

Transformative-based Alternative Education Program: A Study of Teacher and
Leadership Perceptions

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of study was to identify the perceptions of school leaders regarding the effectiveness of an alternative education transformative day program following the first year of implementation. While some divisions were dissolving their alternative education programs, the school division highlighted within this study prioritized and revitalized the division's alternative education program from a behavior-based night program to a transformative-based day program. The goal of this study was to collect and analyze data that could present next steps for the transformative-based alternative education program in order for division and school-based leaders to continue refining and improving upon the existing foundation established during its inaugural implementation year.

The selection of a purposeful sample was used to meet the objective of the study. The sample size for this study included a combination of up to 15 alternative education teachers, principals, and central office leadership members. The research interventions and investigational agents for this study included approved web-based surveys via Qualtrics and virtual interviews for data collection. The study's survey instrument included one twenty question survey session, and voluntarily respondents participated in a ten-question virtual interview via Google Meetings. Interview questions probed beyond the survey questions in order to provide qualitative data obtained from division and school-based alternative education leadership.

The findings of this study, which include the value of stakeholder perception, alternative approach, climate and culture, and alternative course offerings/credit recover, could provide alternative education leaders with tangible next steps for program development by identifying elements necessary for growth and program success as noted by the stakeholders themselves. By analyzing the perceptions of alternative education teachers, principals, and central office leadership, data presented can lead to intentional measures for revising, growing and furthering the existing success of the transformative-based program. Additionally, recommendations for future study, such as how to increase the program's perception to stakeholders of the transformative-based program, could be used to inspire subsequent studies and to support

division leadership when finalizing decisions regarding funding, program implementation, and professional development.

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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

By prioritizing alternative education, a small rural school division has reconstructed its former behavior-based night program into a transformative-based day program in order to best combat the difficulties that plague the alternative population in America today. The history of alternative education in contrast to the needs of today's alternative education learners has been presented within the Literature Review. The perceptions of the transformative-based alternative education program were the target audience for this research study. This study was designed to examine the perceptions of alternative education teachers, principals, and central office leadership regarding the development of a transformative, alternative education day program in a small rural Virginia school division. These data were obtained throughout the survey completion and virtual interviews of 15 stakeholders of the transformative-based program. The study revealed four findings and four implications. One limitation to the study was the small sample size. A suggestion for future study would involve obtaining permission to conduct student research participants in order to explore data from the student perspective for the purpose of restructuring the program's needs as based upon student data.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to teen parents and alternative education participants around the world. While I never intended to change the world with my study, perhaps an unintended bi-product of my work is that some young person, somewhere, will be inspired by my journey. Perhaps they, too, will realize that the sky truly is the limit and that the only true way to fail is to quit – or worse, to never try. I will be the first in my family to earn a Doctorate Degree, and I would never have believed someone if they tried to tell me that it would be me. Sometimes life's unexpected challenges are bestowed upon us in order to pave the way for life's greatest accomplishments. Don't ever give up on a goal, and moreover, do not ever accept the word "No". There is always a way. To the educators in my life, both past and present, thank you for the selfless work that you do while inspiring today's youth to become the great leaders of tomorrow.

To my amazing family who has each contributed their unique mark on my educational journey. Whether it was help with my children, a well needed embrace, inspiration to carry on, or a supportive shoulder to cry on, I would never have made it through this journey if not for you. One thing I have learned throughout this process is that a dissertation is not completed by the efforts of one, it is instead a challenge that must be endured by many. Thank you for your unwavering support and encouragement as I set out to complete, what felt to me, the impossible. It is the accomplishment of many, and we shall celebrate as many!

To my sons, Christopher, Ethan, and Hollis, you may not understand this, but without each of you, this accomplishment would never have become a reality. Christopher – you created this journey. I knew that because of you, my life would require great change, so I went to community college. As you got older and began your formal education, I recognized that I could contribute to the field of education in ways that exceeded being a parent and responsible citizen, so I changed my major. Ethan, your dedication and determination to be successful in school has inspired me to do the same, and so I have continued earning degrees that I never thought I would possess. The way you have championed me throughout my Doctoral program is truly remarkable. You are wise beyond your years. Your completion of high school/start of college, and the ways in which it paralleled my Doctoral journey, has been uniquely impactful and incredibly helpful to me. Thank you for walking the walk with me. Hollis, I have tried my best to spare you the lost hours and time that it took me away from you. The world is changing, and it

takes more and more to be able to make it in the world today. I did this to help you live a life that you could be proud of, and I hope that along the way, I have instilled a passion for learning within you that you will be able to carry forward to your children, my grandchildren.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Background

Technological advancements of the twenty-first century have had an impact on alternative education, but technology has perhaps never been more relevant than it has been during the COVID-19 pandemic as students across the country were forced into receiving virtual instruction from their homes or other alternate locations. As a byproduct of virtual learning, students (in some form) have inadvertently entered the realm of alternative education. Alternative education presents an opportunity to “provide all students, especially those with challenging behaviors, low motivation, poor attendance, failing grades, or those afraid to even walk into the school building, with an engaging and enriching educational experience,” (Mailett, 2017, p. 234).

Alternative Education has evolved from a disciplinary approach to a transformative one where the needs of students are centered at the core of program design, (Kleiner, Porch, & Farris, 2002, p. 10). As presented by Kleiner et al. (2002) from the inception of alternative education schools in the late 1960s, to the 2000-2001 academic year, 1.3% of all public-school students (612,000 students) were served in an alternative education environment. In order to deepen the conceptual understanding of this study, Raywid’s work was referenced to outline three categories of alternative education: Type I, *Popular Innovations*, Type II, *Last Chance*, and Type III, *Remedial Focused*, (Raywid, 1994). For the purpose of study, the current model of instruction implemented in the small rural Virginia school division, during the 2019-2020 implementation, intertwines all three of Raywid’s proposed categories for Alternative Education.

Previously, the site selected for this study operated under an alternative education program design that was behavior-based and transient by design. The purpose of the alternative night program was to provide an outlet for instruction during the duration that candidates were unable to attend their home school. The program design was not intended to deliver long-term instruction. There was no intentional emphasis on students’ social-emotional well-being. Additionally, course offerings were minimal, and transportation was not provided. While it is important to note that transformative program stemmed from the original behavior-based program, it is also worth mentioning that the staff has also undergone a transition and many

original staff members who served under the behavior-based program are no longer employed with the division's transformative day program.

Statement and Significance of the Problem

Considering the academic, emotional, and societal challenges presented to the public education system, a foundational re-evaluation of Alternative Education should be explored in order to meet the dynamic needs of today's learners as summarized by Raywid's philosophy that cited, (with regard to alternative education) "one size does not fit all" (Raywid, 1994, pp. 26-31). In order to investigate the needs of modern-day alternative education, it was necessary to explore both the needs of students and building-level leadership but also to examine the effectiveness of existing programs via student and personnel efficacy and outcomes. Elements leading to the problems contained within this study included increasing occurrences of student discipline, a rise in social-emotional and/or mental health cases, and students who were underperforming in the general education environment.

According to educationdata.org, in 2017 nearly 500,000 students attended alternative education programs throughout the United States, but unfortunately, over half of those alternative education schools had graduation rates lower than 50%. This study established a potential for providing data to help leaders drive future decisions regarding the conceptual design in which individual alternative education programs are formed. Leaders will be empowered; teachers will be empowered; students will be empowered. On the contrary, if modifications to the current trends in alternative education fail to undergo further examination, student outcomes could continue to trend as follows: over half of high school dropouts receive public assistance, young women who drop out of high school are nine times more likely to become single mothers, and nearly 83% of incarcerated persons are high school dropouts.

In addition to giving considerations regarding why alternative education students are underperforming, consideration should also be given towards exploring the reasons why building level staff are unable to support the needs of these students. If improvements to instruction and climate are to be made, the impact on students' performance outcomes will undergo positive impact as a result. For example, as modeled in Bustamante's 2020 study, 40% of males and 35% of females were receiving poor grades or failing classes. Approximately 30% of males and 35% females felt that they could not keep up with schoolwork. Additionally, 28% of males and 22% of females felt that they could not get along with teachers while 23% of males and 9% of females

had been suspended (Bustamante, 2020). Participants of alternative education should not be underperforming in the very arena that was designed to meet the needs of alternative learners. As a result, further attention should be provided towards the consideration of alternative learners' characteristics, trends, and common areas of need within alternative programs to combat the trends outlined above.

In 2019, the subject of this study, a small rural Virginia school division embarked on a mission to transition its former disciplinary-based night school alternative education program into a transformative day program in order to better meet the growing needs of the division's alternative education stakeholders. According to the [PublicSchoolreview.com](https://www.publicschoolreview.com) website, in 2019, the division hosted 706 secondary students - an increase of over 8% throughout the last five school years. As reported on the Virginia Department of Education (2017), the five day per week transformative day program provides individualized group instruction for core academic subjects.

While core content areas were prioritized, the site recognized the alternative approaches necessary for alternative education students to achieve success when they were unable to be successful in a general education environment. As such, additional measures were taken to implement elective courses for students to be provided with a well-rounded academic experience as they worked towards the goal of returning to the traditional learning environment. The school division sought a solution to help allow access to alternative education students that would appeal to their educational needs versus an emphasis on providing a behavioral alternative until students could return to their home school.

By revamping the alternative education program, division and building level leaders could present themselves with valuable data that could potentially increase graduation rates while simultaneously decreasing behavior incidents simply by giving its learners the resources they need to be successful. As a result, students would also be able to use this opportunity to prioritize school while working or helping other students in the home. Would such changes lead to a rise in post formal education and/or trade programs? While there were many unknowns, what was apparent was that change was inevitable for this small rural Virginia school division.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of study was to identify the perceptions of school leaders regarding the effectiveness of an alternative education transformative day program following the first year of

implementation. Examining the development of a transformative, alternative education program in the Virginia school division, revealed information related to the perceptions that alternative education teachers and leadership have and how that information related to student performance outcomes. Once perceptions were identified, data were analyzed to determine the program's strengths, weaknesses, and areas for future consideration in order to continue providing the highest level of instruction for the alternative education population not only in this study, but in other divisions seeking change in their alternative education programs.

Research Questions

The research questions contained within this study are as follows:

1. What are the perceptions of teachers, principals, and central office leadership regarding their effectiveness in their roles as building leaders following the first year of program implementation?
2. What are the perceptions of teachers, principals, and central office leadership regarding the ways that program implementation has impacted building-level leadership's ability to meet students' needs?
3. What are the perceptions of teachers, principals, and central office leadership regarding the program's impact on school climate, behavior and academics?

Overview of the Study

Traditional Secondary Education is designed with students of average ability and intelligence in mind. Porowski, O'Conner, Lup, and ICF International, (2014), demonstrate how this antiquated mentality is no longer meeting the diverse needs of today's learners (Porowski et al. 2014, pp. 4-7). The affiliate used in this case study supports Porowski et al. (2014) when it decided to overhaul its disciplinary-based alternative education program and replace it with a transformative day program that emphasized student achievement instead of providing a place for safekeeping when students are sent as a result of a disciplinary consequence. In order to interpret data after the program's first year of implementation, a mixed-methods study was conducted using virtual interviews and electronic surveys (see Appendix A) with representatives from the staff and leadership of the Division's Alternative Education program. Interviews ranged from teachers, principals, and central office leadership in order to identify the connection

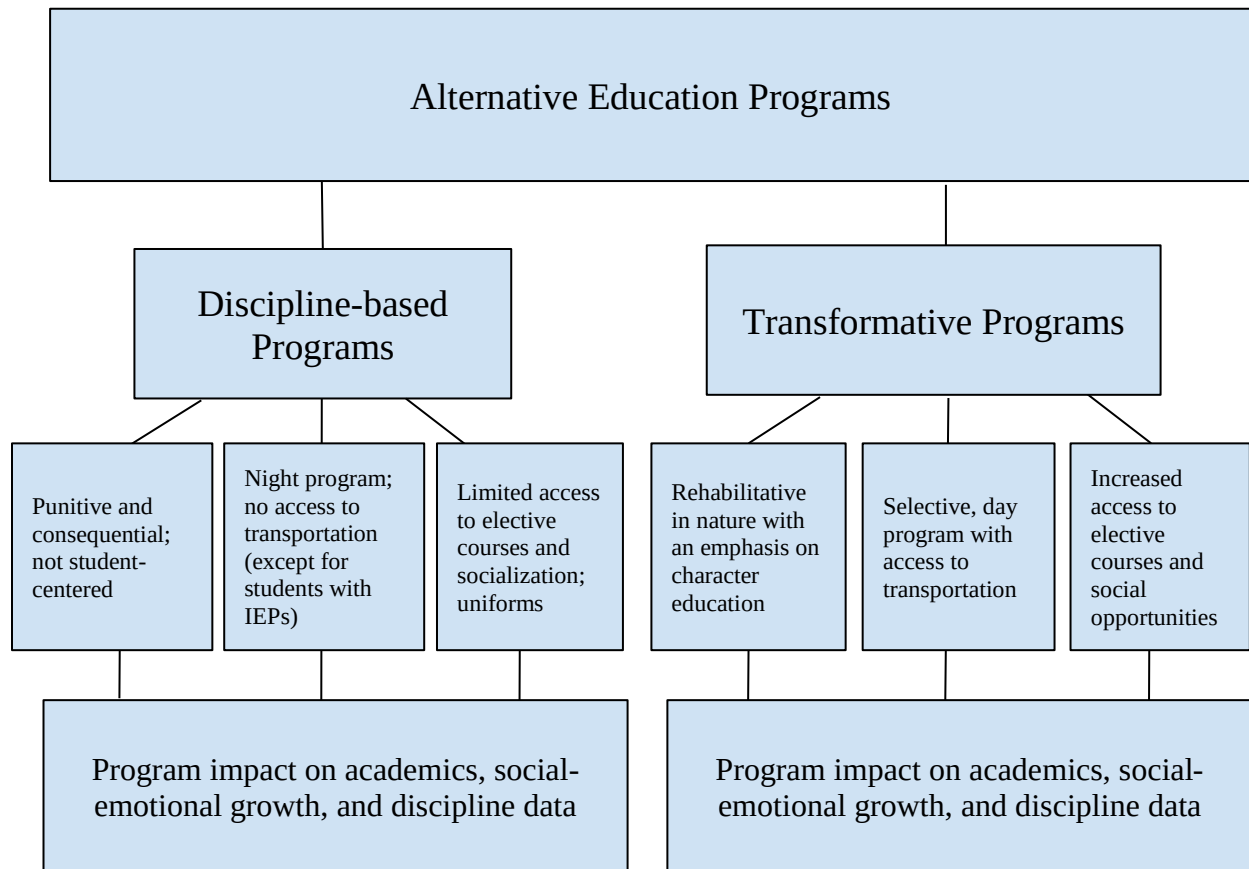
between the perceptions of program teachers, principals, and central office staff and student performance outcomes.

Conceptual Framework

As illustrated in the conceptual framework (which outlines a comparison of the two program models used within the study) alternative education can be divided into two sub-categories: discipline-based and transformative-based programs. Each sub-category is characterized by the school division with its own unique attributes. Distinctively, the discipline-based model features the following attributes: punitive-based discipline, not student-centered, a night program with limited access to transportation and a program with limited course offerings. Conversely, the transformative-based model includes the following features: rehabilitative and emphasizes character education, selective day program where transportation was provided, with increased course and social offerings. Both models of instruction intersect with their common goal of measuring program success with an emphasis on academic, social-emotional growth, and discipline data.

Figure 1

Alternative Education Programs



Definition of Terms

For clarification purposes, the researcher chose to define the following terms:

At-risk students - Students who are considered to have a higher probability of failing academically or dropping out of school (Edglossary.org, 2013).

Limitations of Study

Since there is no way to determine if the respondents' responses were altered due to the fact that this study would become publicly available, it is possible that the information provided was not an accurate representation of the alternative education staff represented in this case study which would result in a limitation to this research study. Additionally, it is also worth noting the

potential for the opinions of interviewees to have been persuaded following conversation and/or interaction with other division stakeholders.

Consideration should also be given to the way in which prior personal and professional experience may influence one's responses. In sum, it is simply not possible to have completely removed bias from the interviews and survey responses. Consequently, the potential for altered feedback does exist. Finally, one must consider the implications of using existing data from the year of the COVID-19 pandemic. During this time, students aborted the face-to-face environment beginning in March of 2019 and participated in virtual instruction for the remainder of the school year. While the students completed the remainder of the year in a virtual environment, the staff remained consistent, and for the purpose of study, data were deemed viable.

Though the study was conducted using a sample of purpose, an external threat to the validity of data obtained throughout the course of this study still existed. Those threats included sample size that resulted from the population of the small rural school division, and the secondary, alternative education emphasis. As a result, the study is not generalizable to all populations - traditional and/or elementary settings. The school division represented in this study was willing to participate in the study with the understanding that the sample size would be limited in nature.

