abuse [NIDA] InfoFacts, 2004, 2005). Further, this report explained that between 1999 and 2004 the number of methamphetamine lab incidents increased in three Mid-Western states as well as in Pennsylvania. These and many other examples of illegal substance abuse provided reason to include drug and alcohol counseling and education in an AEP.

Thomas (as cited in Page & Chandler, 1994, ¶ 4) asserted that group counseling was “the most effective and common treatment available for helping adolescents who abuse drugs or who have had other problems with the law.” Only after the underlying issues of these students are realized and addressed, will they be able to focus on positives such as academic success, increased self-esteem, increased attendance, positive social relationships, and appropriate behavior.

Esters and Ledoux (1999) completed a study in which they identified what, if any, preferences at-risk students had regarding the characteristics of counselors with whom they worked. The study took place at a public charter high school for at-risk students with participation of sixty-six male and female students representing several racial backgrounds. Findings from the study indicated that expertise, the style of counseling used, and the attributes of an alternative counselor were equally important. They found that there was a statistically significant difference between student preference for a counselor with personal characteristics similar to themselves and a counselor with characteristics different from themselves. Therefore, it was important to have counselors in alternative settings who had characteristics similar to the population of the alternative

school in which she or he worked. Further, the possibility for counseling home visits and continued contact with all parts of an at-risk student's life appeared to aid in success of any counseling program (Nevetsky, 1991).

Most at-risk students have low self-esteem. Oftentimes, the factors that place these students at-risk are the same factors that cause them to feel worthless or that they are not good at anything. An extra effort must be made to praise and reward the students for positive interactions or behaviors. Providing a system of recognition for valued behavior, even if the definitions of valued behavior must be expanded, is helpful to the at-risk student who is seldom the high achiever in academics or athletics (McMillan et al., 1992).

Summary

This literature review suggests that in order to meet the varying needs of at-risk students, flexibility in curriculum and instructional delivery must play an important role in the level of success attained. An AEP that focuses on increasing academic success, attendance, and appropriate behavior, coupled with a counseling program that addresses the behaviors that put students at risk, may be the key to keeping students in school as well as preparing them for life after school. To that end, this literature review has explored the factors that put students at-risk, the effectiveness of two types of AEPs, and student placement in AEPs, as well as several other components of AEPs that lead to student success. This review has discussed how the needs of each individual student are important and that flexibility needs to be demonstrated in all areas. It has also identified the lack of available research studies on the effectiveness of alternative education programs for at-risk youth, which demonstrates the necessity for this study.

In the following chapter, this study discusses a method for assessing the extent to which the Intensive Behavioral and Academic Recovery program is essential in helping at-risk students be more successful in school. Data collection was similar to that which was previously explained with regard to the stand-alone studies cited in this chapter, as results from those studies were similar to those expected from the IBAR program.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In response to the need to provide individualized attention to at-risk students and the personal challenges that have put them at risk, the Intensive Behavioral and Academic Recovery (IBAR) program was developed and implemented during the 2001–2002 academic school year as an alternative to the traditional educational environment. The purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of this program with regard to improving academic success, attendance, and behavior. A second purpose for this study was to ascertain student perceptions regarding the components of the program that were most helpful to them. Student perceptions were sought in this study in order to identify specific components that are most helpful as well as to identify components that may need to be changed.

Effectiveness was determined by examining the helpfulness of an on-site alternative education program (AEP) for at-risk students with regard to improving academic success, attendance, and behavior. Additionally, effectiveness was determined by student perceptions as to whether or not the program included opportunities to address the causes of their at-risk behaviors. Using the results of this research, this study has expanded the limited research-based literature regarding alternative schools *within* a public school district.

The fundamental research questions this study sought to answer were:

- How does an on-site alternative education program affect academic success, attendance, and student behavior?
- How does an on-site alternative education program affect student perceptions of academic success, attendance, and student behavior?
- What are the students' perceptions of the helpfulness of various components of the program?

Background: The Intensive Behavioral and Academic Recovery Program

When the IBAR program began, it was included in the district disciplinary plan as a feasible consequence for inappropriate behavior. Its purpose was to replace, as often as possible, the use of in-school suspension and out-of-school suspension. The administration recognized that suspension from school had little or no effect on reducing inappropriate behavior because most students did not view these consequences as punitive. The IBAR program provides education for students in grades 7 through 12 who exhibit to a marked degree any or all of the following conditions: (a) disregard for school authority, including persistent violation of school policies and rules; (b) use of controlled substances; (c) violent or threatening behavior; (d) possession of a weapon; (e) commission of a criminal act on school property; (f) misconduct that would merit suspension or expulsion; and (g) habitual truancy. IBAR was designed to enable the students to stay in an academic setting while participating in individual and group counseling that addressed the underlying issues that led to a lack of academic success, poor attendance or multiple disciplinary infractions.

The IBAR program is concurrent to the regular school day. However, the students are isolated, as a group, from the rest of the student body except for inclusion in regular classes when required and lunch. The IBAR program is staffed with a full-time coordinating teacher and a part-time counselor. The coordinating teacher is the only person who is with the students all day, every day. His responsibilities include ensuring that the students' work gets from the regular classroom teachers to the students for completion and is returned in a timely manner, organizing field trips and community service projects, and overseeing overall academic achievement. He also documents student attendance, student behavior, and other important information necessary for records and end-of-year state reports. The counselor is in the IBAR classroom two days each week to provide individual and group counseling. She also assists the students with post-secondary education and career planning. Additionally, four teachers spend one period each per day with the students to assist them with assignments provided by their regularly scheduled teachers. They also provide assistance to those students who are enrolled in on-line coursework.

During the 2001-2002 school year an alternative education grant was obtained through the Pennsylvania Department of Education. This grant covered one half of the expenses for the program that year with the district covering the other half. Students were placed in this program for a minimum of five days and a maximum of twenty days based on the behavioral infraction that initiated the placement, as well as on the recommendation of the counselor. The administration quickly realized that some of the students could benefit from ongoing counseling. Unfortunately, due to the grant restrictions, student placements were limited to a maximum of twenty days. The

counselor attempted to continue to meet with students after they completed their time in the program; however, it was difficult to find a common meeting time. Therefore, when the grant was applied for the second year, a change was made to the length of program placement to a maximum of 180 days.

Originally conceived as a part of the district's disciplinary options, IBAR has evolved into a program where students know they can get individualized attention that is specific to their needs. As this program evolved, so did the language used to describe the reasons for placement. These descriptions now include ongoing behavioral problems, one-time behavior deemed by the administration to be severe, poor attendance, poor academic performance, and referral from the Student Assistance Program. As stated earlier, the research suggested that students should participate in AEPs by choice. Research has shown that regardless of the type of school, when students, parents, and even teachers "choose" participation, greater success was realized (Linker & Marion, 1995). Occasionally, students request to be placed in this program due to their academic, social, and attendance problems. In addition, others have requested to return to the program after being released from it, as they realized that they were able to be much more successful within that environment.

Depending on how long students stay in the IBAR program, they receive their academic instruction from their regularly scheduled teachers or through an on-line curriculum provider. The four regular classroom teachers, who are responsible for assisting the students with their academics on a daily basis, have no specialized training in working with at-risk youth. Ashcroft (1999) claimed there were no specialized training requirements for teachers who worked in alternative settings. This is an area of the IBAR

program where a continued focus on improving is necessary, as the counselor is the only faculty member who has training to deal specifically with at-risk youth. When working on the master schedule each year and deciding which regular education teachers will be assigned to the IBAR program, efforts are made to select the teachers who work well with this type of student.

Based on the findings of her study in which she investigated the motivational, curricular, and instructional needs of at-risk students, Watts (2000) claimed different curricula and instructional programs were needed in alternative schools designed with the purpose of “fixing the students” (p. 8). The goal in working with the students in the IBAR program is to assist them with their problems and to give them the skills necessary to be successful if and when they return to regular classes. For those students able to return to a traditional classroom setting, attempts are made to make this transition as smooth as possible by permitting the students to return gradually. For example, a student might return for one class every other day. This would be followed by a week in which the student would spend a couple of days in all regular program classes with support from the IBAR program on alternate days. After several weeks, the students are permitted to resume the traditional course schedule; they are then monitored closely by the IBAR coordinating teacher, the counselor, and the administration.

