

Alternative Education:

Past, Present and Next Steps

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The concept of alternative education is not a new phenomenon. In one form or another, education alternatives have existed for over 80 years across the United States. In fact, Thomas Young (1990), in describing alternative education's history, stated that education alternatives have existed since American education's earliest beginnings, coming into its own within public education during the latter half of the 20th century. Today, alternative education is thriving as communities see the merit of educating all youth to be responsible members of society.

History

Prior to 1960, alternatives to public education existed primarily outside the public school system, either in parochial or community/home-based settings. A distinctly different approach began in the 1960's, when civil rights public school critics expressed their concern about the direction of public education by stating that academic success was defined "solely in narrow cognitive terms at the expense of equity (Young, 1990). By the end of the decade, public education had begun to incorporate new models into its processes, positioning educational alternatives in two distinctly different camps, either entirely outside of public education or completely within the public school system (Lange & Sletten, 2002).

Freedom schools provided much of the impetus for this shift. Developed to provide high quality education to minority students, they operated according to a community-school model and were run entirely outside of the public school system. The Free School Movement was also initiated during this time period. These schools emphasized individual achievement, as opposed to a community emphasis.

The premise for the Free School Movement was that many children were being alienated in the public school system and should be given the opportunity to explore and learn according to their own interests and abilities. There were no specific learning requirements or set discipline imposed on students and evaluation was conducted to determine if the learning environment facilitated personal development, as opposed to learning progress objectives (Lange & Sletten, 2002). Most of these non-public alternative education movements of the 1960's had very brief life spans (Raywid, 1981).

However, they forced educators within the public system to recognize the benefit of non-traditional education principles to develop opportunities for school system-based alternative education. Open schools were a product of this reform movement and were characterized by parent, student, and teacher choice; learning autonomy; self-pacing; non-competitive evaluation; and child-centered principles. The open schools lead the way for schools without walls, schools within a school, multicultural schools, continuation schools, learning centers, fundamental schools, and magnet schools (Lange & Sletten, 2002).

In the 1980's, alternative education conceptualization began to narrow in scope and focused more on conservative and remedial purposes. Many previously successful open schools did not survive this change in political and societal climate. During this time period, alternative education became geared towards teaching educational basics to improve achievement, and de-emphasized the idea of collective decision-making in the educational process.

Not too much later, educational choice resurfaced in a new package: Magnet Programs. Both as school-within-a-school programs and as standalone schools, magnet education developed primarily in response to racial and social inequities in efforts to integrate the school system (Lange & Sletten, 2002). While magnet programs did attract non-neighborhood students into a previously segregated school or area, little actual diversity was accomplished as magnet students were largely separated from neighborhood students by programming.

Alternative Programming

There are a wide range of alternative education options, driven by various education theory and research principles. According to Raywid (1981), there are three general types of alternative schools, which she categorizes as Type I, II, and III. While many schools fall primarily within these categories, often programming exists as a hybrid of these three categories, indicating a potential Type IV category.

Type I schools provide full-time education options for any student, whether gifted or a dropout or academically at-risk or behaviorally at-risk, across multiple years. All students attend by choice. There is usually considerable divergence from standard school organization, practices, and policies. Other characteristics of Type I alternative schools include deregulation, flexibility, autonomy, teacher and student empowerment, teacher professionalism, multiple teacher roles, small in size, a whole-student approach, individualized instruction, self-paced instruction, and provision of counseling and other support services. Type I alternative schools could include any of the following: schools-within-schools, magnet schools, charter schools, schools without walls, experiential schools, career-oriented schools, dropout-recovery programming, after-hours schools, and theme location schools. Research tends to support these schools more than any other model (Lange & Sletten, 2002).

Type II schools are considered to be “last chance” schools, usually the step just preceding expulsion. These schools emphasize behavior modification and remediation and often do not offer student choice or decision-making. This category may include boot camps or in-school suspension. Research tends to show that programs in this category do not lead to long-term positive outcomes and can potentially increase the risk for negative outcomes (Lange & Sletten, 2002).