Delimitations of Study

Delimitations are relevant in that this study was designed to use data from building level staff and leadership of a secondary alternative education program in order to identify the perceptions of staff and to establish a connection between staff perception and student performance. The results from this study may be of value to schools in a similar rural setting. Additionally, this study may be beneficial to other alternative programs seeking recommendations for future consideration.

Organization of Study

The organization of this study consisted of five chapters. In Chapter one, an overview of the study was provided, including a statement of the problem, purpose statement, research questions, definition of terms, limitations/delimitations, and the conceptual framework. Chapter two contained a literature review of prior empirical research relevant to the study. Chapter Three

contained, the methodology, the research questions, the purpose of study, the research design, and how the data collection instrument was defined. Additionally, with regard to the data collection process, the collection procedures, treatment, and analysis were determined and outlined accordingly.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Introduction

Alongside mental illness, behavior disorders, and at-risk behaviors, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 1997) provides an alternative lens into the need for providing students with “in-house” alternative education practices. In 1997, IDEA was amended to provide procedural safeguards that would protect students with special needs from being punished for behavior that results from their disability (IDEA, 1997). Regardless, students with special needs are twice as likely to be suspended as their grade level counterparts - six percent compared to a suspension rate of thirteen percent for students with special needs. Beyond the scope of mental illness and other special needs protected under Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), there is a rising category of behavior coined by Danker (2019) with the term, “willful defiance”. With the growing number of challenges presented to today’s youth, along with the increase in underperforming students, schools require strategies that serve the “alternative demographic” within homeschools across America (Danker, 2019, pp. 605-608).

Search Process

The research process for the review of literature began in June of 2019 and continued throughout August of 2021. Research was gathered to explore the most current trends in Alternative Education. Research was collected with the use of the following search terms: alternative education, at-risk students, at-risk behavior, mental health, existing models/programs for alternative education, alternative education strategies, and percentage of alternative education. The research contained within this literature review was primarily obtained from the Virginia Tech Library, Virginia Tech - Works, and Mendeley along with the following search engines: EBSCOhost, ProQuest, and Google Scholar.

Defining Alternative Education

Mills and McGregor (2017), suggest that alternative education is rooted in the findings of early educational theorist, Maria Montessori. “In terms of challenging the grammar of schooling, Montessori education focuses attention upon the internal psychological and developmental elements of each individual child so as to shape learning experiences” (Mills & McGregor, 2017,

para. 37). Frequently, today's public schools do not resemble practices rooted in Montessori theory, so where does that leave students who do not perform under the restrictions of a traditional public education? "Overall, we see a lack of coherence in terms of quality in alternative education provision, regardless of location. Some sites have philosophies and practices that open up new possibilities for their students, while others may actually limit student options because the schools neglect curricular aspects of their programs" (Mills & McGregor, 2017, para. 5).

Additionally, Aron (2006) suggests that alternative programs consist of the following: Schools or programs that are set up by states, school districts, or other entities to serve young people who are not succeeding in a traditional public-school environment. Alternative education programs offer students who are failing academically or may have learning disabilities, behavioral problems, or poor attendance an opportunity to achieve in a different setting and use different and innovative learning methods. While there are many kinds of alternative schools and programs, they are often characterized by their flexible schedules, smaller teacher-student ratios, and modified curricula (p. 6).

While alternative schools do not follow specific criteria, according to Raywid (1994), such schools fit into the following three categories:

- Type I alternatives, or *Popular Innovations*, are schools of choice and are usually popular. They sometimes resemble magnet schools and, in some localities, constitute some or all of the options in choice systems.
- Type II alternatives, or *Last-Chance*, are programs to which students are sentenced—usually as one last chance prior to expulsion. Type II programs focus on behavior modification, and little attention is paid to modifying curriculum or pedagogy.
- Type III alternatives, or *Remedial Focus*, are for students who are presumed to need remediation or rehabilitation—academic, social/emotional, or both. The assumption is that after successful treatment students can return to mainstream programs. (para. 6-12)

According to Mailett (2017), "Alternative schools can provide all students, especially those with challenging behaviors, low motivation, poor attendance, failing grades, or those afraid to even walk into the school building, with an engaging and enriching educational experience" (p. 234). If we cannot service these needs in an alternative setting, how can we bring alternative

education into our existing buildings? The work of Mills and McGregor (2017) provides insight into the evolution of alternative education, and Raywid's (1994) work helps to illustrate what an alternative school "looks" like, but what attributes constitute an *alternative* education - education that is alternative to what?

Alternative, Compared to What?

The Middle School experience can present a trying time of emotional instability and social adjustment. Developmentally, both males and females experience a time of great change - emotions are high due to hormonal increases; students frequently report being tired as a result of rapid growth and increased metabolism, and mentally, both genders seek a sense of belonging and experiment with self-exploration in an attempt to discover personalities, interests, and personal acceptance (Caldarella, Shatzer, Gray, Young, K. & Young, E., 2011). Research by Collishaw, Maughan, Goodman, and Pickles (2004) indicate that behavioral and emotional problems among adolescents have substantially increased over the past 25 years, and given the dramatic change that occurs during the middle grades years, it seems unlikely that a student arrives to his/her high school unscathed from the social-emotional damage endured during the time spent in American Middle Schools" (Collishaw et al., 2004, p. 1351)

According to Pennington (2003), successfully surviving in the 21st century economy increasingly requires that individuals not only complete high school, but also obtain education beyond high school (p. 5). Students deserve alternative education programs, but are we equipping our school leaders with the training necessary for implementing alternative education programs? As the rate of underperforming, demotivated secondary students increase, so does an awareness that quality alternative education is no longer optional - it is a necessity; yet, alternative education is not available to students needing it the most. Pennington (2003) supports this notion by suggesting that "federal dollars targeted toward out-of- school youth in spite of research base that supports that these practices work to best assist youth" (Pennington, 2003, p. 69).

Mailett (2017) stated, "Alternative schools can provide all students, especially those with challenging behaviors, low motivation, poor attendance, failing grades, or those afraid to even walk into the school building, with an engaging and enriching educational experience" (p. 234). A growing population of students require the teaching strategies and methodologies offered in alternative education, but we continue to limit student participation in off-campus alternative

education centers. Nevertheless, despite credible research, resources allocated bring students to alternative education instead of bringing alternative education to students in schools that already exist (Pendergast, Allen, McGregor, & Ronksley-Pavia, 2018, p. 3). As a result, and as noted by Mailett (2017) and Pendergast et al. (2018) additional studies examining in-house alternatives to traditional public education should be furthered in order to continue meeting the evolving needs of today's K-12 population.

Danker (2019) asserts that students suffering from mental illness and/or behavior disorders - along with juveniles introduced to the Juvenile Justice System - have a higher likelihood of performing at an academic level that ranks inferiorly when compared to their peers. Moreover, "Sixty-five to seventy percent of juveniles who encounter the justice system tend to have diagnosable mental health disorders, such as anxiety and depression, with roughly forty-six and eighteen percent affected, respectively" (p. 589). For those students convicted as a juvenile, the journey to leading a successful adulthood becomes an even greater challenge.

Danker further suggests that, "even when an arrest does not lead to any further disciplinary action, psychologically, school-based arrests can precipitate the breakdown in trust between young people and the adults in their lives, turning what should be a nurturing atmosphere into one that is intimidating and hostile" (Danker, 2019, pp. 589-590). Evidence supports a need for alternative education strategies in mainstream education to support students with mental and behavioral challenges. As such, additional consideration should be given towards determining best practice and strategies for supporting the at-risk population in schools.

Current Models and Strategies for Alternative Education.

Current Models

Hanover Research classifies current alternative education models into four categories: charter schools, magnet schools, career and technical schools, and dropout prevention and credit recovery schools. Moreover, Hanover Research rates these four programs into one of two ratings, mixed or positive findings. Receiving ratings of "mixed findings" are Charter Schools and Magnet Schools with Career and Technical and Dropout Prevention Schools receiving "positive findings" ratings. An additional characterizing factor related to Hanover Research's identification of alternative education models notes that Charter and Magnet School appeal to a wide variety of grade levels while Career and Technical and Dropout Prevention specifically

target the high school population. Finally, the study classifies alternative education programs into two types which include a “School-Within-A-School” and “Resource Programs” (Hanover Research, 2018, pp. 5-7).

As outlined by Hanover Research (2018), Charter Schools identify with the following criteria: application-based, tax-payer funded, privately managed schools which seek greater autonomy and flexibility. Charter Schools appeal to an array of students across a variety of grade levels. Hanover cites the following regarding its research findings for Charter Schools, “Research suggests that locally - and state - managed Charter Schools with strong instructional supports can be effective” (Hanover Research, 2018, p. 7).

Hanover characterizes Magnet Schools as schools which have an academic or social focus on a specific theme (i.e., STEM or Performing Arts). Magnet Schools intend to appeal to a wide-variety of attendees with varying racial, ethnic, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds. Hanover asserts that Magnet Schools serve a variety of students and grade levels and attempt to serve minority and/or low socioeconomic stakeholders. Similar to Charter Schools above, Magnet Schools received a “mixed findings” rating from Hanover who states that, “Research suggests that magnet schools may improve behavioral and academic outcomes” (Hanover Research, 2018, p. 7).

Although Career and Technical Schools fall under the alternative education umbrella, Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs possess significant differences when compared to both Charter and Magnet Schools. Hanover characterizes Career and Technical Schools as schools which blend rigorous academics with career preparation to prepare students for college and/or careers. CTE programs appeal to high school students with the “occasional” middle school exception, according to Hanover Research Group (2018). Unlike Charter and Magnet Schools, Hanover rates CTE programs with “positive findings” due to research suggesting that, “Participation in CTE programs improves graduation rates for at-risk students” (Hanover Research, 2018, p. 7).

The fourth and final alternative education model according to Hanover Research Group (2018) is Dropout Prevention and Credit Recovery Schools. Similar to CTE programs, but without the college and career preparatory emphasis, Dropout Prevention and Credit Recovery Schools provide at-risk students (students at-risk of not graduating) with an alternative pathway. Hanover Research suggests that these schools were often referred to as “alternative schools”.

These alternative schools were designed to target high school students, in particular, who are at risk of not graduating and seek to support the academic, behavioral, and emotional needs of its stakeholders. As with CTE programs, Hanover rates Dropout Prevention and Credit Recovery Schools with a “positive findings” rating suggesting that, “Alternative High Schools can improve graduation rates for at-risk students but that the effectiveness ranges by program type and implementation” (Hanover Research, 2018, p. 6).

In addition to the models of alternative education, Hanover Research has classified alternative education into two types of alternative programs, the school-within-a-school and resource programs. Attributes of the school-within-a-school program include a mini-school within a school that serves a small group of students who participate in a learning cohort for the purpose of serving emotional and behavioral needs within the academic environment. Hanover Research found that there is evidence to support that, “Career Academies, a type of “school-within-a-school” may improve graduation rates and post-secondary outcomes” (Hanover Research, 2018, p. 6).

Conversely, the resource program seeks to provide alternative education to students by removing them from the general education environment to receive instruction in a resource room for a portion of the academic day. This model seeks to provide instruction that meets the academic, behavioral, and emotional needs of students across a variety of grade levels. Hanover Research cites limited positive results which include the following: “Research suggests that small group and individual interventions provided in separate classes can effectively support higher-risk students’ behavioral outcomes” (Hanover Research, 2018, p. 7).

Strategies

This review of the literature suggests a need for improvement to alternative education, effective strategies for supporting alternative education environments, and a rationale for doing so. As outlined in the 2017 Duffield article entitled, “Alternative middle school models: An exploratory study”, a qualitative, evaluative case study was conducted among 17 middle-level schools in an attempt to “...better understand these middle school programs” (Duffield, 2017, p. 83). Duffield proposes, “This case study plays an important role in advancing a field’s knowledge base” (Duffield, 2017, p. 41). The study sought answers to three research questions: a. How do you know these alternative middle-level programs work? b. What are the goals of these programs? c. What are the outcomes of these programs? While none of the participants in

this study questioned the need for alternative programming, each identified areas of improvement: the findings were categorized into the following four categories for analysis purposes: program structure, goals, services, and funding (p. 86).

The recommendations for the study suggest that funding may be the culprit that inhibits the advancement of alternative education programs. According to Duffield (2017), “Little was found related to funding in reviewed literature” (p. 91). Limitations for this study include the fact that the study included 17 middle-level schools from the same Mid-western region, thus, generalizability is not possible; however, as acknowledged by Duffield, conclusions are able to be drawn from the findings of the study. Those conclusions include, but are not limited to, the following: Alternative programs are a viable way to meet the needs of at-risk adolescents. Moreover, alternative programs present a space for these students to receive the types of nontraditional support and services they need to stabilize themselves, giving them a chance to achieve success. Finally, alternative middle school programs allowed students to stay in school, experiencing a highly structured and supportive environment where they could close the achievement gap (Duffield, 2017, p. 83).

As demonstrated within the Duffield (2017) article, “Alternative middle school models: An exploratory study”, alternative education models will work. Students will close the achievement gap and be provided the environment needed in order to experience success. The model is not the problem; what is causing the “disconnect between what alternative education is and what it could be is the lack of preparation to principals and staff (p. 83). In a 2009 article entitled, “WE CAN DO IT: Preparing Leaders to Lead in Alternative Education Schools”, Price punctuates the need for preparation with the following assertion, “Clearly, leaders of schools with an at-risk student population require specific preparation with appropriate training and support so they can lead staff toward teaching effectively and for at-risk students to learn successfully” (Price, 2009, p. 1).

It is not enough to lead an alternative education environment with the tradition skillset available in principal preparation programs across America and abroad. These preparation programs, according to Price (2009), “says nothing of alternative schools with at-risk populations” (p. 6). If alternative schools are to thrive, an alternative approach is required.

Among several of Price’s (2009) proposed recommendations for leading a successful alternative education program, include the following, “a change in culture (support for leadership

excellence) and an increase in the use of technology to support communication among leadership candidates” (Price, 2009, p. 10). The presence of leadership is a viable strategy for promoting an appropriate atmosphere within an alternative education program. In essence, one of the most promising offerings for leading a successful program is to demonstrate to the staff the ways in which it is most appropriate to lead the students in the alternative environment.

Six Powerful Practices

In addition to the variety of models, and an exploration of the student demographic who benefit from alternative education, one should explore the strategies being used in today’s alternative education programs. Mailett’s (2017), “Six powerful practices for alternative education programs”, suggests six strategies that could easily be transferred into mainstream education. These fundamental cornerstones include the following strategies: provide active and creative instruction; integrate service-learning opportunities into all aspects of the program; accelerate student learning; build time into the schedule to connect with kids; have a plan B (and C) for every student every day; and utilize volunteers such as college students and community members.

Alternative learners possess at-risk behaviors that can inhibit the ability to graduate high school. As such, plans should be made to provide access to mentors, flexibility and access to content in the form of remote learning and relationship building with school staff and community members. “The mission of the alternative middle school was to provide active, creative and service-driven instruction that would reengage students in their own learning” (Mailett, 2017, p. 234). Each of these strategies are equally powerful learning opportunities, all of which are easily replicated in a general education setting, therefore, greatly enhancing the quality of learning for an at-risk student population.

Problem-Based Learning

Similar to the way that Mailett’s (2017) six powerful practices enhance the learning opportunities of at-risk students in a mainstream environment, findings presented by Liu, M., Liu, S., Pan, Zou, and Li (2019) offers an additional approach to in-house alternative education, Problem-based Learning (PBL). Research supporting the power of implementing Project-based Learning to enhance the overall learning experience of students is available, as provided by Liu and colleagues; however, previous data suggesting that PBLs are a beneficial mode of instruction

for at-risk students. Liu et al. examined the science learning and attitude of a group of at-risk middle school students - all of whom originated from failing and/or Title I school with a high percentage of economically disadvantaged students (2019).

In conjunction with a 3-D immersive multimedia-enriched PBL science environment, the study sought answers to the following questions: Are there any differences in these at-risk students' science knowledge and attitude toward science after they used a multimedia-enriched PBL science environment, and are there differences between boys and girls? Additionally, what is the relationship between students' science knowledge and attitude toward science after they engaged in a multimedia-enriched PBL science environment? (Liu, M. et al., 2019).

Using both quantitative and qualitative data, the study revealed a significant improvement to science knowledge and attitude toward science following the PBL instruction. In addition to the increase in pre/post test scores, Min Liu, and colleagues note that, "PBL characteristics such as students in control of their learning, working collaboratively, and solving an ill-structured problem in an authentic context make this learning "different from the usual science classes" as confirmed by the teacher" (p. 13). Liu, M. et al. (2019), suggest that Project-based Learning offers engaging strategies that provide improvement to knowledge and attitude, both qualitatively and quantifiably. As a result, PBL should be considered as an effective strategy for those seeking to evolve alternative education environments.

