Case Study of an Alternative Education Program for
At-Risk Students

by

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(ABSTRACT)

This was a case study analysis of the Opportunity School, an alternative public

education program in Danville, Virginia that serves students who are considered

academically at-risk, grades six through twelve. A case study analysis of the Opportunity

School was implemented to provide specific information regarding the overall effectiveness

of the program. In addition, the analysis attempted to: reflect on the worthiness of the

program since its inception in 1993; assess the program's strengths and weakness; ascertain

students' level of satisfaction; address areas that needed further expansion and suggest

recommendations, based on indicators of effectiveness cited in the literature.

The case study analysis, which was qualitative and quantitative was the methodology

implemented in this research. The case records included, focus group sessions, interviews,

student questionnaire, typology--using Kellmayer's indicators, and analysis of students'

records.

The sample population for this study was students who participated in the

Opportunity School's program in 1996-97. Sixteen students participated in three focus groups and 41students responded to a questionnaire designed to determine their satisfaction with the Opportunity School. In addition, school records of 153 students who participated in the program for at least one year between 1993-1997 were analyzed using: paired *t-Tests*, correlation coefficients, standard deviations, means and cross tabulations.

Analysis of student data revealed the Opportunity School's program may have contributed to the positive change in students' academics performance and disciplinary behavior. Other factors that may have contributed to this change are maturation of students and the repetitiveness of the Literacy Passport tests, which was used as a barometer to gauge academic performance.

Collectively the Opportunity School's program has provided at-risk students with a second chance to continue their education. However, to more effectively serve students, there are areas that should be strengthened and expanded. Some of these areas included: use and integration of technology in the classroom, more variety in curriculum courses, adding a vocational education component, flexibility around the time of day students attend school and a comprehensive counseling program.

The Opportunity School in Danville, Virginia should continue serving students who are considered at-risk of dropping out of school. Students in the school perceived the program as meeting their needs, and were very satisfied with the program and the school's staff. However, if alternative programs for at-risk students are to have real benefits,

merely labeling them alternative will obviously not do. A program design must incorporate

quantitative attributes. To further assess the effectiveness of alternative education programs

for at-risk populations more longitudinal studies are needed.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The following phrases are expressions of the struggles and dedication that resulted in this dissertation.

Leaving behind nights of terror and fear

I rise

Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear

I rise

Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,

I am the dream and the hope of the slave

I rise

I rise

I rise

Excerpts from Maya Angelou's (1988) poem "Still I Rise"

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CHAPTER I

A defining feature of life in America's schools today is the increasing incidence

of violence. According to the National School Safety Center (1993) nearly three million

crimes take place in or near schools annually, one every six seconds of the school day.

The increase in violence is occurring nationwide. With the help of new laws and greater

public resolve, schools are getting serious about weeding out violent-prone students. One

prominent legislative and policy measure to ensure a safe school environment has been to

require removal of disruptive and dangerous students. Typically this is accomplished

through expulsion and long-term suspensions. Under the Federal Gun-Free Schools Act

(P. L. 103-382), enacted in October 1994, each state receiving assistance under the

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) must have a law requiring expulsion

from school for a period of not less than one year of any student found to have carried a

firearm on school grounds (Safe and Drug-Free Schools, 1996). As a result of the Gun-

Free School Act, several states are passing laws requiring alternative education sites for

expelled students.

> School districts across the country report experiencing significant
> increase in both the number of students expelled and the length of
> time they are excluded from their schools. The consensus among
> educators and others concerned with at-risk youth is that it is vital for
> expelled students to receive educational counseling or other services
> to help modify their behavior and possible other support services
> while they are away from their regular school. Without such services,
> students generally return to school no better disciplined and no better
> able to manage their anger or peaceably resolve disputes. They will
> also have fallen behind in their education, and any underlying causes

of their violent behavior may be unresolved. Research has shown a
link between suspension/expulsion and later dropping out of school,
with resulting personal and social cost (Safe and Drug-Free Schools,
1996 September, p. 1).

School districts' zero tolerance for violence must be compatible and not conflict

with the Individuals Disability Education Act (IDEA) of 1997. This act assures all

children with disabilities the right to a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) (Dick,

1998). On June 4, 1997, President Clinton signed an amendment to IDEA, which

attempts to clarify the effect of school discipline on state's FAPE obligation. FAPE

extends to all children with disabilities including children with disabilities who have been

suspended or expelled from school (Dick, 1998). Discipline law under IDEA, 1997

requires changes in the process for disciplining students with disabilities. Students with

disabilities can be disciplined for breaking the law or not complying with local board

policy or codes of student conduct. However, because these students are guaranteed the

right to a Free Appropriate Public Education, including procedural safeguards; the law

mandates that schools continue to provide educational services to a student whether or

not the action was related to the disability. However, these services may be provided in

an alternative setting (CEC TODAY, 1997). Consequently, instead of being expelled

from school services, these students often end up in a setting that offers smaller classes,

closer supervision, and increased security, identified as alternative educational setting

(AES) (Walters, 1995). An alternative setting is one that is clearly distinguishable from

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the student's regular school placement (Safe and Drug-Free Schools, 1996).

In 1995, the Public School Board Association Urban, Suburban, and Rural Forums Advisory Council members cited alternative education as a top concern. This accentuates the need for alternative education solutions in diverse geographic settings. The need for appropriate alternative educational settings for all students, with and without disabilities, is becoming more critical. The Safe School Act frequently speaks to alternative education settings, and recommendations and guidelines developed by the Alternative Learning Programs Task Force have been adopted by the State Board of Education in North Carolina (Harris, 1997).

Within the past 20 years the term *alternative education* has been applied indiscriminately to a variety of programs. Kellmayer (1995), stated that there are approximately 2,500 programs called "alternative" across the United States. Although there is disagreement about the origin of alternative education; there is agreement, however, that alternative schools were not originally established to work with "dis" kids: those whom society has judged disadvantaged, disruptive, or just plain distasteful (Ferrara, 1993).

Punitive models ("soft jails") are ineffective for all students-- whether disruptive or not. It is because so many of these soft jails exist and call themselves alternative, that real alternative programs are often unfairly characterized as havens for misfits and delinquents (Kellmayer, 1990, p. 27).

California, followed by New York and Washington state, has had the largest number of public alternative schools in the nation since the movement flowered in the early 1970s (Raywid, 1988). Nationally, California has been credited with having

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pioneered continuation education (Kelly, 1993). Alternative education or continuation education as it was referred to in 1960, was designed to help students who didn't work up to their mental ability in school, who resisted academic learning, and who made up the larger portion of social problems, academic failures and school dropout—labeled "divergent youth." Kelly (1993) states that although a number of different types of alternative schools exists, continuation programs remain the most prevalent. In the first extensive survey of K-12 alternative programs, continuation schools comprised the single largest category (20 percent of the total); providing "for students whose education in the conventional schools has been (or might be) interrupted" (Kelly, 1993, p.61). This definition included dropout centers, reentry programs, pregnancy-maternity centers, evening and adult high schools, and street academies. The most recent national survey, focused at the secondary level, found that about two-thirds of public alternative schools are intended for potential and actual dropouts (Young, 1990).

Originally, alternative programs were established for students who chose to pursue programs other than those offered by the regular school (Williams, 1991; Smith, 1974). As a result of the dramatic increase in school discipline problems that have occurred during the past two decades, large numbers of alternative programs have been created to deal with chronically disruptive students. Kellmayer, (1995) states that the philosophy that characterizes most of these programs has been markedly different

from the philosophy that characterized the initial alternative schools of the 1960s. He

adds that many of today's alternative programs bear little resemblance to earlier

humanistic models. The most common discipline problems of the 1940s included talking,

chewing gum, making noise, running in the hallways and getting out of place in line.

Compare this list to the problems of the 1990s: assault, arson, rape, drug and alcohol

abuse, pregnancy, suicide, and bombing (Kellmayer, 1995).

> " How then do human characteristics in interaction with social circumstances influence the development of identity, and what is the relationship between sources of one's identity and one's being at risk of developmental and educational failure to thrive? We submit that culture is the context and the ubiquitous vehicle" (Rossi, 1994, p. 54).

It appears that the social disintegration of the past two decades

has influenced the development of alternative education programs to

serve a chronically disaffected population. Today, we refer to

chronically disruptive and chronically disaffected students as "at risk."

The Center for At-Risk Students at LaGuardia Community College

defines at risk as: "youth who are educationally at risk those in danger

of dropping out of school without receiving a high school diploma

because the educational system does not meet their needs" Rogers,

1992, p. 109). According to Mintz (1994), many of the new alternative schools have

been designed to work with this at risk population.

Many school districts establish alternative schools to provide programs for

students who have been unable to function effectively in a traditional school program,

due to behavior problems (Ferrara, 1993). According to Ronald Stephens, executive

director of the National School Safety Center, a California-based group specializing in

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school security issues, "alternative schools are one of the fastest growing segments of the public education system today (Walters, 1995, p. 1)."

The alternative education program differs from the expelled students' typical education program in several areas such as: the ratio of students to teachers, the way academic subject matter is presented, the setting of the program, the linkage of the school to the community or workplaces, the emphasis on behavior modification, the emphasis on counseling for conflict resolution and anger management, and the availability of comprehensive support services (Safe and Drug-Free Schools, 1996). Some seek to prepare students to return to their regular schools, and others prepare students to graduate from high school and enter the workforce or postsecondary education directly from the alternative program.

Purpose

A systematic analysis of the Opportunity School (referred to as OS), located in Danville, Virginia, an alternative education program for students who are considered at-risk, will reflect on the effectiveness of the program, with respect to purpose and student outcomes (social behavior and academics) since its inception in 1993. A case study analysis of the Opportunity School will:

1. provide information regarding the overall effectiveness of the program,

2. assess the program's strengths and weaknesses,

3. ascertain students' level of satisfaction with the OS,

4. address areas that need further expansion, and

5. suggest recommendations based on research on effective alternative education programs for at-risk students.

Assessment of established programs helps determine the degree to which programs are effective—that is, how successfully these programs provide their intended target populations with resources, services, and benefits, conceived by their advocates and designers (Freeman & Rossi, 1993).

Limitations of the Study

This study is limited to the Opportunity School which operates under the auspices of Danville Public Schools, Danville, Virginia. The case study analysis of the program was internal, and not a comparison with similar programs. This research examines other programs to authenticate common indicators associated with successful alternative education programs. It is an internal case study analysis of the program's objectives and

specific student outcomes. It is unlikely that a program developed elsewhere can be duplicated exactly in another site because the particular needs, interests, demographics, and social-economic characteristics of the students to be served vary. Therefore, the study will identify a set of general components to increase the holding power of schools serving students at risk, which may be adapted to fit local circumstances.

The OS case study also does not compare students in the program with a control group because of the change in focus of the OS original program, and the program's leadership, which was inconsistent the first three years.

Organization of the Study

Chapter I consist of a introduction, purpose and limitations and of the case study. Chapter II reviews the literature on alternative education and related issues. Chapter III explains the study's methodology, the population and methods implemented to answer research questions.

Chapter IV uses text and graphics to show the results of the quantitative and qualitative case study analysis of the Opportunity School's program. Chapter V discusses the results and Chapter VI consists of the study's recommendations and implications for practice.

CHAPTER II

Review of literature and discussion of related issues

The review of literature discusses alternative education programs for at-risk students, and indicators of effectiveness for programs targeting at-risk students. It also includes causal factors for dropout and at-risk students.

Alternative education programs

The effectiveness of certain alternative schools was verified by Bowman (1959) and Gold and Mann (1984) through their behavioral research. This research employed a control group comprised of comparable students, that is students who might have attended the alternative school but did not because the school was filled. Bowman found that two years after students had experienced an alternative school program, the students' delinquency records were significantly sparser than those of students in the control group. Gold and Mann (1984) found that a semester after returning to a conventional school program, former alternative school students received significantly higher grades, and according to their teachers' rating of their behavior, were less disruptive at school, compared to the control group. Gold (1995) reported that preventing scholastic failure and providing a genuinely caring staff appear to be sufficient to improve students' grades and their behavior. Gold concluded that the

alternative schools in his study made no special efforts to intervene in their students'

family lives.

Reckless and Dinitz (1972) reported that an alternative school program in Columbus, Ohio made no significant difference in adjustment of its students compared to the control group. The writers added that labeling a school alternative, that is different from other schools in the community is no assurance that the school will make a difference.

Paige (1995) noted that a 1993 Texas Education Agency audit report commended Houston Independent School District's (HISD) alternative schools, calling them "a positive trend," and cited their "strong support services for the unique needs of urban students" as one of the basis for their success. According to Paige (1995), superintendent of the HISD, the district strives to stem the dropout rate, raise academic achievement and meet the needs of students with special interests and skills. He further adds that one of the most effective ways to accomplish these challenges is through alternative schools. Essentially, HISD alternative schools serve students who can learn best in nontraditional settings. These include those with special learning requirements caused by physical and mental disabilities; those with advanced academic ability, and talents in areas beyond regular academic studies; those who, because of encounters with the criminal justice system, are at risk of dropping out, and giving up on their education; and those who have been assigned by the courts to secure residential facilities.

Common characteristics that increase the effectiveness of alternative schools can

be readily identified according to Paige (1995). The lower ratio between pupil and teacher, additional support staff located at the facilities, strong leadership within each program, and support within the district for these programs are important aspects of their success.

Rogers (1992) reported that the Center for At-Risk Students at LaGuardia Community College has taken as its mission, researching and promulgating models and interventions that are successful in educating at-risk students. The center personnel, according to Rogers, visited twenty-five programs or schools targeting at-risk students. Some of the common characteristics found in these programs or schools include: small class size (15-20 to 1); a safe environment; high expectations; high student involvement; expanded teacher role; a supportive peer culture; an emphasis on tools to create knowledge and skill in problem solving; the use of a variety of instructional techniques; and individualized learning.

Chalker (1992) states that the significance of successful programs for at-risk students lies in their ability to reduce school dropouts' rate and facilitate academic, social, and personal improvement of those students who have surpassed the age of compulsory attendance. A study by Griffin and Richardson (1994) examined students' perception of an alternative school. School Attitudinal Surveys were completed by the 45 students enrolled at OASIS, an alternative school in South Carolina. Respondents believed that in comparison to teachers at a traditional high school, teachers at the alternative school were

more genuinely concerned about students, were less authoritarian, did not play favorites as often, and were more enthusiastic about their jobs. Students felt they had more input into decision making at the alternative school and were more satisfied with the alternative than the traditional high school. The writers concluded that alternative schools may ensure a quality education for more students, help reduce the dropout rate, and help achieve excellence in schools.