Occasionally, some students have requested permission to return to the program because they found themselves relapsing into the same routines and behaviors that they previously displayed. Some students have requested not to attempt to transition back to the traditional program as they felt they were more successful in IBAR. These students often cited that they felt as though they were successful because of the relationships they

had built with the counselor and teachers. However, with positive encouragement and the assurance of follow-up counseling sessions, many of these students agreed to give their regular schedule another chance.

When first developed, the IBAR program included two basic components: individual/small group academic assistance and individual/small group counseling. Although the students were removed from their regular education classes, their regular education teachers provided academic materials and assignments. The teachers simply placed assignments in the mailbox of the IBAR coordinator who would then see that the students completed them. The work would then be returned to the appropriate regular education teacher for grading. While this method of providing academic instruction is still used for students who are placed in the program, school-to-work internships as well as the use of technology to provide on-line learning opportunities has increased each year.

The counseling component of IBAR has undergone significant changes since its formation. It previously consisted of a few people sitting in a room or taking a walk to discuss student problems and how their choices affected those problems. The counselor now incorporates many real world and career experiences the students find valuable. She works with the students individually and in groups on topics such as drug and alcohol use, anger management, physical/emotional/sexual abuse, social and coping skills, and career goals. The students also have the opportunity to visit local agencies to participate in community service activities, as well as to see first-hand the consequences of poor decision-making. Some of these agencies include a homeless shelter, a food pantry, a battered women's shelter, a county jail, and a local environmental center. Guest speakers

such as police officers, attorneys, motivational speakers, and recovering addicts are also incorporated into the students' day.

Participants

The target population for this study included all students who have participated in this alternative education program from the beginning of the 2002-2003 school year to the present, as academic, attendance, and behavior data are available through the computerized student management system. However, the target population for the student survey included only those students who are currently enrolled in the AEP or those who were previously enrolled and have returned to the traditional classroom. Students who are no longer enrolled in the school district were excluded from this portion of the study. Participants included both male and female students between the ages of 13 and 19 who had been placed in the program for 45 or more days. Reasons for being placed in the program included failing multiple academic courses, serious or multiple disciplinary referrals, poor attendance, returning from an out-of-district placement, or social and/or emotional problems that prohibit a student from being successful in the traditional classroom setting.

A total of 104 students participated in the IBAR program between the 2003-2004 school year and the 2007-2008 school year. Forty-nine of these students were included in this study because they participated in the program for at least 45 days. Participants included 13 students from the 2003-2004 school year, 11 from the 2004-2005 school year, 13 from the 2005-2006 school year, 5 from the 2006-2007 school year, and 7 from the 2007-2008 school year. Six students participated in the IBAR program during two

separate school years, one student participated during three separate school years, and one student participated during four separate school years.

Instrumentation

Data was collected through the *Modular Management System* (MMS) and *Classroll* database software, which are used by the Brookville Area School District for tracking school records. Data collected from MMS and *Classroll* included discipline records, attendance records, and grades. This included data prior to placement in the IBAR program, during placement in the IBAR program, and in some cases, following placement in the IBAR program. This method of data collection was chosen because this is the software package currently being used by the Brookville Area School District.

After a review of numerous instruments used for child assessment, I determined that none fit the specific nature of the components of the IBAR program. In order to assess student perceptions specific to this study, a survey was created and administered to collect data from students. The survey is comprised of questions which are divided into six categories: Academics, Attendance, Behavior, Counseling, Overall Reaction, and Strategies/Components for Success. Additionally, the survey includes four open-ended questions that enabled students to include additional information regarding their perceptions of the program (see Appendix 4). In an effort to determine if IBAR had a significant effect on students, *SPSS* software was used to calculate and analyze the survey data through repeated measures one-way analyses of variance and paired sample *t*-tests.

Data for this study was collected through analysis of academic, attendance, and disciplinary documentation. However, to gain a better understanding of how the IBAR

program affects students' attitudes and perceptions regarding behaviors that put them at risk, data was also collected through a student survey.

The database for this study included the number of days a student was in school before participation in the IBAR program, the number of days spent in the IBAR program, and the number of days in school after participation in the IBAR program. Data regarding grades, attendance, and discipline were also divided into the categories of before, during, and after placement in the IBAR program. There was also a column that included notes as to where the students went following participation in the IBAR program.

Procedures

The research consisted of two phases. The first phase included the gathering and analysis of data available through the *Modular Management System (MMS)* and *Classroll* software to determine if the alternative education program had any influence on grades, attendance, and number of behavioral referrals. This included data prior to placement in the alternative program, during placement in the alternative program, and in some cases, following placement in the alternative program. Academic, attendance, and behavioral data for this study was collected by the building secretary who is responsible for submitting the alternative education report to the Pennsylvania Department of Education each year. This information was then transferred into a *Microsoft Excel* spreadsheet and finally imported into the *SPSS* (Statistical Products and Service Solutions) statistical package to calculate and analyze the data through paired sample *t*-tests and repeated measures one-way analyses of variance. As the secretary created the spreadsheet for data

collection, all personal identifiers were stripped from information prior to it being sent to the researcher.

Through the use of the *MMS* software, it was possible to compile this data for all of the students who have participated in this alternative education program during previous school years. Unfortunately, data from the program's initial development in 2001-2002 and 2002-2003 school years were not available due to a change in student management software. To complete this phase, a comprehensive inventory of all students who had been placed in the program was compiled. Once this list was created, those students who spent less than 45 days in the program were eliminated because it was believed that significant change in any of these areas was not possible during a shorter time period.

The second phase consisted of a gathering survey data from students to gain a better understanding of how the alternative education program affected their attitudes and perceptions regarding behaviors that put them at risk. The first five sections of the survey required the students to respond to the questions by marking Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree, or Not Applicable (NA). The sixth section of the survey required students to respond to items as being Extremely Unhelpful, Somewhat Unhelpful, Somewhat Helpful, Extremely Helpful, or Does Not Apply (DNA). This data included students' perceptions of their academic achievement, attendance, and behavior as a result of participating in the alternative education program, as well as their perceptions of the usefulness of various components of the program. Four open-ended questions enabled the students to share any additional thoughts they had to help improve the program. The survey was designed so that the participants were not required to provide any identifiable

information such as their name, age, or grade. All potential student participants were offered the opportunity to participate. Thirteen of the 24 eligible students participated in the study. These students were required to sign an assent to participate letter and their parents were required to sign a letter of permission allowing their children to participate in the research study.

Whereas I am the researcher for this study, I am also the principal of the building in which the alternative education program exists. In an effort to reduce or eliminate any possibility of feeling pressure to participate in the study, a guidance counselor was asked to speak to the students about their possible participation. Students were informed that the utilization of the results were twofold. First, they were to be used for the purpose of providing data for this dissertation. Secondly, the information provided by the students gave them an opportunity to share their perceptions of the current structure of the program and provided insight on how the program could be improved for themselves and others.

The guidance counselor visited the alternative education program to explain the purposes of the study and how student participation would assist with this study as well as help to improve the program. The students were informed of the measures which were being taken to insure their anonymity as well as the fact that participation was totally voluntary and would not be reflected upon them whatsoever. They were also told that their parents would need to agree to allow them to participate and if they did choose to participate, they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

After answering any questions the students had, the guidance counselor mailed the following items to the parents/guardians of all the students: a letter describing the

study (see Appendix 1), an assent to participate form for the participants to sign (see Appendix 2), a permission to participate form for the parents/guardians to sign (see Appendix 3), and a copy of the actual survey they would be asked to complete (see Appendix 4). This mailing also included a stamped envelope, addressed to the counselor, for the signed permission/assent forms to be returned. After the initial mailing of these forms, the counselor was asked by some of the students for a second copy, as the mailed forms were either lost or accidentally thrown away. Upon receipt of the signed permission/assent forms, the counselor stored them in a locked filing cabinet in his office.