Sense of Belonging in Schools

As discussed in, *Engaging Marginalized, "At-risk" middle-level students: A focus on the importance of a sense of belonging at school*, the rationale behind a "sense of belonging" is similar to those in Mailett's (2017) Six powerful practices...and Liu, M. et al.'s (2019) emphasis on Project-based Learning - all are free, all are replicated with relative ease, and all yield high gains in the performance of at-risk students. SOBAS, or a sense of belonging at school, is a fundamental contribution to a successful educational experience for at-risk youth. "The nurturing of receptive, school-based interpersonal connections with students, which are characterized by being both social and academic, emerged in many of the studies as being a major influence for students' SOBAS in middle level education" (Pendergast, 2018, p. 4).

Pendergast et al. (2018) revealed six interrelated themes related to the sense of belonging for at-risk middle school students; these themes include: school climate, social belonging and relationships, students' personal attributes, academic belonging, school transitions, and other

factors (socio-economic status and gender). The studies reduced the related factors to five which include relationships in schools, school climate factors, pedagogical practices, specific programs and activities, and other factors such as family mental health, trauma, and poverty. The Pendergast et al.(2018) study concludes that, data reveal that a sense of belonging at school is, indeed, a key element of emotional engagement, sitting firmly between the behavioral and cognitive indicators of student engagement (p. 5). As such, the Pendergast et al.(2018) (research should be referred to when considering best practice and strategies for the alternative education stakeholders.

“Controlled burn: A story of growth” by Hart (2019) supports the use of highly effective strategies to motivate students using alternative education as the vehicle. Hart suggests that we need to support students who are not successful in a traditional school environment and offers that we do so using the following strategies: start with strengths, make students feel competent, help students feel they belong, and offer autonomy. Similar to Mailett’s findings, Hart recognizes that a focus on student strengths is where we will begin to show gains. According to Hart, “In emphasizing strengths, a teacher can positively impact a learner’s sense of self-efficacy, or competence. When teachers emphasize students’ interests and abilities, students begin to see themselves as capable” (Hart, 2019, p. 31). One should consider the ways in which Hart’s findings could be used in conjunction with differentiated instruction/interventions and problem-based learning in order to personalize instruction with the purpose of allowing students to achieve success regardless of his/her current level of understanding.

School-Wide Positive Behavior Support

“The Effects of School-wide Positive Behavior Support on Middle School Climate and Student Outcomes” (2011), presents the findings of a study examining two Western United States Middle Schools - one treatment group using a convenience sample, and one control group that was selected for its demographic and geographic similarities to the treatment group. The purpose of this quasi-experimental study was to evaluate the effects of School-wide Positive Behavioral Supports on school climate and student outcomes (behavior and grade point average) over four years at one middle school, using a longitudinal experimental design. Researchers hypothesized that school climate and student outcomes would show improvements over the four years of the intervention (2011).

With response rates of 81.4% and 74.3%, a total of 345 teachers responded to the PBS-Supplemental Questionnaire, and 315 teachers responded to the Indicators of School Quality along with data collection for 10,766 students throughout the four-year collection of data. The findings to the Caldarella et al. (2011) study revealed the following: “While SWPBS did appear to have significant and practical effects on student behavior and school climate, there were no statistically significant effects on GPA in comparison to the control school. The magnitude of implementing a comprehensive intervention like SWPBS should be considered” (Caldarella et al., 2011, pp. 1-14).

Data-driven decision making

To further demonstrate the value of effective strategies for students receiving an alternative form of education, one should consider, “Providing a supportive alternative education for environment for at-risk students” (McGee & Lin, 2017). McGee and Lin’s (2017) work is based on “The data-driven decision-making process influences the Alternative Education (AE) program development through the collaboration of all stakeholders, including but not limited to the school, the parents, the students, and the community. Data collected through continuous evaluations of student information pertaining to academics, attendance, and discipline reshapes and refines the program’s nucleus” (McGee & Lin, 2017, p. 181).

The four “components” of the data-driven decision-making process include the following: preconditions, planning, delivery, and collaboration. Each of the four components work together as an integrated, yet individual unit, to establish the most effective learning strategies for each student (p. 181). First, the precondition component focuses on both the reduction of class size and student-teacher ratio as well as a positive classroom climate. “An additional support system, such as class climate, should be in place to overcome the resistance to change” (p. 182). McGee and Lin (2017) suggest that positive classroom climates are attributed to the increase in educational success and a decrease in academic anxieties (p. 182).

The second component in McGee and Lin’s (2017) work is that of *planning* (p. 183). Planning is further broken down into two elements: social-skill instruction and high-quality academic instruction. “Many students placed in AE have difficulty interacting with adults and peers in a constructive manner” (p. 183). Just as students have a vast array of social skills and social development, the same can be said for the need of a personalized, high-quality curriculum. McGee and Lin (2017) note the following as characteristics of a high-quality curriculum:

curriculum, relevance, and differentiation (p. 183). In addition to acknowledging the value of social-skill instruction and high-quality academic instruction, further consideration must occur regarding the manner in which the instruction is delivered.

The third component is delivery. “The instruction delivery must occur in the context of a positive behavioral management system in which the AE personnel teach classroom rules and replacement strategies, reinforce desired behaviors, determine the purpose of misconducts, and create personalized behavior plans” (p. 184). Positive behavior management emphasizes desired behaviors which set the tone for providing the academic environment necessary for the high-quality curriculum. The Functional behavioral assessment (FBA) is a data collection process that is conducted by the use of qualitative data in the form of surveys, interviews, and rating scales that provide teachers with data to monitor trends in behavior over time. “FBA helps teachers properly interpret the contingency between the environmental stimuli and the responding behaviors, rather than simply blaming the students” (p. 184).

Last in the four components focused on throughout McGee and Lin’s 2017 work is *collaboration* between the student, along with adult mentors, and parental involvement (p. 184). “The mentoring relationship can be viewed as a safety net, helping to guide students through challenging times” (p. 184). This student-adult mentor relationship is designed to support students throughout their academic day, but it will not reach its intended purpose if not reinforced by the parents at home. Perhaps a fifth component exists in the importance of connecting the school instructional staff with the student’s caretakers in order to maximize the benefits of the student-adult mentor relationship as it is likely that the strategies used by the mentor could also be reinforced within the home. McGee and Lin (2017) assert that, “Successful partnerships between school staff and student families increase the likelihood of student success in an AE program” (McGee & Lin, 2017, pp. 184-185).

Social-emotional learning

Yeager’s (2017), “Social and Emotional Learning Programs for Adolescents”, presents evidence that Social-emotional Learning (SEL) can have positive impacts on at-risk students and should, therefore, be considered as a successful strategy for the alternative environment. “SEL programs try to help adolescents cope with their difficulties more successfully by improving *skills* and *mindsets*, and they try to create respectful school environments that young people want to be a part of by changing the school’s *climate*” (Yeager, 2017, p. 2). According to Yeager

(2017), effective programs align the adult-sanctioned healthy choice - such as not getting pregnant, not getting arrested, etc. with peer-sanctioned sources of status and respect like freedom, autonomy, or mattering (p. 11). While evidence suggests that an SEL program can enhance student success, how do building leaders gain teacher buy-in for an SEL initiative?

Progress/performance monitoring

Aron and Zweig (2003) complete the list of strategies contained in this review of literature with their submission that, in addition to the academic, behavioral, and emotional needs, performance monitoring of both students and staff is a pivotal necessity when constructing a successful alternative education program (2003). “In addition to examining outcomes for youth themselves, providers of alternative education programs will need to monitor their own performance and progress if they are to succeed in educating vulnerable youth” (Aron & Zweig, 2003, p. 50). According to Aron and Zweig, the progress monitoring process should include the following criteria: Defining local standards of performance based on outcomes of interest for the student population, designing tools for individual programs or settings to monitor progress toward outcomes of interest, garnering support for implementing the monitoring process, and reviewing the results of the process and changing programs and strategies accordingly (p. 47).

Asynchronous Education

As outlined in the June, 2020 article (Dorn, Hancock, Sarakatsannis, & Viruleg, 2020), the 2019-2020 school year was cut short as of the result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Students across America exited their classrooms, in many states, never to return, and classrooms have begun to appear all across our nation in the form of virtual sessions providing educators a vehicle to connect with students and offer academic support and structure right inside the walls of their own home. An unintended bi-product of COVID-19 is that students and educators have demonstrated the ability to teach and learn remotely - in many cases, right alongside their working parents who have also demonstrated the ability to conduct their professional roles from home while supporting their child’s learning process (para. 24).

The necessity of continued remote learning cannot be an excuse for inaction or indifference. There are examples of high-quality online education, and reaching this level should be the general expectation. While no one knows exactly what level of in-class

learning will be possible for the 2020–21 school year, many students will probably need to stay home for at least part of it. Educators need to use the summer to learn how to make instruction more effective, whatever the scenario (Dorn et al., 2020, para 23). With the uncertainty that lies ahead for the state of education, IT virtual instruction must be further explored. Moreover, what are the impacts of virtual instruction on alternative education?

As conveyed by Bailey (2002), the Digital Age has long since arrived, and upon its arrival, it has brought forth a potential for asynchronous learning as an alternative to the brick-and-mortar model that has existed since Industrialism ruled in America:

One problem in education is that we educate students in an agricultural timetable in an industrial setting, and we tell kids they live in a digital age...we've always assumed that school is a place. With the industrial model school, it's a place we've had to go where education is located. The whole purpose of schools was to physically contain teachers in a location where education is passed on from teacher to student. Now, because of technology, the education can travel all the way to where a student is located. The teacher can be literally from anywhere in the world... it actually makes learning that much richer and more involving for the students. It opens up a wide range of opportunities for students who are constrained by just local resources (John P. Bailey, Director of the Office of Educational Technology, U.S. Department of Education; Karnovsky, & Warner 2002, pp. 18-19).

As outlined by Gray's dissertation, "Virtual High Schools: A Case Study to Explore Why Students, Parents, and Teachers Choose This Type of Alternative Education", Gray reports the findings of a 2005 case study intended to explore the motivation towards an increased growth in virtual learning as an alternative to the traditional education received in brick-and-mortar schools. In support of the benefits for virtual learning, as an alternative to traditional models, Gray states the following, "In most states, virtual schools help cover the gaps in public education by being open to all students, including gifted-and-talented, homeschool students, and students with special needs" (Gray, 2005).

This new focus on virtual schools for students who do not fit in or do not desire to participate in traditional schooling has become a real choice option for parents and students. In many cases, it is the public schools and districts that are creating this option

as a result of the increasing numbers of students who do not graduate for various reasons, students who are at-risk and/or do not do well in traditional settings, and parents opting to place their children in charter, private, or home school environments (Aufderheide, personal communication, 2003).

As such, Gray (2005) conducted a qualitative, mixed methods case study in which he conducted purposeful sampling in order to explore the increased motivation towards seeking virtual education as a means of receiving an education alternative to the traditional brick and mortar experience. Gray's (2005) research questions included the following: why are students choosing virtual high school education as opposed to traditional "Brick and Mortar" high school education, and are they satisfied with their choice? What are the characteristics/demographics of students, teachers and parents who participate in virtual schools? Why are the parents of these students supporting their child's choice to pursue a virtual high school education and are they satisfied with this option? Why are teachers choosing to pursue practicing their profession in a virtual high school setting and are they satisfied with their career choice? Finally, as result of this study, what lessons can be learned for other schools or divisions that desire to implement this type of educational program?

The findings from Gray's study concluded that, "...students were pleased with their choice of involvement in Branson Online High School" (Gray, 2005). Stakeholders cite issues in course offerings, quality of curriculum and assessments, and technology problems as areas for growth. The lack of a content specialist was a mutual concern for parents and students alike. Similarly, both teachers and parents expressed concern of the loss of socialization, and all stakeholders professed those strong relationships resulted in the success of the Branson Online High School. One finding to report is that of a unanimous teacher panel reporting that, "in order for students to be successful in a virtual setting, they must be organized, motivated, and have strong parental support" (Gray, 2005). Along with the categories of alternative education from Hanover Research, Gray's offering of virtual education rounds out the kinds of alternative education for the purpose of this literature review.

As highlighted throughout, "Keeping Pace With K-12 Digital Education: An Annual Review of Policy and Practice" (Evergreen Education Group, 2015), the state of Virginia offers a unique lens into the potential for using virtual instruction as a supplemental form of instruction but one who still struggles to offer virtual instruction as the primary form of instruction despite

successful results. “Virtual Virginia, operated out of the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) since 2005, has become one of the 10 largest state virtual schools in the U.S. with 24,611 course enrollments in SY 2014–15.

The state of Virginia has shown success in operating supplemental virtual instruction; however, “There are no virtual charter schools and no other full-time virtual schools authorized in Virginia. Although the state does allow charter schools, there were only four operating during the 2014–15 SY. Virginia Virtual Academy was the only full-time online supplier in SY 2014–15, serving students in grades K–7” (p. 21). With the “Virginia Virtual” pilot program of 2015, came opportunities to demonstrate the potential for online, virtual instruction for one hundred percent of a student’s academic process.

In addition to the potential benefits of virtual instruction, as presented by the United States Department of Education, Competency-based Learning should be considered as an additional element to alternative forms of education.

By enabling students to master skills at their own pace, competency-based learning systems help to save both time and money. Depending on the strategy pursued, competency-based systems also create multiple pathways to graduation, make better use of technology, support new staffing patterns that utilize teacher skills and interests differently, take advantage of learning opportunities outside of school hours and walls, and help identify opportunities to target interventions to meet the specific learning needs of students (US Department of Education, 2020, para. 2).

Using Competency-based Learning as a research-based foundation, the impact of Self-paced Learning should be considered as an additional additive for helping the at-risk population achieve academic success. Hope High School in Arizona offers a promising glimpse into the benefits a self-paced learning can have for an alternative education program and its students. As stated on the Hope High School website, “The personalized learning plans, flexible schedules, and continuous communication with both students and parents are at the core of why Hope High School Online is not just another free accredited online high school in Arizona” (Hope High School Online, 2020).

Archambault et al. (2010), purport the strategy of mastery learning, within a virtual learning environment, increase in communication between student, teacher and home, along with early identification of at-risk students as a means of ensuring student success in a virtual setting,

(p. 7). As indicated by the research, a virtual learning environment can be effective when accompanied by the specific strategies outlined within this section,

By implementing strategies such as the role of teachers and support staff helping students progress through their classes, individualizing instruction through the affordances of technology, ensuring that students have ongoing access to the technology they need and specific instructional strategies that support achievement, programs serving the needs of students who may be “at-risk” have defined successful outcomes in a variety of ways, all of which deal with the progress that the student is making while in various courses and as a participant in the virtual school program (p. 8).

Given the research available to support virtual instruction as a viable model for alternative education by providing additional flexibility and support to students, virtual learning options should be considered when designing programs for an alternative learning environment.

Principal Readiness for Implementation of Alternative Education

“Wanted/Needed Prep for Alt. Ed. Leaders” by Price, Martin, and Robertson (2010), suggest that both the challenge and goal for alternative education is to prepare and train leaders who can lead in special schools while implementing proven alternative education principles and strategies in districts, counties and states throughout the country that are facing their own alternative education and dropout crises (pp. 307-309). The demand for enhancements to principal preparation was emphasized by Samuels (2008) (two years prior to Price et al. 2010), for Education Weekly, who states, “It's not just the children who need to learn. Strong leaders are essential to academic success, and they need to be cultivated as carefully as their students” (Samuels, 2008). The literature presents a need for additional leadership development and preparation for alternative education, but what are the needs of principals and building-level leaders in order establish a readiness for alternative education environments? As asserted by the Southern Regional Education Board (2008/2009), “The challenge is to redesign middle schools and high schools so that virtually every student gains the skills and knowledge that have been traditionally taught to only the most and best situated...before we can redesign schools, we must redesign the programs that prepare school leaders. We cannot have one without the other” (SREB, 2008, p. 7).

Bottoms and O’Neill (2001) assert that, “Successful school leaders...recognize and encourage implementation of good instructional practices that motivate and increase student

achievement” (Bottoms & O'Neill, 2001, p. 11). Bottoms and O'Neill (2001) suggest that the individualization of instruction and the use of data to drive instruction are key elements to facilitating a successful building (p. 18). Additionally, transparent leadership and investment of all stakeholders are integral to the success of a building. Lastly, being able to acquire resources and use them effectively along with, “continuously learn and seek out colleagues who keep them abreast of new research and proven practices,” are included among the litany of skills necessary for the leaders of tomorrow’s schools (Bottoms & O'Neill, 2001, p. 17). These findings highlight the abilities needed for 21st century success, but do such skillsets translate to preparedness in an alternative education environment?