Alternative education, dropouts and at-risk students

Researcher have found that alternative education programs can attribute to the reduction of the dropout rate by enabling students to complete their secondary education. For example, Foley (1983) reported on a study of ten alternative public high schools in New York City. The author writes,

> A preliminary assessment compared credit accumulation and attendance data for the fall of 1981 for 25 percent of incoming students at eight alternative schools with similar data from their high school careers. On average, this group of nearly 300 students earned 60 percent more credits and cut their absences by nearly 40 percent, clearly an important break from past practices…. When data from students and faculty interviews were taken together, we began to glimpse what dropout and truant youngsters require of the schools: structure and support, close interpersonal relationships, flexibility, a curriculum that helps them understand the world and their own lives, and continuity toward a diploma. (p.59)

Academic achievement as well as the attitudes of delinquent students attending alternative and conventional schools were analyzed by Martin Gold and David Mann (1984) in Expelled to a Friendlier Place. The authors compared

approximately sixty at-risk students from three alternative secondary schools with a matched group of students from conventional secondary schools in the same districts. Alternative and conventional students were matched by age, sex, grade point average, discipline history, self-esteem, and attitude toward school. Pre and posttest results over the school year were the basis for comparison. The authors concluded:

> Alternative students were significantly less disruptive in school at the end of the study than conventional students. Teachers rated alternative students better behaved than conventional students. Alternative students were significantly more positive about school and confident in their role as students than conventional students. While alternative students received slightly improved grades when they reenrolled in conventional schools, their achievement test scores did not improve and were not different from those of conventional students. (p.41)

Despite the thousands of alternative programs throughout the United States most "alternative" schools according to Raywid (1990) are alternative in name only. Gregory (1988) contends that this pseudo-alternative represents ineffective and often punitive

approaches to isolate and segregate students who are considered difficult, according to traditional standards.

Conversely, there are alternative programs that serve a significant function in our education system to give children second chances to become productive citizens. For many it is their last and best chance. Glass (1994) reports that many school districts are

finding ways to help turn around students with disciplinary problems. Alternative schools are offering them an academic environment targeted to their special needs. Wells Alternative Middle School, The Shallcross School and Woodbourne are three schools designed to work with at-risk students. Wells Alternative Middle School, of Wichita, Kansas provides short-term intervention for students with a variety of problems and attempts to modify children's behavior so that they can be reassimilated. The Shallcross School, located in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, accepts students who have been expelled, repeatedly transferred for disciplinary reasons, or who have brought weapons to school. The last school reported by Glass (1994) is located in Baltimore City, Maryland and is called Woodbourne Academy. Woodbourne emphasizes small classes to make it possible for students to get more attention; collaboration among the school's staff and social service agencies, and students' families; greater flexibility in curriculum, schedules, teaching strategies; and extensive staff development.

Neumann (1994) reports that while no typical model of an alternative school exists, there appears to be some common structures and processes that contribute to the success of these schools. In addition to collaborative and site-based management, other common characteristics include small school size, small class size, extended roles for teachers, cooperative roles for students, student involvement in governance, and an absence or minimization of tracking, ability grouping, and other forms of labeling.

The Safe and Drug-Free Schools program (1996) cited the following as

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components of effective alternative program:

1. Lower student-to-staff ratio.

2. Strong and stable leadership.

3. Highly trained and carefully selected staff.

4. A vision and set of objectives for the program that are shared by all staff and

integrated into how staff and administrators interact with the program.

5. District-wide support of programs.

6. Innovative presentation of instructional materials with an emphasis on real- life

learning.

7. Working relations with all parts of the school system and with other

collaborating agencies that provide critical services to youth.

8. Linkage between schools and workplaces.

9. Intensive counseling and monitoring.

Based on site visits to alternative education programs across Texas, as well as

current research, Jacob (1995) offers the following recommendations:

1. Staff selection is the single most important undertaking of any prospective

alternative program. Teachers involved in alternative program should have

exceptional affective and relational skills.

2. Low pupil/teacher ratios must be maintained usually about 10 to 1, but no more

than 15 to 1.

3. Successful alternative programs include intensive counseling by teachers and staff, social services, community and volunteer mentoring, peer tutoring, and careful monitoring of students' progress both in and out of school.

4. The program should be locally administered and governed.

5. Programming should be based on the needs and goals of students; input from students, staff, and business and community representatives; and the economic and social realities of the community.

6. The alternative program should have a distinct identity and special facilities.

7. The program plan should include specific, measurable objectives such as attendance rates, incidents of disruptive behavior, contacts with the juvenile justice system, and progress toward graduation. Programs should maintain contact with students who return to their home school or who graduate.

Clark (1991) discusses the state of evaluation of programs for at-risk students. Clark suggests that more evaluations are needed because many programs have never been formally evaluated. Those evaluations that have been conducted vary so widely in quality and focus that it is difficult to make comparisons to add to the body of knowledge on what program contents are successful. According to Clark (1991), too often adjustments or compromises in methodology are made due to limited funds for evaluation or limits on data availability. Therefore, the results really are not conclusive in supporting the effectiveness of a program. In such cases whatever positive changes are seen in students,

before and after the program intervention, cannot be conclusively attributed to the particular program intervention.

Rogers (1992) reports that the methodology encouraged by The Center for At-Risk Students at LaGuardia Community College is examining exemplary programs and their practices and comparing them with practices that work as cited in the literature. The center reported that this will lead to the development of a master list of principles of good practices, which have been consistently found across programs that have been cited as exemplary.

The Opportunity School

The Opportunity School, established in 1993, is a public alternative education program in Danville, Virginia, which serves students who are considered at-risk, in a nontraditional educational setting for grades six through twelve. This alternative school serves marginal or at-risk students in a generally nonpunitive, positive and compassionate orientation. The program is designed for students who need extra help with academic remediation, or social and emotional rehabilitation. In theory, this program fits Raywid's (1994) Type III Remedial Focus, wherein, after sufficient treatment, successful students can return to the mainstream and continue in their regular educational program. Raywid (1994) explains that student behavior often improves in the supportive environment of

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Type III schools as does student attendance and credits accumulated. But these programs

have two major disadvantages. They are costlier because of the low teacher-student ratios

and they are often only temporarily successful.

The Opportunity School's program was designed for

students who were not experiencing academic success in their

regular school. Students were recommended to the OS for a variety

of reasons, some of which are cited below:

> "This is not a dumping ground for students who are not doing well. It is a place where students who have problems succeeding in regular school or those who are not able to mesh with the numbers in base schools. They come here and are successful" (Samuel Massie, principal of Opportunity School, interview, 12/96).

1. one or more years behind in school;

2. poor academic success and/or poor

attendance;

3. increasingly poor patterns of behavior;

4. performance not commensurate with student's ability;

5. limited home support;

6. very low self-esteem;

7. a need for more individualized or small group instruction and;

8. a need for positive adult attention.

The overall mission of the OS is to change the direction of each student's life by

establishing positive self-worth, enabling students to experience personal, intellectual,

and social growth (DPS, 1993).

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<u>Demographic Background of the Program</u>

The Danville Public School System in 1996 had a student population of approximately 8,300 students, with a 55% minority to majority ratio. Approximately 4,400 students (53%) were eligible for free or reduced lunch.

In 1995, nearly 40 percent of students who comprised the freshman class of 1991 failed to graduate from high school. The dropout problem was more serious for young African-American males for whom the dropout rate was 63 percent. The overall dropout rate in 1995, for students in grades nine through twelve was 63 percent (Danville Public Schools, 1996).

Danville, a city in south central Virginia, has many problems common to urban centers. The city's work force is primarily composed of factory workers with a small percentage of white collar workers. Danville's economy remains heavily influenced by the textile and tobacco industries. In 1996, the unemployment index for the city was 8.1 percent compared to 4.4 percent for the state of Virginia, and a national average of 5.4 percent (Danville Employment Commission, 1997). Although unemployment is relatively high, jobs are available, but pay minimum wage (Bland & Womack, 1997).

In the second year of the program (1994-95) the OS and the Phoenix Center merged. The Phoenix Center, a Danville Public School, was a separate learning facility

for students in grades 6-12 with excessive disciplinary problems. The merger resulted in a program for middle and high school students and slanted towards the purpose of the Phoenix Center. During this year approximately 30 percent of the students volunteered to participate in the program. The remainder enrolled because of disciplinary hearing recommendations. In the third year (1995-96) voluntary participation increased to seventy percent. In the fourth year (1996-97) ninety percent of the students from school year 1995-96 chose to remain in the program. Prior to school year 1996-97, most students in the program after the first year were assigned via a disciplinary hearing panel, which approved or denied long term suspensions and expulsions (DPS, 1996). In 1996-97 the student population was 85 percent African-America and 15 percent Caucasian. The ratio of male to female students was three to one. The majority of students in the program are from low socio-economic families (DPS, 1996).

In 1996, the OS staff included a principal, instructional specialist, guidance counselor, 14 teachers, two teacher assistants and other adjunct support staff. The school's staff served approximately 130 students in grades 6-12. Students were provided a comprehensive curriculum aligned with state requirements. High school students were required to fulfill the necessary credit hours to graduate, most of which were provided through the curriculum offered at the Opportunity School. However, limited elective classes are available to students in the OS, and the availability of classes at the local high school is restricted for most OS students. Students who

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graduate from the OS receive a diploma from the local high school (George Washington High).

Description of the Opportunity School's Program

The OS program was established to provide accelerated learning opportunities and counseling, thus preparing students to be successful upon their return to a traditional educational program. Additionally, it endeavors to prepare students for college or the work place. Key components of the program are small classes, individualized computer assisted instruction, and community resources.

The mission of the Opportunity School (OS) is to educate all students to their maximum potential by providing high expectations for success. Additionally, the school will provide a safe, orderly, nontraditional learning environment that encourages self-worth, family support, and community involvement (OS Student Handbook, 1995).

Parental involvement, mentorships, personal and social responsibility and community services are identified as major components of the OS program (DPS, 1995).

The OS community service component was primarily the Service Learning Program, a student volunteer program, which places students in local agencies such as YMCA, YWCA, food shelter, daycare for children and recreation center. Students render several hours of services during the school day and at times on the weekend. Student volunteers are supervised on-site, with periodic supervision by OS staff. A grant of $15,000 from Serve America provided partial financial support for the program (1994-96) with the local school system providing matching funds.

<u>Profile of an OS Student</u>

The age range is 13 to 21 for students who participated in the OS during 1993-1997. The majority of students enrolled in the program were in grade six. Although students could choose to remain in the program through graduation, most remained in the program for only one year. The profile of the average student in the OS program is an African-American male, in grade six or seven, 13-16 years of age and behind one to two years in school. Specifically, of the 153 students who participated in the program for at least one year, 107 (70%) were African-American males. The typical OS student usually has behavior problems that often result in difficulty with authority figures and consequently a high out-of-school suspension rate. Repeated suspensions from school lead to high absence rate that usually result in poor academic performance and often retention for many students. This student is often referred to the OS by the principal, who offers the OS as a viable option to accelerate academically and be placed in the correct grade.

Table 1 reports the grade, age, race and gender of the 153 students who attended the OS for at least one year. As indicated in the table the majority of students who participated in the OS were quite old for their grade placement. This supports the criteria for admission to the OS, which are failing one or more grades and poor attendance. Poor attendance is a factor relating to students passing their grade and it is more significant in high school, where it can results in lost of credits for graduation.

African-American students participated in the OS in significantly larger numbers in all grades as compared with white students. The majority of African-American students were in grades six, seven and nine. White students participated in the program in greater numbers in grades six, eight and nine. Male students participated in the OS in greater numbers in grades six, seven, and nine, and their participation exceeded female participation. In grades seven and eight the female population was larger. Of the 153 students who participated in the program for at least one year, 123 were males compared to 30 female students.

Table 1

Students who attended the OS for at least one year and their grade, age range, race and gender

	6 grade	7 grade	8grade	9grade	10grade	11grade	total
Age range							
13-14	23	5	2	-	-	-	30
15-16	9	22	14	10	2	-	57
17-18	-	10	15	18	14	2	59
19-21	-	1	-	1	1	4	7
Race							
White	5	4	11	5	3	-	28
African-American	27	34	20	24	14	6	125
Gender							
males	28	28	24	25	13	5	123
females	4	10	7	4	4	1	30
Total	32	38	31	29	17	6	153

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative and quantitative methods were used in the analysis of the Opportunity

School's program. The case study was based upon the following sources:

1. Kellmayer's ten indicators of effective alternative education programs (see

Appendix C),

2. the OS goals and objectives 1993-1996 (see Appendix F),

3. documents, site visits, and interviews with students and faculty,

4. questionnaire results from 41 OS students (1997) and,

5. data from students' records (1993-1997).

Statistical analysis including standard deviations, means, paired *t-tests*, and

correlation coefficients were used to analyze students' attendance and discipline before,

during and after attending the OS. Paired *t-tests* were used to determine whether two

samples were likely to have come from the same populations (same mean). The

populations in this study are described as students' attendance and discipline behavior

before, during and *after* the OS; paired *t-Tests* were before/during, during/after and

before/after. Correlation coefficients were used to determine the relationship between

variables, examining trends such as direction of change, rate of change, or no change

among the three stages *before, during* and *after* the OS.

Cross tabulations were applied to students' age, race, gender, entrance grade in the

OS, duration in the program, number of Literacy Passport Tests passed in the OS and

number of Literacy Passport Tests (referred to as LPT) passed before entering the OS.

The independent variables were age, race, gender, entrance grade, duration in the program

and the number of LPT sections passed before entering the OS. The dependent variable

was the number of LPT sections passed while attending the OS.

Data triangulations (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) defined as the use of multiple data

sources in a study, are processes which the evaluator can use to guard against the

accusation that a study's findings are artifacts of a single method, a single data source, or

a single investigator's bias.

The methods of triangulations used in this study were:

1. student focus groups

2. interviews with administrators

3. interviews with teachers

4. documents such as goals and objectives and grant proposals

5. analysis of students' data from the AS-400 (student information system)

   and,

6. questionnaire results from OS students.

Research Design

The sample subjects for this study were interviewed and surveyed, and school records of 153 students who participated in the program for at least one year between 1993-1997 were analyzed. Figure 1 depicts the sample population, including the subgroup used in the study. Data collected on this population consisted of students' current enrollment, LPT results--number of tests passed before attending the OS or the number passed in the OS. The LPT are in reading, writing, and math. Data also included students' ages, as of 1996, and the year students entered the program. Supplementary data, spanning three and a half years, August 1993 to January 1997, were collected on students who attended the school 1½ to 4 years. This included 56 of the 153 students previously cited. Data collected on this cohort consisted of yearly attendance (number of days absent) and number of discipline referrals.