The guidance counselor then administered the survey to the participants for whom he had received signed permission and assent forms. He escorted the students in small groups to the school's conference room where they were provided the survey and a pencil. As the students completed the surveys, they were placed in an unmarked envelope. After the surveys were completed and placed in the unmarked envelope, they were given to me for data analysis. The surveys are now kept in a locked filing cabinet in my office.

The results of academic, attendance, and behavioral data, as well as the data collected from the survey, were used to determine the effectiveness of the alternative education program in addressing the varied individual needs of the at-risk students it serves.

Data Analysis

Data collection for this part of the study began with the creation of a spreadsheet for all students who spent 45 or more days in the IBAR program. The spreadsheet was created by a school secretary because the student data was to be kept anonymous. The

students were each assigned a number and organized by school year and by ordinal number. For example, students who participated in the 2003-2004 school year are numbered 1-13. Students who participated in the 2004-2005 school year are numbered 14-24 and so on. The spreadsheet also included a column which described where the students went after exiting the IBAR program. For example, some students returned to the regular education program while others may have graduated or transitioned to the evening school program. Once the spreadsheet was completed, the data was loaded into *SPSS* software to compute statistical analyses. Repeated measures one-way analyses of variance and paired sample *t*-tests were utilized to determine significance levels for multiple combinations of dependent variables. These variables included attendance before, during, and after placement in the program, discipline before, during, and after placement in the program, and grades before, during, and after placement in the program. Data which described where the students went after exiting the IBAR program were calculated through hand-scoring.

The numbers of participants differ for each analysis because not all data was available for each time period. For example, there may be data for a student before placement and during placement in the IBAR program. However, there would be no data after placement if the year ended at that point or if the student graduated. Similarly, if a student entered the school district from another alternative program, he or she would be placed in the IBAR program before transitioning into the regular education program. Therefore, no data was available prior to participation in the IBAR program.

All analyses were conducted with an alpha level of $\alpha = .05$. The *N* varies between analyses due to the fact that before placement in IBAR data was not available for some

students while after placement in IBAR data was not available for others. Of the 49 students for whom data was collected, only eight students had data for before placement, during placement, and after placement.

For the repeated measures one-way analyses of variance regarding grades, attendance, and discipline for before placement in IBAR, during placement in IBAR and after placement in IBAR, effect sizes are reported as partial eta squared, which is appropriate for analyzing repeated measures over time (Cohen, 1992). For *t*-tests, effect sizes are reported as Cohen's *d* to aid interpretation of results for before placement in IBAR and during placement in IBAR as well as for during placement in IBAR and after placement in IBAR. Cohen's *d* of .2 is considered small, .5 moderate and .7 large.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of a site-based alternative education program for at-risk high school students. In an effort to understand if and to what extent the Intensive Behavioral and Academic Recovery (IBAR) program is effective in facilitating success in school for at-risk youth, data was collected with regard to the academic achievement, attendance, disciplinary referrals, and graduation status of program participants. Additionally, data was collected from student surveys to gain a better understanding of how the alternative education program affected their attitudes and perceptions regarding various components of the program. This chapter is organized according to the research questions of the study. Several tables are included to illustrate details of the data collection including the number of participants, means and standard deviations. In addition to the tables, explanations of statistical findings are offered.

Research Question One: How Does an On-Site Alternative Education Program Affect Academic Success, Attendance, and Student Behavior?

In order to answer this question, I conducted repeated measures one-way analyses of variance and paired sample *t*-tests. The repeated measures one-way analyses of variance were utilized to compare the means of students' grades, attendance, and behavior before, during, and after placement in the IBAR program. Paired sample *t*-tests were conducted for grades, attendance, and discipline to compare these variables before

and during placement and during and after placement in IBAR. The results of repeated measures one-way analyses of variance were consistent with the results of paired sample *t*-tests throughout this study.

Effects of Placement in IBAR on Student Grades

Table 2 depicts descriptive statistics on students for whom data was available for all three time periods.

Table 2

Comparison of Means Before, During, and After Placement in IBAR (n = 8)

Variable	Descriptives	Before IBAR	During IBAR	After IBAR
Grades	<i>M</i>	73.57	78.23	60.79
	<i>SD</i>	8.47	5.05	17.24
Attendance	<i>M</i>	84.75	85.12	74.25
	<i>SD</i>	15.35	8.53	17.34
Discipline	<i>M</i>	14.25	4.12	1.12
	<i>SD</i>	9.82	1.96	1.46

Note. The mean values for grades and attendance represent percentages. The mean values for discipline represent the actual number of incidents.

The results of a repeated measures one-way analysis of variance comparing grades before placement in IBAR, during placement in IBAR, and after placement in IBAR indicated that the assumption of sphericity was not violated. Results with sphericity assumed indicated significant differences in student grades across time ($F(2,14) = 4.675, p = .028, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .400$). Follow-up paired samples *t*-tests indicated no statistically significant differences between grades before placement in IBAR and during placement in IBAR ($t = -1.05, df = 40, p = .301, d = .195$), nor were there significant differences between grades during placement in IBAR and after placement in IBAR ($t =$

1.96, $df = 10$, $p = .079$, $d = 1.004$). This difference was practically significant though, with a large Cohen's d .

Table 3 depicts descriptive statistics on all students for whom data was available for the time period before placement in IBAR and time during placement in IBAR.

Table 3

Comparison of Means Before Placement in IBAR and During Placement in IBAR (n = 41, 44, 42)

Variable	Descriptives	Before IBAR	During IBAR
Grades	<i>M</i>	72.35	74.34
	<i>SD</i>	9.79	10.60
Attendance	<i>M</i>	86.50	86.11
	<i>SD</i>	11.86	12.25
Discipline	<i>M</i>	11.81	5.02
	<i>SD</i>	12.30	5.27

Note. The mean values for grades and attendance represent percentages. The mean values for discipline represent the actual number of incidents.

A paired sample t -test comparing grades before placement in IBAR and grades during placement in IBAR indicated no statistically significant difference, $t = -1.05$, $df = 40$, $p = .301$, $d = .195$. In addition, the small effect size indicated no practical significance in grades for these two time periods. These results based on 41 students corroborate the results found with 8 students in the previous analysis.

Table 4 depicts descriptive statistics on students for whom there is data for the time period during placement in IBAR and the time after placement in IBAR.

Table 4

Comparison of Means During Placement in IBAR and After Placement in IBAR (n = 11)

Variable	Descriptives	During IBAR	After IBAR
Grades	<i>M</i>	78.19	66.61
	<i>SD</i>	5.47	17.58
Attendance	<i>M</i>	85.91	76.18
	<i>SD</i>	8.62	15.98
Discipline	<i>M</i>	5.55	2.18
	<i>SD</i>	5.73	2.99

Note. The mean values for grades and attendance represent percentages. The mean values for discipline represent the actual number of incidents.

A paired sample *t*-test comparing grades during placement in IBAR and grades after placement in IBAR indicated no statistically significant difference, $t = 1.96$, $df = 10$, $p = .079$, $d = 1.004$. However, the large effect size was indicative of practical significance. The mean for grades during placement in IBAR was equal to a passing grade and the mean for grades after placement in IBAR declined to a percentage equal to a failing grade. Overall, results showed no significant differences but there was a practical decline after students leave the IBAR program.

Effects of Placement in IBAR on Student Attendance

The results of a repeated measures one-way analysis of variance comparing attendance before placement in IBAR, during placement in IBAR, and after placement in IBAR (refer back to Table 2 for descriptives) indicated that the assumption of sphericity was not violated. Results with sphericity assumed indicated no significant differences in student attendance across time ($F(2,14) = 1.907$, $p = .185$, partial $\eta^2 = .214$). Follow up

paired samples t -tests indicated no statistically significant differences between attendance before placement in IBAR and during placement in IBAR ($t = .227$, $df = 43$, $p = .821$, $d = .032$). However, a statistically significant difference was found between attendance during placement in IBAR and after placement in IBAR ($t = 2.37$, $df = 10$, $p = .039$, $d = .79$). Unfortunately, there was a decline in attendance between these two time periods. A large effect size also showed practical significance.