Reddy and Dudek (2014) suggest that the CSS-Observer Form, a promising data collection tool, is valuable for “school personnel to assess and guide educators’ classroom instructional and behavioral management practices” (Reddy & Dudek, 2014, p. 81). “Access to and implementation of validated, easy-to- use tools that measure educators’ use of evidence-based practices for professional improvement plans are warranted” (p. 81). Strategies to support alternative education exist - as referenced throughout this literature review - now, performance tools exist to help building leaders measure the effectiveness of the strategies and programs being implemented. “We believe that measures like the CSS-Observer Form can help school personnel in collaboratively improving teachers’ classroom practices and student academic outcomes” (p. 82).

Funding Verses Demand

The findings of the Hosley, N., Hosley, J., Thein, and Center for Rural Pennsylvania (2009) study, reports that between 2004-2005, “The need for alternative education services for disruptive youth programs clearly rose while funding declined.” At the height of its funding, alternative education programs received \$26 million dollars in funding for the 2001-2002 school year, but in the 2002-2003 school year, funding for Alternative Education for Disruptive Youth (AEDY) began its decline - even though during the 2001-2002 to 2003-2004, the number of students served increased by 83% before declining to 32% during the 2004-2005 school year (Hosley et al., 2009, p. 17).

To further investigate the Hosley et al. (2009) study’s findings on financial analysis of Alternative Education for Disruptive Youth in Pennsylvania, Hosley et al. (2009) explored the contrasts in funding among rural and urban areas. In 2006-2007, rural programs in the state of

Pennsylvania received funding that exceeded \$3 million dollars; however, in the same school year, the funding for urban programs quadrupled the amount of its rural counterparts for a total sum of \$12.2 million dollars to support AEDY (pp. 5-6). Hosley et al. (2009) note the primary difference between rural and urban funding being the number of students served since the funding is based on a per-student basis as it has been since the inception of the program; therefore, an area which can qualify a higher number of students to receive services, the higher amount of funding that area will receive (Hosley et al. 2009, p. 5).

According to Blatt (2016), the state of Oklahoma, a former “national leader” in alternative education, now provides a startling lens into the negative financial outlook for programs that are increasing graduation rates and reducing behavior infractions. “Despite this proven success, education funding cuts have now slashed support for alternative education in half and are leaving our most at-risk students without the support they need for educational success” (Blatt, 2016, para. 2). In the 2014-15 school year, 267 alternative education programs served 12,332 Oklahoma students.

Between 1998, when alternative education was expanded statewide, and 2010, Oklahoma’s statewide dropout rate was cut by more than half – from 5.5 percent to 2.3 percent (para. 5). “That’s the good news. The bad news is that like many proven programs that are making a difference for Oklahoma students, alternative education funding has been decimated in recent years” (para. 8). “Now, this year, after the Legislature slashed the Department of Education’s program and activities budget by \$38 million, or 29 percent, funding for alternative education is down to \$9.8 million – a full 50 percent drop compared to seven years ago” (para. 8).

A Call for Additional Research

While increases in mental illness, behavioral disorders, dropout rates, and a lack of funding for alternative education programs continue, and despite a growing number of participants, the literature reveal a need for additional alternative education strategies in American mainstream education that will help to accommodate the varying needs of today’s at-risk population. In addition to a need for incorporating such strategies, the literature reveals a call to demonstrate evidence that this implementation can be done with minimal cost, time, effort, and with no additional staff. A potential bi-product of the strategies examined, is that each of

these strategies are an effective means of educating all students - not just students who are at-risk.

According to the Virginia Department of Education, Fall, 2019 report, a state-wide student enrollment of 1,298,083 was cited (Virginia Department of Education, 2019). Ergo - approximately 1.3 million students sought virtual instruction when the COVID-19 pandemic called for an abrupt end to the 2019-2020 school year. As a result, findings demonstrate an opportunity to explore the benefits of in-house alternative education for all students in the form of virtual and/or hybrid instruction that potentially allows for self-paced learning. By adhering to the strategies presented in the articles and studies included above, we can produce, not only gains in test scores, but gains in the students' perceptions towards learning with outcomes such as increased graduation rates, increased attendance to colleges and/or trade schools, and a reduction to the high school drop-out rate as well as discipline infractions.

Summary

Many factors have led to the increased need for providing effective alternative education. Alternative education provides a flexible education that allows students who struggle from mental health disorders, behavioral disorders, and other at-risk characteristics such as teen pregnancy, chemical or alcohol abuse, and unstable living conditions. As this need continues to climb, the strategies and models use to service at-risk students should expand alongside the need (Danker, 2019).

Raywid (1994) defines current alternative education with three classifications. Type I program are schools of choice that may resemble magnet schools. Type II (Last Chance) program is one in which students are sentenced—usually as one last chance prior to expulsion. Type II programs emphasize behavior modification, and little attention is paid to modifying curriculum or pedagogy. Type III (Remedial Focus) program is suited for students who are presumed to need remediation or rehabilitation—academic, social/emotional, or both (Raywid, 1994). Given the recent pandemic, it is here that one must also consider the possibility that a Type IV program has emerged - online learning that may or may not be self-paced - in order to expand the number and types of students who are offered an alternative form of education (Dorn et al., 2020).

Research demonstrates further need for modifying existing strategies and models of alternative education in such a way that benefits all students, but specifically, an electronic form

of education that could provide a flexibility in structure that could support at-risk students within their home school environment. This electronic, self-paced form of instruction is endorsed by the United States Department of Education with the notion that Competency-based Learning should be explored as an additional element to alternative forms of education. “By enabling students to master skills at their own pace, competency-based learning systems help to save both time and money” (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). In conclusion, following a comprehensive review of literature pertaining to the current trends in alternative education, it is my recommendation that further study dedicated towards exploring the potential outcomes of transformative alternative education strategies is warranted if we are to continue producing a capable and competent twenty-first century workforce which includes the at-risk population.

Chapter Three

Methodology

This chapter included an outline of the research design including the methodology and justification. Additional information was provided such as a review of the research questions along with information regarding the research site and sample selection. Finally, a description of the data collection instrument, collection procedures, data treatment as well as data analysis were defined within this chapter.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of study was to identify the perceptions of school leaders regarding the effectiveness of an alternative education transformative day program following the first year of implementation. Examining the development of a transformative, alternative education day program in a small rural Virginia school division could reveal perceptions of alternative education teachers, principals, and central office leadership as well as the correlation between those perceptions and student performance outcomes. Once perceptions were identified, data were analyzed to determine the program's strengths, weaknesses and areas for future consideration.

Research Questions

The questions contained within this research study are as follows:

1. What are the perceptions of teachers, principals, and central office leadership regarding their effectiveness in their roles as building leaders following the first year of program implementation?
2. What are the perceptions of teachers, principals, and central office leadership regarding the ways that program implementation has impacted building-level leadership's ability to meet students' needs?
3. What are the perceptions of teachers, principals, and central office leadership regarding the program's impact on school climate, behavior and academics?

Research Design - Methodology & Justification

This study utilized a mixed-methods methodology that heavily emphasized the qualitative component. According to Merriam (2016), qualitative studies are in search of "understanding

how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p. 5). Since the researcher sought to explore the perceptions of alternative education teachers, principals, and central office leadership, a qualitative study allowed for a comprehensive analysis of the impact of their experiences as related to alternative education.

The purposeful sampling sought to inhibit some of the potential limitations as discussed in Chapter One which included but were not limited to the following: prior personal and professional experiences that may impact survey responses, persuasion to alter thinking due to pressure or intimidation from those in a position of authority, the inability to remove bias from the responses, and consideration of the fact that data being used for this research study included the months prior to, during the onset of, and in the months that followed the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result of the limitations above, a mixed methods approach was selected in order to allow for survey responses and interview data to more accurately reflect the true perceptions of building-level and division-level stakeholders. A combination of quantified descriptive statistics and qualitative data were used in this mixed methods study where descriptive statistics were quantified and qualitative data were coded in order to assess the development of themes which emerged within these data.

The selection of a purposeful sample was used to meet the objective of the study. Given the recent program redesign, the school division was willing to grant permission to conduct research under the predetermined notion that the sample size would be limited in nature, but as Merriam (2016) suggested, a minimum sample size of 15 is recommended in order to maximize data. As a result, the sample size selected for this case study satisfied the requirements necessary to fulfill the research requirement.

Needed Data

This study sought to compile research that would attempt to examine the perceptions of building-level and division-level stakeholders involved in this study’s alternative education program and student performance outcomes. An email was sent to a small rural program superintendent asking permission to send survey to alternative education stakeholders (see Appendices C & D). Assessing how school leaders rate their effectiveness in their roles as program teachers, principals, and central office leadership following the first year of program implementation assisted in determining which professional development, changes in staffing,

curriculum, and procedural protocols are necessary for building level administration to continue advancing the program in order to meet the needs of its stakeholders. Building-level leadership is the pipeline for which perceptions, information, and needs travel to the division-level personnel who are responsible for funding, allotments, transportation, etc. In addition to the value of the building leadership representing the needs of the program, it is equally as important for building leaders to continually assess program effectiveness in terms of identifying measures for success, needs, and steps for future implementation.

One of the single most important measures of effectiveness can be determined by examining how school leaders indicate the program's impact on school climate, behavior and academics. According to Klahkhali et al. (2013), all of the reform, all of the funding, and all of the evaluative measures come down to the impact of school climate and the impact that it has on behavior and academics. If students are comfortable coming to school, they are more likely to experience success. Klahkhali et al. recognized the pivotal role that schools play in helping students succeed by providing engaging and relevant opportunities that sustain all students' abilities, (Khalkhali, Sharifi, & Nikyar, 2013).

Finally, success could be short-term unless leaders encouraged progress and actively sought strategies and planning for future implementation. The school division included in this study planned to use the findings from the analyzation of data for determining the direction of its program in the future. Items that could require further consideration included but were not limited to, student/teacher ratio, course offerings, meeting social-emotional needs, partnerships with community businesses, and best practice for alternative education.

Site/Sample Selection

These data presented in this study were collected from stakeholders of an alternative education program housed in a small rural Virginia school division. Data collection was conducted using a sample of purpose. Merriam and Tisdell (2016), asserts that when it comes to determining a specific sample size, "there is no answer," (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 101). However, according to Merriam and Tisdell (2016) in order to maximize information and achieve a point of saturation, information must be obtained until no new information is available (2016). All efforts were made to include as many stakeholders as possible (program teachers, principals, and central office leadership) in attempt to reach saturation.

While the school division was small, the location proved to be advantageous due to the recent redesign of the Alternative Education program under the support and guidance of its division and building and central level leadership. This small rural community contained one middle school and one high school; however, the alternative day program provided services to eight neighboring localities - all contracted by the participating school division. As a result, it was determined that sufficient data would be achievable with the program's alternative education stakeholders.

Data Collection and Procedures

Data collection occurred over an intended duration of three to four weeks, and the process was organized into two phases: the electronic submission and completion of surveys and virtual interviews which were conducted using the Google Meets feature contained within the Google platform. Additionally, phone calls, emails and Google Calendar invites were used to schedule virtual interviews with interviewees, as needed. Successful completion of the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) modules was satisfied (see Appendix E). These modules provided online instruction to candidates seeking approval to conduct research involving human subjects. The modules documented were in compliance with a variety of federal mandates. IRB approval was granted prior to the completion of the survey and interview process in 2021.

Instrument Design

The research conducted in this study was collected with a compilation of interviews, face-to-face when possible and virtual, when necessary, along with surveys that were distributed via email to appropriate school and division level personnel. The survey instrument used for data collection was not an existing instrument but was instead created in order to provide data that best represented the alternative education program and its stakeholders.

The instruments used to obtain data remained focused on the goal of presenting data that attempted to identify, and make meaning of, perceptions held by those responsible for supervising the transformative alternative education program. A preliminary electronic exchange was conducted with the School Division's Superintendent in order to reveal examples of information that the school division was seeking. Examples of information that the division was seeking included, but was not limited to, the following: a side-by-side comparison on

program/course offerings between the behavior-based and transformative models of instruction, a comparison of instructional hours between the behavior-based (previous) and transformative (current) instructional model, instructional resources provided (staffing), character educational opportunities, climate and culture, and transportation. The survey instrument and interview questions (see Appendix B) maintained an emphasis on answering the research questions presented within this research study in addition to obtaining anecdotal information to compare and contrast the behavior-based and the transformative-based models of instruction in order to determine indicators for change and potential next steps.

Instrument Validity and Reliability

“Reliability, validity and triangulation, if they are to be relevant research concepts, particularly from a qualitative point of view, have to be redefined as we have seen in order to reflect the multiple ways of establishing truth” (Golafshani, 2003, p. 597). Golafshani’s quote relates to this study in that this qualitative case study, using a newly created instrument, must undergo a process in order to produce an instrument that will yield the desired results in data being sought after in addition to avoiding unintended bias. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016) reliability is, “the extent to which research findings can be replicated” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 251). The goal of reliability in this study was to produce instruments that are valid for use in future studies.

The instrument used in this study was vetted by a minimum of five to seven education professionals who had the opportunity to complete the instrument and provide feedback for revision. Feedback was carefully considered and changes were made as necessary. Attempts were made to provide the most reliable instrument possible after having carefully considered potential limitations and delimitations to the study while triangulating validity and reliability with keeping the emphasis the purpose of study along with the division stakeholders presented within this case study.

Data Treatment/Management

Participation in this study was voluntary. In accordance with protocol, each participant was provided with the consent form notifying the participants of both the purpose of study and the voluntary nature of the study as well as their right to exit the study at any time. Participants were notified of their right to refuse any identifying or confidential information.

Data retrieved from surveys and interviews sought to protect all participants. Efforts were made to protect confidentiality by conducting official surveys and interviews using one of two password-protected laptops. Additionally, all interviews were conducted using invite only links via Google Meetings which eliminated the possibility of unintended guests being privy to confidential information. Survey data were printed and stored in a locked filing cabinet. Information from virtual interviews was recorded using a passcode protect iPhone X and the use of the Smart Voice app due to its ability to both record and transcribe. Transcripts were printed and stored in a locked filing cabinet. After a period of three to five years, all printed data and copies of informed consent will be shredded and disposed of accordingly.

The survey instrument consisted of three sections where each section served to address questions from one of each of the three research questions contained within this study. The open-ended qualitative interview questions were crafted to provide additional anecdotal insight to survey questions that may have required further explanation or were unable to be answered using a rating system. All surveys and interviews were conducting in a digital and/or virtual format. Member checking, according to Candela (2019), is “commonly used in qualitative research as a means to maintain validity” (Candela, 2019, p. 619). In order to provide the highest level of validity, member checking was conducted for both the survey instrument and interview questions that were used within this study.

Data Analysis Techniques

Creswell (2013), asserted that data must be prepared and reviewed for analysis. Given the qualitative nature of the interview questions, Creswell’s work was used to establish a process for analysis. Once these data were obtained, all these data were organized and coded, alphabetically. Codes were stored on a password-protected laptop and a password protected USB. These Data were stored and analyzed within a Google Sheet in order to be categorized into themes such as people, places, and events. Next, organized data underwent the coding process where themes were identified and reviewed in order to establish a process for providing a qualitative narrative which presented the findings of the study. Analysis of survey data were presented with descriptive statistics and coded interview data for the purpose of determining saturation and identifying themes that presented findings related to program effectiveness and future steps for furthering program success. Interviews were coded alphabetically. Creswell’s analysis techniques provided a structured way to interpret the offerings contained in both the open-ended

interview questions in addition to offering a streamlined process for organizing the themes and offerings.

Timeline

Upon successful completion of the Prospectus exam prior to the start of the Spring 2021 semester, the required IRB proposal was submitted during the first week of the Spring 2021 semester. Once approval was received, the anticipated two-week data collection period began. An expected two to three-week analyzation of data proceeded the collection phase. Once survey data were quantified and data recordings were transcribed, coded, and analyzed, the interpretation of data occurred.

Methodology Summary

In summary, this study examined the perceptions of division and building leadership regarding effectiveness and performance outcomes for the newly implemented transformative alternative education program model in a small rural Virginia school division. Additionally, the study sought to provide information related to the research questions outlined in Chapter one. The findings were used to identify trends, strengths weaknesses, and next steps for the transformative day program and the current instructional model. Chapter four revealed data obtained from the surveys and qualitative interviews outlined in the Methodology section of Chapter three.

Chapter Four

Presentation & Analysis of Data

Introduction/Review/Restatement of the Purpose

The purpose of study was to identify the perceptions of school leaders regarding the effectiveness of an alternative education transformative day program following the first year of implementation. Examining the development of a transformative, alternative education day program in a small rural Virginia school division could reveal perceptions of alternative education teachers and building-level leadership as well as the value of those perceptions and student performance outcomes. Chapter four provided information related to the purpose of study, the research questions, and the sample population along with a brief overview of demographic information. Within Chapter four, each survey question has been connected to the research question that is related to. Survey data has been represented in the form of tables and qualitative data. Data collected within this study was obtained in order to examine the following research questions:

1. What are the perceptions of teachers, principals, and central office leadership regarding their effectiveness in their roles as building leaders following the first year of program implementation?
2. What are the perceptions of teachers, principals, and central office leadership regarding the ways that program implementation has impacted building-level leadership's ability to meet students' needs?
3. What are the perceptions of teachers, principals, and central office leadership regarding the program's impact on school climate, behavior and academics?