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                    ┌─────────────────────────┐
                    │   Study's Total Sample   │
                    │           210            │
                    └─────────────────────────┘
      ┌──────────────────────┬──────────────────────┐
┌──────────────────┐  ┌──────────────────┐  ┌──────────────────┐
│       153        │  │        16        │  │        41        │
│ student records  │  │     students     │  │   OPS students   │
│  were examined   │  │ were interviewed │  │   particpated in │
│(present and      │  │                  │  │   questionnaire  │
│ former students) │  │                  │  │                  │
└──────────────────┘  └──────────────────┘  └──────────────────┘
┌──────────────────┐  ┌──────────────────┐
│  subgroup of 56  │  │   OPS students   │
│    students      │  │  participated in │
│  who attended    │  │  3 focus groups  │
│   1.5 -4 yrs.    │  │                  │
└──────────────────┘  └──────────────────┘
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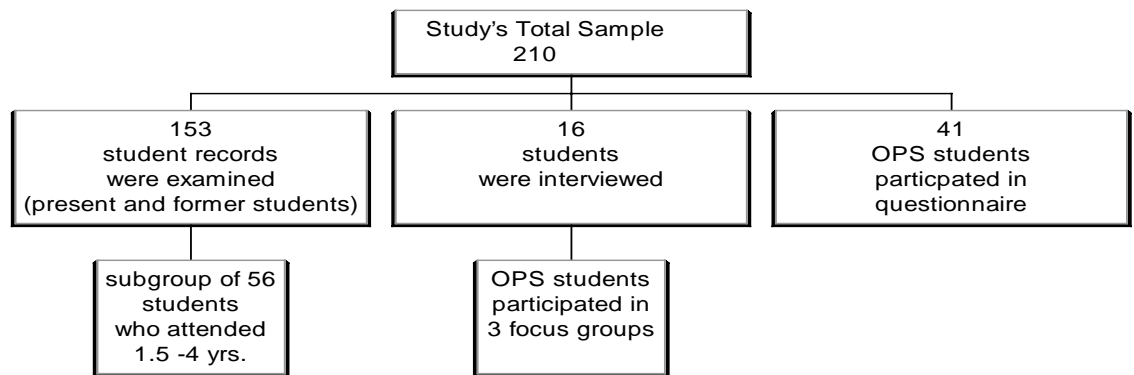
 Figure 1. Sample Population for study.

Focus group interviews were conducted with 16 students who were currently attending the Opportunity School (1996-1997). After the selection criteria (see below)

were established, the OS guidance counselor provided the writer with a list of 23 students matching the criteria. With parental and the principal's permission, the writer scheduled three appointments to interview students. Students were selected from the list and assembled in small groups (five or six) based on their availability the day of the interview. The selection criteria for student focus group interviews were:

1. Middle, high school, male and female students.

2. Students who attended the OS school for at least one year.

3. Students who attended the OS school since 1993 (first year of the program).

4. Recycled students (returned to a base school but have since re-enrolled in the OS).

To develop a perspective and knowledge pertaining to the OS program from 1993 through 1997, present and former administrators and teachers were interviewed. This process involved interviewing two administrators, present and former, and three teachers including one former. See Appendix J for a description of these individuals and anecdotal comments about the program. Individual interviews were audiotaped and transcribed; responses were coded based on reoccurring themes. Interviewees were asked specific questions that were developed from Kellmayer's indicators (1995) and the OS 1993-96 goals and objectives. Most interviews lasted 60 minutes.

The analysis of the Opportunity School's alternative education program includes the development of a typology (see Appendix C) using Kellmayer's (1995) ten indicators

of effective alternative education programs.

Procurement of Data

Students' disciplinary records, attendance records, grades, and standardized test
results were used in the case study analysis. These records were obtained from the school
system's student data base (AS-400) for years 1993-97. Other documents used were:
annual reports, proposals, grant applications, minutes from meetings, Virginia
Guaranteed Assistance Program (VGAP) student data sheet, and VGAP evaluation
reports for years 1993-96. These documents were acquired from the Opportunity School's
administrators and the central office of the Danville Public Schools.

The Opportunity School's goals and objectives for years 1993-1996 were used as
a baseline to develop interview and questionnaire questions. The goals and objectives for
the OS are presented in Appendixes D, E, and F in Tables 24-30.

Research Questions

Methods Implemented to Answer Questions

1. How does the Opportunity School's program compare to Kellmayer's (1995) ten
indicators of effective alternative education programs and to the state of Virginia's

guidelines on alternative education?

To answer the first research question, objectives from the OS for years 1993-96, and other documents were analyzed. Additionally, data were analyzed from the transcripts of interviews with students and faculty (present and former) of the OS.

2. Do students who attend the Opportunity School for one to four years improve their academic performance, attendance, and social behavior after returning to their base school or while continuing at the OS?

To determine the effects of the program on the variables cited above, statistical tests were conducted on students' data, which was compiled individually and aggregately.

3. What is the level of satisfaction with the school's program among students who attend the OS?

To ascertain students' level of satisfaction, a questionnaire developed by the writer was administered to 41 out of 134 students who were enrolled in the OS for the school year 1996-97. The group composed of 41 students included 18 students in grades 9-11 and 23 students in grades 6-8. Participants were randomly selected from three middle and high school homerooms. Surveys were administer to students in their homeroom classes and collected upon completion.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This section presents the study's results for research questions one, two and three.

To answer part one of the first question, a matrix design was developed,

comparing the Opportunity School's program with Kellmayer's ten indicators of effective

alternative programs. Data were collected from interviews with faculty, focus groups and

the school's goals and objectives for 1993-1996.

Research Question One

How does the Opportunity School's program compare to Kellmayer's (1995) ten

indicators of effective alternative education programs and to the state of Virginia's

guidelines on alternative education?

Kellmayer's Ten Indicators

1. Size

The first of Kellmayer's ten indicators for effective alternative education

programs is *size*. He states that the optimal program should have from 100 to 125

students. According to Kellmayer (1995), over time all alternative programs, large or

small, tend to be more traditionally structured and difficult to manage. However, he

proposes, larger alternative programs are more likely to survive. A curious side-effect,

contrary to what is commonly believed, Kellmayer (1995) found that student discipline

tends to improve when smaller alternative programs accept more students. This premise seemingly proposes that a program can have too few students, subsequently providing limited social interactions and positive peer role models.

> "The ratio was 15:1. Knowing that these were students who had not succeeded in the regular school, it was obvious that ratios of 25:1 or higher were not working for them... We were so overwhelmed by the second year with our numbers, we started off with under 100 and by the end of the year had serviced 160 or so....On a given day it was about 130.'' (administrator 1, interview 10/96)

Table 2 indicates that the Opportunity School's enrollment was inconsistent. This growth in enrollment could be attributed to the influx of students assigned to the school via the recommendations of the DPS hearing board. Based on the school's attendance records and interviews, the average enrollment ranged from 120 to 135 students, which exceeds Kellmayer's recommendation for size (maximum 125). Interviews with faculty and administrators reported that the size of the school was an important factor in the program's effectiveness. The importance of maintaining an optimal student-teacher ratio is shared in the following quote from a teacher who taught in the program the first year.

> Although 15:1 sounds small, these children had such intense needs that we really needed an extremely small number of students. I truly believe that we might be very effective if we were working with five students per staff member because what I discovered was that we needed to be social workers, surrogate parents, teachers, and counselors (teacher 1, interview 11/96).

The third administrator of the OS implied he made an earnest effort not to exceed the maximum number of 135 students as established by the Danville Public Schools.

According to statements by teacher 3 (interview 12/96) the program's administrator was often expected to admit any student referred by the DPS discipline hearing, regardless of the student's profile or compatibility with the program.

Table 2

Indicator One Size

Indicator	Kellmayer's Recommendation	Opportunity School's Enrollment			
Size	100-125	1993-94	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
		63	170	145	134
Documentation	Appendix F, Table 27, process objective 1 and Table 30, goal 1, strategy D				

Note. In 1994-95 approximately 90 students were in the program the complete year, 80 enrolled after January 1995.

2. Site

An alternative educational program can be housed in a variety of settings and Kellmayer's preference is a college campus. He states this environment is superior for a multitude of reasons such as a stimulating academic environment and positive peer role models. The program's *site* is the second of Kellmayer's ten indicators. According to administrator 2, the first facility (a dilapidated elementary school) was inadequate if not inhumane. He comments:

> Where we were, the students had to be served like prisoners and I detested that. I went to the superintendent and I let him know emphatically that the students were treated as prisoners and they had that kind of mentality. I wanted them to see their food and to be able to eat in a very conducive atmosphere. Those components plus the

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fact that we had more space here…there were rooms in the other
building that had already been condemned. (interview, 12/96)

According to administrator 2, a different facility was crucial to the survival of the

program. The OS site was inadequate the first and second year. The program was moved

to a different location the third year. The new site, an enormous improvement, was an old

middle school, which was renovated for the OS. Table 3 displays the Opportunity School

sites and the transformation of the current facility.

The present facility is an attractive old middle school

that was considered inadequate by the school system and closed.

Renovations were made to the building to include air

conditioning. In the old site, the gym and cafeteria were too

small for the physical stature of high school students. The

current facility alleviates this problem; however, it lacks a

vocational building or media center, although most classes have

a reading center in their room. Kellmayer's preference

"At the old Schoolfield, we had guys 6'2" and 6'3" you have to keep in mind that they had to bend over to get under the low doorway in the basement for the cafeteria. It was a closed in area, two classes in there at a time. It was too small; the area just was not the right facility what-so-ever." (teacher 2, interview, 11/96)

site for an alternative education program is a college campus; per my documentation and

interviews this was not discussed as a possibility for Danville's program.

Table 3

Indicator Two Site

Indicator	Site
Kellmayer's Recommendation Years	The richer the site (i.e., college campuses), the more effective the program. Many of the most successful alternative programs in the United States are located on college campuses. Sites for the Opportunity School
1993-94	Reopened old elementary school, used bottom level. No gym or cafeteria. Food delivered to students.
1994-95	Opportunity School merged with Phoenix School. Both programs were housed in an old elementary school. The middle school program was located on the bottom floor and the high school program, on the second level. Food continued to be delivered and no gymnasium was available.
1995-97	Moved to new site. OS program combined with Phoenix School. Housed in former middle school. The building renovated and air condition added. The gym and cafeteria were both inadequate for the size of the students. All parts of the building were functional.
Documentation	Appendix F, Table 27, objective 1 and Table 30, goal 1

3. Volunteerism

Participation in alternative programs should be voluntary for both students and

staff. The issue of *volunteerism*, Kellmayer's third indicator, is addressed in Table 4.

Volunteerism is complex for at-risk students in alternative education programs. Many

researchers have stated that students should not be forced to attend an alternative program

(Raywid, 1990; Meixner, 1994); however, some students are coerced. The dispositions of

the authors previously cited are that alternative programs often represent the last chance

for chronically disruptive and disaffected students who have been unsuccessful in a

traditional program.

Teachers and administrators had an option in their participation in the Opportunity School's program. They were not arbitrarily assigned to the school. There was limited information included in the goals and objectives about the selection process for teachers and administrators. The OS goals and objectives for years 1993-96 are displayed in Tables 26-30 in Appendix F. One reference to criteria for teachers and administrators was stated in Table 26. "The selection of the administrators and teachers who have had success with at-risk students through acceleration and personal support will ensure the success of the venture (Table 26, strategy 1, 93-94 Appendix F)." This statement suggest that experience with at-risk students should be a prerequisite for employment in the OS.

Students were in a different predicament in the volunteerism process. They were given a coercive choice, except for the first year (1993-94), and had limited involvement in their placement, contrary to Kellmayer's recommendation. In the first year of the program, approximately fifty students were lured into the program through appealing options such as college scholarships and an accelerated curriculum. The

accelerated curriculum would have afforded students who were

retained, the advantage of being promoted to their correct grade.

Students were recommended by teachers and principals, based on

established criteria such as grade failure, poor attendance and low

motivation but potential. During the second year (1994-95),

students who had been recommended for long suspension had few

options once the discipline committee upheld the recommendation.

Consequently, students chose to enrolled in the Opportunity School

in lieu of long-term suspension.

> The OS was billed to the public as an alternative setting for students in grades six through eight who currently were not meeting their expectations and their ability in a regular school setting. (administrator 1, interview, 10/96)

In the third year of the program (1995-96) the number of students assigned

through the discipline hearings process declined. The decline is possibly attributed to the

third administrator who adhered to the basic premise of the school's mission and

philosophy but also envisions the future, he states:

> I see this program as being a program on 20/20 and I may not ever be
> here for it but I want to get it to the place where it is ready for it. I
> envision people working with students that have the same vision that I
> have and the same images that I have and the same dedication that I
> have. I don't brag but I know that I am dedicated to these kids and I'm
> not a phony. I say what I need to say and do what I need to do and I'm
> working for all kids but especially for black kids. (administrator 2,
> interview, 12/96)

Seventy percent of students chose to remain in the program the third year. Student

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volunteerism increased to approximately 90 percent the fourth year of the program (1996-97).

Kellmayer (1995) suggests that assignment of students to an alternative program for the chronically disruptive is precarious. He recommends every effort be made to create a non-punitive model that is as rich as or even richer than the traditional school program from which students have been excluded. In a true alternative program, the great majority of students (including those who were assigned to the program against their will) will not wish to leave the program and return to the mainstream after they have been cured. This has become the propensity for the majority of the OS students, who at the end of the second and third years remained in the program, thus contributing to the volunteerism concept of alternative programs.

Many alternative programs operate on the erroneous assumption that after a certain period of time in the program students will want to return to a traditional program. This is only the case if the alternative program is perceived by students as punitive or inferior to the traditional program. Alternative should not mean "inferior," as pointed out in focus group one. In the good programs alternative means superior. Students who

"Alternative education, I hate to hear those words. I really do. I'm getting the same thing that they are teaching at G.W....so why is it alternative education. If I leave G.W., where am I going? College. If I leave here, where am I going? College. There is no alternative to it. It's an education." (student/ focus group interview, session 1, 12/96)

attend the most effective alternative programs generally graduate, and receive the same diploma as students who attend the parent school (Kellmayer, 1995).

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Table 4

Indicator Three Volunteerism

Indicator	Volunteerism
Kellmayer's Recommendation	Participation in the alternative program should be voluntary for both students and staff.
Years	Volunteerism process for students and staff
1993-94	Students invited to attend the program. Teachers selected through interview process (93-97).
1994-95	OS program merged with Phoenix School in which students attended in lieu of long-term suspension. Participation was a combination of assignment and voluntary. Thirty percent of the students were in the program last year.
1995-96	Students were in the program in lieu of long term suspension. Seventy percent were in the program last year.
1996-97	Ninety percent of students in program volunteered to remain at the OS.

Note. No reference was made to volunteerism in the goals and objectives. Interviews with teachers and administrators revealed that the selection process the first year was voluntary. Interviews also indicated that participation of students (1994-1997) shifted from the majority assigned through discipline hearing (long-termed suspensions) to voluntary participation.

4. Participatory Decision-Making

    To empower students and help them acquire a sense of belonging, *participatory decision-making*, the fourth indicator, should be a component in alternative education programs. The perception of a former teacher, who was interviewed, indicated that in 1993-1994 students had some involvement in participatory decision-making. As

presented in Table 5 students and parents participated in events such as parent

conferences, student council, team meetings and open houses.

Participatory decision-making involving students exceeded

customary activities as reported by students in focus group one.

Since 1995, students perceived that they were actively involved in

the school's decisions-making process, particularly pertaining to

student related issues. Whereas written documentation is limited in

this area, participants in all focus groups stated they felt the staff

"We would have meetings in the morning (year 1)...in one room like a group session ...if there was a burning issue and we needed the students' input we would have these meetings and talk about these things." (administrator 1, interview, 10/96)

listened to them. The following quote from a student in focus group two supports this

perception: "We all run this school together. Mr. --- is the head but we all have our say

and opinions... we all work together" (focus group 2, interview, 12/97).