Type III schools are oriented in a remedial focus on academic and social emotional issues. These settings provide short-term therapeutic services, (i.e., counseling, access to social services, academic remediation), target specific student populations, and allow student choice. Research

indicates programs in this category may improve behavior and achievement, but results face when students return to their home schools. It is recommended that transition and follow-up services be provided as students re-enter their home schools to facilitate positive long-term outcomes (Lange & Sletten, 2002).

There are many components of alternative education programs and schools that serve unique purposes for students who need or desire an educational environment different from the traditional public education model. Examples of some of these programs supported as successful practices by evaluation and research, include the following:

- ? Cantelon and LeBouef (1995) examined *Communities in Schools (CIS): A Collaboration at Work for Youth*. Actually, CIS is a network composed of local, state, and national partnerships. The aim is to provide at-risk children with personal one-on-one relationships with adults, a safe place to learn and grow, a marketable skill to use upon graduation, and a chance to give back to peers and community. CIS brings together businesses and public and private agencies in communities (welfare & health professionals, employment counselors, social workers and recreation leaders, the clergy, and members of community groups) and puts them in the schools. CIS utilizes a freestanding facility or wing of an existing school that is sponsored by an individual corporation or organization.
- ? Carpenter-Aeby and Kurtz (2000) presented the use of portfolios for strengths-based intervention in the empowerment of disruptive students in a Crossroads* grant-sponsored alternative school utilizing a disciplinary structure, specialized education, and social services. The researchers presented a literature review of portfolio research, discussed portfolio format in the context of the alternative school, and presented portfolio limitations.
- ? Levine (2002) shares information about the *Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center* in Rhode Island. The school has no classes, no grades, no tests, but no “easy rides.” Customized education focuses on five learning goals: communication, social reasoning, empirical reasoning, and personal qualities. Two days each week are spent at internships selected by students in keeping with their interests. The students work closely with adults inside and outside of school, rather than with same-age peers. Instead of tests and grades, a multi-disciplinary team meets quarterly to assess student progress.

Needs assessment components that incorporate student perceptions and ideas are proven tools in effective program implementation and maintenance. Students attending a new alternative school in a Midwest suburb in 1995 were asked to provide their perceptions of past and current schools

environments. Perceptions of the new alternative school experience indicated that it was significantly better than the schools they had left. Reasons for these differences and intervention strategies to keep these students in school were provided in an article written by Saunders and Saunders (2002). Interpersonal development was important for staff-to-staff relationships, staff-to-student relationships, as well as student-staff relationships. A sense of community was reported to bridge adjustment difficulties for students in a new environment away from previous peer influences. The school attempted to create a “pastoral” environment that supported psychosocial needs of students through a small student-staff ration and intense caseworker investment. Student perceptions of an alternative school are integral to the evaluation of effectiveness in the context of best practice. Focusing on the immediate needs of each student allowed for a learner-centered environment with all important student buy-in to the alternative school process. With all of the best intentions and creative strategies, unless students take an active role in learning and relationship building and perceive the school environment as being supportive, all alternative education efforts will ultimately fail.

Wetzel and McNaboe (1997) presented information about the initial years of the Alternative School Program (ASP) of the Willington public system and support specialists from Camp Horizons Support Services in Connecticut (1992-1993). They emphasized the role of family participation in the student core group and its direct impact on student success. Parents should be included as primary stakeholders, with equal footing with probation officers, social workers, teachers, etc. Correspondingly, their feedback, when available, should be included in evaluation, such as self-studies.