Chapter four presented these data analyzed within this study. The representation of data were based upon the major themes that emerged from data collected from the surveys and qualitative interview protocol that were created by the researcher. The electronic survey instrument and interview protocol were created specifically for this study in order to represent the perceptions of alternative school leaders. Once the survey and interview data were collected, and perceptions were identified, data were analyzed to determine the program's strengths, weaknesses, and areas for future consideration.

Due to the size of the participating school division, the intended number of survey participants was approximately 10-15 candidates. While confidentiality prevented the researcher

from knowing how many candidates were included in the initial email sent by the school division's superintendent, the total outcome of the surveys completed was 20. Not all surveys were able to be included in the study as a result of incomplete surveys or surveys that did not contain enough data to be included in the study. A total of twelve respondents' survey data were included in the study along with four interview participants. As Merriam (2009) suggested, a minimum sample size of 15 is recommended in order to maximize data; therefore, the sample size selected for this qualitative study does satisfy the requirements necessary to fulfill the research requirement.

Reporting of Data/Findings

This study was comprised of two components: electronic survey and virtual interview. The first component of the study invited eligible participants to complete the *Perceptions* survey via Qualtrics. The second component of the study involved the voluntary completion of a virtual interview that included a series of ten open-ended questions related to alternative education stakeholder's perceptions. Prior to the completion of the Qualtrics survey, question 20 invited interested candidates to provide their email address if they were willing to participate in a voluntary, virtual interview.

The researcher conducted a thorough reading of all surveys, submitted via Qualtrics, in order to internalize a general overview of data collection throughout the surveys. The researcher analyzed and disaggregated survey data as a means of organizing information for presenting descriptive statistics of the survey data. Creswell (2013) asserted that data must be prepared and reviewed for analysis. Creswell's work was used to establish a process for analysis. Once the qualitative interview data were obtained, all data were organized and coded, alphabetically. Data were stored within a Google Sheet and analyzed in order to be categorized into themes such as people, places, and events. Organized data underwent the coding process where themes were identified and reviewed in order to present the findings contained within this study.

Analysis of data (Creswell, 2013) was conducted by analyzing and disaggregating survey data and coding interview data with the purpose of determining saturation and identifying themes that may present findings related to program effectiveness and furthering program success. Qualitative interviews were coded alphabetically. Creswell's 2013 analysis techniques provided a structured way to interpret the offerings contained in the open-ended interview questions in addition to offering a streamlined process for organizing the themes and offerings. The following

codes presented the researcher with themes that served as the platform for the remainder of the study.

Table 1*Recurring Descriptions and Codes*

Description	Code
Flexibility	F
Patience	P
Scaffolding	S
Behavior	B
Alternative Approach	AA
Collaboration	C
Placed	PL
Funding	FUN
Alternative Discipline	AD
Perceptions	PER
Smaller Environment	SE
Transportation	T
Credit Recovery	CR
Electives	E
Pacing	PAC
Asynchronous Classes	AC

The initial round of surveys yielded only one participant who volunteered to conduct a virtual interview. Further communication with central office leadership resulted in a follow-up email that did provide additional surveys but did not yield any additional volunteers for the virtual interview. A third follow-up attempt with central office leadership did result in a second interview volunteer. It was the second interview candidate that facilitated the scheduling of the third and fourth interviews that resulted from my request to extend my contact information to any additional alternative education stakeholders from within the school division. At the conclusion of the data collection process, twenty surveys were accessed and four interviews were conducted.

At the conclusion of the data collection process, these data Qualtrics were downloaded and organized using Google Sheets. Additionally, data from Qualtrics were imported into data tables and charts which were downloaded onto a Google Document. All data were loaded on to a password protected, encrypted USB device to ensure the security of the study's data. In all, 20 participants accessed the survey, one stakeholder declined the opportunity to participate, seven

surveys were unable to be included due to impartial completion, and four stakeholders volunteered to participate in a virtual interview.

Approval to conduct research was granted by the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board on February 23, 2021. The initial invitation to participate in this study, sent on the researcher's behalf, was dispersed by a member of the division's central office leadership on February 23, 2021. This initial invitation yielded seven responses to the survey instrument (35% of total participants). Out of the seven respondents, six completed the survey, one declined to participate, and one survey participant agreed to participate in the virtual interview. The second reminder email, sent on March 2, 2021, presented twelve additional respondents, (60% of total participants) and all twelve accessed the study. The third and final reminder email, sent on March 12, 2021, resulted in one additional survey participant, and this participant did consent to access the Qualtrics survey. A follow-up email, sent on March 16, 2021, was provided to division stakeholders in attempt to recruit additional interview candidates. In addition to the survey volunteer, this email warranted one additional interview candidate. Data collection was conducted over a period of 23 days.

Part I of the electronic survey asked study participants to provide relevant demographic information. When asked to provide the highest level of education achieved, of the 13 surveys included in the study, participants responded as follows: six participants failed to respond, one participant noted an Associate degree, one participant noted a Bachelor's degree, four participants noted Master's degrees, and one participant noted a Doctorate degree. Study participants were asked to provide their years of experience in alternative education. Of the 13 survey participants, six possessed five or less years of alternative education experience; five possessed between six and ten years of experience, one participant possessed twelve years of experience, and one participant possessed fifteen years of alternative education experience. In conclusion, participants were asked to include their years of experience as an alternative education principal or leader. Participants responded with the following information: one respondent reported five years of alternative education leadership experience; two respondents reported nine years, one indicated alternative education experience in a former division but did not report the actual number of years. No other respondents reported years of leadership experience within the alternative education environment (see Table 2).

Table 2*Demographic Data for Survey Respondents*

Highest level of education (degree)				
1 – Associate's degree	1 – Bachelor's degrees	4 – Master's degrees	1 – Doctorate degree	6 – Respondents did not report information for this question.
Years of experience in alternative education				
6 – 0-5 years	5 – 6-10 years	1 – 12 years	1 – 15 years	0 - <15
Years of leadership experience in alternative education				
1 – 5 years	2 – 9 years	1 – Respondent reported experience in another division but did not include the number years	No other respondents reported leadership experience	

Summary of Demographic Information for Qualitative Interview Candidates

Each of the four interview participants were asked to provide demographic information to provide demographic information such as the current division, highest level of degree, years of experience in alternative education, and educational experience prior to the current role. Table 3, below, presents a summary of demographic information for each qualitative interview participant.

Table 3 describes the demographic information related to current employer, highest level of degree, years of experience in alternative education, and education experience prior to the current role for each of the four interview candidates.

- Participant 2A –reports working for a rural, Northern Virginia Alternative School. 2A possesses a post-Master's degree. The participant has nine years of alternative education experience. Prior to the current role, participant 2A has been a teacher and an administrator at every level, P-12.
- Participant 2B –reports working for a rural, Northern Virginia Alternative School. 2B holds a Bachelor's in Communication along with additional endorsements. Participant 2B has two years of alternative education experience. Prior to the current role, participant 2B had experience in coaching and reported a long-term substitute position.

Table 3*Representation of Demographics for Interview Participants*

	Participant 2A	Participant 2B	Participant 2C	Participant 2D
Division for which the participant is currently employed:	A rural, Northern Virginia Alternative School	A rural, Northern Virginia Alternative School	A rural, Northern Virginia Alternative School/High School	A rural, Northern Virginia High School
Highest level of degree:	Post-master's degree	Bachelor's degree	Master's degree	Master's Degree
Years of experience in Alternative Education	Nine years	Two years	Five years	Five Years
Education experience prior to the current role:	Teacher Administrator (P-12)	Coach Long term Substitute	Indirect experience collaborating between the high school and Alternative Education Program	Teacher

- Participant 2C –reports working for a rural, Northern Virginia Alternative School. 2C possesses a Master's degree. Participant 2C has five years of indirect experience in alternative education resulting from collaboration between the high school and the alternative education program.
- Participant 2D –reports working for a rural, Northern Virginia Alternative High School. 2D currently possesses a Master's degree. Participant 2D has five years of indirect experience in alternative education by serving as the administrator who collaborates in order to place students in the Alternative Education program.

The following section describes the survey data collected from Part II of the electronic survey. Questions 1-6 were designed to determine how alternative program leaders rate their effectiveness as building leaders one year after program implementation.

Research Question One

What are the perceptions of teachers, principals, and central office leadership regarding their effectiveness in their roles as building leaders following the first year of program implementation?

Survey Question One

How do you rate your effectiveness as the leader of an alternative education program?

Survey question one asked alternative education leaders to rate his/her effectiveness as the leader of an alternative education program. Survey respondents were provided with effectiveness rating choices which included: strongly effective, effective, somewhat effective, somewhat ineffective, and not effective. Out of the thirteen participants, zero percent of survey participants rated their leadership effectiveness as somewhat ineffective or not effective. Respondent selections yielded a 15.38% rating of somewhat effective, Data revealed that 53.85% of participants selected a rating of effective and 30.77% responded with an effectiveness rating of strongly effective (see Table 4).

Table 4 provides effectiveness ratings for program leaders for each of the 13 survey participants.

Table 4

Effectiveness Ratings for iMPACt Program Leaders

Leader Rated Effectiveness	% / (n)
Not effective	0% / 0
Somewhat ineffective	0% / 0
Somewhat effective	15.38% / 2
Effective	53.85% / 7
Strongly effective	30.77% / 4
Total:	100% (n=13)

Table 4 provides quantified data regarding effectiveness ratings for the 13 survey participants. More importantly, these data presented in Table 4 demonstrates that all survey participants rated their effectiveness as Somewhat effective or better with a concentrated 53.85% of participants rating themselves as Effective.

Survey Question Two

When thinking about the attributes related to your effectiveness rating, which of the following has had the most positive impact on your effectiveness rating?

Survey question two asked alternative education leaders to think about the attributes related to the selected effectiveness rating and to determine which of four predetermined

selections had the most positive impact on effectiveness rating that each participant chose. Predetermined options included the following: professional development, division-level support, funding, or administrative support. Out of the 12 survey respondents, 16.67% of study participants selected professional development. 41.67% of participants selected division-level support. 8.33% of survey participants selected funding as the choice that had the most positive impact on his/her effectiveness rating, and finally, an additional 33.33% of respondents selected administrative support (see Table 5).

Table 4 represents the survey responses for what survey candidates selected as the attribute contributing to their effectiveness rating.

Table 5

Attributes Contributing to Effectiveness Rating

Attributes	% / (n)
Professional development	16.67% / 2
Division-level support	41.67% / 5
Funding	8.33% / 1
Administrative support	33.33% / 4
Total:	100% (n=12)

Table five presents these data from survey question two which asked respondents to select the predetermined attribute that has contributed to their effectiveness rating. As demonstrated above, a combined 75% of survey respondents attribute their effectiveness rating to division-level support (41.67%) and administrative support (33.33%).

Survey Question Three

When thinking about your school leadership effectiveness, how would you rate yourself given the choices below? (Please choose only one answer.)

Survey question three asked survey respondents to rate their leadership effectiveness using the following prewritten descriptions: I was a more effective school leader under the previous instructional model; my school leadership effectiveness has remained the same between the previous and current models of instruction; my school leadership effectiveness has remained the same between the previous and current models of instruction; Zero percent of survey participants chose I am a less effective leader under the current model of instruction or I was a

more effective school leader under the previous instructional model. An additional 8.33% of respondents selected I was a less effective leader under the previous instructional model. Only 8.33% of survey respondents selected my school leadership effectiveness has remained the same between the previous and current models of instruction. Finally, I am a less effective leader under the current model of instruction, and I am a more effective school leader under the current instructional model which accounted for the selections of 83.33% of the 12 survey respondents.

Table 6 represents the responses to survey question three which asked respondents to select the statement that describes the candidates' self-rating for school leadership effectiveness.

Table 6*Statements Describing Leadership Effectiveness*

School leadership effectiveness, self-rating	% / (n)
I was a more effective school leader under the previous instructional model.	0% / 0
I was a less effective leader under the previous instructional model.	8.33% / 1
My school leadership effectiveness has remained the same between the previous and current models of instruction.	8.33% / 1
I am a less effective leader under the current model of instruction.	0% / 0
I am a more effective school leader under the current instructional model.	83.33% / 10
Total	100% (n=12)

Table 6 represents the responses that respondents selected to describe the candidates' self-rating for school leadership effectiveness. As seen above, out of the 12 survey participants for survey question three, 83.33% of the respondents selected that they are a more effective school leaders under the current instructional model. Also worth noting, 0% of respondents selected that they were more effective under the previous model, nor did any respondents select that they are a less effective leader under the current model of instruction.

Survey Question Four

If you were still participating in the previous model of instruction, rate the likelihood that you would have remained in your position for more than one school calendar year.

Survey question four asks' respondents to select the choice that best represents the likelihood that the leader would have remained in their position for more than one school calendar year, under the former model of instruction. For this survey question, 25.00% of respondents selected unlikely. 0% of the survey respondents selected the choice for either somewhat likely or somewhat unlikely. 41.67% of respondents selected neutral as their likelihood of remaining in the position for more than one school calendar year. Finally, 33.33% selected that they were likely to have remained in their position.

Table 7 represents these data for question four which asks respondents to rate the likelihood that they would still be in the same position under the previous model of instruction.

Table 7

Retention of Program Leaders During the Previous Instructional Model

Likelihood of still being in same position if using previous model	% / (n)
Unlikely	25.00% / 3
Somewhat unlikely	0.00% / 0
Neutral	41.67% / 5
Somewhat likely	0.00% / 0
Likely	33.33% / 4
Total	100% (n=12)

Table 7 represents respondents' ratings of the likelihood that they would still be in the same position under the previous model of instruction. As reflected above, 0% of survey respondents selected that they were somewhat unlikely or somewhat likely to be in their position if the previous model of instruction was being used.

Survey Question Five

When thinking about, iMPACt, the current model of instruction, rate the likelihood that you will choose to remain in your position for more than one year.

Survey question five asked respondents to rate the likelihood that, under the current model of instruction, the leader would choose to remain in the current position for more than one year. Out of the 12 survey participants, 0% of the respondents selected a likelihood rating of neutral, somewhat unlikely, or unlikely. An additional 16.67% of the respondents selected somewhat likely as the likelihood of remaining in the current position. Finally, 83.33% of respondents selected likely for the likelihood of remaining in the current position for more than one calendar year.

Table 8 represents these data from survey question five which asked respondents to rate their likelihood of remaining in the current position after using the current model of instruction for more than a year.

Table 8*Retention of Program Leaders in the iMPACt Program*

Likelihood of remaining in position, using iMPACt” for more than a year	% / (n)
Unlikely	0.00% / 0
Somewhat unlikely	0.00% / 0
Neutral	0.00% / 0
Somewhat likely	16.67% / 2
Likely	83.33% / 10
Total	100% (n=12)

Table 8 represents respondents’ ratings of the likelihood of remaining in the current position after using the current model of instruction for more than a year. These data shows that a combined 100% of respondents selected either somewhat likely (16.67%) or Likely (83.33%). Also noted above is that 0% of survey respondents selected Neutral, somewhat unlikely, or Unlikely. These data appear to suggest a high likelihood of leadership stakeholders returning to their current positions beyond the current school year.

Survey Question Six**When thinking about iMPACt, the transformative day program, which area of leadership do you feel the most comfortable?**

Survey question six asked respondents to determine the area of leadership, under the transformative day program, where the leader is most comfortable. Of the 12 survey respondents, 33.33% of respondents selected student leadership. 50.00% selected staff leadership. Similarly, 8.33% selected curriculum, and 0% of survey respondents selected budget as the area of leadership that the participant is most comfortable. Finally, 8.33% selected stakeholder involvement.

Table 9 presents these data for survey question six in which respondents were asked to select the area of leadership that they were most comfortable with under the current model of instruction.

Table 9*Rating Areas of Leadership in the iMPACt Program*

Areas of most comfort with iMPACt program	% / (n)
Student leadership	33.33% / 4
Staff leadership	50.00% / 6
Curriculum	8.33% / 1
Budget	0% / 0
Stakeholder involvement	8.33% / 1
Total	100% (n=12)

These data presented in Table 9 was slightly more balanced with Budget being the only area not represented. Worth noting is that only 8.33% of respondents selected Stakeholder involvement as a leadership area that they were most comfortable with. On the contrary, 50% of respondents noted staff leadership as an area of leadership that they were most comfortable.

Qualitative Interview Data

Voluntary respondents participated in a virtual interview session conducted via Google Meets. The interview sessions lasted approximately thirty minutes and consisted of ten open-ended questions in search of qualitative data to enrich these data rendered through the electronic Qualtrics surveys. In total, four candidates elected to participate in a virtual interview. The following section reveals the findings related to research question one.