Table 5

Indicator Four Participatory Decision Making

Indicator	Participatory Decision-Making
Kellmayer's Recommendation	Despite the difficulties involved in engaging at-risk students in group activities and higher-order thinking skills, efforts must be made to allow students and staff to have a real voice in the day-to-day operation of the alternative program (Kellmayer, 1995).
Years 1993-95	No reference in goals and objectives
1995-97	Creation of Student Council Association (OS Handbook, 1995).
Documentation	Appendix F, Table 30, goal 6

Note. In the Service Learning Program, students participated in the decision-making
process regarding where they would volunteer among the available sites.

5. Curriculum

The fifth indicator, *curriculum*, in most effective alternative education programs consists of the core curriculum, a few electives, behavioral skills and a vocational education component. All of the above are advocated by Kellmayer (1995) and most experts in the field of alternative education (Neumann, 1994; Rogers, 1992).

Mary Anne Raywid (1988) has published extensively on matters relating to of alternative education. She states the following on curriculum:

> An alternative program must have broad aims, making it concern the
> full development each youngster--character and intellect, personal and
> social development, as well as academic achievement. It is concerned
> with the person, not just with the person's academic achievement.
> Effective alternative programs can be both innovative
>
> and experiential and still emphasize basic skills such as reading,
> writing, and mathematics (p.27).

Hence, the curriculum, Indicator Five, especially in an alternative education environment, must strive to meet the needs of the whole child. "The rigors of the curriculum and the strategies for achievement will place students in the position to pursue college-bound work in the ninth grade (DPS, Process Objective 93-94, Table 26, Appendix F)." This prevailing position, from the founder and designers of the OS, was evident each year in the goals and objectives, but was not as evident in the practices of the educational program. Table 6 presents a synopsis of the Opportunity School

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curriculum of the for 1993-1997.

Alternative Education Plans (AEP) were supposed to be designed for each student, according to the goals and objectives of the OS, but there was no evidence of any AEP, nor were teachers cognizant of them. "Specific strengths and weakness of each student will be analyzed. Accordingly, an individualized instructional plan will be established to ensure student success. The student's AEP will be developed from a holistic perspective (Table 30 Goals: 5; 1994-95, Appendix F)."

Students are grouped in multi-age classrooms. Students have access to computers which are located in all instructional classrooms. Teachers at the OS use teaching strategies such as cooperative learning, hands-on activities, and independent projects.

The Service Learning Project (SLP) was highlighted as the school's attempt to provide instruction related to students' personal concerns. Students volunteer to participate in the project and have some flexibility in their assignment. Students were complementary of the program in the first focus group session.

They felt the SLP was effective and comprehensive in both the cognitive and affective domains. In 1996-97, the school experimented with learning styles, by using the Multiple Intelligence's Inventory (MI) by Howard Gardner. The researcher observed during on-site visits, teachers in the beginning stage,

> "SLP helps you reach your goal...attitudes change for the positive...helps you to reach your goal toward college...I look forward to learning how to deal with people." (interview/focus group1, 12/96)

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using differentiated instruction to compliment students' learning styles.

The OS lacks a major component in its curriculum, which is the omission of vocational education. A student in focus group three comments about more choices and vocational education.

We need more choices so we wouldn't have to go back to G. W. …We need more

programs or activities. We don't have nothing like wood shop or voc. tech.

[vocational technical program] (interview, 1/97).

One description of the OS curriculum was flexibility. This was the response given

by teacher 3, she explains:

A lot of flexibility and we need that. It's just a lot of flexibility and
that is what I like about it. In regular school, it was pretty much by the
schedule. Here I feel like if you make it up, it's okay, you need to
make up some and if you don't make it up, it's still okay. When it
comes to academics, yes, you don't want them feeling like they're
getting away with something….because you've got to deal with
behavior situations so much that you will be off task or you had to get
off task sometime to get other thing done. The guidance counselor can
pull them out and have sessions. If there is a need for a rap session or
some kind of forum with the girls…the principal works with you.
Whatever there is a need to do, we have enough flexibility to go with
it (interview, 11/96).

Table 6

Indicator Five Curriculum

Indicator	Curriculum
Kellmayer's Recommendation	The alternative program curriculum should be student-centered, and instruction should be related to students' personal concerns.
Years 1993-94	-Alternative Education Plan (AEP) -Continuous process curriculum without failure -rigorous curriculum
1994-95	-AEP -Career Exploration -Service Learning Project
1995-97	-Integrated curriculum---Individual academic needs and interest of students -Raise student's self-esteem -Service Learning Project
Documentation	Appendix F, Table 27, objectives 2,3,6,9; Table 30, goals 3,5; Table 30, goals 2,4,6

6. Separate Administrative Unit

The OS has had a *separate administrative unit*, indicator six, since its inception. However, written documentation was sparse relating to the preferred characteristics of an administrator for the program. One reference, made in a specific goal, suggested that this individual should have experienced success working with at-risk students (see Table 26: strategy one, Appendix F).

As indicated in Table 7, three different administrators were assigned to the program between 1993 and 1996. The first administrator remained in the program from August 1993 until February 1994. The next administrator, a former teacher, became

acting administrator for the remainder of year two. The third administrator was appointed

before the second school year concluded. The latter shared leadership with the acting

administrator while still employed as principal of a middle school. The interim

administrator became the school's curriculum specialist. The first and third administrators

of the OS were African American males. The second administrator was a Caucasian

female. Interviews with administrators, teachers and students suggest that the three

principals of the Opportunity School differ greatly in their skills, experiences, and

leadership styles.

Leadership of the OS

        Several factors influenced the leaders of the OS. Each administrator was

confronted with similar circumstances including students' academic and social needs.

And each administrator was challenged with significant differences during their

leadership. The major difference was student population--size and attributes. The first

administrator had a student enrollment of approximately 50-55 students. These students

volunteered to attend the program. The second administrator inherited a program for

students with discipline problems from the Phoenix School, as this program merged with

the Opportunity School. The combined enrollment of the program was 120-140, with

great fluctuations. This was predicated on the number of students who were assigned, or

complied with the recommendations of the discipline hearing committee in lieu of long-term suspension. Although students had choice, it was coercive.

The third administrator of the OS had a population of 110-120 students. The majority of these students were residual from both programs who decided not to return to their base school. Where students continued to be assigned to the OS, they were not automatically accepted into the program. The third administrator adhered to the Opportunity School's admission criteria and the recommended enrollment capacity. Other disparities during administrator's tenure were size of staff and location.

When students were asked to compare and contrast the program under the first and current administrators, they commented that the current program was "different from the old...yes, a lot different, it's better" (interview/focus group 2, 1/97).

The organizational element was a recurring theme when teachers were interviewed. The comments that follow refer to the leadership of the first administrator. "There was no leadership. He was a nice guy, naive, but nice. He did not have an organized school. If you don't have a daily schedule, you don't have an organized school...we did not even know what time we began in the morning and that's the truth" (interview, teacher 1, 11/96).

"Back then, it wasn't really organized. Now it's like a school. Before it was like a holding place for fighting. Now it's like you're going to learn. It's like there's a reason why Mr.--- was put here...it's like he's better for us right now. He's doing more to get everybody together." (interview/focus group 2, 1/97)

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Table 7

Indicator Six Separate Administrative Unit

Indicator	Separate Administrative Unit
Kellmayer's Recommendation	Effective alternative programs generally have a separate administrative unit.
Years	
1993-94	Administrator No. 1, (5) teachers
1994-95	Administrator No. 2: (Acting) (7) teachers
1995-97	Administrator No. 3: instructional specialist, guidance counselor, 12 teachers, and 2 teacher assistants
Documentation	Appendix F, Table 26, process strategy one; regarding the assignment of administrative staff and selection of teachers.

7. Distinctive Mission and Family Atmosphere

Characterized by a culture of concern and caring, alternative programs strive to develop a sense of "family" among all participants...(Kellmayer, 1995). This was wholeheartedly advocated among both students and faculty of the OS. Table 8, *Distinctive Mission and Family Atmosphere*, is a strong indicator for the OS—this was apparent in all student focus groups. Students in the focus groups felt teachers knew them as individuals as well as a students. They demonstrated that the schools' staff was genuinely concerned about them. "They know all about our personalities," stated students in focus group three (interview, 1/97). The majority of the students in all focus group sessions were complimentary of the

> Even the custodian, we get along with them. You know everybody. That's why I like it. It's like a big, happy family. Families have problems ...you mess up or have a bad day. Everybody is still a happy family. (focus group 2, interview 1/97)

third administrator. They knew his expectations and felt he was trying to help them succeed. This was expressed in the following statements from focus group one: "You see over here, it's like they work with whatever you're doing... Mr. --- (administrator, number 3) he understands. It's just they care more. They always say, 'I want to see you make something of yourself'...look how far we've come" (interview, 12/96).

Gold (1995) stated that successful alternative settings are staffed by adults who have exceptional skills at building positive relationships with distrustful and alienated youth. And according to students in the focus groups, teachers and the administrator of the OS possess these skills. The students expressed feelings that a warm and caring ethos permeates the Opportunity School. They referred to the school's staff as a "family." A student in focus group one expresses how the OS is an extended family for some and a family for others. "They [teachers] always encourage you, no matter what. If Ms. Branch was here, her first words would be, 'If you believe it, you can achieve it.' We hear it every day. And I think this real good cause some of us, at home, we don't have that. You see in my home, I don't have-- because my mother is sick and she don't really talk to us that much" (interview, 12/96).

Table 8

Indicator Seven Distinctive Mission and Family Atmosphere

Indicator	Distinctive Mission and Family Atmosphere
Kellmayer's Recommendation	A clear mission, a sense of community and commitment, and shared values are characteristics of effective alternative programs.
Years 1993-97	-Warm and caring environment -Involvement of family, community and work force in educational process
Documentation	Appendix F, Table 30, goals 1,7

8. Flexible Teacher Roles and Program Autonomy

"You had to be a counselor. You had to be an advocate...a mediator...you had to be the intervention between outside services and the child and the home. You needed to be a leader. (administrator 1, interview 10/96)

The eighth indicator addresses *Teachers roles and Program Autonomy*. Teachers' roles

and responsibilities, as in any school, are enormous, but in a program for at-risk students,

the roles are magnified. Consequently, demands imposed by the administrator in the first

year of the program pressured two of the five teachers to voluntarily leave the program.

However, since the first year, the teacher turnover rate has been marginal.

What characteristics are desirable for teachers in alternative education? This question was posed by the writers during an interview with a teacher who was teaching in the OS. The response:

> You have to have a lot of compassion. Not only must you have compassion but you must be concerned…some days you have to be on their level but yet still be a professional because everyday brings a new challenge. Many of the children we're dealing with are so street-wise that you've got to be wise enough to know where they are coming from but yet be gentle enough to let them know, 'Yes, I know what you're talking about but we can't deal with that right now.' The person who deals in alternative education have to have characteristics to be able to deal with all sorts of problems because they bring you all sorts of problems (interview, teacher 3, 12/96).

As indicated in Table 9 and echoed in interviews with teachers, an enormous degree of flexibility exists in the program's schedule and curriculum. The first year (1993-1994), the program's flexibility was viewed as a hindrance because it produced confusion and lacked continuity for students and teachers. According to teachers interviewed, the program was organized better the second year, and teachers' autonomy did not alter the program's structure or organization.

"We didn't know what classes we were going to teach per day. I mean we really didn't." (teacher 1, interview 11/96, p.13)
"They (students) did not come in at one time... they would come in... 10 to 15 minutes late." (teacher 2, interview, 11/96)

Table 9

Indicator Eight Flexible Teacher Roles and Program Autonomy

Indicator	Flexible Teacher Roles and Program Autonomy
Kellmayer's Recommendation	The distinctive mission of alternative programs and concept of school-as-family....teachers, counselors, and administrators who work in successful programs accept a much broader and more flexible role than do teachers in traditional programs.
Years 1993-97	-Flexible scheduling to accommodate students -Extended year for students who needed more time to master content
Documentation	Appendix F, Table 27, objectives 8, 10

9. Access to Social Services

Social service support is an important component in an alternative education setting. However, according to interviews, this component is not directly linked to the Opportunity School's program. Table 10 looks at the connection between the OS and *social services* agencies and its availability to students, beyond an as-need basis. Data was only available through interviews on this topic, no written documentation was found.

Although this area is not an intricate component of the OS program, students were provided information and assistance on an as-needed basis. The school's counselor is the primary liaison between the school and social services. Some students, because of personal circumstances, were more involved with the services provided through public

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agencies than were other students.

Table 10

Indicator Nine: Access to Social Services

Indicator	Access to Social Services
Kellmayer's Recommendation	Ideally, social services should be available on the school site or at least arrangements should be made to provide students with access to social services on an as-needed basis.
Years	
1993-94	No reference in goals and objectives
1994-95	Goal—Align community agencies with the school Strategy-- Form alliances with various support agencies in the community
1995-97	No reference in goals and objectives
Documentation	Appendix F, Table 29, goal 4

10. Use of Technology

      The tenth indicator address the *use of technology* in the school's curriculum. The use of technology examines the equity of resources available to students who attend alternative education programs. When examining the OS program, the lack of availability of technology was not an issue as shown in Table 11. Each year the OS increased its acquistion of computers and technological hardware and software. The school also has Internet access to at least one computer per instructional class. In 1996-1997, all instructional classes had a minimum of five computers. Nevertheless, the infusion of computer assisted instruction is dictated by the teacher's level of expertise with computers and other technological tools. The integration of computers in the OS curriculum is not

significant, although the availability of computers is generous.

Students in all focus groups reported that although classes had computers, their primary usage was for free time and some word processing. They indicated there was limited integration of computers or other technology in classroom instruction.

Table 11

Indicator Ten Use of Technology

Indicator	Use of Technology
Kellmayer's Recommendation	Students who attend alternative programs should have at least the same level of access (or more access, if possible) to technology as do students who attend a traditional program.
Years	
1993-94	Five computers will be placed in each classroom along with printers and appropriate software
1994-95	No reference in goals and objectives
1995-97	-Integrate technology -Upgrade and increase number of computers in each classroom
Documentation	Appendix F, Table 27, objective 5; Table 30, goal 5

Alignment of State of Virginia's Model of Alternative Education Program with the OS

To respond to the second part of question one, the State of Virginia's prescribed model of alternative education was researched to decide whether Danville Public School's alternative education program is aligned with the recommendations from the state. The Opportunity School was characterized as a Model III (separate alternative

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school) per description given by Virginia's Department of Education (1994). The separate

alternative school is a self-contained educational facility that uses nontraditional

strategies to promote learning and social adjustment.

Tables 12 and 14 suggest the Opportunity School's program objectives and target

population are compatible. The two exceptions were creation of a student support system

in Table 12 (1993-95) and low achievers, Table 14 (1993-94).

Areas of dissimilarities are depicted in Table 13: Characteristics of Separate

Alternative Education Programs. The OS does not provide day care for children of

students, contracted independent studies, or provide family counseling. Minimum

parental involvement was reflected in the goals and objectives. Additionally, there was no

indication of plans to help teenage mothers with child care needs. The area of contracted

independent studies was not addressed in the goals and objectives (1993-96).