A paired sample t -test comparing attendance before placement in IBAR and attendance during placement in IBAR (refer back to Table 3 for descriptives) indicated no statistically significant difference, $t = .227$, $df = 43$, $p = .821$, $d = .032$. Additionally, the small value for the Cohen's d analysis indicated no practical significance.

A paired sample t -test comparing attendance during placement in IBAR and attendance after placement in IBAR (refer back to Table 4 for descriptives) indicated a statistically significant effect, $t = 2.37$, $df = 10$, $p = .039$, $d = .79$. A large Cohen's d value also showed a significant practical effect, as attendance dropped by nearly ten percent.

Overall, the results from the repeated measures one-way analysis of variance and paired sample t -tests were consistent, as no significant difference was found between the time periods of before placement in the IBAR program and during placement in the IBAR program. The results of the data analyses were also consistent for the time periods of during placement in the program and after placement in the program, as both tests found a significant decline in attendance after leaving IBAR.

Effects of Placement in IBAR on Student Discipline

The results of a repeated measures one-way analysis of variance comparing discipline before placement in IBAR, during placement in IBAR, and after placement in

IBAR (refer back to Table 2 for descriptives) indicated that the assumption of sphericity was violated. Results of Mauchly's test of sphericity was found to be significant so it was concluded that the assumption of sphericity was not met ($W = .094, \chi^2 = 14.176, df = 2, p = .001$). Therefore, the Greenhouse-Geisser test was used to correct the violation of sphericity, as it alters the degrees of freedom, thereby producing a more accurate significance value. The Greenhouse-Geisser adjusted F indicated statistical significance for discipline across time ($F(2, 14) = 11.551, p = .01, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .623$). Follow up paired samples t -tests indicated statistically significant differences between disciplinary referrals before placement in IBAR and during placement in IBAR ($t = 3.25, df = 41, p = .002, d = .773$) as well as disciplinary referrals during placement in IBAR and after placement in IBAR ($t = 2.69, df = 10, p = .023, d = .773$). The high Cohen's d value was indicative of practical significance as well. These results indicated that discipline referrals dropped significantly during placement in IBAR, and then again after leaving IBAR.

A paired sample t -test comparing discipline before placement in IBAR and discipline during placement in IBAR (refer back to Table 3 for descriptives) confirmed a statistically significant effect, $t = 3.25, df = 41, p = .002, d = .773$. Likewise, a large Cohen's d value confirmed practical significance, as student disciplinary referrals declined by more than half once students enrolled in the IBAR program.

A paired sample t -test comparing discipline during placement in IBAR and discipline after placement in IBAR (refer back to Table 4 for descriptives) was also statistically significant, $t = 2.69, df = 10, p = .023, d = .773$. Again, a large Cohen's d value signified practical significance, as the mean for disciplinary referrals declined from almost six to less than three.

Overall, results of the repeated measures one-way analysis of variance and paired sample *t*-tests were consistent, as there was a significant decline in disciplinary referrals for the time periods before placement in IBAR and during placement in IBAR and again between the time periods during placement in IBAR and after placement in IBAR.

Effects of Participation in the IBAR Program on Post-Placement Circumstances

In addition to the data already discussed, it was important to examine where the students ended up after leaving the IBAR program. This data was hand-scored based on the original spreadsheet created by the school secretary. Of the 49 students included in this study, 67% have either graduated or continue to be enrolled in school, 16% no longer live in the district, 10% were expelled for crimes code violations, and only 6% have dropped out of school. Whereas the results of the statistical analyses did not indicate significant improvement for grades or attendance, the outcomes described here indicated that the IBAR program was effective in helping these at-risk students be successful in completing school. These percentages equate to 33 students either remaining in school or graduating and only three students dropping out of school. These and other student outcomes are identified in Table 5.

Table 5

<i>Outcomes for Students Following Participation in the IBAR Program</i>	
Outcome	Number
Placed in evening school program and graduated	3
Placed in evening school program and dropped out	2
Placed in evening school program and subsequently expelled and removed by outside agency	5
Placed in evening school program and remain	4
Moved out of district	7
Sent to placement by an outside agency from IBAR	1
Graduated from IBAR	9
Dropped out of IBAR	1
Remain in IBAR	3
Returned to regular education program and graduated	6
Returned to regular education program and remain	7
Returned to regular education program and dropped out	0
Went to Vocational-Technical School and graduated	1

Research Question Two: How Does an On-Site Alternative Education Program Affect Student Perceptions of Their Success With Regard to Academics, Attendance, and Appropriate School Behavior?

The student survey designed specifically for this study was utilized to answer both the second and third research questions. In order to answer the second research question, this instrument included questions intended to gain a better understanding of student perceptions regarding academics, attendance, and behavior. Of the 24 students who were eligible to complete this survey, 13 students received parent permission and chose to participate, for a 54% response rate.

*Students' Perceptions of Their Academic Achievement as a Result
of Participating in IBAR*

Whereas the results of the statistical analyses of school data indicated that participation in the program did not significantly improve students' grades, Table 6 illustrates that students overwhelmingly perceived IBAR to positively impact their academic success.

Table 6

Student Responses Demonstrating Perceptions of Academic Performance While Enrolled in the IBAR Program n =13

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree		NA	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
I can stay more focused on schoolwork in IBAR than in a regular classroom setting.					2	15	11	85		
I complete more schoolwork than I did while in a regular classroom setting.					2	15	11	85		
Being in IBAR has helped me to understand why good grades are important.			1	7	7	54	5	39		
Appropriate computer technology is available for me to use while in IBAR.			2	15	3	23	8	62		
Overall, placement in the IBAR program has helped me to achieve better grades.					2	15	9	70	2	15

Note. N = Number of student responses in a given category; % = percentage of students who responded to a given category for that specific question.

Students' Perceptions of Their Attendance as a Result of Participating in IBAR

The results of the statistical analyses indicated that there was no statistically significant effect for attendance once a student entered the IBAR program and there was

a significant decline in attendance when students transitioned from the IBAR program back to the regular educational setting or to another alternative program. Conversely, the survey suggested that students not only perceived that their attendance improved while in IBAR but that they actually enjoyed coming to school while participating in the program. These perceptions are revealed in Table 7.

Table 7

Student Responses Demonstrating Perceptions of Attendance While Enrolled in the IBAR

Program n = 13

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree		NA	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
My attendance has improved since participating in IBAR.			1	7	4	31	7	54	1	7
I enjoy coming to school since participating in IBAR.			1	7	6	46	6	46		
I have a better understanding of why coming to school is important since participating in IBAR.			2	15	5	39	6	46		
Knowing the IBAR teacher checks up on me has helped to improve my attendance.					3	23	9	70	1	7

Note. N = Number of student responses in a given category; % = percentage of students who responded to a given category for that specific question.

Students' Perceptions of Their Behavior as a Result of Participating in IBAR

The statistical analyses and the student responses to the survey indicated that participation in the IBAR program has a positive effect on the number of disciplinary referrals that the students receive. Without being able to identify which students provided which responses, I believe the students who provided Not Applicable (NA) responses were those who had few or no disciplinary referrals prior to placement in the IBAR

program. Results regarding student perceptions of IBAR having an effect on their behavior are shown in Table 8.

Table 8

*Student Responses Demonstrating Perceptions of Behavior While Enrolled in the IBAR Program
n = 12*

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree		NA	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Overall, my behavior has improved since participating in IBAR.					4	33	6	50	2	17
I have received fewer disciplinary referrals since participating in IBAR.					3	25	7	58	2	17
I feel better about myself when I am not receiving disciplinary referrals.			1	8	2	17	8	67	1	8
Knowing that the IBAR teacher is there helps me control my behavior.					3	25	8	67	1	8

Note. N = Number of student responses in a given category; % = percentage of students who responded to a given category for that specific question.