Data for Research Question One**How do school leaders rate their effectiveness in their roles as building leaders following the first year of program implementation?**

Table 10, as seen below, reflects the interview responses for question number one which asked respondents how long they have been an employee of the Transformative-based Program.

Table 10

Interview Question One – How Many Years Have You Been an Employee of the Transformative-Based Program?

Participant Response	2A	2B	2C	2D
Two Years	X	X		
Five Years			X	
Zero				X

These data in Table 10 reflects that two respondents have been employed with the Transformative-based program for two years while only one respondent selected five years and one selected zero years of employment.

When interview participants were asked what former positions, they hosted prior to their current role, the following responses were provided:

Table 11 reflects these data obtained in interview question two which asked respondents what former positions were held prior to their current role.

Table 11

Interview Question Two – What Former Position(s) Did you Host Prior to your Current Role?

Participant Response	2A	2B	2C	2D
Teacher	X			X
Administrator	X		X	
Coaching		X		
Substitute teaching		X		

In Table 11, two respondents reported being a teacher, two respondents reported being an administrator, one reported being a coach, and one respondent reported being a substitute teacher.

In interview question four, when interview candidates were asked how their experience in the transformative-based program compared to their experience in the former night-based program, several themes emerged. Themes related to interview question four included the following: alternative approach, credit recovery, and transportation.

Alternative Approach. Participants 2A and 2D emphasized the focus on “true alternative approach” under the transformative-based program. (2A, 4-5). When

discussing the alternative approach 2D exclaimed, “The focus of the night program was never on behaviors, it was always a focus on academics first, which I get because they need those credits, but they are in an alternative program for a reason, and how are we really addressing the reason they are here for in the first place?” (2D, 36-37).

Credit Recovery. Participant 2A and 2D noted credit recovery when asked to compare the former and current programs. Participant 2A expressed, “I have students here to recover credits – where typical high school is not working out for them – too big, too much drama...whatever, but here they are able to have that smaller environment that allows them to recover credits” (2A, 2).

Transportation. Two respondents, 2C and 2D, mentioned transportation when asked to compare their experiences between the former and current programs. Participant 2C explained that under the night program, “Our kids had to find their own transportation, and that really puts a major barrier in place for kids to be able to have access” (2C, 28). Further, when 2D explained how the former program did not provide transportation, 2D noted that this did not allow “access or any choice to participate in school activities” (2D, 36-37).

Table 12 presents these data from interview question four where respondents were asked how their experience in the transformative-based program compares with the former night-based program. Emerging themes related to interview question four included the following: alternative approach, credit recovery, and transportation.

Table 12

Interview Question Four – How Does your Experience in the Transformative-Based Program Compare to your Experience with the Former Night-Based Program?

Participant Response	2A	2B (N/A)	2C	2D
Placed	X			
Alternative Approach	X			X
Smaller Environment	X			
Electives	X			
Credit Recovery	X			X
Asynchronous Learning	X			
Transportation			X	X
Partnership/Collaboration			X	
No Access to Activities				X
Climate				X

In interview question five, when interview participants were asked to discuss the area in which their leadership skills have grown the most, the respondents provided a variety of responses which included the following: flexibility, pacing, collaboration, perception, and the alternative approach. While a variety of responses were offered, there were no clear themes to emerge from interview question five.

Table 13

Interview Question Five – In Which Area did your Leadership Skills Grow the Most, and to what do you Attribute that Growth?

Participant Response	2A	2B	2C	2D
Flexibility	X			
Pacing		X		
Collaboration			X	
Perception			X	
Transformative Approach				X

Flexibility. Participant 2A responded with flexibility stating, “Now, they are our students, here, they are my students, my babies. Learning to deal with behaviors and temperaments and personalities of students who were placed here – didn’t want to be here.” “I have had to serve as a counselor, too, not just an administrator” (2A, 5).

Pacing. Participant 2B expressed that leadership growth occurred most in the area of pacing citing, “I went from not teaching to teaching everything, and I just had to figure it out pretty quickly” (2B, 16).

Collaboration. Participant 2C voiced that leadership growth grew the most in the arena of collaboration. Participant 2C stated remarked, “I’ve learned a whole lot about it. I’d say that’s the area that has grown the most. I’d say that looking at how we can improve on the model from what we had previously now that it is a day program and working to continue changing the perception of the program” (2C, 28).

Transformative Approach. Participant 2D reflected on the transformative approach of the program and the focus on behaviors stating, “That’s how I feel my leadership practices have grown the most is not only focusing on what’s best for kids, but also for the school environment in terms of changing behavior before it becomes that next level of suspension” (2D, 39).

Table 13 revealed that the respondents did not share any common areas of leadership growth; therefore, no themes emerged from interview question four.

Questions 7-11 of the survey were designed to explore the ways in which the transformative day program has affected building-level leadership’s ability to meet students’ needs. Survey questions 7-11 directly relate to research question number two.

Research Question Two

What are the perceptions of teachers, principals, and central office leadership regarding the ways that program implementation has impacted building-level leadership’s ability to meet students’ needs?

Survey Question Seven

How would you describe the influence that the iMPACt program has had on building-level leadership’s ability to meet the needs of students?

Survey question seven asked respondents to describe the influence that the current model of instruction has had on building-level leadership’s ability to meet the needs of students using the predetermined statements provided for survey question seven. Of the 12 survey respondents, 0% of survey respondents selected that the iMPACt program has had a slight impact on my ability to meet the needs of students, and zero percent of respondents selected that the iMPACt

program has not impacted my ability to meet the needs of students. A mere 8.33% of respondents selected that the iMPACt program has not impacted my ability to meet the needs of students. An additional 41.67% of respondents selected that the iMPACt program has increased my ability to meet the needs of students. Finally, 50.00% of participants selected that the iMPACt program has allowed me to effectively meet the needs of students.

Table 14 represents these data obtained from survey question seven which asked the respondents to consider how the transformative-based program has influenced the ability to meet students' needs.

Table 14

Influence of iMPACt on Meeting Students' Needs

The iMPACt program has	% / (n)
not impacted my ability to meet the needs of students.	0.00% / 0
had a slight impact on my ability to meet the needs of students.	0.00% / 0
not impacted my ability to meet the needs of students.	8.33% / 1
increased my ability to meet the needs of students.	41.67% / 5
has allowed me to effectively meet the needs of students.	50.00% / 6
Total	100% (n=12)

Data presented in table 13 indicates that the transformative-based program has had a positive impact on leadership's ability to meet students' needs. Survey data revealed that a combined 91.67% of respondents selected either that the program has increased the ability to meet the needs of students (41.67%) or that the current program has effectively allowed them to meet the needs of students (50%).

Survey Question Eight

How would you describe the impact on transitioning from a behavior-based to a transformative-based program?

Survey question number eight asked survey respondents to describe the impact on transitioning from a behavior-based to a transformative day program using one of the predetermined statements provided for question number eight. Of the 12 survey respondents, 8.33% of the respondents which selected that the transformative-based program has not impacted the ability to meet the needs of students. 0% of survey respondents selected that the transformative-based program has had a slight impact on the ability to meet the needs of

students. 8.33% of participants selected that the transformative-based program has impacted the ability to meet the needs of students 41.67% of participants selected that the transformative-based program has been effective for allowing students' needs to be met. Similarly, 41.67% of the respondents selected that the transformative-based program has increased the ability to meet the needs of students.

Table 15 represents these data from when respondents were asked to describe the impact on transitioning from a behavior-based program by selecting one of the predetermined statements.

Table 15

Rating the Impact of Transitioning to a Transformative-Based Program

The transformative-based program	% / (n)
has not impacted the ability to meet the needs of students.	8.33% / 1
had a slight impact on the ability to meet the needs of students.	0.00% / 0
has impacted the ability to meet the needs of students.	8.33% / 1
increased the ability to meet the needs of students.	41.67% / 5
has been effective for allowing the needs of students to be met.	41.67% / 5
Total	100% (n=12)

Table 15 revealed data that a combined 83.34% of respondents selected either that the behavior-based program has increased the ability to meet the needs of students (41.67%) or that the program has been effective for allowing the needs of students to be met (41.67%). Table 14 did indicate an outlier of 8.33% of the participants that selected that the program has not impacted the ability to meet the needs of students.

Survey Question Nine

When thinking about transportation, how would you rate the changes to transportation after the introduction of the iMPACt program?

Survey question nine asked survey respondents to rate the changes to transportation after the introduction of the iMPACt program. Predetermined ratings included the following selections: positive, slightly positive, neutral, slightly negative, and negative. Out of the 12 survey respondents, 0% of survey respondents selected slightly positive or negative as the rating for changes to transportation following the introduction of the iMPACt program. 8.33% selected

slightly negative. 8.33% of respondents selected neutral. Significantly, 83.33% selected positive as the rating on changes to transportation after the introduction of the iMPACt program.

Table sixteen presents these data from survey question nine where participants were asked to rate the changes to transportation following the transition to the transformative-based program.

Table 16

Rating the Changes to Transportation

Rated changes to transportation after iMPACt program	% / (n)
Negative	0.00% / 0
Slightly negative	8.33% / 1
Neutral	8.33% / 1
Slightly positive	0.00% / 0
Positive	83.33% / 10
Total	100% / (n=12)

As demonstrated in Table 16, 83.33% of survey respondents rated the changes made to transportation following the introduction of the transformative-based program as positive. Additionally, 0% of survey respondents rated the changes made to transportation as negative.

Survey Question Ten

When thinking about program scheduling (day vs night), how would you rate the changes to program scheduling after the introduction of the iMPACt program?

Survey question ten asked survey respondents to rate the changes to program scheduling after the introduction of the iMPACt program. Predetermined ratings included the following selections: positive, slightly positive, neutral, slightly negative, and negative. Out of the 12 survey respondents, 0% of the study's survey respondents selected the predetermined options for slightly positive or negative. 8.33% selected slightly negative. Additionally, 8.33% of respondents selected neutral. Significantly, 83.33% selected the positive rating. Table 16 rates the changes made to program scheduling.

Table 17*Rating the Changes Made to Program Scheduling*

Rating	% / (n)
Negative	0.00% / 0
Slightly negative	8.33% / 1
Neutral	8.33% / 1
Slightly positive	0.00% / 0
Positive	83.33% / 10
Total	100% (n=12)

Table 17 demonstrates the finding for survey question 10 where respondents were asked to rate the changes made to program scheduling. With 83.33% of respondents rating the changes made to program scheduling as Positive, and 0% of respondents rating the changes as Negative, it appears that the majority of stakeholders are in favor of the changes made to program scheduling.

Survey Question Eleven

When thinking about meeting the needs of the whole child, how would you rate the iMPACt program's ability to meet the needs of the whole child? (Ex. Social opportunities, extra-curricular activities, etc.)

Survey question eleven asked survey respondents to rate the iMPACt program's ability to meet the needs of the whole child (Ex. social opportunities, extra-curricular activities, etc.). Of the 12 survey respondents, there were 0% of the respondents selected slightly negative or negative as the predetermined rating. An additional 25.00% of respondents selected a rating of neutral. 16.67%, selected slightly positive. The remaining respondents, 58.33% selected a predetermined rating of positive.

Table 18 presents these data from survey question eleven where respondents were asked to rate the transformative-based program's ability to meet the needs of the whole child.

Table 18*Rating the Ability to Meet the Needs of the Whole Child*

Rating	% / (n)
Negative	0.00% / 0
Slightly negative	0.00% / 0
Neutral	25.00% / 3
Slightly positive	16.67% / 2
Positive	58.33% / 7
Total	100% (n=12)

Data presented in Table 18 revealed that 58.33% of survey respondents rated the transformative-based program's ability to meet the whole child as Positive. While there were zero respondents who rate the ability to meet the needs of the whole child as slightly negative or negative, 41.67% of survey respondents selected ratings of neutral and slightly positive. These ratings suggest areas of growth with regard to the transformative-based program's ability to meet the needs of the whole child.

Research Question Two

How do school leaders indicate the program implementation has impacted building-level leadership's ability to meet students' needs?

Qualitative Interview Data

When interview participants were asked to reflect the way on which students' needs have or have not been met, and to describe the ways in which the changes have been most impactful to the student experience, participants responded with the following:

Table 19

Interview Question Six – How Would you Describe the Ways in Which the Transformative-Based Program has Impacted your Ability to Meet the Needs of your Students?

Participant Response	2A	2B (N/A)	2C	2D
Electives	X	X		X
Credit Recovery	X			X
Pacing	X		X	
Climate		X		
Transformative Approach			X	
Skills Training				X

The theme that emerged from interview question six, when respondents were asked to state the ways in which the transformative-based program as impacted building-level leadership’s ability to meet the needs of students, was electives.

Electives. Participant 2A and 2B emphasized the transformative-based program’s ability to offer electives, maintaining pacing similar to the division’s high school, and credit recovery/early graduation. Participant 2A stated that “We have found that we can be ahead of where the home schools are, but most times we stay pretty on pace, so there are no gaps in instruction” (2A, 5). When reflecting on the program’s ability to offer electives, respondent 2B expressed that, “We now offer Art I, II, and III. It’s been huge, not only from a credit perspective, but they have literally been able to put their mark on this building” (2B, 17). Participant 2D stated, “I think it (course offerings) was a step in the right direction for the kids so that they could have equal access” (2D, 36-37).

While the theme of electives emerged, the information below represents qualitative data from respondents who did not reflect upon electives as being the way in which the transformative-based program has allowed building-level leadership to meet the needs of its students:

- Participant 2B responded that changes to being able to access curriculum in multiple ways, stating that, “I do think that we are meeting student needs in a wide variety of ways. The GED program, the virtual learning, and in person instruction, and it’s a pretty well-rounded hybrid approach in my mind.” “We still don’t have a fully

expansive curriculum, and for various reasons, I don't know if that will ever happen, but I think we are getting close" (2B, 18-19).

- Participant 2C expressed changes to the approach for addressing behaviors and the importance of flexibility with his students being able to transition back and forth to the high school and back to the transformative day program as needed. Participant 2C stated that, "Having more ways and more platforms where kids have that really transformative experience, so we can get down to the root cause of student behavior. With this program being smaller, and in its own building, I'd like to see if we can figure a way to react to those behaviors instead of them just being suspended again" (2C, 29-30).
- Participant 2D focused on inclusion, environment, and perception expressing that what has made the biggest impact on student success was, "Giving students the opportunity to feel like a normal student." 2D went on to describe how, "Allowing them to be a part of a school environment is slowly going to change the perception of alternative education being the dumping ground for bad kids" (2D, 39-40).

When the participants were asked what recommendations, they have in order to continue advancing students' success, and what recommendations they have in order to continue advancing the success of the alternative education program, respondents offered the following:

Table 19

Interview Question Seven – Regarding the Ways that Students' Needs Have or Have Not Been Met, Describe the Ways in which the Changes have Been Most Impactful to the Student Experience.

Participant Response	2A	2B	2C	2D
Credit Recovery	X			
Pacing	X			
Multiple Ways to Access Learning		X		
Flexibility to Transition In/Out			X	
Meeting Behavioral Needs			X	
Experiencing a School Environment				X
Perception				X

Interview question seven, which asked respondents to describe the ways in which the changes have been most impactful to the student experience, did not yield any common themes.

Interview question ten asked respondents what recommendations they have in order to continue advancing student success. The qualitative data from interview question ten revealed four (combined) themes: funding/staffing, pacing/collaboration, program perception, and behavior/discipline measures.

Funding/Staffing. Participant 2A recommended additional funding to provide a full-time counselor and an additional math teacher (2A, 9-10). Further, “As for additional funding for teachers and supplies, Participant 2B explained, “We just need to expose them to more things. Whatever we can expose them to that they wouldn’t otherwise have an opportunity to do” (2B, 23).

Pacing/Collaboration. Participant 2A advocates for collaboration between the alternative education program and the participating high schools in order to promote student success” (2A, 9-10). Likewise, participant 2B suggested that further improvements to the alignment of pacing between the alternative program and the high schools. Participant 2B stated, “I do feel like that’s (pacing) been critical for their success. I think moving forward, as much as we can stay with them the better, and again, I don’t have to do every single thing they do at the high school, but as long as I hit the important concepts and use a lot of their materials, even if I approach it a little differently, it will all make sense and will all come together.”

Program Perception. Participant 2A shared the need for “...a plan to reinvent the perception of the alternative education program stating, “It will be a slow process, but the more kids that come and experience success are going to be listened to more than adults are... it will take some time. It will take some time, but I do think that it’s much different than it used to be” (2A, 9-10). Similarly, participant 2C emphasized a recommendation to focus on the program’s perception. Participant 2C expressed, “We’ve got to really promote the program and make sure there’s a really good understanding of what the program is, and how it can really serve the needs of our students that, traditionally, we have never really looked at” (2C, 32).