Table 12

State of Virginia Goals for Model III: Separate Alternate Education Program

Characteristics of Virginia's Model III	The OS Program		
	1993-94	1994-95	1995-96
Elimination of academic failure	x	x	x
Creation of a student support system	--	--	x
Improved social, career, and academic skills	x	x	x
Preparation for a return to the regular school setting or for graduation	x	x	x
Development of self-esteem, self-discovery, and self-awareness	x	x	x

Table 13

State of Virginia Model III: Characteristics of Separate Alternative Education Program

Characteristics of Separate Alternate Education Program	The OS Program		
	93-94	94-95	95-96
Individualized competency-based instruction	x	x	x
Integration of academic, affective, career, and survival skills	---	x	x
Small school setting	x	x	x
Academic emphasis	x	x	x
Day care for children of students	---	---	---
Extended instructional periods	x	x	x
Contracted independent studies	---	---	---
Counseling 1)-individual 2)- peer and 3)-family counseling	1,2	1,2	1,2
Flexibility	x	x	x

Table 14

State of Virginia Model III: Target Population

Characteristics of target population	The OS Program		
	93-94	94-95	95-96
Students who are not able to function within the traditional school setting	x	x	x
Potential dropouts	x	x	x
Students with average or above-average intelligence but who are deficient in basic skills	x	x	x
Low achievers	--	x	x
Those who are chronically absent	x	x	x

(Virginia Department of Education, 1994)

Research Question Two

Do students who attend the Opportunity School for one to four years improve their academic performance, attendance and social behavior upon return to their base school or while continuing at the OS?

A student's attendance is defined as the number of days absent from school. Academic performance is defined as passing or failing the Literacy Passport Test (LPT), and social behavior refers to the number of discipline referrals a student receives.

The data for this analysis were obtained from the 153 students who attended the

OS for more than one year between 1993 through January 1997. The data includes:

students' demographics (age, race, sex), duration in program, grade of entry in OS,

performance on LPT before enrolling and while participating in the program, students'

attendance (reported as number of days absence) and disciplinary behavior (reported as

number of discipline referrals).

Means and Standard Deviation

In figures 2 and 3, the means and standard deviation is reported for number of

days absent and disciplinary referrals of students *before, during*, and *after* the OS.

Comprehensive data on 42 of the 56 students in this group was used because data were

unavailable on 14 of the 56 students.

There was minimum improvement in students' attendance, see figure 2, when the means

are examined for *before* attending and *after* attending the OS. Students' attendance did not change

in stages *during* and *after* attending the OS. Generally, students' attendance trend remained the

same during all three stages *before, during* and *after* attending the OS.

Moderate correlations [*before/during* .631, *during/after* .484, *before/after* .687],

across time for attendance suggest that students who had good attendance *before* attending

the OS continued to have good attendance *during* and *after* attending the OS. The reversal

could also be suggested for students who had poor attendance *before* attending to the OS.

Figure 3 shows that the number of referrals dropped dramatically once student

attended the OS and remained low. Surprisingly not significant (*before/during,* ρ=.199),

due in part to the low correlations between referrals *before* and *during* (Υ=.091). As

expected the mean difference between the number of referrals *before* and *after* was

significant (ρ=.004) in part due to moderate correlation between referrals in these stages

(*before/after, Υ*=−.440).
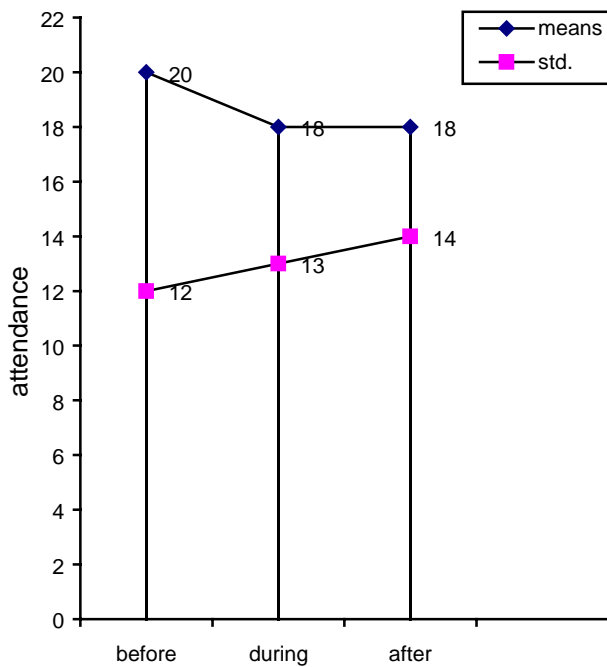
Figure 2. Means and standard deviation of OS students' attendance.
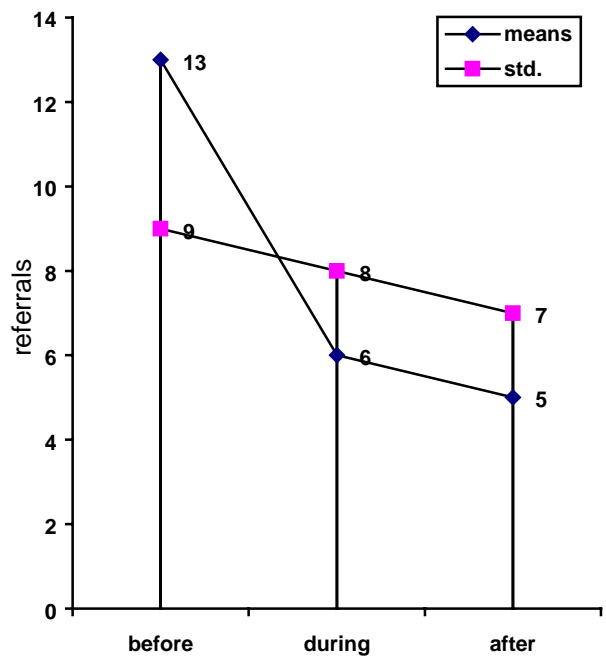
Figure 3. Means and standard deviation of OS students' discipline referrals.

Frequency Analysis

As shown in Table 15, 58 of the 158 had already passed all three LPT test.

Another 47 satisfied the LPT requirement by passing one or more LPT tests while in OS

(the frequencies are shown in bold italics in Table 15). Another 31 made progress by

passing one (12 students) or two (20 students) LPT tests. Sixteen students passed no LPT

test while in attendance

Table 15
Number of students who passed one, two, or three LPT before entering OS

and after enrolling in the OS

| | | After OS | | | |
| | | Number of LPT Tests passed while in OS | | | |
	zero	1 more	2 more	3 more	Total
Before OS					
zero	10	10	20	*28*	68
only 1	4	2	*6*	-	12
only 2	2	*13*	0	0	15
all 3					58
Total	16	25	26	28	153

Tables 16 and 17 shows performance distributed by grade on the LPT, *before*

enrolling and *after* attending the OS. Of the 32 students in grade six only 3% (1 out 32)

passed at least one section of the LPT before enrolling in OS. In comparison, 81% passed

between one and three sections of the LPT while attending the OS with about 44%

passing all three sections. This trend continues for students in grades seven, eight and

nine.

Table 16

Number of students who passed one, two, or three LPT *before* attending

the OS and their grade level.

	Before the OS Number of LPT passed				
	zero passed	1 passed	2 passed	3 passed	total
Grade level					
6 grade	31	1	-	-	32
7 grade	15	3	7	13	38
8 grade	9	4	4	14	31
9 grade	6	4	2	17	29
10 grade	3	-	2	12	17
11grade	4	-	-	2	6
Total	68	12	15	58	153

Table 17
Number of students who passed one, two, or three LPT *after* attending

the OS and their grade level.

	After attending the OS Number of LPT passed				
	zero passed	1 passed	2 passed	3 passed	total
Grade level					
6 grade	6	5	7	14	32
7 grade	3	8	8	5	24
8 grade	2	6	7	2	17
9grade	4	1	3	4	12
10grade	-	4	-	1	5
11grade	1	1	1	2	5
Total	16	25	26	28	95
(58 students passed all 3 sections before entering OS)					

Table 18 shows students' results on the LPT after they attended the OS compared to their length of stay in the program. Of the 64 students who were in the program for only one year, 14 did not pass any section of the LPT, 13 passed one, 20 passed two and 17 passed three. This is a 78% passing rate for students who remained in the OS for at least one year and passed at least one LPT test. There is a 100% passing rate for 1.5 years, a 90% passing rate for those who were there for two years and a 100% passing rate for students who were in the program for four years--passing at least one LPT test. Passing rate is defined as obtaining the minimum required score of 300 on at least one of the three sections on the LPT.

Table 18

Number of students who passed one, two, or three LPT *after* attending the OS

compared to their length of stay in the program

	zero passed	1 passed	2 passed	3 passed	total	Passing rates *(passed at 1east 1 LPT)*
Length of stay in program						
1 year	14	13	20	17	64	78%
1.5 years	-	1	-	2	3	100%
2 years	2	8	4	7	21	90%
3 years	-	-	-	-	-	-
4 years	-	3	2	2	7	100%
total	16	25	26	28	95	83%

(58 students passed all 3 sections before entering the OS)

Table 19 and 20 examines students' race, gender, age and their performance on the LPT

after and before enrolling in the OS. The passing rate for white students after OS is 77% and

before OS is 71%; this is an increase of about 6%. For African-American students it is 84%

after OS and 51% before OS; this represents an increase of 33%. A total of 29.5% passed all

three sections of the LPT after the OS; for African-American students this rate is 29.3%; and for

white students this rate is 31%. Of the 95 students who failed at least one section of the LPT

before entering the OS, 79 were males and 17 were females, which represents a ratio of 5:1. The

passing rate for males was 86% (before 55%) an increase of 31%. For females students the rate

was 71% (before 57%) and increase of 14%. A total of 22 out of 60 (37%) students ages 13 to

16 passed all three sections of the Virginia Literacy Passport Tests of writing, reading, and math

compared to 6 out of 35 (17%) students ages 17 to 21, after attending the OS. Overall, younger

students performed better on the LPT *after* enrolling in the OS.

Table 19
Students' race, gender, age and number of LPT passed *after* attending the OS

	0 passed	1passed	2 passed	3 passed	Total	Passing rates *(passed at 1east 1 LPT)*
			After OS			
Race						
white	3	3	3	4	13	77%
African-American	13	22	23	24	82	84%
Gender						
male	11	20	24	23	78	86%
female	5	5	2	5	17	71%
Ages						
13 - 14	5	5	8	11	29	83%
15 - 16	3	9	8	11	31	90%
17 - 18	7	9	9	4	29	76%
19 - 21	1	2	1	2	6	83%
total	16	25	26	28	95	82%

Table 20
Students' race, gender, age and number of LPT passed *before* attending the OS

	0 passed	1 passed	2 passed	3 passed	Total	Passing rates *(passing at least 1 LPT)*
			Before OS			
Race						
white	8	2	3	15	28	71%
African-American	61	10	12	42	125	51%
Gender						
male	56	11	12	44	123	55%
female	13	1	3	13	30	57%
Ages						
13-14	27	1	1	1	30	1%
15-16	24	2	6	25	57	58%
17-18	13	8	8	30	59	73%
19-21	5	1	0	1	7	29%
Total	69	12	15	57	153	55%

OS Enrollment and Attrition

Enrollment records were obtained for all students who attended the OS for at least a year during the period from 1993 through 1997. There were 153 students who remained in the program for more than one year. Of this number, 39 dropped out of school and 114 (75%) returned to their base school, or remained in the OS. Nevertheless, this percentage is lower than projected for completion of high school as stated in the Opportunity School's academic objectives for 1993-94. According to process objective two (1993-94, Table 27 Appendix F), 95 percent of students completing at least one year in the OS will complete high school.

Of the 145 students who enrolled in the OS during 1995-96, eighteen returned to a regular education program for the 1996-97 school year. Among this group one student dropped out of school, as of January 1997. Seventeen students remained in school and five of the seventeen returned to the Opportunity School. Generally when students attend the OS they continue their education by remaining in the OS, returning to their base school, or returning to the OS when they are unable to acclimate or assimilate to their base school.

Research Question Three

What were students' level of satisfaction with the OS?

To address students' satisfaction with the OS program, a survey instrument was

designed and administered by the researcher to forty-one students (see Appendix I), who

attended the OS during 1996-97. Middle and high school students participated in the

survey in their respective homerooms. The survey instrument was specifically designed to

measure students' satisfaction with the OS program. The Likert scale, shown below, with

response options ranging from zero to five was used on the ten item questionnaire.

0	1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	mostly disagree	somewhat disagree	somewhat agree	mostly agree	strongly agree

An approval ratio was obtained by computing the percentage of responses

indicating agreement (responses 3, 4, 5). The findings are presented in Table 21.

The mean response, as shown in Table 21, across items ranged from 3.8 to a high

of 4.9 with a composite mean across all ten items equal to 4.6. It is evident that these

means suggest a very high level of satisfaction with the OS. This high response rate was

substantiated in student focus group sessions. The item evidencing the lowest level of

agreement was, "I would like to continue my education in the OS." The principal's

explanation of students' responses to question seven is that several students in the

program expressed interest in Focus Schools, which are similar in concept to magnet

schools. Focus Schools were scheduled to open the following school year (1997-98).

Theoretically, these schools will advocate specialized curriculum, a more personalized

environment, and smaller classes (characteristics of the Opportunity School).

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Table 21

Means and standard deviation on OS students' satisfaction with the program

	Questions	Mean	SD	Approval Ratio
1	I feel I am getting a good education at The Opportunity School.	4.8	0.43	96%
2	The teachers and principal in the Opportunity School are willing to help me when I need help.	4.7	0.46	94%
3	My teachers use a variety of teaching materials, such as games, group work, computers and hands on activities to help me learn.	4.4	0.63	88%
4	The teachers and principal in the Opportunity School encourage and motivate me to do my very best.	4.7	0.47	94%
5	The teachers and principal care about me as a student and a person.	4.5	0.74	90%
6	I would recommend the Opportunity School to other students.	4.5	0.74	90%
7	I would like to continue my education in the Opportunity School.	3.8	1.72	76%
8	The Opportunity School provides more individual attention than my other school.	4.6	0.67	92%
9	This is a good school.	4.9	0.42	98%
10	I like this school.	4.8	0.38	96%
	Group	4.6	0.67	92%

Note. Approval Ratio was obtained from items 3, 4, and 5 on the Likert scale.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Influence of the OS on students' academics, behavior and attendance

Analysis of student data revealed the Opportunity School may have contributed to

the positive change in students' academics and discipline. Other factors that may have

contributed to this change are maturation of students and the repetitiveness of LPT tests.

Student attendance rates were the least influenced by the program. The Literacy

Passport Tests were used as an academic barometer to gauge students' outcome in the

program. The findings indicate that students in the OS did passed more sections of the

LPT as compared to before attending the OS. Students in grades six and seven

experienced greater success passing all sections of the LPT than any other group,

especially if they entered the program in those grades.

The Opportunity School's attempt to improve both behavior and attendance has

been marginal. It is important to note that the OS attendance policy was quite liberal

compared to the traditional high school's policy. The OS did not drop students from class

if they missed a specific number of days from school as is the policy in the traditional

high school. Regardless, students' attendance was addressed but the focus was to help

students develop the habit of attending school; consequently, the attendance policy in the

OS was more accommodating. When examining students' discipline behavior, interviews

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did not indicate a liberal policy regarding discipline. A student in focus group three comments. "He [administrator 3] don't tolerate but he tries to talk to you and work through the problem. He will hear your side of the story before he passes punishment" (interview, 1/97).