COST BENEFIT

In examination of cost and benefit analysis of alternative education across Type I, II, and III categories, researchers have established cost-benefit rationale for improving educational through alternatives to traditional education practice. While most of the data addresses educating youth-at-risk,

it can be assumed a correlation exists for all students, whether identified as at-risk or not. According to a 1997 *American Teacher* Special Report, “When one hour of instructional time per day is lost to disruption in the regular classroom, the cost is \$23,429 per class, based on the national average annual cost per student of \$5,623. Each student that an alternative program prevents from having to repeat a grade has a cost savings of \$5,623. In 1993, the average cost to incarcerate an inmate in local jails was \$14,667 per year, and federal prisons cost an average of \$22,773 per inmate per year. Alternative programs could potentially save taxpayers’ money by helping these students avoid the criminal justice system to become productive members of society.”

School Culture Issues

Not only does an effective alternative education environment have the potential for financial and other related resource benefits, but it also can be an integral component of creating a safe and healthy learning environment. Schools create their own culture; parts of school culture are bound up with the community where it serves, but much of it is created by the community within. When any part of a culture feels ostracized or marginalized, the normal reaction is to opt out or act out. Many times, because students are not generally an integral part of the educational planning process in traditional education environments, these students opt out (fail academically) or act out (resort to disruption or violence).

Often, violence is a precipitating factor for a student’s suspension or expulsion (i.e., alternative school or program placement). Researchers have identified student goals that may influence the degree and manner in which some children and most adolescents engage in acts of violence (Bailey, 2001). These goals include achieving or maintaining high social status, materialism and social identity, power, social control and defiance of authority. Risk-taking also can be a function of adolescent violence as a student works toward establishing their social identity. Alternative education

can be the bridge between the traditional setting and their feelings of isolation, re-connecting them to education as a valued, and valuable, experience.

The very tools by which we often determine placement and release from alternative education can be suspect to bias and inconsistency. Bailey (2001) stated youth violence profiling raises legal concerns regarding the validity and utility of profile measurement tools and their interaction with potential discriminatory practices, search and seizure, and implications for student privacy. Profiling is problematic when it is used to support alternative education referrals due to racial, gender, and other personal characteristic bias. Additionally, profiling hinders confidentiality policies in school and in the surrounding community. Bailey (2001) stated that more information is needed regarding the validity of profiles as scientific tools, specifically examining objectivity, accuracy, sensitivity, over-inclusiveness, and general scientific acceptance. As alternative educators grapple with the complexity of student needs, they must incorporate a degree of objectivity in decision-making and flexibility in that process to guard against the dangers of bias through profiling (Bailey, 2001).

Best Practice Research

Alternative education comes in many flavors, and is known by as many names and titles as there are programs. Today, best practices in alternative education focuses primarily on utilizing positive, proactive measures to improve student success. Many programs demonstrate that these students thrive in a learner-centered, creative environment that provides a multi-faceted program connecting the student to success both academically and socially is the most common model. These evaluation-directed and research-supported programs attest to the range of services that exist in education across the nation.

Daugherty and Compton (1996) examined the effects of a school program that integrates community service, academic courses, and vocational work for at-risk high schools students. Research focused on document student change in the areas of self-esteem, self-confidence, knowledge and work

skills awareness, and work concepts and ethics. Pre- and post-measures indicated no significant differences on self-esteem and locus of control. Qualitative analysis of student journals, focus group interactions, and evaluative feedback indicated student development of self-esteem, self-confidence, and positive attitudes toward work. Awareness of community services and diversity populations increased positively over the course of the study according to student responses. Data analysis revealed students learned about children, the elderly, mental illness, and their personal abilities in working with these groups. When community service was linked to course content, students reported that they gained insight and knowledge in sociological and work-related concepts (Daugherty & Compton, 1996).

Williams and Sadler (2001) examined the effects of an urban high school-based childcare center of parenting adolescents and their children (enrolled 1995-1998). 52 students received services with 62% being African American and 98% female. Students that utilized these services showed improvements in their overall grade point averages, and were promoted to the next grade or graduated from high school. None of the students had additional children during their childcare center enrollment and 90% of children were up-to-date on their doctors' visits and immunizations. The authors stated that these results strongly support extended childcare and social support services to teen parents.