Research Question Three: What Are the Students' Perceptions of the Helpfulness of Various Components of the Program?

Three sections of the student survey were designed specifically to obtain feedback to answer the third research question of this study. In these sections, students were asked to respond to questions pertaining to Counseling, their Overall Reaction to the program, and the Strategies and Components for Success utilized in the program. Additionally, student responses to four open-ended questions provided valuable insight regarding their perceptions of the helpfulness of the IBAR program.

Students' Perceptions of the Helpfulness of the Counseling Component of IBAR

Because the school database did not include information to review the counseling component of IBAR, the information provided by the students on the survey was

invaluable to determine its effectiveness in assisting the students with the issues that put them at-risk for failure or dropping out of school. While there was at least one student who felt that the counseling component had not benefited him or her, the overall responses indicated that the counseling provided in the IBAR program was well-received and has, in fact, assisted the students with their problems. Results for the counseling portion of the student survey are revealed in Table 9.

Table 9

Student Responses Demonstrating Perceptions of the Counseling Component of the IBAR

Program n = 12 or 13

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree		NA	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
I like meeting with the IBAR counselor.			1	8	5	42	5	42	1	8
The IBAR counselor has helped me to better understand the problems/issues for which I was placed in the program.			1	7	5	39	5	39	2	15
The IBAR counselor has taught me techniques that will help me deal with these problems/issues in the future.			1	7	4	31	6	46	2	15

Note. N = Number of student responses in a given category; % = percentage of students who responded to a given category for that specific question.

Students' Perceptions of the Overall Reaction to IBAR

Student responses to the Overall Reaction portion of the survey were overwhelmingly positive. Of the 104 total responses in this section of the survey, 86% of the students responded that they either Agree or Strongly Agree that the IBAR program has helped them in some way. There were 10 students whose response to a particular question was Not Applicable and only five students who responded that they disagreed

that a particular item was helpful. No students responded to any of the items with a Strongly Disagree response. Results from Overall Reaction portion of the student survey are indicated in Table 10.

Table 10

Student Responses Demonstrating Overall Perceptions of the IBAR Program
n = 13

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree		NA	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
	I believe I can be more successful academically when I return to the regular classroom because of what I have learned while in IBAR.					6	46	5	39	2
I believe my attendance will improve and be maintained because of what I have learned while in IBAR.					6	46	5	39	2	15
I believe I will have less behavior referrals when I return to the regular classroom because of what I have learned while in IBAR.					6	46	4	31	3	23
My parents and I were able to provide input regarding my placement in the IBAR program.					6	46	5	39	2	15
My parent(s) are pleased with the progress I have made.			1	7	2	15	10	77		
My parent(s) are more involved in my education since I started in the IBAR program.			3	23	4	31	6	46		
The IBAR program has provided me an opportunity to be helpful to others.			1	7	7	54	5	39		
I am glad to have been placed in the IBAR program.					3	23	9	70	1	7

Note. *N* = Number of student responses in a given category; % = percentage of students who responded to a given category for that specific question.

*Students' Perceptions Regarding the Strategies and Components for
Success Utilized in IBAR*

As was the case with the other sections of the student survey, student responses to the Strategies and Components for Success portion were positive overall. Of the 113 total responses in this category, there were only three Extremely Unhelpful responses, two Somewhat Unhelpful responses, and seven Does Not Apply (DNA) responses. Therefore, almost 90% of all student responses indicated that participation in the IBAR program was either Somewhat Helpful or Extremely Helpful. Results from Strategies and Components for Success portion of the student survey are indicated in Table 11.

Table 11

Student Responses Regarding Perceptions of Strategies and Components for Success in the IBAR Program n = 13

	Extremely Unhelpful		Somewhat Unhelpful		Somewhat Helpful		Extremely Helpful		DNA	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Small class size					4	31	9	69		
Individualized attention					2	15	11	85		
On-line coursework					4	33	4	33	4	33
Flexibility of instruction (in IBAR room, regular classrooms, on-line)			1	7	2	15	9	70	1	7
Rapport with the IBAR Director					2	18	9	82		
Individual counseling	1	7			6	46	5	39	1	7
Group counseling	1	7			5	39	6	46	1	7
Rapport with the IBAR Counselor	1	8	1	8	3	25	7	58		
Interaction with other IBAR students			1	7	3	23	9	70		

Note. N = Number of student responses in a given category; % = percentage of students who responded to a given category for that specific question.

Summary

The overall results of the statistical analyses used to answer the first research question of this study suggested that participation in the IBAR program brought about statistically significant effects for attendance and discipline at one time or another. Results of analyses examining grades indicated that participation in IBAR did not improve students' grades, but a large effect size indicated a practical drop in grades after leaving IBAR. Analyses examining attendance indicated that student attendance

remained constant before and during placement in IBAR, but attendance also dropped after leaving IBAR. Results examining disciplinary referrals indicated that discipline referrals dropped significantly during placement in IBAR, and then again after leaving IBAR.

Whereas the statistical analyses of school data resulted in important findings that addressed the first research question and will serve to guide improvements for the IBAR program, the results of the student perceptions identified by the survey and the data for post-placement circumstances serve to answer the second and third research questions posed in this study. The students' perceptions of the effects of participation in the IBAR program with regard to academics, attendance, and appropriate school behavior were overwhelmingly positive, as indicated by their responses to the Academics, Attendance, and Behavior categories of the survey. Student reactions to the Counseling, Overall Reaction, and Strategies/Components for Success categories were also extremely positive.

It was apparent that the results from the school data and student surveys differed on certain points. However, the end results of this study have indicated that 67% or 33 students have either chosen to remain in school or have already graduated after participating in the IBAR program. Whereas there was no control group to compare these students to, it is clear that participation in the IBAR program does have a positive effect on students at-risk of dropping out of school.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This study sought to examine the effectiveness of an on-site alternative education program for at-risk students with regard to improving academic success, attendance, and behavior. The Intensive Behavioral and Academic Recovery (IBAR) program was developed and implemented in the Brookville Area School District as an alternative to the traditional educational environment to provide individualized assistance for at-risk students in an effort to help them be more successful. A second purpose for this study was to ascertain student perceptions regarding the components of the program that were most effective in providing support for at-risk factors and in facilitating success. Data was collected through statistical analyses based on the review of multiple documents of student records and from student surveys. The fundamental research questions this study sought to answer were:

- How does an on-site alternative education program affect academic success, attendance, and student behavior?
- How does an on-site alternative education program affect student perceptions of their success with regard to academics, attendance, and appropriate school behavior?
- What are the students' perceptions of the helpfulness of various components of the program?

As was outlined in Chapter 1 of this study, research supported the concept that students are best served by instruction that takes into account individual differences (Tomlinson, 2001; Silver et al., 2000). This study was useful to the Brookville Area School District, as findings are being used to guide the decisions and actions of those involved with the Intensive Behavioral and Academic Recovery program. The results of this study may also help other administrators with the development and implementation of strategies and opportunities to better meet the various needs of the at-risk students served by an AEP. Further, this study may also be useful to counselors and other staff to gain a better understanding of the effects of their actions and attitudes when working with these students. Finally, this study has contributed to what was found to be a limited availability of research-based literature regarding alternative schools *within* a public school district.

As was the case with Chapter Four, this chapter is organized according to the research questions of the study.

Research Question One: How Does an On-Site Alternative Education Program Affect Academic Success, Attendance, and Student Behavior?

It has been stated several times throughout this study that the available research regarding the effectiveness of AEPs for at-risk youth was limited. This was not to say that it was non-existent, as I was able to find several studies for both stand-alone and on-site programs. Most of these studies were able to identify significant effectiveness for students in at least one aspect of the program being studied. For example, the results of a study conducted by Turpin and Hinton (2000) indicated that 91% of the students did, in fact, improve their grades while placed in an alternative education setting. However, no

data was available after the students left that AEP. Additionally, studies conducted by Foley and McConaughy and Foley and Crull (as cited in Young, 1995, pg. 42) found that participation in alternative high schools designed to serve at-risk students led to improved academic achievement and attendance, as student absences decreased by 40% and credits earned increased by 60%.