Although, differences between mean scores for absences were minimum, there was a slight decrease in attendance observation stages *before* and *after*, as indicated in Figure 2.

When examining discipline behavior and students' attendance, students made more progress in the area of improving inappropriate behavior than improving their attendance. There was a decline in the mean average for students' behavior among the three observation stages before, during, and after (see Figure 3). Thus indicating that students received fewer discipline referrals upon their return to regular education, compared to prior enrollment and during the OS program.

Students' disciplinary behavior and passing rate on the LPT improved in the Opportunity. Furthermore, students' attendance seems to stabilize in a positive direction after attending the OS.

An overall analysis of the Opportunity School's program, using Kellmayer's ten indicators of effective alternative programs, reveals more areas of strengths than weakness. There are seven indicators that are relatively strong: (1)-size, (2)-site, (3)-volunteerism, (6)-separate administrative unit, (7)-distinctive mission and family atmosphere, (8)-flexible teacher roles & program autonomy, and (9)-access to social. Areas that are deficient when using Kellmayer's indicators, are (4)-participatory decision-making, (5)-curriculum, and (10)-technology. Table 22 presents a summary of the strengths and weaknesses of the Opportunity School's program when comparing to Kellmayer's indicators.

It is critical for teachers to work effectively with students who have difficulty adapting to traditional educational settings. Teachers must also have program autonomy (indicator eight), and the flexibility to make decisions that are unique for each student's academic and disciplinary needs.

The OS has yet to completely capture the student centered concept, or instruction related to students' personal concerns; however, the program is making improvements in these areas. Such efforts are evident with the implementation of multiple intelligence (learning styles) in year four, 1996-1997. Learning styles were identified for all students using the Multiple Intelligence Instrument. Teachers reported that they attempted to incorporate at least two different learning styles in their instructional presentations.

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Table 22

Summary of Kellmayer's Indicators and the OS

Indicators	Strengths	Weaknesses	Comments
No.1 Size	(+)		Average enrollment was within accepted range 120—125 students.
No. 2 Site	(+)		Present site is in an established neighborhood with community support. The building is in good condition but not all spaces are adequate, i.e., gym, cafeteria.
No. 3 Volunteerism	(+)		Although seemingly coercive and punitive, students and their parents had the final decision regarding attending the OS. The program has become more inviting. Teachers had complete choice in the process.
No. 4 Participatory Decision-Making		(-)	Documentation does not indicate strong parent participation. Student involvement has gradually increased each year.
No. 5 Curriculum		(-)	More hands-on and student centered activities are needed. Instruction is traditional with the exception of multi-age classes and some independent study.
No.6 Separate Administrative Unit	(+)		The program's principal and teachers are selected, through the interview process, to work specifically in the program.
No.7 Distinctive mission and Family Atmosphere	(+)		Initially the mission and focus of the program was weak and not well articulated, however, through the program's metamorphosis this has drastically changed.
No.8 Flexible Teacher Roles and Program Autonomy	(+)		Teachers have curricular and program autonomy. They assume many responsibilities outside the norm.

No. 9 Access to Social Service	(+)	Although not integrated in the program, services are accessible and provided as needed.
No. 10 Use of Technology	(-)	Overall the availability of computers for students use is more than adequate, however the use of technology is not integrated in the instructional process.

Students' Satisfaction with the OS

Students expressed a high level of satisfaction with the OS program, as indicated in focus groups, and by the results from the questionnaire on student satisfaction. A group response of 4.6 was obtained on a 5 point scale where 1= strongly disagree and 5=strongly agree.

"I look at the Opportunity like this. I made a mistake at G.W., just one mistake. They didn't want to give me a second chance and this school wanted to give me a second chance so I'm going to take advantage of it." (interview focus group 3, 1/97)

Alternative education programs for at-risk students is effective when such indicators as Kellmayer's (1995) are the guiding principles. These programs can and often do provide at-risk students with a potential second chance.

CHAPTER VI

RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

<u>Recommendations</u>

Although there is no typical mode of an alternative school, there appear to be some common structures and processes that contribute to the successes some school have experienced. Common characteristics of alternative schools include small school size, small class size, extended roles for teachers that include student counseling and guidance, cooperative roles for students, voluntary membership, student involvement in governance, absence or minimization of tracking, ability grouping, and other forms of labeling (Kellmayer, 1995; Neumannn, 1994). Most educator would agree that the characteristics of alternative education and traditional education overlap, and they should, since most of the characteristics mentioned above, are also indicators of effective schools. The major differences between traditional and alternative education are the overwhelming inappropriate behaviors and academic challenges of the student population in an alternative's school.

The Opportunity School in Danville, Virginia should continue serving students who are considered at-risk of dropping out of school. Students in the school perceived the program as meeting their needs, and were very satisfied with it and the school's staff. Collectively the Opportunity School's program has provided at-risk students with a second chance to continue their education. However, there are areas that should be

strengthened and expanded to more effectively serve students in the OS.

Alternative education programs need structure and flexibility. Structure for students includes consistency in procedures (classroom and school-policies), consequences for violation of rules, and stability of staff. Flexibility is needed in the school's schedule and curriculum. The alternative education program should reflect the needs of the student. Course offerings in the program should provide opportunities for students to have varied options in selecting their curriculum, adjoins the state requirements and their individual interests. A vocational education component should be added to the curriculum to offer students a more hands-on curricular option, choices and introduction to possible career and apprentice options.

Students need flexibility around the time of day they attend school. Many students in alternative programs are older and have started to work and, may have to work to supplement their family's income. A flexible school schedule could possibly function as an attraction and encourage more students to continue their education. Therefore, a morning, afternoon, and if necessary a night program should be offered in an alternative education setting.

In the area of curriculum, the Opportunity School should implement the use of contracted independent studies, as suggested in Table 12 (Characteristics of Separate Alternative Education Program), for students who are mature and academically capable of handling the responsibility. Independent studies would also allow students to move

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through content in a self-determined order according to their specific needs. Thus providing students with more curricular options and individualized instruction based on need and interest. The delivery of the curriculum should engage and challenge students by drawing from their strengths and the environment. The classroom should encompass community resources such as churches, colleges, non-profit agencies and partnerships with local businesses and industries.

Child care alternatives are lacking in the Opportunity School's program. The need to provide this service is advocated among experts in the area of alternative education. The child care component would strengthen the OS appeal for young female students and their parents. A contributing cause of the high dropout rate for young female students in the Danville community is teen-age pregnancy (Bland & Womack, 1997).

Although the counseling focus in the OS is on the student, significant family members of the student should be included in a more direct role. Family counseling is not available through any formal program of the OS. Students who need family counseling are referred to a community agency. Since the behavior component is a major influence on students' performance in the OS, it would be beneficial to have an internal support program for students and their families. This program could help students develop emotional independence, understand external forces that often influence their decision making and ultimately allow students to gain better control of their behavior and make smarter choices.

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Deficiencies were found in the program implementation when Kellmayer's indicators were applied to the Opportunity School's program. They are participatory decision-making and the use of technology. In the area of participatory decision-making, students participated in the student government and some limited informal round table discussions. Students' level of decision-making should be enhanced through more opportunities to discuss issues that relate to them and the school's program. This can be done through committee assignments and special interest projects. A student discipline committee would enhance students' ability to influence their peers and model acceptable behavior. It would also empower students and give them ownership in the school.

Integration of technology to enhance the curriculum was an area of weakness in the Opportunity School. As stated previously the OS has a generous supply of computers and at least one computer per instructional class has Internet capabilities. Nevertheless, students reported minimal use of technology except for free time usage. Teachers should incorporate technology to respond to students' different learning styles and as a tool to enhance learning, an alternative education setting should be more hands on with small group instruction. Technology affords teachers these opportunities. The administration and site-based team should address staff development needs, and implement a plan that will encourage and promote the use of technology throughout the school.

Implications

Our nation faces very serious challenges in serving its at-risk students. We have

made progress in isolated areas, but to sustain this isolated progress and extend it to much larger numbers of schools, we must provide a more solid research base for the many suspected connections between instructional processes and student outcomes and for the level of effectiveness of various promising programs.

More longitudinal studies are needed to test the effectiveness of alternative education programs for at-risk populations. If programs are to have real benefits, then merely labeling them "alternative" will obviously not do; program design must incorporate quantitative attributes.

The curriculum in programs for at-risk populations should consist of laboratory experiences (hands-on), vocational training, and community service. Service learning programs should be offered to allow students a bridge to the real world, which reinforces their development of relevant skills in the classroom. Curriculum in alternative education program also should have strong counselor/guidance components. These components should be available to students daily in conjunction to weekly scheduled group or individual sessions.

Teachers should have measured training beyond the core subjects to teach effectively in an alternative education setting. Specifically, teachers involved in alternative programs must have exceptional affective and relational skills (Jacobs, 1995).

Opportunity School students who return to their base school did not receive any formal re-acclimation, other than a visit to the counselor's office for scheduling, and the

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assistant principal's office for forewarning of consequences of violation of rules. Students

needed to reconnect and feel apart of their base school after spending sometime a year or

more in the OP. Therefore, a built-in follow-up program should include formal case

review between the student, base school counselor, alternative site counselor and a

principal representative from both schools; a reorientation to their base school; approved

and best practices methods for administrators and teachers to employ which are geared to

the successful matriculation of the student.

School districts should be committed to funding programs which provide low

student-teacher ratios and incentives to attract competent staff. Alternative education sites

should have as an attractive appeal as other schools and allow students to maximize on all

educational opportunities provided at other school sites.

Alternative education programs will continue in public education. The

questioning of their effectiveness continues to remain an essential focus. School districts

that just focus on the removal of troubled students from their buildings are merely

exacerbating the problem. Boards of education must reexamine the purpose, mission, and

vision of alternative education. The focus should be helping students (academically,

socially, and emotionally) -- not placing them in an unattractive incarcerated-like

environment. "If schools truly reflect society, then one must consider that these at-risk

students come from an at-risk society (Beach, Casey, McSwain, 1993 p.54)." Therefore,

one may infer that there is a causal relationship between society and students in

alternative education program. The question is whether school districts and or society will

be proactive or reactive. If the choice is to be proactive, school districts will successfully

provide rich alternative education programs that conversely offer a multitude of

opportunities for at-risk students to be successful. If school districts and or society are

reactive, taxpayer's money will continue to be absorbed in programs for juvenile

delinquents followed by an extended visit to a federal penitentiary.

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APPENDIX A

Matrix of Literature on Alternative Education,

At-Risk Students and

Students who drop out of school

The following matrix represents an assortment of literature (books and magazines) on topics that specifically address at risk students, alternative education, and students who dropped out of school.

Table 23
Review of Literature Matrix on Alternative Education

	Categories		
Authors	Student Dropout	AE Programs	At-Risk Attributes
Allen, S. D. & Edward-Kyles, R. (1995)		X	
Coley, R. (1995)	X Reasons		
Cicchelli, & Marcus (1995)		X	
Ferrara, M.M. (1993)		X(research)	
Gold, M. 1995		X(research)	
Hunter, W. A. & Wiles V.L. (1994)	X		
Lewis, A. C. (1995)	X		
Jackson, M.H. Reddick, K.B. (1995)			X
Corbett, W.T. & Delancy, B. (1994)		X	X
Queen, K.W. (1994)		X	X
Neumannn, R. (1994)		X (incld. history)	

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Table 23 continues

Review of Literature Matrix on Alternative Education

Authors	Student Dropout	AE Programs	At-Risk Attributes
Stratton J. (1995)	X		
Stevens, C.J. (1991)		X	
VA Dept. Of Education (1994)		X Report AE criteria	
Capuzzi, D. & Gross, D.R. (1989)	X	X	X
Meixner, C. (1994)		X	
Potter, P.D. (1996)	X		

APPENDIX B

Glossary of Terms

<u>At-Risk Student</u>

The term "at-risk" (Gross & Capuzzi, 1989) is descriptive of a set of casual/behavior dynamics that place the individual in danger of a negative future event. With school-age persons, one of these dangers may be that of dropping out of school; with others, it may be the danger of dropping out of life. When viewed from a casual/behavioral perspective, the notion of being at-risk broadens, and dropping out is only one of many possible outcomes.

At-risk students refer to those unlikely to succeed in school because their home resources and experiences differ from the expectations on which school experiences are built (Levine, 1988). Hundreds of studies have provided an accurate picture of students who are most likely to be at risk. General characteristics, such as the following, serve as "red flags" for students who are at-risk (Kellmayer, 1995; Minga 1988; Grossnickle 1986 and Hahn 1987):

Tardiness

Absenteeism

Poor grades

Failing one or more grades

Inability to tolerate structured activities

Low family socioeconomic level

Poor sense of self-esteem

Inadequate goals and lack of future orientation

Students apathetic or withdrawn

Students angry, defiant, or overly disruptive

Single parent or broken family structure

Low standardized test scores

Low aspirations and parents with low expectations

Alternative Education

The State Board of Education (1994) defines alternative education in Virginia as:

...learning experiences that offer educational choices that meet the needs of students with varying interest and abilities. Alternative education offer choices as far as time, location, staffing, and programs. Alternative education may include programs for drop-out prevention, for employment under the regular supervision of designated school personnel, and for the reduction of illiteracy. Regular programs of general, vocational or college preparatory education, and required educational programs for gifted or handicapped students are not programs of alternative education.

Dropout

The term is used both to describe an event - leaving school before graduating, and a status - an individual who is not in school is not a graduate. A person who drops out of school may return and graduate. At the time the person left school initially, he is called a dropout. At the time the person returns to school, he is called a stop out (The Condition of Education 1994 p.415).

Virginia's Literacy Passport Test

The LPT is a test designed to measure competency in math, reading, and writing

at the six-grade level. Students must pass all three parts before graduating from high

school [with a diploma]. The LPT is given twice a year in the sixth through twelfth grade.

Typology

Typology is a classification system made up of categories that divide some aspect

of the world into parts. It is a theoretical categorization produced by the cross tabulation

of two or more defining variables. The primary purpose of typology is to describe

(Patton, 1980).

Case study

Case analysis according to Patton (1980), can be analysis of individual, program,

institution, or group. The case study approach to qualitative analysis is a specific way of

collecting, organizing, and analyzing data. The purpose is to gather comprehensive,

systematic, and in-depth information about each case of interest. It includes all the

interview data, the observation data, the documentary data, impressions and statements of

others about the case. At the program level, case data includes program documents,

program reports, interviews with program participants and staff, observation of the

program and program histories (Patton, 1980).

Focus group interview

A focus group interview is a way of gathering qualitative data by asking

individuals about their lifestyles and behavior. It is an interviewing technique conducted

with a small group of individuals who share a common link. Participants freely respond

in their own words, and offer their opinions about a variety of issues, generally

predetermined by the individual(s) conducting the interview. According to Shamdasani &

Stewart (1990), focus groups provide a rich and detailed set of data about perceptions,

thoughts, feelings, and impressions of group members' own words. Focus group

interviews represent a remarkably flexible research tool, and can be adapted to obtain

information about almost any topic, in a wide array of settings, and from very different

types of individuals.