Grunbaum and colleagues (2000) examined the impact of health choices of students in alternative education placements. They assert that alternative education settings are prime locations for delivering health promotion education to adolescents and young adults. Data was collected via administration of the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS) which provides information regarding behaviors that contribute to unintentional and intentional injuries, tobacco use, alcohol and other drug use, sexual behaviors that contribute to unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, unhealthy dietary behaviors, and physical inactivity. Results from the 1988 ALT-YRBS

indicated that many alternative high school students engage in behavior that greatly increases their risk of poor health outcomes and likelihood of earlier death. (Grunbaum, et al., 2000). This study compared health-risk behavior prevalence of students attending alternative high schools, as compared to students attending regular high schools. Research was based on data from the 1997 national Youth Risk Behavior Survey. Health-risk behaviors included behaviors that contribute to unintentional injuries and violence, tobacco use, alcohol and other drug use, sexual behaviors, unhealthy dietary behaviors, and physical inactivity. Alternative high school students were at significantly greater risk than regular high school students for violence-related injury, suicide, HIV infection or other sexually-transmitted diseases, pregnancy, development of chronic disease related to tobacco use, unhealthy dieting practices, and lack of vigorous activity. Suggestions are provided in the context of the study's findings that address program development to decrease the prevalence of risk-taking behaviors within this particular population (Grunbaum, Lowry, & Kann, 2001).

Wiest, et al. (2001) studied motivationally related variables among regular, special, and alternative education high school students (Southern California, 104 reg, 93 alt, 54 special ed). They specifically examined students' perceptions of competence, control, parental autonomy support, teacher autonomy support, peer autonomy support, and academic coping. Significant group differences were found in perceived competence, academic coping, and parental autonomy support. Regular education students reported higher academic competence than special education students. Regular education and special education students reported that their parents were more involved with them than alternative education student reports. Regular education students reported more academic anxiety than special education or alternative education students. Regular education students reported the highest level of positive coping (Wiest, et. al, 2001).

Geographic Diversity

There is little doubt that the present state of alternative education in the United States is diverse and varies from region to region, state to state, and even district to district. In the following paragraphs, brief synopses of the state of alternative education and evaluation in a select number of states is reviewed to illustrate this point:

In Kentucky, alternative schools have been primarily implemented with the intention of lessening the impact of school violence and correspondingly, increasing school safety. State funding was provided to districts to develop alternative programming and only behavioral data, not achievement data, was utilized to gauge the effectiveness of alternative education. Recently, educators have begun to examine alternative programs in the context of academic, learning environment, and efficiency criteria.

In North Carolina, a statewide survey of alternative learning programs was conducted. 185 programs existed with 41% within an existing high school and 31% in a school separated from the main campus (1996). Alternatives were created to meet the needs of students with behavior problems, lack of consistent attendance, and academic difficulties in general education (Brewer, 1998). The North Carolina Department of Education has conducted evaluation of alternative education programming and has recommended some key ingredients for successful alternative programs. Some of these identified ingredients include a caring and committed staff, dynamic leaders, collegiality with faculty and students, a family-like atmosphere of respect, small size facilities or teaching units, individualized and hands-on instruction, basing instruction on the theoretical “whole” child approach—both physical, emotional, and academic needs of students, flexibility with high standards, creative strategies for course offerings, strong community agencies (volunteers, financial and non-monetary contributions), service learning, identifying and focusing resources, contracting part-time teachers, student directed learning ,shadowing programs, and a clinical/team approach to behavior

management. Alternative school staff shared that there have been many challenges in making alternative programs work in their schools. They identified specific needs, which include additional funding, alternative education certification programs, appropriate staff training, public/political relationships, better communication and follow-up with feeder schools, establishment of a variety of alternatives – a continuum for diverse student needs (low academic achievers, discipline problems, English as a Second Language), additional course offerings, and facility improvements.