In the study conducted to complete his dissertation, Jones (1999) found that since returning to their base high school, all students consistently received lower grades than when they were enrolled in the Central City Learning Academy. Additional findings from that study indicated that attendance also declined among students after leaving the program and that the only variable to show significant improvement was a decrease in the number of disciplinary referrals from teachers.

Results of this study were similar to those of Jones' study given that grades improved for some students while in the IBAR program and declined once they left the program. Student attendance also improved while in IBAR followed by a decline after leaving IBAR. Linker and Marion (1995) found similar results of a decline in grades and attendance after students left an alternative education program. This decline is of concern to me because these results indicate that at least some of the students are not meeting the attendance requirements set forth in the No Child Left Behind Act. In turn, this lower attendance rate in IBAR could affect the overall requirement of 90% for the entire school. The only variable to indicate a significant positive effect after leaving IBAR was the number of disciplinary referrals students received after leaving the IBAR program. While it was not the initial intent of this study to determine if a transition strategy was needed for students upon leaving the IBAR program, one could conclude that this is a need for

students to ensure that grades, attendance, and behavior improve or are at a minimum, are maintained.

Barr and Parrett (1995; 1997) indicated that at-risk students become more successful with regard to academics, behavior, attendance, social interaction, or a combination thereof, when removed from the regular education program and placed in an alternative education program. Prior to completing this study, I believed that this was the case for the students enrolled in the IBAR program. Unfortunately, results indicated no significant improvement in the overall means for grades or attendance during the time before placement in IBAR and during placement in IBAR or for the time during placement in IBAR and after placement in IBAR. One possible explanation for this could be the fact that core area teachers and IBAR students are not available at the same time to work on a given subject. For example, a math teacher could be assigned to the IBAR classroom during second period every day. However, if there are students who struggle with math but are not able to meet with that teacher at that time due to attending other classes, those students would not receive any individualized attention for math. These students must then rely on the full-time IBAR teacher, who is not math certified, or other students to assist them with this subject. It is also possible that student grades begin or continue to decline after exiting the program as they no longer have an opportunity for individualized instruction. Whereas there may have only been five students in the IBAR room during their science period, a student exiting the program may return to a classroom that has 22 students.

Research Question Two: How Does an On-Site Alternative Education Program Affect Student Perceptions of Their Success With Regard to Academics, Attendance, and Appropriate School Behavior?

Although statistical analyses of school data showed no significant effect on grades or attendance, the results of the student survey told a different story. It was evident that the students overwhelmingly felt that their grades had improved as a result of being placed in the IBAR program as 85% of them indicated that they Agreed or Strongly Agreed that the program had helped them achieve better grades. Further, every student surveyed indicated that participation in the IBAR program helped them stay more focused on schoolwork than they could while in a regular classroom and that they actually completed more schoolwork while in IBAR than in a regular classroom.

Attendance was another area in which the students' perceptions indicated they believed they were doing better than was proven through school data. Although attendance decreased slightly while in IBAR and significantly after IBAR, the students perceived that the program served as a change agent for improving attendance. When asked if their attendance had improved since participating in IBAR, 85% either Agreed or Strongly Agreed that it had. Students also indicated that they enjoyed coming to school since participating in IBAR (92%) and that they had a better understanding of why school was important (85%). Perhaps one of the most important student responses was that 93% of the students indicated that knowing the IBAR teacher checked up on them had helped improve their attendance. The loss of this support system could be an indication of why attendance declined after students left the IBAR program. Another possible reason why attendance declines after leaving the IBAR program is that the students no longer have

the feeling of belonging that they do while in the program. Barr and Parrett (1997) cited a 10th-grader who felt as though he became a “faceless person” among the many students in the regular education program because he could not connect with any teachers and had no friends.

Student perceptions regarding discipline matched the results of the statistical analyses of school data, as none of the students Disagreed or Strongly Disagreed that IBAR had a positive influence on behavior. Interestingly, an increased number of students chose to answer this series of questions with a Not Applicable response. Although the identity of those who completed the surveys was not known to me, I believe that those who answered as such were those who had no behavioral problems to begin with. Linker and Marion (1995) conducted one of the few studies that collected data on student discipline. Results of their quantitative analysis indicated that 93% of the students had improved school discipline. Unlike the study presented here, Linker and Marion did not survey student perceptions and acknowledge that many benefits of an alternative education program can only be assessed subjectively.

Research Question Three: What Are the Students’ Perceptions of the Helpfulness of
Various Components of the Program?

School data were not available to determine the impact of the counseling component of the program on the students. Therefore, student responses to the survey were essential in determining if counseling was beneficial. Similarly student responses regarding their overall reaction to the IBAR program and to the strategies and components used in the program were also vital.

Of the six categories included on the student survey, it was the counseling component that received the least favorable responses from the students. This was somewhat surprising to me because it was the inclusion of a counseling component that initially made the IBAR program unique in the Brookville Area School District. It is my belief that if this survey had been done in any other year that the IBAR program has existed, there would have been an entirely different response from the students. I believe this to be the case for several reasons. First, there was a new counselor in the program this year because the former counselor had decided to open her own private counseling service. It was she who was the full-time adult in the IBAR program from its inception in 2001 until the end of the 2006-2007 school year. Second, prior to becoming a counselor, the original counselor had endured many experiences similar to those of the students. Those experiences shaped her counseling approach which fostered trust from the students and enabled her to teach them how to identify, understand, and cope with the issues that were affecting their lives at school as well as at home. As was found in a study by Esters and Ledoux (1999), most people prefer to participate in counseling with a counselor who has personal characteristics similar to their own. Third, the counseling component of the IBAR program had been reduced from full-time to approximately eight hours per week due to financial constraints and the availability of a qualified certified counselor.

Generally, student reactions to the counseling component were favorable with 84% indicating that they enjoyed meeting with the counselor and 78% responding that she had helped them to better understand the problems or issues for which they were placed in the program. Moreover, 77% of respondents Agreed or Strongly Agreed that the counselor had taught them certain techniques that would help in dealing with their

problems. It appeared as though there was one student who found the individual counseling, group counseling, and rapport with the counselor to be Extremely Unhelpful. While I cannot say for certain, as the respondents were anonymous, it appeared as though this was a student who had a personality conflict with the counselor for some reason. As was previously stated, students tend to prefer counselors who share characteristics similar to themselves (Esters & Ledoux, 1999).

In the Overall Reaction category of the survey, the students again indicated that they Agreed or Strongly Agreed that the IBAR program was helping them to be successful in school. For example, 85% of them believed that they could be more successful academically and that their attendance would either improve or be maintained when they returned to the regular classroom because of what they had learned while in IBAR. Surprisingly, that number went down to 77% regarding the reduction in the number of behavior referrals upon returning to the regular classroom. These responses were contrary to the results of the statistical analyses, as grades and attendance actually declined slightly and behavior improved significantly.

Kellmayer (1995) asserted that punishment continued to be used in response to inappropriate behaviors even though statistics have shown that this approach is ineffective. Instead, at-risk students should have the opportunity to choose to be placed in alternative education programs not as a punishment but as a means for them to receive the services they need. Other researchers contended that students and teachers alike were much more successful when given the choice to participate (Barr & Parrett, 1997; Young, 1990). The ability to choose often leads to a greater sense of belonging, a desire to learn, and a willingness to attend school. Almost all of the respondents of the survey for this

study indicated that they either Agreed or Strongly Agreed that they and their parents were able to provide input regarding their placement in the IBAR program.