Group interviewing is a research technique that takes advantage of group

dynamics to produce new and additional data. In fact, group interviews can be a source of

validation for events observed and for individual interview data (Frey & Fontana (cited

in Morgan, 1993).

APPENDIX C

Typology of Ten Key Indicators of

Effective Alternative Education Programs

According to Kellmayer (1995), many effective alternative programs have existed for a long enough period that researchers have determined the key characteristics of effective programs. Kellmayer identified and described in his book, <u>How to Establish an Alternative School</u> (1995), ten key characteristics of effective programs.

Typology of Ten Key Characteristics of Effective
Alternative Programs

Indicators	Characteristics

~Size

For most programs, 100-125 students may represent the maximum advisable enrollment.

~Site

The richer the site, the more effective the program. However, because the stigma that is sometimes attached to alternative programs, many of the "richest" sites (college campuses, for instance) are reluctant to open their door to these programs.

~Volunteerism

As much as possible, participation in the alternative program should be voluntary for both students and staff.

~Participatory Decision Making

Various models of democratic all-school governance systems allow students and staff to have a real voice in the day-to day operation of the alternative program. Similarly, parents and the community should be involved in program planning and operation.

~Curriculum

The alternative program curriculum should be student-centered, and instruction should relate to students' personal concerns. Further, it is important to note that affective development often precedes cognition development for students who attend alternative programs. Alternative programs are often characterized by an innovative, experiential

curriculum. The curriculum should also provide opportunities for students to be involved in community service, internships, externships, and school-to-work transition.

~Separate Administrative Unit

Effective alternative programs generally have a separate administrative unit. The administrator must work with students and teachers to create the sense of community that characterizes successful alternative programs.

~Distinctive Mission and Family Atmosphere

Alternative schools have a clear mission, a sense of community and commitment, and shared values. Characterized by a culture of concern and caring, alternative programs strive to develop a sense of "family" among all participants: students, teachers, counselors, support staff, and administrators.

~Flexible Teacher Roles and Program Autonomy

Depending upon the needs of the program, staff members may serve as counselors, attendance officers, bus drivers, and coaches. Students and teachers in successful alternative programs share a sense of program ownership.

~Access to Social Service

Alternative programs often serve disruptive and disaffected students, therefore, arrangements should be made to provide students with access to social services on an as-needed basis. Service could include individual, group and family counseling; access to basic health screening and counseling; employment services; probation; and welfare.

~Use of Technology

Often students who attend alternative programs are academically deficient due to a host of manifestations. Students should have at least the same level of access, if not more, to technology as students who attend a traditional program.

APPENDIX D

Goals and Objectives of the Opportunity School

1995-1997

Table 24 Goals and Objectives 1995-97 of the OS

<u>The Opportunity School's Philosophy</u>

Believing that all students in the Danville Public Schools should have an opportunity to succeed to the maximum of their potential, the members of the faculty and staff of the Opportunity School will work diligently with students who are having problems experiencing success in the traditional school setting. The Opportunity School will be a school with high expectations for each student's success. At the Opportunity School, there will be an inviting and nontraditional learning environment.

Goal #1	Objectives for Goal #1
Provide a warm and caring environment in conjunction with a strong educational program that will be conducive to learning for students as well as staff	We will demonstrate a consistent readiness of learning linked with a tone of concern and love.
	We will welcome students with soft spoken tones.
	We will approach students with a caring attitude.
	We will plan open classroom sessions that are well structured.
	We will provide, as role models an atmosphere of open discussion in moderate tones.

Goal # 2	Objectives for Goal #2
Raise Self-esteem among students.	We will give genuine praise to students.
	We will take the time to catch students being good.
	We will take the time to get to know each of our students individual interests and goals.
Goal # 3	Objective for Goal #3
Foster whole life education by involving the school, family, community and work force in the educational process.	Students will be offered the opportunity to participate in the Opportunity School's Service Learning Program. This program allows students to volunteer in a variety of community agencies.
Goal # 4	Objectives for Goal #4

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Broaden students' awareness of the world outside school.	Students will be offered the opportunity to participate in field trips and excursions to colleges, businesses and educational places of interest.

Table 24 continues

	Reading materials concerning postgraduate opportunities including universities, armed services and school-to-work will be provided.
	Students will be aligned with resources persons within Danville.
	Mentors will be acquired for those interested students to partake.
	Students will give and partake in holiday feasts.

APPENDIX E

Opportunity School 1993-94 - Alignment of Goals with

Process & Academic Objectives

Table 25

Opportunity School 1993-94 Alignment of Goals with Process & Academic Objectives

	Process Objectives	Academic Objectives
A. Reduced dropouts	1, 7, 9, 10	1, 2
B. Academic Success	2,5,6,8,9,10	1,2,3,4,5
C. Readiness for a college preparatory or tech-prep curriculum	3,5,9	1, 3
D. Close monitoring upon return to ninth grade to ensure continued success		2
E. Preparation for college	3, 4	2

APPENDIX F

Goals, objectives, strategies, timeline, and evaluation of

the Opportunity School 1993-1996

Table 26
DPS Alternative Education Program: Opportunity School **Process Objectives** 1993-94

TABLE 26
DPS Alternative Education Program: Opportunity School
Process Objectives 1993-94

Process Objectives	Strategies	Timeframe	Evaluation
1. The Danville Public will develop an Opportunity School for students in grades 6-8 who aren't experiencing success in the traditional school setting.	Sixty students will be enrolled in the OS in the fall of 1993 in a nontraditional setting. The selection of the administration and teachers who have had success with at-risk students through acceleration and personal support will ensure the success of the venture	Fall 1993	Actual implementation of program within specified timeframe.
2. The Opportunity School will be a school without failure with high expectations for each	The students will engage in a continuous process curriculum without failure. High expectations will be in order for all students, with demonstrated mastery being the key to successful achievement.	Fall 1993	Student's end of year report card. No retentions reported for 1993-94.
3. A pre-college preparatory curriculum will be established.	The rigors of the curriculum and the strategies for achievement will place students in the position to pursue college-bound work in the ninth grade. Appropriate steps will be taken to ensure proper articulation of the curriculum with a ninth grade college preparatory or tech-pre curriculum.	Upon each student's reentry to regular curriculum.	Students' placement schedule; reflects courses aligned with college or tech-prep requirements
4. Cooperative ventures with colleges will be established.	Students will utilize college libraries for research projects and will experience the positive role models of selected college students and faculty.	Fall 1993	Visits to local colleges and contact with selective college students as mentors.
5. Supportive technology will be available in each classroom.	Five computers will be placed in each classroom along with printers and appropriate software. In addition, a 3 tie-in with the division's central computer system (IBM AS400) will allow flagging and monitoring of all students.	Fall 1993	Computers, printers, and software utilized in classrooms.

TABLE 26
DPS Alternative Education Program: Opportunity School
Process Objectives 1993-94

6. An integrated curriculum will be implemented.	Using science as the vehicle for thematic units, an integrated curriculum of language arts, math, science, and social studies will be in place. Extensive planning by the team of teachers will facilitate the process.	Summer 1993	Implementation of integrated curriculum--lesson plans and students work.
7. Multiple mentoring and other one-to-one relationships will be established with the students.	Community mentors will be selected to work with the sixty students. In addition, central office and other school personnel will have weekly contact with selected students.	Summer and fall 1993	Mentors assigned and log of visits.
8. Flexible scheduling will be used to accommodate students.	The continuous progress curriculum will allow for grouping across the grade level for master.	Summer and Fall 1993	Observation of implementation of flexible schedule and hard copy of schedule matrix.
9. AEP's (Alternative Education Plans) will be developed for each student.	The specific strengths and weaknesses of each student will be analyzed. Accordingly, an individualized instructional plan will be established to ensure student success. The student's AEP will be developed from a holistic perspective. Thus, products will be evaluated from the same perspective.	Summer 1993	AEP for each student.
10. An extended year will be provided for any student needing additional time to master essential objectives.	Through continual evaluation teachers will determine the needs of their students. If students need extended year time, that time will be strongly recommended to parents.	Summer 1994	Number of students participating in the extended year program.

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Table 27

DPS Alternative Education Program: Opportunity School **Academic Objectives** 1993-94

TABLE 27
DPS Alternative Education Program: Opportunity School
Academic Objectives 1993-94

Process Objectives	Strategies	Timeframe	Evaluation
1.Ninety percent of the students completing three years in the OS will enter a college-bound or tech curriculum in the ninth grade.	An accelerated pre-college preparatory curriculum will prepare students to enter a regular college preparatory program in the ninth grade.	Fall 1996	Results of students who enter a regular college preparatory program in the ninth grade.
2. Ninety-five percent of the students completing at least one year in the Opportunity School will complete high school.	All students participating in OS will be monitored very closely during the remainder of their time in the public schools in Danville. Frequent counseling will ensure retention in school and graduation from George Washington High School.	Ongoing	Documentation (log/daily planner) with students to monitor and their progress and counseling sessions provided.
3. Overall achievement of the Opportunity School students will equal or exceed that of regular school students on local developed criterion and performance assessment of Danville Essential Objectives.	As formative assessments are administered, comparative performances of OS students and other students will be evaluated. The integrated curriculum, mentoring, peer assistance, and small classes will combine to help students improve their academic achievement.	Fall 1993	Comparison of performance of OS students with other students. Data from standardized test.
4. Six graders in the OS will perform at or above the division average on the Literacy Passport Test.	Intense preparation in reading comprehension, math, and composition (including computerized monitoring) will assist six grade students in the program to perform at or above the division average on the LPT. The LPT plan will be a component of each student's AEP.	Spring 1994	Scores on the LPT; Literacy Development Plan included in each student's AEP.
5. All OS students will satisfactorily achieve the essential instructional objectives, either during the regular year or the extended year.	Through continuous progress and careful monitoring, OS students will be enabled to complete essential instructional objectives by the end of the extended year. Continuous formative evaluation will apprise students and their parents of achievement toward performance goals.	Fall 1993	Documentation in student's records.

Table 28
 DPS Alternative Education: Areas of Focus in 1993-94 Evaluation Parallel

EVALUATION FOCUS	STRATEGIES	TIMEFRAME	EVALUATION
Longitudinal study of students enrolled in the OS will profile the percentage of students who have been prepared to enter college and those who chose to enroll.	Use AS 400 to access students' academic profile at end of senior year in high school. Track OS students who enter college, community college or vocational school after graduation.	Ongoing	Documentation of reports.
A particular focus on the evaluation will be adaptive implementation of the OS and the developmental changes occurring in user-reported attitudes toward teaching, attitudes toward students, teaching strategies, and sense of professional self.	The intended as well as the unintended changes reported by teachers, administrators and students will be documented. Teachers and students will keep records of self-improvement in portfolios reflecting their experiences.	Spring 1994	Student and teacher portfolios and documentation of analysis of interviews with teachers and administrators.

Table 29

DPS Alternative Education Program: Opportunity School Goals and Objectives 1994-95

TABLE 29
DPS Alternative Education Program: Opportunity School
ACADEMIC OBJECTIVES 1994-95

Goals	Strategies	Timeframe	Evaluation
1. Facilitate student achievement	Through continuous progress and careful monitoring, OS students will complete essential instructional objectives by the end of the extended year. Continuous formative evaluation will apprise students and their parents of achievement toward performance goals.	Spring 1995	Students' grades and number of subjects passed.
2. Increase college awareness	Visit at least four college campuses in Virginia.	Spring 1995	Documentation of visits to colleges.
3. Career Exploration	a. Career Indicator Activity b. Service Learning Project	Spring 1995	a. Students participation in Career Exploration Week. b. Participation of 50% of students in community based projects
4. Aligning community agencies with the school.	Form alliances with various support agencies in the community.	Spring 1995	Collaboration and participation with organization documented via, minutes from meetings and contact with students.
5. Develop Alternative Education Plans (AEP) for students.	Specific strengths and weaknesses of each student will be analyzed. Accordingly, an individualized instructional plan will be established to ensure student success. Student's AEP will be developed (holistic perspective).	September 1994	Student's AEP

Table 30

 DPS Alternative Education Program: Opportunity School Goals and Objectives 1995-96

TABLE 30
DPS Alternative Education Program: Opportunity School
Goals and Objectives 1995-96

Goals	Strategies	Timeframe	Evaluation
1. The OS's first goal is to provide a warm and caring environment in conjunction with a strong educational program that will be conducive to learning for students as well as staff.	Improve school climate: a. Change locations. b. Have plants and art work throughout the building. c. Staff training and involvement of parents and community. d. Student-teacher ratio will continue to be 1:15 (or less). Expand the guidance department to encompass career exploration and development, vocational assessment and school-community agency alliance.	a. Summer 1995 b. Fall 1995 c. Ongoing-June 1996 d. Fall 1995	a/b. New site; evidence of art work and plants in the building. c. Documentation of staff development (workshops, conferences) and parental and community involvement. d. Class rosters; evidence of expansion plans and programs.
3. The curriculum will encompass college preparatory classes.	a. All classes will have a college preparatory focus. High school students will be offered 7 credit courses. b. Drivers' education and vocation classes offered off campus at the high school.	Fall 1995 - Spring 1996	a. Teachers' lesson plans; class schedule. b. AS 400, class roster, students' schedule, grades and students' performance.

TABLE 30
DPS Alternative Education Program: Opportunity School
Goals and Objectives 1995-96

4. A major goal of the OS is to raise students' self-esteem through the incorporation of character development, control theory, peer mediation and conflict resolution.	a. Integrate character development, control theory and restitution. Train guidance counselor and administrative specialist in Glasser's Control Theory/Reality Therapy. b. The book In Pursuit of Happiness will be used in a developmental course with students. c. In-service of Alfie Kohn's Punished by Rewards. d. Celebrate academic and social success. e. Train students in peer mediation and conflict resolution training.	Fall 1995 - Spring 1996	a. Documentation of practice (plans/logs). b. Course syllabus, students' work. c. Roster from in-service. d. List and date of activities. e. Plans, date (s) of training and roster of participants
5. The OS will integrate supportive technology to assist in student records management, instruction, and learning.	a. Implementation of NCS's Abacus Instructional Management Software and provide continuous support in the use of technology for all employees. b. Upgrade and increase the number of computers in each classroom (present status; 4) DOS/IBM in each middle school class and 4 are shared by the high school class.	a. Fall 1995 b. January 1996	a. Purchased software; utilization of software by teachers to aide instruction and assessment; students' portfolios. b. Additional computers in classroom and increased memory in old computers.
6. Opportunity School students will increase their participation in the Service Learning Program.	a. Students will participate in the decision making process concerning where services will be provided. b. Integrate within the academic curriculum.	Fall 1995 - Spring 1996	a. Date of meetings, participation, and activities with students. b. Lesson and unit plans.

TABLE 30
DPS Alternative Education Program: Opportunity School
Goals and Objectives 1995-96

7. Foster whole life education by involving the school, family, community, and work force in the educational process. Also, the OS strives to broaden students' awareness of the outside school.	a. Invite parents and students to a preschool orientation for prospective students. Provide transportation per need. b. Form a Parent Teacher Association. c. Home visits to ensure communication and involvement with families. d. For community involvement, acquire mentors for at least 25% of the student population and have students shadow persons in the community for career exploration. e. Incorporation of career exploration through each discipline throughout the year.	a/b. Fall 1995 - Spring 1996 c. Fall 1995 - Spring 1996 d/e. Winter 1995 - Spring 1996	a. Invitations to parents and students (pictures) b. Names of officers in the organization and membership roster. c. Log, journal, written feedback from parents visited. d. Names of students mentors and dates. List of activities. e. Lesson plans and students' work.