Illinois State Evaluation (1999) reported that alternative education programming in the state has provided services that include academic counseling, tutoring, mentoring, personal counseling, referral services & follow-up, drug/alcohol referral, case management, parent courses, job placement, day care services, vocational training, career counseling & guidance, career education, work experience, college counseling, cultural programs, GED courses, summer school, weekend school, evening school, community college courses, and traditional academic instruction. Illinois alternative educators and evaluators provided a series of evaluative questions to consider when implementing and maintaining alternative education programs:

1. How many students received services and what were their characteristics?
2. What were the bases for referring students to the program?
3. What were the participation objectives for the students that were served in the program?
4. What services did the students receive?
5. What were the outcomes for the students that participated in the program?
6. To what extent were the students' participation objectives achieved?
7. Which education agencies offered program services?
8. What types of staff participated in offering services?
9. How were program funds allocated for services?
10. What were the student characteristics, program services, and student outcomes for the individual education agencies that offered program services?

The Michigan Alternative Education Organization reported that 369 alternative education programs exist in 270 out of 700 school districts. Approximately 25,000 students are served by these alternatives and the programs/schools are primarily oriented to students at-risk. Policies of choice and

similar racial/ethnic makeup to surrounding communities are two areas of focus for Michigan state alternative education (Michigan Alternative Education Association, 2002).

The Minnesota Department of Children, Families, and Learning (2002) reported that there are approximately 150 alternative programs implemented at 600 sites across the state. Their focus tends to be on the provision of educational choices for at-risk students ranging from kindergarten to adult. Many programs are offered year round and consist of public alternative programs, area learning centers, and privately contracted programs. Students can qualify for programs if they are performing academically below grade level, speak English as a second language, are teen parents, or are chronically truant. Emphasis is placed on small size and specialized teacher training for working with students at-risk.

The New York Guide to Alternatives (1997) reported that roughly 100,000 students are served in alternative education programs or detention facilities. The range of services encompasses the needs of students with behavioral or academic difficulties, gifted students, newly immigrant students, and teen parents.

Ohio has approximately 120 alternative programs, which include both short- and long-term placement options. The programs include social skills building, health behavior training, career development, GED completion, day suspension, and correctional programming. Students are served through alternative education if they have significant academic difficulty or have dropped out of school (Ohio Department of Education, 2000).

The South Carolina State Board of Education Report (2000) recorded the existence of 100 alternative schools across the state. The median size was 35 students with variation in services by age, size, and operation hours. The five most utilized instruction formats were self-paced, computer-assisted, whole group, traditional, and tutorial. Although 90% of schools collected evaluative

information on students and alternative education programs, there was no systematic and formalized evaluation process for the schools (Tenenbaum, 2000).

The Washington Association for Learning Alternatives has stated that their schools are schools of choice rather than remediation or “last chance” schools. The Parent Partnered Program is a popular alternative education that incorporates public education and home schooling to address the needs of students at-risk.

Funding

Providing multiple supports for student needs is not an inexpensive process, and there is no set amount that is required to begin a program. Costs associated with alternative education can vary from state to state and program to program, depending on financial and human resources readily available via direct (volunteers, foundation donations, fees, etc.) or indirect (i.e., grant-writing, lobbying for state government resources, etc.) means. Expenses can include, but are not limited to, the following: staff salaries (which may include teachers, social workers, counselors, psychologists, administrators, instructional aides, cooking and cleaning staff, and maintenance staff), specialized curriculum expenses, vocational supplies and equipment, school-to-work collaborative activities, transportation expenses, technology, evaluation materials, school-to-home communication, safe and security measures, building maintenance, and experiential education projects and activities (i.e., gardens/greenhouses, home economics projects, computers). The state of Kentucky appears to be a forerunner with the creation of KY House Bill 330, allocating initially \$10 million toward safe school efforts, 87% of which has been used for alternative education over the four years of funding. The state of Oklahoma passed its first alternative education legislation in 1992 with the creation of Alternative Approaches Grants. These grant funds are awarded to local education agencies and non-profit organizations that provide alternative education services to at-risk students. In 1994, OK House Bill 2640 required a state-wide district needs assessment of alternative education. Alternative Education

Academy grants have also been presented to serve high needs students. In 1996, Texas state government spent \$25 million on alternative education programming. Arkansas state government has provided over \$30 million in At-Risk Grants and Training, according to AR Act 1194 (1995).