The literature review completed for this study revealed the importance of parental involvement with school, especially for at-risk youth (Barr & Parrett, 1995; Barr & Parrett, 1997; Tobin & Sprague, 2000). The IBAR students provided mixed results to the questions that related to parental involvement. While 92% indicated that their parents were pleased with the progress they had made since entering the IBAR program, 23% of the students indicated they Disagreed that their parents were more involved with their education since they entered the program. This could have been another possible reason why students were not as successful as they could have been after leaving the IBAR program. If parents were disengaged while their son or daughter was enrolled in the program, chances are that they were no more engaged after he or she left the program.

The final section of the student survey, Strategies and Components for Success, also showed the student perceptions to be supportive of the IBAR program. Every student who participated in the survey responded with a Somewhat Helpful or Extremely Helpful response with regard to small class size, individualized attention, and rapport with the IBAR director.

Gold and Mann (as cited in Young, 1990, pg. 42) indicated that flexibility was a key component for fostering positive attitudes about school and instilling self-confidence in students. Similarly, results of the survey for IBAR indicated that students perceive flexibility of instruction to be beneficial in assisting with academic success. The combination of traditional teaching methods and the availability of on-line coursework has enabled the IBAR teachers to customize learning opportunities to better meet the

needs of the students. As was the case with the study conducted by Day (2002) in which the students took part in a technology based curriculum, all IBAR students who completed computer-based courses found them to be either Somewhat Helpful or Extremely Helpful.

Not surprising was the fact that 93% of the students found their interaction with other IBAR students to be Somewhat Helpful or Extremely Helpful. Peer mediation, peer tutoring, academic motivation, and cooperative learning are examples of how interaction with other students in an alternative education program can be helpful in keeping at-risk students in school (Day, 2002; Jones, 1999; Kellmayer, 1995; McMillan, Reed, & Bishop, 1992).

It is quite possible that participation in the IBAR program was the only time that these students felt as though they “fit in” with any group of students. Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, and Fernandez (1989) asserted that AEPs were effective because they provided a community of support that at-risk students often lacked in their lives. They all knew that they were there because they were not able to be successful in the regular education program for some reason. It could have provided a sense of relief that they were not alone in the way they felt and learned. This could also have been a reason why grades and attendance declined after students left the program. They either missed being in that environment and wanted to return or they simply floundered because their support system was no longer in place.

Tobin and Sprague (2000) claimed that alternative education programs must break from the traditional structure of the regular education program. Instead, flexibility with regard to the curriculum as well as how that curriculum was delivered was imperative to

meet the needs of these at-risk students. Results from the student survey for this study concurred with Tobin and Sprague, as 85% of the students found the flexibility of instruction either Somewhat Helpful or Extremely Helpful.

There is no way to know what the outcomes for these students would have been without the IBAR program, as there was no control group that was denied the opportunity to participate in the program to see if there is a difference in the drop-out and graduation rates. Of the 49 students reported in this study, 33 have either graduated or remain in school. Thirteen students moved out of the district, either voluntarily or involuntarily and only three of the 49 students have chosen to drop out of school. It is clear by the ratio of graduates to drop-outs that the IBAR program provides the support that many of these students need to successfully earn their high school diploma.

Implications for Educators

One of the most important things that I have learned from this study was the fact that assessing the effectiveness of the alternative education program offered for the district's at-risk population is imperative. Prior to collecting data, it was my belief that I would find results similar to those found in several studies outlined in the literature review chapter of this study. I expected to see significant positive effects for grades, attendance, and discipline. Unfortunately, the results indicated that my perceptions were not completely accurate. However, having this data will allow me and other stakeholders of the IBAR program to make the appropriate changes necessary to insure greater success for these students. This is important for other educators to know because their perceptions of an alternative education program they provide for their students may be skewed also.

Therefore, examining data, as was presented in this study, could provide important information for the improvement of those alternative education programs.

The data collected for this study indicated that grades and attendance remained fairly constant when comparing time periods before placement in IBAR, during placement in IBAR, and after placement in IBAR, as repeated measures one-way analyses of variance and the paired sample *t*-tests indicated that these results were not statistically significant. However, these findings were still a concern for me because several of the grade percentages had gone from passing to failing and attendance rates went down for some students after exiting the IBAR program. Although not statistically significant, the practical significance of these results was certainly important to the students who would not receive a diploma if these variables did not improve. Therefore, it is evident that a more structured and supportive transition is needed when students return to the regular education program.

As the administrator of the school in which the IBAR program is located, I found the results of the student survey to be extremely important because the students' perceptions are their reality and those optimistic perceptions could be what kept them from dropping out of school. The following student response to the open-ended survey question which asked what the students liked the most about the IBAR program is one example supporting this conclusion. This student stated:

The things I like most about the IBAR program is I can get up in the morning and look forward to coming to school, and I get my schoolwork finished and turned in on time because I'm encouraged to do so. I also like that the teacher can relate and understand us, and that there is a counselor for us to talk to.

Implications for Future Research

There was no way to tell if the students included in this study would have improved their grades, attendance, or behavior if they did not have the option of participating in the IBAR program. There was no control group for this study because having one would mean that certain at-risk students would have simply been left to their own devices and not had an opportunity to take advantage of the assistance provided in the IBAR program. As an educator, allowing any student to struggle through school without attempting to provide the assistance he or she may need would have been unethical and simply was not an option.

Given the shortage of available research on the subject of on-site alternative education programs, this field is wide open for future research. Based on the findings and limitations of this study, I would recommend several options for future research. The first recommended study would be a more in-depth program evaluation that includes input from alternative education administrators, teachers, counselors, parents, and students. Additional input from other stakeholders could provide valuable information that reaches beyond the scope of this study. A second study could be a qualitative one that examines the issues or circumstances that put the students at risk and the different approaches and strategies that should be used to address them. As was previously stated, school districts may face dissimilar problems with their students and may need to provide specific support, counseling, and education. A third recommended study could investigate the feasibility to provide authentic work experiences for students similar to those used in the Philadelphia Parkway School (Young, 1990). In order to stay motivated about school, at-risk students may need to see how their learning relates to the real world and could

benefit from work experience. A fourth approach that could be the foundation for future study would be to ascertain if the removal of at-risk students from a regular education classroom had a significant educational impact on the other students. One could hypothesize that removing truant, disruptive, or disengaged students from a classroom would have a positive impact on the rest of the students.

It is evident from the lack of available research in the current literature that additional studies are needed with regard to the effectiveness of on-site alternative education programs. Therefore, it is recommended that alternative education stakeholders add to the literature by conducting research-based studies that pertain to their individual programs. This additional research will enable the educational community to develop and improve programs necessary for at-risk students.

Conclusion

Whereas the data collected for this study indicate that the IBAR program does not show the same successes with regard to academics and attendance as other alternative programs previously discussed, it does indicate that academic and attendance percentages are essentially maintained while students are enrolled in the program. Statistics have also shown that participation in the IBAR program has a significant positive effect on discipline. Additionally, this study has shown that the percentage of students who have either been retained or who have graduated far exceeds that of drop-outs.

Student perceptions indicate that they rely on the supportive environment that exists in the IBAR classroom, they feel better about themselves, and that they have learned how to manage the issues that put them at risk. Additionally, student responses to the survey show that they feel they have more responsibility for their academics,

attendance, and behavior and that their parents are as pleased with the program as are they.

For many students, an AEP may be their last best hope to stay in school and earn a diploma. Whether a school district is in an urban or rural area, has a large or small student population, or has great or limited financial resources, not providing a program to help facilitate student success cannot be an option for school districts. Research has shown that at-risk students can be successful in school. It is our mission as educators to insure that we do all we can to make it happen.

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APPENDIX 1

Participant Recruitment Letter

Dear Parent/Guardian:

A study is being conducted of the Intensive Behavioral and Academic Recovery (IBAR) program in an effort to examine its effectiveness in helping students be successful in school. Results of the study will be used to improve various components of program. Additionally, these results will also be used by our principal, Mr. Wolfe, as he completes the requirements for a Doctor of Education degree from Duquesne University.

Enclosed with this letter is a copy of the survey that we would like to administer to the students. While the students will need to *complete the survey at school*, we are sending a copy of it home for you to look over and see that there are no questions that will enable others to identify any of the students who participate. Please know that participation in this study is completely voluntary and that you or your son/daughter can choose to withdraw at any time for any reason.