APPENDIX G

Interview Questions

Teachers & Administrator

Former Teachers & Administrator of OS

Questions on Size: 1
1.1 What is the maximum enrollment? Why?
1.2 What is/was the average student-teacher ratio?
1.3 Does this have any influence on students' learning or discipline?
1.4 What is the optimal ratio? Why?

Questions on Site: 2
2.1 Why was this location selected?
2.1 What influence does the location of the school and the condition of the school have on the public perception of the Opportunity school?
2.3 Do you feel the community, where the school is located, has any impact or influence (positive, negative, indifferent) on the school's program?

Questions on VOLUNTEERISM: 3
3.1 What characteristics describe the students in this program?
3.2 Was pre-college potential a characteristic?
3.3 What method(s) were used to select the first group of students in the program?
3.4 Did student have a choice in whether or not they wanted to participate in the program?
3.5 How were the teachers selected?
3.6 Were teachers provided with any special preparation or training?
3.7 What characteristics are desirable for a teacher in an alternative education setting?
3.8 Would you describe the program as punitive, therapeutic, remedial, or nonpunitive? Explain.
3.9 What percentage of students choose to remain in the program after required placement through long-termed suspension?

Questions on Participatory Decision Making: 4
4.1 How were parents and students involved in the initial planning and daily operations.
4.2 Were there programs or activities that empowered students in the decision making?
4.3 What role does the community play in the function of the OS?

Questions on Distinctive Family Mission: 5
5.1 What was the initial mission of the OS?
5.2 What is the present mission of the OS ?
5.3 Initially, what was the operational philosophical foundation of the school?
5.4 What's the mission or vision of the OS? Do you think it's practiced by the faculty and staff in the building? Explain.
5.5 Did you consider the program successful at the end of the first year? Explain
5.6 What would you like to see in the future for the OS?
   (follow-up) What's the biggest obstacle?

Questions on Flexible Teacher roles: 6
6.1 Describe the role(s) of teachers?

Questions on Social Service: 7
7.1 What involvement did social service type programs have in the overall OS program?
7.2 What provisions were made for teenagers with children?

Question on Technology: 8
8.1 How technologically equipped is the school?
8.2 How is technology infused into the curriculum?

Questions on Curriculum: 9
9.1 How would you describe the curriculum? How is it different from regular education?
9.2 What teaching strategies are used?
9.3 Were AEP developed for students?
9.4 How are the needs of the "whole child" met?
   Is it possible?
9.5 Did you consider the program successful at the end of the first year? Explain.
9.6 What programs are available in the areas of vocational and special education?

Questions on Separate Administrative Unit: 10
10.1 Describe the leadership style of the first administrator in comparison with the present administrator.
10.2 How has the change in leadership impacted or affected the program?

APPENDIX H

Focus Group Discussion

Questions: Sessions 1, 2 & 3

Goals 1 (95-96)
1.1 If you had to describe your experiences at the OS in two to three words what would they be and why?

1.2 Complete this sentence. The OS is a school where teachers and administrators....

Objective: D--Goal 1 (95-96)
2.1 How would you describe your classes? Were they organized, homework etc.

Objective: B--Goal 1 (95-96)
2.2 Describe the general tone of voices used by the adults towards the students.

Objective: E--Goal 1 (95-96)
2.3 What opportunities were available for open discussion of student issues or concerns
2.4 Do you consider the adults in the building role models?

Goal 2 (95-96)
3.1 How would you describe the self-esteem of the students in the school? Explain with
    What about your self-esteem?
3.2 How does the school influence students' self-esteem?

Objective: C--Goal 2 (95-96)
3.3 Do teachers and staff know you as a person as well as a student? Examples.

Process Objective: 7 (93-94); Objective: E--Goal 4 (95-96); Goal 7 (95-96)
3.4 Did anyone have a mentor from the school or community?

Objective A--Goal 3 (95-96)
3.5 Did you participate in Service Learning?

CURRICULUM
Goal 2 (95-96)
4.1 Describe the teaching style of your teachers.

Process Objective: 5 (93-94)
4.2 How often did you use technology such as computers, graphing calculators, video, laser disc, electronic microscope etc.?

Objective: B--Goal 4 (95-96)
4.3 What kind of field trips did you go on? and how frequently?
Process Objective:6 (93-94)

4.4 How were the subjects presented? separate--integrated?

Process Objective: 9 (93-94); Goal 5 (94-95) ;Goal 2(strategy d) 95-96
4.5 Was an AEP developed for you?

Process Objective:3 (93-94)
Goal 3 (95-96)
4.6 Was the curriculum pre-college preparatory or tech prep?

Process Objective:4 (93-94)
4.7 Did you ever visit DCC or Averett library? Did you do a research
project?

Goal 2 (strategy a) 95-96
4.8 How often did you have lab activities in science?

Goal 5 (95-96)
4.9 Do you feel you are adept at using the computer? What specific program do you use?

Acclimation to Regular Education

Strategy--Process Objective 2 (93-94)
5.1 What process occurred once you returned to reg. ed.

Process Objective 2 (93-94)
5.2 Did the counselor (OS or base school) meet with you?
5.3 How did you feel when you returned?

Process Objective 3 (93-94)
5.4 Were you academically prepared?

5.5 Why do you think some students have a hard time successfully returning to their base
school?

Goal 1 (95-96)
6.1 Is the environment at the OS safe, orderly, and drug free?
6.2 How are parents involved in the school's program?
6.3 How is the community involved in the school's program?

Goal 6 (95-96); Kellmayer Indicator 4:Participatory Decision Making

7.1 Do you feel students are included in some of the decision-making process of the school?

Objective for Goal 1 (95-97); Kellmayer Indicator 8
Flexible Teacher Roles and Program Autonomy
7.2 Are there opportunities for you to discuss your concerns etc. with teachers, counselors, or administrators?
7.3 What do you think other think about the OS?
7.4 What do you think can be done to change the perception of the school?

Administrative Changes
8.1 Compare and contrast the first year of the program with the present program.
8.2 Describe the different administrative styles of the principals.
8.3 Compare this school with regular education program (base).
8.4 What changes would you make at the OS?

APPENDIX I

Student Questionnaire on Satisfaction

The Opportunity School

1996-97

Student Questionnaire on Satisfaction: The Opportunity School
1996-97

This questionnaire is designed to help determine students' satisfaction with the OS program. Please complete this survey to the best of your ability, honestly expressing your opinions. All information shared will be confidential. Do not put your name on this sheet.

Please choose from the following options as you respond to these statements.

strongly disagree   strongly agree
          0   1   2   3   4   5

1. I feel I am getting a good education at the Opportunity School.

strongly disagree   strongly agree
          0   1   2   3   4   5

2. The teachers and principal in the Opportunity School are willing to help me when I need help.

strongly disagree   strongly agree
          0   1   2   3   4   5

3. My teachers use a variety of teaching materials, such as games, group work, computers and hands on activities to help me learn.

strongly disagree   strongly agree
          0   1   2   3   4   5

4. The teachers and principal in the Opportunity School encourage and motivate me to do my very best.

strongly disagree   strongly agree
          0   1   2   3   4   5

5. The teachers and principal care about me as a student and a person.

strongly disagree   strongly agree
          0   1   2   3   4   5

6. I would recommend the Opportunity School to other students.

strongly disagree   strongly agree
          0   1   2   3   4   5

7. I would like to continue my education in the Opportunity School.

strongly disagree   strongly agree

       0   1   2   3   4   5

8. The Opportunity School provides more individual attention than my other school.

strongly disagree   strongly agree

       0   1   2   3   4   5

9. This is a good school.

strongly disagree   strongly agree

       0   1   2   3   4   5

10.   I like this school.

strongly disagree   strongly agree

       0   1   2   3   4   5

APPENDIX J

Former and Present

Opportunity School Staff Interviewed

Appendix J includes selected excerpts from the five adults interviewed for this study. The five adults represent:

- interviewee 1, former OS administrator,

- interviewee 2, former teacher,

- interviewee 3, present teacher in OS,

- interviewee 4, present OS administrator and

- interviewee 5, present teacher in the OS.

The participants were selected based on their tenure in the program, whether they were in the original program, former teachers/administrator and present teachers/administrator. A brief biographical sketch is presented on each individual, followed by selected excerpts of some of their comments. Interviewees were interviewed individually. All sessions were approximately 60 minutes and were audiotaped and transcribed.

Interviewee Number 1
Former teacher (1993 - 1995, Feb.) &
Administrator of OS (1995, Feb.- June)
Identified in study as Administrator 1

This individual was also a teacher in the program the first year. She assumed the duties and responsibilities of administrator when the first administrator left the program mid-year of the second year. She was recruited into the program by the first administrator. She worked with the team of five teachers who developed the first Opportunity School program. She believed in the concept, which focused on reaching students who had potential, possibly for college, but lacked motivation. She left the

program in 1996 to accept an assistant principal position in DPS.

When asked to describe the program as it is now compared to the initial program

she comments:

> I saw it evolve. I was there. The initial direction of the school was to provide
>
> opportunities for students who were college bound but weren't currently
>
> succeeding. It was obvious, not simply by ability, but after interviewing each
>
> student the first year that many of them simply had no interest in college. They
>
> wanted a further education. They wanted vocation but they didn't necessary want
>
> to go to college (interview, 10/96).

Interviewee Number 2
Former Teacher of OS
1993-94
Identified in study as Teacher 1

This individual taught in the program the first year (1993-94). She was involved

in developing the curriculum and other aspects of the program with the team of five

teachers. She worked under the first administrator. She applied for the program under the

premise of working 12 months, thus increasing her salary, and with a small group of

students who were *not* targeted as discipline problems.

Her comments on student volunteerism were:

> …[t]hese children were being promised college scholarship if they stayed in the
>
> program. That's why a lot of the children were recommended. That was what was
>
> being touted; you send these children who are at-risk and we'll put them in this

alternative setting and when they finish it, they will have a college

scholarship….[w]e discovered there was just a tiny amount of money, like a

thousand dollars…. (interview, 11/96)

Interviewee Number 3
Teacher in OS
1993- present
Identified in study as Teacher 2

This individual is a veteran teacher in Danville Public Schools and has taught for

more than 24 years. She was asked if she was interested in working in an alternative

setting. She accepted the offer after much thought and a sense that maybe she could help

this group of students. She has taught in the OS program since its inception in 1993. She

is loyal to the program's mission and dedicated to the students. She has seen the program

evolve and when she was asked to comment on the different administrators and their

leadership she stated:

I think experience counts a lot. I think if you are really dedicated and you have a

number of years under your belt….Mr.—(first administrator) was young. I think

they (students) looked at him as one of the boys. I really do…. I felt the students

really didn't take him seriously as they should have. The second year, being a

woman (reference to second administrator), I feel like the boys and some of the

girls felt like they still had a reason to try to get over….She had to really tighten

her belt to let them know that her being a woman doesn't mean you're going to

get away with it. She went by the school code and let them know. Mr. -- (current

principal) came in; he had taught a lot of the students at the middle school as well as he was their principal. Some of the students had already passed the word about what he was like and what he expected out of them so there wasn't a lot they could get away with (interview, 11/96).

Interviewee Number 4
Administrator of OS
1995- present
Identified in study as Administrator 2
Administrator 2 is the third principal of the OS. He was a former middle school teacher and principal. He has taught in the Danville Public Schools for more than 23 years. He also taught many of the students or their siblings in the OS. He is well respected in the community. He is characterized as principle-centered, intelligent, strong disciplinary and a student advocate. He states the following regarding his task when he became principal of the OS.

> When I came on as principal of the OS, I had to redo a lot of things that have been done incorrectly. That is no slander on the person that was there. It was just the fact that if you don't have experience at doing something, you go astray. The program lacked a lot of stability….there were some changes that had to be made in order for the program to continue (interview, 12/95).

Commenting on students' learning and discipline he states:

> Yes, size was a big factor and as far as achievement is concerned, it helps our program to have this 12:1 ratio. My first year, last year (1995) was not a year I

was really focusing in on academics and passing standards of learning (SOLs) and

essential objectives and the literacy passport (LPT). That was not my goal my

goal was mostly to get the students to know the teacher and the teacher to know

the students. I wanted the entire faculty, staff and student body to recognize that

there were changes that needed to be made in order for this school to be more

effective. So, I did not focus in on test scores and all that kind of stuff (interview,

12/96).

Interviewee Number 5
Teacher in OS
1993 - present
Identified in study as Teacher 3
   Teacher number 3 has been in the educational system in Danville Public Schools

for more than 31 years. He is a member of the original team of teachers of the OS.

Students and other teachers consider him a role model for the students. This individual is

well respected by his colleagues throughout the school system. When asked about the

merger of the Phoenix School and the OS he states the following:

   The first year we had them (OS students), it took us anywhere from four to five

   months to really reach them, to turn them around….They were moving ahead;

   they had grasped what we were all about. Their self esteem had come up and they

   had begun to be able to relate to each other and hostilities had subsided. Then out

   of the blue sky because we've had a successful year, our next year the bomb was

   dropped on us. Because we all had done so well, we're going to combine the

Phoenix School and the Opportunity School. It was just total chaos (interview,

12/96).

His comments on the different administrators was:

The administration that we have now in the OS is 100 percent different from what

we had. This administration, the person is an experience administrator…I think

the present administration has some meaningful attributes about the program. The

program is moving forward; it's not stagnant…. Philosophically, I think that we

have an administrator and administration now that is much more open and more

concerned about all of its students and all of its staff and faculty as opposed to the

prior administration (interview, 12/96).

VITA

<u>Education</u>

　　Shelia P. Jackson was born April 12, 1955, in Chester, South Carolina. In

1973, she graduated from Salisbury High in Salisbury, North Carolina. She then

entered North Carolina Agricultural & Technical State University (N. C. A&T),

located in Greensboro, N. C. and in 1977 she earned a Bachelor of Science degree

in Health and Physical Education. In 1980, she received a Master of Science

degree in Health and Physical Education from the University of North Carolina at

Chapel Hill (UNC-CH). In 1988 she began the Master of Administration degree

at N. C. A&T State University and completed the requirements for this degree in

1990. She completed requirements for the Doctor of Education in Educational

Administration at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in the Fall of

1998.

<u>Experience</u>

　　Upon completion of her M. S. degree from UNC-CH in 1980, she returned

to Greensboro, N. C. and began her career in education in the Guilford County

School System. She taught at the middle school level in the area of Health and

Physical Education. Upon completion of her Master of Administration degree

from N. C. A. & T. State University in 1990, she

pursued a position in administration as an assistant principal. In the fall of 1991

she began her administrative career as an assistant principal at McLeansville

Middle School in Guilford County. While an assistant principal, she began her

doctoral program in the fall of 1993. In 1997 she became principal of Y. E. Smith

Science & Technology Magnet Elementary School in Durham, North Carolina,

and continues in this position to date.

Shelia P. Jackson