Behavior/Discipline Measures. Participant 2A advocates for “disciplinary procedures/process” (2A, 9-10). Similar to 2A, participant 2D expressed a need for

continuing the academic improvements that have been made along with an additional focus on individualizing the way in which behaviors are addressed. Participant 2D suggests that, “There is not enough focus on when a kid has a behavior, and how do you plan to address the behavior almost like an FBA (functional behavioral assessment) or a BIP (behavior intervention plan) like in elementary or middle school? What are the triggers and what is the desired outcome, and how do we work on trying to change that behavior” (2D, 39-40)?

Table 19 presents these data from interview question ten where respondents were asked what recommendations they have in order to continue advancing students’ success.

Table 19

Interview Question Ten – What Recommendations do you have in order to Continue Advancing Students’ Success?

Participant Response	2A	2B	2C	2D
Funding	X	X		
Staffing	X	X		
Therapeutic Day Treatment	X			
Program Perception	X	X	X	X
Re-entry Strategies		X		
Behavior/Discipline Measures			X	X
Collaboration			X	

As presented in table 20, the qualitative data from interview question ten reveal four (combined) themes: funding/staffing, pacing/collaboration, program perception, and behavior/discipline measures. Program perception was the strongest theme to emerge suggested by respondents that improving program perception amongst stakeholders should remain a consideration for future success.

Research Question Three

What are the perceptions of teachers, principals, and central office leadership regarding the program’s impact on school climate, behavior and academics?

Questions twelve-nineteen were designed to examine school leaders’ perceptions of how the transformative program has impacted school climate, behavior, and academics. Survey questions 12-19 directly relate to research question number three.

Survey Question Twelve

When thinking about school climate, how would you rate the change in school climate after the introduction of the iMPACt program?

Survey questions twelve-nineteen were designed to examine school leaders' perceptions of how the transformative program has impacted school climate, behavior and academics. Survey questions 12-19 directly relate to research question number three.

Survey question twelve asked survey respondents to rate the change in school climate after the introduction of the iMPACt program. Predetermined ratings included the following selections: positive, slightly positive, neutral, slightly negative, and negative. Out of the 12 survey respondents, 0% of survey respondents selected a school climate rating of slightly negative or negative. An additional 16.67% of respondents selected a rating of neutral. 8.33% selected a rating of slightly positive. Finally, 75.00% selected the school climate rating of positive.

Table 22 represents data for survey question twelve where respondents were asked how they would rate the change in school climate after the introduction of the transformative-based program.

Table 22

School Climate

Rating	% / (n)
Negative	0.00% / 0
Slightly negative	0.00% / 0
Neutral	16.67% / 2
Slightly positive	8.33% / 1
Positive	75.00% / 9
Total	100% (n=12)

Table 22 represents data presented by respondents when asked how they would rate the change in school climate after the introduction of the transformative-based program. According to table 21, 75% of respondents rated the change as positive. Also worth mentioning is that while the rating for positive was at 75%, 16.67% of the participants rated the change in school climate as neutral. The neutral ratings suggest that efforts to explore way to improve school climate ratings should be considered.

Survey Question Thirteen

Which word below would you use to describe the school climate of the iMPACt program?

Survey question thirteen asked respondents to select a predetermined rating to describe the school climate. The predetermined selections included the following: inclusive, encouraging, formal, non-existent, and unsupportive. Out of the survey's 12 respondents, were 0% of survey respondents who selected climate ratings of non-existent or unsupportive. 8.33% of participants selected a climate rating of formal. 50.00% of survey respondents selected a climate rating of encouraging. Additionally, 41.67% of the participants selected a rating of inclusive.

Table 23, below, presents data obtained from survey question thirteen where respondents were asked to select the rating that describes the school climate.

Table 23

Description of School Climate

Description	% / (n)
Unsupportive	0.00% / 0
Non-existent	0.00% / 0
Formal	8.33% / 1
Encouraging	50.00% / 6
Inclusive	41.67% / 5
Total	100% (n=12)

Table 23 demonstrates combined climate ratings of inclusive (41.67%) or encouraging (50%). 0% of the respondents selected non-existent or unsupportive. While survey question sixteen showed a need for growth in school climate ratings with 6.67% of the participants having rated the change in school climate as neutral with regard to the overall change in climate within the transformative-based program, Table 23 provided encouraging data revealing that a combined 91.67% of respondents selected encouraging or inclusive ratings.

Survey Question Fourteen

When thinking about student behavior incidents under the iMPACt program, how would you rate the decrease of incidents under the iMPACt program?

Survey question fourteen asked survey respondents to rate the decrease of student behavior incidents under the iMPACt program. Descriptive ratings for the decrease in student

behavior incidents include the following: transformative, positive, neutral, slightly worse, and significantly worse. Of the 12 survey respondents, 0% of the survey's participants selected a predetermined descriptive rating of slightly worse or significantly worse. 25.00% of the respondents selected a rating of neutral. 50.00% of the survey respondents selected positive for the descriptive rating regarding the decrease in student behavior incidents. Finally, 25.00% of survey respondents selected a descriptive rating of transformative.

Table 24 presents data from survey question fourteen which asked respondents to rate the decrease of student behavior incidents under the transformative-based program.

Table 24

Decrease in Student Behavior Incidents

Rating	% / (n)
Significantly worse	0.00% / 0
Slightly worse	0.00% / 0
Neutral	25.00% / 3
Positive	50.00% / 6
Transformative	25.00% / 3
Total	100% (n=12)

Table 24 represents data from survey question fourteen. When asked to select a rating that represents the decrease in student behavior incidents, a combined 75% of survey participants selected either Positive or Transformative rating for the decrease in student behavior incidents. Additionally, 25% of survey respondents selected a rating of neutral which suggests a need to investigate the root cause of student discipline incidents.

Survey Question Fifteen

When thinking about discipline problems, which word below most accurately reflects the way in which discipline problems are managed?

Survey question fifteen asked survey respondents to select a predetermined description that most accurately reflects the way in which discipline problems are managed. Predetermined descriptions included the following selections: equitable, consistent, acceptable, and inconsistent. Of the 11 survey respondents that participated in this question, 0% of the survey respondents selected a predetermined rating of inconsistent to describe the way that discipline problems are managed. 8.33% of respondents selected a rating of acceptable. 16.67% of the respondents

selected a rating of consistent. Finally, a majority 75.00% of the respondents selected a rating of equitable.

Table 25 represents data from survey question fifteen which asked respondents to select a predetermined description that most accurately reflects the way in which discipline problems are managed.

Table 25

Description of Discipline Management

Description	% / (n)
Inconsistent	0.00% / 0
Acceptable	8.33% / 1
Consistent	16.67% / 2
Equitable	75.00% / 8
Total	100% (n=11)

Table 25 demonstrates that out of the eleven participants (one failed to answer), had a 100% combined rating of acceptable, consistent, or equitable. These data suggest consistency and equity towards the way in which discipline incidents have been managed since the inception of the transformative-based program.

Survey Question Sixteen

How would you rate your involvement in the student discipline process?

Survey question sixteen asked survey respondents to rate the participant's involvement in the student discipline process. Predetermined ratings included the following selections: significant involvement, moderate involvement, slight involvement, and no involvement. Of the 11 survey respondents, zero percent of survey respondents selected no involvement in the student discipline process. 27.27% of participants selected a slight involvement in the student discipline process 36.36% of respondents selected moderate involvement in the student discipline process. Similarly, 36.36% selected significant involvement as their rating for student discipline involvement.

Table 26 presents data from survey question sixteen which asked respondents to rate their involvement in the student discipline process by selecting one of the predetermined ratings.

Table 26*Involvement in the student discipline process*

Rating	% / (n)
No involvement	0.00% / 0
Slight involvement	27.27% / 3
Moderate involvement	36.36% / 4
Significant involvement	36.36% / 4
Total	100% (n=11)

Table 26 presents data obtained from the eleven participants (one failed to answer) who responded to survey question sixteen. These data reveal that the ratings for student discipline involvement is diverse. Respondent's selections ranged from slight involvement (27.27%) to significant involvement (36.36%). These data could represent the individual role of each participant, which could be indicative of how involved the participant would be, but it could also suggest the respondent's interpretation of how involved they are allowed to be. These data suggest an opportunity to further explore leadership involvement in the student discipline process.

Survey Question Seventeen**How would you rate the academic performance of students participating in the iMPACt program when compared to the previous model of instruction?**

Survey question seventeen asked survey respondents to rate the academic performance of students participating in the iMPACt program when compared to the previous model of instruction. Ratings for academic performance of students in the iMPACt program include the following ratings: significant improvement, improvement, neutral, slight improvement, and no improvement. Of the 12 survey respondents, 0% of survey respondents selected no improvement for the rating of academic performance of students participating in the iMPACt program. 8.33% who selected a rating for a slight improvement, additional, 8.33% of respondents selected neutral. Next, 33.33% of respondents selected a rating of improvement. 50.00% selected significant improvement for the rating of academic performance for students participating in the iMPACt program.

Table 26 represents data collected for survey question seventeen which asked survey respondents to rate the academic performance of students who participate in the transformative-based program.

Table 27

Student Academic Performance Under iMPACt

Rating	% / (n)
No improvement	0.00% / 0
Slight improvement	8.33% / 1
Neutral	8.33% / 1
Improvement	33.33% / 4
Significant Improvement	50.00% / 6
Total	100% (n=12)

Table 27, above, presents the findings from survey question seventeen. The ratings indicate that participants find student academic performance to have shown a range from slight improvement (8.33%) to significant improvement (50%). While no respondent indicated no improvement, 50% of respondents indicated a slight improvement to Improvement which would indicate a need for additional exploration of why 50% of the program's leadership indicate significant improvement in student academic performance.

Survey Question Eighteen

When compared to the previous model of instruction, how would you rate the iMPACt program's variety of course offerings?

Survey question eighteen asked survey respondents to rate the iMPACt program's variety of course offerings when compared to the previous model of instruction. Ratings for the iMPACt program's variety of course offerings included the following ratings: significant improvement, improvement, slight improvement, slightly decreased, and decreased. Out of all 12 survey respondents, 0% selected that the iMPACt program's course offerings as slightly decreased. 16.67% of respondents rated the course offerings as an improvement. An additional 25.00% of survey respondents rated the variety of courses as an improvement. The remaining 58.33% rated the iMPACt program's variety of course offerings as a significant improvement.

Table 28 presents data from survey question eighteen which asked respondents to rate the transformative-based program's variety of course offerings when compared to the previous model of instruction.

Table 28

Variety of Course Offering Under iMPACt

Rating	% / (n)
Decreased	0.00% / 0
Slightly decreased	0.00% / 0
Slight improvement	16.67% / 2
Improvement	25.00% / 3
Significant improvement	58.33% / 7
Total	100% (n=12)

Table 28 revealed that 100% of respondents indicated a minimum of a slight increase to the variety of course offerings provided within the transformative-based program. Also worth noting, nearly 60% of survey participants indicated a significant improvement to course offerings. While the majority of leadership stakeholders rate the course offerings as improved or significant improvement, the 16.67% of participants who rated the course offerings with a slight improvement rating should be considered during the planning and staffing process for subsequent school years.

Survey Question Nineteen

Rate the impact that course offerings have on the students' ability to be successful in the iMPACt program.

Survey question nineteen asked survey respondents to rate the impact that course offerings have had on the students' ability to be successful in the iMPACt program. Ratings for the impact that course offerings have had on the students' ability to be successful in the iMPACt program included the following: significant impact, moderate impact, some impact, slight impact, and no impact. Of the 12 survey respondents, 8.33% of respondents selected the course offerings have had no impact. 0% of survey respondents selected that course offerings have had a slight impact on the students' ability to be successful in the iMPACt program. An additional 16.67% of survey respondents selected that the course offerings have had a moderate impact on

students' ability to be successful. Finally, 75.00% of survey participants selected that the course offerings have had a significant impact on the students' ability to be successful.

Table 29 presents data obtained from survey question nineteen where respondents were asked to rate the impact that course offerings have had on the students' ability to be successful in the transformative-based program.

Table 29

Impact of Course Offerings Under the iMPACt Program

Rating	% / (n)
No impact	8.33% / 1
Slight impact	0.00% / 0
Some impact	0.00% / 0
Moderate impact	16.67% / 2
Significant impact	75.00% / 9
Total	100% (n=12)

Table 29 presents data from survey question nineteen which revealed that 75% of respondents found the impact of course offerings to have a significant impact on the transformative-based program. One outlier indicated that course offerings have had no impact. While this outlier represented only 8.33% of the survey respondents, the selection of no impact should be examined as the program continues to build on its ability to provide a variety of course offerings.

Qualitative Interview Data

Interview Question Three

When respondents were asked to state the essential elements, or non-negotiable elements, of alternative education, the following theme emerged:

Alternative Approach. Participant 2A emphasized the need for flexibility and a true alternative approach. Participant 2A expressed, "...they may or may not all just be here because they have been placed here for behavior, but truly being able to offer an alternative approach to your high school diploma. That may mean online learning, it may mean smaller class sizes – that more personalized touch that you are not getting in a traditional high school when you have 700-800 kids with class sizes of 25-28 kids," (2A, 2). Additionally, similarly to 2A, 2C expressed an emphasis towards the alternative approach. Instead of prioritizing discipline, 2C suggests, "I,

personally, would like to see it be a true alternative model where we're looking at kids who might just do better virtually or who might not excel like a traditional high school environment. Really, just making sure that our kids have every chance they can to graduate on time" (2C, 16).

While only one theme emerged from interview question three, the qualitative data presented valuable insight as to what alternative education leadership consider to be non-negotiable elements of alternative education.

- Participant 2B states that patience and scaffolding were an essential element of alternative education citing, "Uhm, patience is going to be, I think, the key for many teachers, but particularly in an alternative education program. I feel like patience needs to be at the top of the list. Most of my kids are great at being willing to do something, and they won't look at it as though they need to do it, but I think a lot has to do with patience and respect." Participant 2B described scaffolding as anytime you are "just trying to get them started". 2B suggests that, "A little bit of scaffolding, patience, and really a lot of respect in this environment...because a lot of the kids are here because they didn't get along with their teachers... if you can just be respectful to them, it goes a long way" (2B, 9).
- Participant 2C impressed upon the value of on-time graduation. "I think it's really important that we are providing our students a way to graduation on time. I know that's everyone's goal."
- Participant 2D suggested that essential elements of alternative education include safety, high degree of expectations, a network of support, collaboration, high degree of pedagogy for alternative education, crisis management for students in distress and student buy-in. 2D elaborated by saying, "You've got to be able to talk to kids and deescalate through crisis management and de-escalation strategies." Additionally, 2D reinforced the value of student buy-in by suggesting, "We've really got to find ways to get kids to buy in to the program both for themselves and our community" (2D, 20).

Table 30 presents data obtained from interview question three where respondents were asked to state what they consider to be essential or non-negotiable elements of alternative education.

Table 30

Interview Question Three – Please State what you Consider to be Essential or Non-Negotiable Elements of Alternative Education?

Participant Response	2A	2B	2C	2D
Flexibility	X			
Alternative approach	X		X	
Patience		X		
Scaffolding		X		
Respect		X		
Access to on-time graduation			X	
Safety				X
Expectations (academic/behavioral)				X
Support				X
Collaboration				X
Pedagogy				X
Crisis management				X
Student buy-in				X

Table 30 presented data from interview question three which asked respondents to state what they consider to be essential or non-negotiable elements of alternative education. Interview question three revealed only theme, Alternative Approach. These data suggests that alternative education leaders believe the alternative approach to be an essential or non-negotiable element for the success of the alternative education program.

Interview Question Eight

Interview question eight asked leaders of the transformative-based program if they believe the students want to be a part of the alternative education program, and if so, to what do they attribute the students' desire to participate. Additionally, if the school leaders did not feel that the students wanted to participate, they were asked to explain the changes that could be made in order to increase the students' desire to participate in the alternative education program.

Alternative education leaders responded with the following:

- **Placed vs Choice.** Participant 2A followed up with an acknowledgement that the answer is two-fold and replied with, "That was a loaded question!" Participant 2A explained that those students who were placed for disciplinary reasons were not likely to want to participate and suggested, "No, I do not think they do – they are not

signing up to come here. They are being placed here.” Participant 2A explained that for those who have chosen to attend the transformative program, participation is desirable, and in fact, some students have returned to the home school and then chosen to return, by choice. Participant 2A credited the program’s ability to offer smaller class sizes with “less drama” and the program’s ability to be “better equipped” at handling the behavioral and mental needs of the students attending the transformative day program, and stated, “Here, I can take Johnnie or Susie and talk to them and spend a couple hours with them, and sometimes that is what it takes to turn their day around so that they can be productive for the rest of the day” (2A, 6-7).