Katsiyannis and Kearney (1998) examined the availability and nature of state legislative and policy mandates regarding alternative education. 38 states completed surveys and indicated wide variability in state policy/legislative mandates and funding mechanisms. The good news is that their study also noted that acceleration in alternative education activity, a commitment to providing technical assistance, limited state compliance monitoring and program evaluation, and an emphasis on interagency collaboration and partnerships with the private sector surfaced as trends across all states participating in the study (Katsiyannis & Kearney, 1998).

One alternative school principal is outspoken about publicizing the success of effective alternative education methods to garner higher support levels, but his crusade is not limited to added funding, either. He wants to spread incorporate successful alternative education pedagogy into traditional education environments. He examined the relationship between alternative schools and their surrounding districts and communities, and believes that alternative schools are delaying educational reform advances by keeping a low profile because they are “outcast” schools. The author discusses efficacy in alternative schools (people, identity, equity, and programs) and concludes that alternative education staff, while confident their methods work, overestimate roadblocks to implementing structural changes in traditional education (Gregory, 2001). It is his view that once everybody knows how well it works, the dollars will drive the practice.

Evaluation

Despite pockets of educational evaluation and psychological and sociological research over the past thirty years, controlled empirical and evaluative research regarding practices and programs has been minimal and, at best, sporadic over the course of alternative programming development and

implementation in the United States (Lange & Sletten, 2002). Rigorous research and evaluation can be a problematic undertaking, in that alternative education has not been clearly defined across settings and purposes. Defining and operationalizing alternative education terms, concepts, and outcomes needs to occur in order to establish consistency across settings. It is proposed that an alternative education evaluative model with universal operationalization of alternative education technology and concepts will support data collection and accountability for both qualitative and quantitative or measurable criteria. In doing so, it can help establish realistic, but challenging goals for alternative schools and programs. In establishing these criteria, the collective body of educational, psychological, and sociological research can potentially support and complement pre-existing best practice in the schools (Tobin & Sprague, 2000). Indicators should be measurable, support achievement and learning, baseline measures should be provided, and progress reports over the course of the year should be presented on a school, district, state, and national level.

In order to examine alternative education in its many forms, it is recommended that a universal evaluation process be developed to direct best practice and institute research. When evaluating programs, it is important to consider the general framework that guides research and evaluation, as well as program implementation, in alternative education settings. Educators often utilize a risk-focused approach that aims to decrease negative behaviors by reducing or buffering risk factors (Lange ,1998). In contrast, an asset-building approach supports positive youth development by identifying strengths to counteract weaknesses or personal challenges. The two approaches can be considered mutually exclusive or can be used to complement educational practices. Alternative educators may not consider their work as being preventive in nature, but they are, in fact, often being asked to provide a continuum of student services - preventative, remedial, and intervening – often times simultaneously.

Regardless of alternative research and evaluation limitations, it is fortunate that a diverse range of choices for alternative education has been developed (i.e., based on early principles and present educational innovations) to address societal-directed changes in student needs, both within and outside of public education. Conversely, it is somewhat unfortunate that these innovations increase the difficulty and complexity of gauging progress through evaluation of alternative education outcomes across settings. Ultimately, alternative educators, parents and guardians, and all other stakeholders would like results evaluation results to provide a strong rationale for the necessary financial expenses, training, and service and facility acquisition required in implementing and maintaining alternative education programming. The future of alternative education ultimately rests in the hands of all educators in their provision of educational, behavioral, and vocational supports and the development of systematic means of gauging outcome progress, as well as providing continually updated needs assessment (Dugger & Dugger, 1998). Raywid (1998) has provided some basic questions that may be helpful in establishing a strong evaluative framework for alternative education practices. Once these questions are answered by each individual school or program, the development process, procedures, and policies for systematic evaluation can be formally introduced.