Two other forms are also included in this mailing; one is a PERMISSION TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY, which needs to be signed by a parent/guardian. The other form is the ASSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY, which needs to be signed by the student. Once signed, please return these forms to me in the enclosed self-addressed stamped envelope. Upon receipt, these forms will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in my office.

If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call Mr. Wolfe at (814) 849-1106 or me at (814) 849-8372 ext 2217.

Sincerely,

Ray Doolittle
11th & 12th Grade Counselor

APPENDIX 2

Assent to Participate in a Research Study Form

DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY**600 FORBES AVENUE – PITTSBURGH, PA 15282****ASSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY**

- TITLE:** Examining the Effectiveness of a Site-Based Alternative Education Program for At-Risk High School Students
- INVESTIGATORS:** Keith S. Wolfe
96 Jenks Street
Brookville, PA 15825
- ADVISOR:** Dr. Sarah Peterson
Duquesne University
School of Education
600 Forbes Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15282
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree Doctor of Education.
- SOURCE OF SUPPORT:** None
- PURPOSE:** You are being asked to participate in a research project to examine the effectiveness of the Intensive Behavioral and Academic Recovery (IBAR) program. I want to find out how you feel the program has helped you and how it can be more helpful to you. If you choose to participate and if your parents give you permission, you will take the survey with the guidance counselor during the time you are in IBAR. It will take approximately 10 minutes.
- RISKS AND BENEFITS:** There is no risk to you if you participate in this study. I will not know if you choose to participate or not, and there will be no way for me to know what your answers are if you do participate.. Your participation will help me determine how we can improve IBAR to make it more useful to you and other students who may be in IBAR in the future.

- COMPENSATION:** You will not be paid for participating in this study but participating will also not cost you anything.
- CONFIDENTIALITY:** Your name will not appear on the survey instrument so your answers can never be identified. All surveys and consent forms will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the principal's office. All materials will be kept on file for a period of five years following the completion of the research.
- RIGHT TO WITHDRAW:** You are under no obligation to participate in this study. You are free to withdraw your assent to participate at any time.
- SUMMARY OF RESULTS:** A summary of the results of this research will be supplied to you, at no cost, upon request.
- VOLUNTARY CONSENT:** I have read the above statements and understand what I am being asked to do. I also understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw my consent at any time, for any reason. On these terms, I certify that I am willing to participate in this research project.
- I understand that should I have any further questions about my participation in this study, I may call Mr. Ray Doolittle, Brookville Area Jr/Sr High School Guidance Counselor at 814-849-8372, Dr. Sarah Peterson, Duquesne University Advisor at 412-396-4037, or Dr. Paul Richer, Duquesne University IRB Chair at 412-849-4306.

Participant's Name (printed)

Participant's Signature

Date

APPENDIX 3

Permission to Participate in a Research Study Form

DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY**600 FORBES AVENUE – PITTSBURGH, PA 15282****PERMISSION TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY**

- TITLE:** Examining the Effectiveness of a Site-Based Alternative Education Program for At-Risk High School Students
- INVESTIGATORS:** Keith S. Wolfe
96 Jenks Street
Brookville, PA 15825
- ADVISOR:** Dr. Sarah Peterson
Duquesne University
School of Education
600 Forbes Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15282
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree Doctor of Education.
- SOURCE OF SUPPORT:** None
- PURPOSE:** Your son/daughter is being asked to participate in a research project to examine the effectiveness of the Intensive Behavioral and Academic Recovery (IBAR) program. I want to find out how he/she feels the program has helped him/her and how it can be more helpful to him/her. If you grant permission for him/her to participate, he/she will take the survey with the guidance counselor during the time he/she is in IBAR. It will take approximately 10 minutes.
- RISKS AND BENEFITS:** There is no risk to your son/daughter if he/she participates in this study. I will not know if he/she chooses to participate or not, and there will be no way for me to know what his/her answers are if he/she does participate. His/her participation will help me determine how we can improve

IBAR to make it more useful to your son/daughter and other students who may be in IBAR in the future.

COMPENSATION: Your son/daughter will not be paid for participating in this study but participating will also not cost him/her anything.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Your son/daughter's name will not appear on the survey instrument so his/her answers can never be identified. All surveys and consent forms will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the principal's office. All materials will be kept on file for a period of five years following the completion of the research.

RIGHT TO WITHDRAW: You are under no obligation to grant permission for your son/daughter to participate in this study. You are free to withdraw your permission for your son/daughter to participate at any time.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS: A summary of the results of this research will be supplied to you, at no cost, upon request.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT: I have read the above statements and understand what I am being asked to do. I also understand that my permission for my son/daughter to participate is voluntary and that I can withdraw my permission at any time, for any reason. On these terms, I certify that I am willing to grant permission for my son/daughter to participate in this research project.

I understand that should I have any further questions about my participation in this study, I may call Mr. Ray Doolittle, Brookville Area Jr/Sr High School Guidance Counselor at 814-849-8372, Dr. Sarah Peterson, Duquesne University Advisor at 412-396-4037, or Dr. Paul Richer, Duquesne University IRB Chair at 412-849-4306.

Parent/Guardian's Name (printed)

Parent/Guardian's Signature

Date

APPENDIX 4

IBAR Student Survey

Please respond to each of the following statements based on your experiences while in the Intensive Behavioral and Academic Recovery (IBAR) Program. Place an X the appropriate box next to each statement based on the following scale:

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree NA – Not Applicable

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	NA
ACADEMICS					
I can stay more focused on schoolwork in IBAR than in a regular classroom setting.					
I complete more schoolwork than I did while in a regular classroom setting.					
Being in IBAR has helped me to understand why good grades are important.					
Appropriate computer technology is available for me to use while in IBAR.					
Overall, placement in the IBAR program has helped me to achieve better grades.					
ATTENDANCE					
My attendance has improved since participating in IBAR.					
I enjoy coming to school since participating in IBAR.					
I have a better understanding of why coming to school is important since participating in IBAR.					
Knowing the IBAR teacher checks up on me has helped to improve my attendance.					

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	NA
BEHAVIOR					
Overall, my behavior has improved since participating in IBAR.					
I have received fewer disciplinary referrals since participating in IBAR.					
I feel better about myself when I am not receiving disciplinary referrals.					
Knowing that the IBAR teacher is there helps me control my behavior.					
COUNSELING					
I like meeting with the IBAR counselor.					
The IBAR counselor has helped me to better understand the problems/issues for which I was placed in the program.					
The IBAR counselor has taught me techniques that will help me deal with these problems/issues in the future.					
OVERALL REACTION					
I believe I can be more successful academically when I return to the regular classroom because of what I have learned while in IBAR.					
I believe my attendance will improve and be maintained because of what I have learned while in IBAR.					
I believe I will have less behavior referrals when I return to the regular classroom because of what I have learned while in IBAR.					
My parents and I were able to provide input regarding my placement in the IBAR program.					
My parent(s) are pleased with the progress I have made.					

My parent(s) are more involved in my education since I started in the IBAR program.					
The IBAR program has provided me an opportunity to be helpful to others.					
I am glad to have been placed in the IBAR program.					

Rate the following strategies/components of the IBAR program with regard to how you feel they help you achieve success.

STRATEGIES/COMPONENTS FOR SUCESS	Extremely unhelpful	Somewhat unhelpful	Somewhat helpful	Extremely helpful	DNA
Small class size					
Individualized attention					
On-line coursework					
Flexibility of instruction (in IBAR room, regular classrooms, on-line)					
Rapport with the IBAR Director					
Individual counseling					
Group counseling					
Rapport with the IBAR Counselor					
Interaction with other IBAR students					

I am a:

Male _____

Female _____

What do you find MOST helpful about the IBAR program?

What do you find LEAST helpful about the IBAR program?

What do you like the MOST about the IBAR program?

What do you like the LEAST about the IBAR program?