1. For whom is the alternative school intended?
2. Is the alternative school's primary purpose to education and otherwise benefit those who attend it?
3. Should the alternative school target a particular kind of student?
4. How many alternatives are envisioned?
5. Do students have to "qualify" for admission to the alternative school by failing key tests, being truant, etc.?
6. Are teachers – as well as students – assigned to the alternative or do they consist of those who have chosen to be there?
7. Are alternative schools subject to the same academic standards and expectations as are other schools?
8. Are alternative school students subject to the same kinds of indicators for having met academic standards as are students in other schools?
9. Is the alternative a separate multiplex?
10. Has the alternative school the autonomy to design its own program?

The Blueprints for Violence Prevention Model Program Selection Criteria (University of Colorado-Boulder) can potentially be utilized as a guiding model for alternative education evaluation. It includes the following selection criteria to identify its model and promising programs: evidence of deterrent effect with a strong research design, sustained effects over time, multiple site replication, analysis of mediating factors, and cost versus benefits analysis. Some examples of Blueprints criteria programs, available for personal review within the context of alternative education programming options, include the following: Project PATHE, School Transition Environmental Program (STEP), Prevention Intervention, CASASTART, Brief Strategic Family Therapy (BSFT), Midwestern Prevention Project, Life Skills Training, Multisystemic Therapy (MST), Bullying Prevention Program, Quantum Opportunities Program, Functional Family Therapy (FFT), and the Big Brothers Big Sisters of America (BBBSA) (CPSV, 2002).

Evaluation components can include needs assessment to establish baseline status, formative evaluation as the program evaluation process commences, periodic progress reports, and summative evaluation (Dugger & Dugger, 1998). Academic outcomes or indicators of success can include the following: percentage of students who graduate with a diploma, percentage of students who earn a GED, percentage of students who return to a regular school, percentage of students who GPA's improve after arriving at the alternative program, reduction in the dropout rate for the program, reduction in the dropout rate for the school district, percentage of students earning credits toward graduation, and percentage of students returning to a regular school and earning passing grades (Duke, 1990). Behavioral indicators of success can include reduction in delinquency rates, discipline referrals, truancy, and increases in classroom participation, service activities, and positive health behaviors. Programs can be classified within the theoretical Type I, II, III model according to the program's overarching goals and objectives (Raywid, 1981). Longitudinal empirical research (Tobin & Sprague, 2000) can be conducted to examine educational, psychological, and vocational outcomes

of alternative education programming. Internal and external factors can be reported and analyzed and data collection can be systematized from state to state.

Conclusions

A successful future for alternative education depends on how we define what success is...we must reflect on past history, conduct thorough needs assessment in the present, and lay the groundwork for empirical research and systematic evaluation of alternative education programming for the future. Establishing baseline knowledge about the basic framework, service population, and goals of a particular program is the first step in this process. Examining established and effective violence prevention program evaluation criteria can be a complementary component of this first step in the development of criteria. There is readily apparent goal similarity and cross utility in the theory and research developed in both violence prevention efforts and alternative education programming. The second step in this process is to create a universal language and discipline with regard to alternative education practices. Particularly, federal and state funding, as well as local support, is key in making systematic needs assessment, evaluation, and empirical intervention research a fiscal and policy reality within the context of alternative education. Additionally, alternative education training and certification through college and universities could be an development in alternative education's future. With these initial structural tools, alternative education of the future can be strengthened by its successes, directed towards positive change in evaluation of its weaknesses, and guided in future efforts by the information gained through operationalization of terms, formalized needs assessment, systematic formative and summative evaluation, and quantitative and qualitative empirical research.

This narrative was based on a comprehensive literature review done during 2002. References for this review can be found in the accompanying annotated bibliography at the Kentucky Center for School Safety Clearinghouse website, www.kysafeschools.org.