Participant 2B, similarly to Participant 2A, clarified that there are two sides to the response stating, “Ok, let me attack this from two sides of this coin,” and referenced that while some students are placed, other attend on a voluntary basis. The respondent suggested that those students who are placed often demonstrate feelings of, “This is the end of the world. We are showing up to jail school.” The respondent stated that all efforts are made to “mitigate those feelings”. On the contrary, the students who have chosen the transformative day program do want to participate because they are aware of the benefits of the program. Participant 2B explained that, “They like it here. They feel respected here. Some of them feel like it is a pretty safe space – smaller class sizes, they don’t get made fun of by other students, they have good relationships with their teachers, and they like the principal, so there are a lot of layers as to why they actually like this environment once they get acclimated” (2B, 19-21). Participant 2C responded with, “Good question, some of them do not.” Echoing the responses of Participant 2A and 2B, Participant 2C stated that, “Students who are being sent for disciplinary reasons typically do not want to go to the alternative program. We have had some success with students wanting to gain a GED or get back on track, so I think we are on the right track, I truly do.

- **Perception.** Participant 2D responded with the recognition that both answers are true because, “Some kids want to go, but there’s still a lot of kids who don’t want to go. The respondent continued with the following explanation, “For those who still have a negative perception, this year, I think by necessity, because of COVID and the pandemic, we have so many kids in the program trying to recover credits, or get a

GED online, or who transferred from another division with a totally different schedule, entirely and are able to go there and recover credits, this year of all years, will hopefully change the perception amongst the kids of the program being a bad place, automatically, where it still is a place for discipline – depending on outcome, but it’s also a place where you can have a different path to graduation” (2D, 39-40). Participant 2C added, “I think we need to help our community understand what the program is verses just being a true alternative school” (2C. 30-31). Participant 2C continued with, “I think it is a big hurdle when you are trying to encourage students to go to an alternative setting, but they don’t want to be treated as if it’s a disciplinary setting, so that would be one of my biggest points is that we have to change that view” (2C. 30-31).

Table 31 presents data obtained in interview question eight which asked respondents if they believe that students want to be a part of the alternative education program.

Table 31

Interview Question Eight – Do you Believe that the Students want to be a Part of the Alternative Education Program? If so, to what do you Attribute the Students’ Desire to Participate in the Program? If you do not Believe that the Students want to Participate, What Changes do you Feel could be Made that would Increase the Students’ Desire to Participate in the Program?

Participant Response	2A	2B	2C	2D
Placed vs Choice	X	X	X	
Class Size	X			
Incomplete Course Offerings		X		
Perception			X	X
Transformative Approach			X	
Access to On-time Graduation				X

These data presented in Table 31 revealed two themes: placed vs choice and perception. Based upon the qualitative data provided by respondents, these two themes are closely related. The perception that students have about the transformative-based program could impact whether or not they will choose to participate in the program. On the other hand, if stakeholders perceive the program to be a place where students are placed for behavior concerns, the overall perception of the program could be affected.

Interview Question Nine

When school leaders were asked about the impact that the transformative-based program has had on school climate, and to describe the way that the transformative-based program differs from the behavior-based program, the following themes emerged:

Environment. Participant 2A responded with acknowledgement that the respondent was not involved with the former behavior-based program, but “When compared to the night school, we have more of a traditional approach but in a smaller setting. It is more normal for them. They get to be normal students” (2A, 7-8). Participant 2B tied together the impact on climate and the difference(s) between the behavior-based and transformative-based programs by suggesting, “Naturally, I think that when you have a clientele that is 100% placed here based on behavior, it’s naturally going to breed an environment that is not maybe as conducive to concentrating and studying.” Participant 2B counters with, “Instead, when you introduce a lot of these kids who are here by choice, I feel like it changes the tone a little bit, and the median or average behaviors just begin to shift. To have these kids who are actually fairly smart, some of them incredibly smart, they just don’t fit in with the traditional environment, actually want to be here, it’s just innately picked up by the other kids” (2B, 21).

Transformative Approach. Participant 2C replied with an acknowledgement of the transformative-based program’s attempt at “really looking toward the next step” with an emphasis on “making sure that the students have the skills they need when they leave us”. Participant 2C suggested, “I feel that it’s not seen now as a stop gap measure, and I think they are really looking at it as a way to help retain students, to help students graduate and/or to help transition them back to their schools.” Participant 2C went on to share that the transformative based program is no longer a disciplinary transaction but instead is an opportunity to “figure things out” and to discover why it wasn’t working in a traditional setting versus pushing students back into the environment that already didn’t work for them in the first place. (2C, 31). Participant 2D expressed the impact on teachers suggesting that, “Teachers see that it is no longer just a dumping ground, that it is a place for kids to be able to come back into their classroom without a total loss of learning” (2D, 39-40).

Table 32 presents data collected during interview question nine where alternative education leaders were asked to describe the way that the transformative-based program differs from the behavior-based program.

Table 32

Interview Question Nine – What Impact has the Transformative-Based Program had on School Climate? Describe the way that the Transformative Program Differs from the Behavior-Based Program.

Participant Response	2A	2B	2C	2D
Environment	X	X		
Transformative Approach			X	X
Perception				X

As demonstrated in Table 31, participants revealed that climate has impacted the transformative-based program in the areas of environment, a transformative approach and perceptions. This impact has resulted from differences/changes between the former behavior-based program and the current transformative model.

Survey Question Twenty

***If you are willing to participate in a virtual interview regarding your experience(s) in alternative education leadership, please include your contact information in order to schedule your interview.**

Survey question twenty yielded four candidates which volunteered to participate in a virtual interview. Data from all four candidates were included in this study.

Table 33*Summarization of Recurring Themes Mentioned by Study Participants*

Themes	2A	2B	2C	2D
Flexibility (F)	X		X	
Patience (P)		X		X
Scaffolding (S)		X		
Behavior (B)	X			X
Alternative Approach (AA)	X	X	X	X
Collaboration (C)		X	X	X
Placed (PL)	X	X		X
Funding (FUN)	X	X		
Alternative Discipline (AD)	X		X	X
Perceptions (PER)	X	X	X	X
Smaller Environment (SE)	X	X		
Transportation (T)			X	X
Credit Recovery (CR)	X			X
Electives (E)	X	X		
Pacing (PAC)	X	X	X	
Asynchronous Classes (AC)	X	X		X
On-Time Graduation (OTG)	X	X	X	

Table 33 provides a summary of the recurring themes mentioned during the qualitative interviews. As demonstrated in Table 33, themes that emerged from the interviews included alternative approach, perceptions, and if combined, credit recovery/electives (course offerings).

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of data collected from the Qualtrics *Perceptions* Survey. Survey data submitted by 12+ alternative education division stakeholders was analyzed for the purpose of identifying emerging themes from data supporting each of the following research questions:

1. What are the perceptions of teachers, principals, and central office leadership regarding their effectiveness in their roles as building leaders following the first year of program implementation?

2. What are the perceptions of teachers, principals, and central office leadership regarding the ways that program implementation has impacted building-level leadership's ability to meet students' needs?
3. What are the perceptions of teachers, principals, and central office leadership regarding the program's impact on school climate, behavior and academics?

As demonstrated in Table 33, the coded survey data reveal 16 recurring themes embedded within the survey data. These themes were related to the three research questions presented above that sought to explore the perceptions of alternative education leaders, teachers, and division stakeholders.

Chapter Five

Findings and Implications

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify the perceptions of school leaders regarding the effectiveness of an alternative education transformative day program following one year of implementation. The study examined the development of a transformative, alternative education day program in a small rural Virginia school division in order to reveal perceptions of alternative education teachers and building-level/division-level leadership as well as the correlation between those perceptions and student performance outcomes. A phenomenological, qualitative based study was conducted in order to examine the following research questions:

- 1 What are the perceptions of teachers, principals, and central office leadership regarding their effectiveness in their roles as building leaders of the alternative education program following the first year of program implementation?
- 2 What are the perceptions of teachers, principals, and central office leadership regarding the ways that program implementation has impacted building-level leadership's ability to meet students' needs?
- 3 What are the perceptions of teachers, principals, and central office leadership regarding the program's impact on school climate, behavior and academics?

Summary of Findings

Following the analyzation of data for this study, four findings emerged. Each finding has been summarized and is included in the sections below.

Discussion of Finding

Finding One

Leaders in alternative education identified the need for increasing program perception for building and community stakeholders as being a critical factor for program success.

Supporting data/supporting literature for finding one

According to alternative school leaders who identified the need for increasing program perception for building and community stakeholders as a leading factor in program success, the increase in positive perception of the program was attributed to recruiting new students into the

program and will continue to propel program success in the future. Interview question number ten posed the following: What recommendations do you have in order to continue advancing students' success? Qualitative data obtained from interview question number ten revealed that 100% of study participants discussed the impact of perception on the transformative-based alternative program (see Table 20). Participants referenced the word, perception, on six individual occasions. The frequency and the relationship of how the term, perception, were consistent throughout each virtual interview.

- When asked what recommendations could be shared in order to advance students success, one interview participant shared that “really changing the perception of the alternative program” because “we are still viewed as the bad kids”. The participant explained that there is still a perception of students not wanting to attend “that school”. Moreover, a concern that language with a negative connotation has been used where students are told, “I am going to send you to that school” (2A, 9).
- Additionally, participant 2B shared the program perception has improved. According to 2B, “The ones that are placed, they feel like OMG, this is the end of the world. They are showing up at jail school, and we do everything we can to mitigate those feelings. Sometimes, it's just cracking that initial perception that this is for bad kids,” (2B, 11-12).
- Similarly, Participant 2C expressed that an area in which the program still has room to grow would be in area of program perception. Participant 2C explained the following, “I would say that looking at how we can improve on the model from what we had previously, now that it is a day program, would be working really hard to change the perception of the program. It's no longer just an alternative for discipline, but it's truly an alternative education model” (2C, 16).
- Participant 2C emphasized a recommendation to focus on the program's perception, disciplinary procedures/process, and collaboration between the alternative education program and the participating high schools. “We've got to really promote the program and make sure there's a really good understanding of what the program is, and how it can really serve the needs of our students that, traditionally, we have never really looked at” (2C, 32).

- Finally, participant 2D remarked upon program perception stating, “For those who still have a negative perception, this year, I think by necessity, because of COVID and the pandemic, we have so many kids in the program trying to recover credits, or get a GED online, or who transferred from another division with a totally different schedule entirely and are able to go there and recover credits. This year, of all years, will hopefully change the perception amongst the kids of the program being a bad place, automatically, where it still is a place for discipline – depending on outcome, but it’s also a place where you can have a different path to graduation” (2D, 39-40).

As noted in Chapter Four, “Six powerful practices for alternative education programs” Mailett (2017) suggests six strategies that could easily be transferred into mainstream education. These fundamental cornerstones include the following strategies: provide active and creative instruction; integrate service-learning opportunities into all aspects of the program; accelerate student learning; build time into the schedule to connect with kids; have a plan B (and C) for every student every day; and utilize volunteers such as college students and community members. “The mission of the alternative middle school was to provide active, creative and service-driven instruction that would reengage students in their own learning” (Mailett, 2017, p. 234). Alternative learners possess at-risk behaviors that can inhibit the ability to graduate high school. As such, an action plan should be established to provide students with access to mentors, flexibility and access to content in the form of remote learning and relationship building with school staff and community members.

Mailett’s (2017) emphasis on alternative schools highlighting community involvement in order to provide mentor opportunities and exposure to hands on learning environments could offer a potential solution for altering the perception of the transformative-based, alternative education program. By arranging opportunities for community members to interact with, mentor, and serve as community liaisons for the students of the alternative program, members of the community would be granted access to both the facility and the stakeholders for which the program serves. Additionally, members of the community would be granted valuable insight of the climate, quality of instruction, and the overall culture of the program. The more exposure the program has, the greater the potential for transforming stakeholder and community members’ perception of the program which could result in reversing the stigma resulting from the former behavior-based program.

Finding Two

Alternative education leaders identified *alternative approach* as being an integral component of program success.

Supporting data/supporting literature for finding two

Alternative education leaders agreed that providing an alternative approach to both learning and the path to graduation is a key component to the transformative-based program. Survey question seven asked respondents to describe the influence that the current model of instruction has had on building-level leadership's ability to meet the needs of students using the predetermined statements provided for survey question seven. Of the 12 survey respondents, 50.00% selected that the iMPACt program has allowed me to effectively meet the needs of students. An additional 41.67% of respondents selected that the iMPACt program has increased my ability to meet the needs of students – a combined total of 91.67%. Qualitative data obtained within the virtual interviews revealed that 100% of the study's participants attributed the alternative approach to the current state of program success (see Table 32). Study participants referenced the alternative approach on 11 occasions. The frequency and the examples referencing the term, *alternative approach*, were consistent throughout all four interviews. The information below expresses how alternative education leaders viewed the transformative-based program when compared to the former behavioral-based program.

- Participant 2A emphasized the need for flexibility and a true alternative approach. Participant 2A expressed, "...they may or may not all just be here because they have been placed here for behavior, but truly being able to offer an alternative approach to your high school diploma. That may mean online learning, it may mean smaller class sizes – that more personalized touch that you are not getting in a traditional high school when you have 700-800 kids with class sizes of 25-28 kids" (2A, 2). Participant 2A also mentioned credit recovery, and replied, "I'm still thinking it goes back to credit recovery and being able to stay on target with their credits to earn towards graduation." Participant 2A reflected on the night program where students would return to their home school behind. "To me, that just increases the risk of them either dropping out, acting out, or returning here because they're failing classes or not graduating on time" (2A, 6).

- Participant 2B responded that changes to being able to access curriculum in multiple ways, stating that, “I do think that we are meeting student needs in a wide variety of ways. The GED program, the virtual learning, and in person instruction, and it’s a pretty well-rounded hybrid approach in my mind.”
- Participant 2C impressed upon the importance of on-time graduation. “I think it’s really important that we are providing our students a way to graduation on time. I know that’s everyone’s goal.” Additionally, similarly to 2A, 2C expressed an emphasis towards the alternative approach. Instead of prioritizing discipline, 2C suggests, “I, personally, would like to see it be a true alternative model where we’re looking at kids who might just do better virtually or who might not accel like a traditional high school environment. Really, just making sure that our kids have every chance they can to graduate on time” (2C, 16).
- Participant 2D suggested that essential elements of alternative education include safety, high degree of expectations, a network of support, collaboration, high degree of pedagogy for alternative education, crisis management for students in distress and student buy-in. 2D elaborated with, “You’ve got to be able to talk to kids and deescalate through crisis management and de-escalation strategies.” Additionally, 2D reinforced the importance of student buy-in by suggesting, “We’ve really got to find ways to get kids to buy in to the program both for themselves and our community” (2D, 20).

Research conducted by McGee and Lin (2017) and Yeager (2017) provided a basis of support towards the importance of an alternative approach when establishing the foundation for a successful alternative education program. McGee and Lin’s work emphasizes the critical collaboration between stakeholders in order to ensure a successful experience for alternative learners. “The data-driven decision-making process influences the AE program development through the collaboration of all stakeholders, including but not limited to the school, the parents, the students, and the community. McGee and Lin assert that, “Successful partnerships between school staff and student families increase the likelihood of student success in an AE program” (McGee et al., 2017, pp. 184-185).

Whereas McGee and Lin (2017) focused on the collaboration of stakeholders, Yeager (2017) presents an awareness for the importance of prioritizing Social-emotional Learning (SEL)

in an alternative education environment. “SEL programs try to help adolescents cope with their difficulties more successfully by improving *skills* and *mindsets*, and they try to create respectful school environments that young people want to be a part of by changing the school’s *climate*,” (Yeager, 2017, p. 2). According to Yeager (2017), effective programs align the adult-sanctioned healthy choice - such as not getting pregnant, not getting arrested, etc. with peer-sanctioned sources of status and respect like freedom, autonomy, or mattering (p. 11). As demonstrated in the supporting data above, division and building-level leadership possess a strong sense of support towards the importance of the alternative approach and the ways in which McGee and Lin (2017) and Yeager (2017) could provide a strong foundation for next steps in the arenas of stakeholder collaboration and Social-emotional Learning in alternative education.

Finding Three

Leaders in alternative education have identified the elements of climate and culture as impactful on student success.

Supporting data/supporting literature for finding three

According to alternative education leaders, the climate and culture of the transformative-based program has affected students’ success and the overall success of the alternative education program as a whole. Survey question twelve asked survey respondents to rate the change in school climate after the introduction of the iMPACt program.

Survey question twelve asked participants to rate the change in school climate after the introduction of the iMPACt program. Predetermined ratings included the following selections: positive, slightly positive, neutral, slightly negative, and negative. Out of the 12 survey respondents, 0% of survey respondents selected a school climate rating of slightly negative or negative. An additional 16.67% of respondents selected a rating of neutral. Further, 8.33% selected a rating of slightly positive. Finally, 75.00% selected the school climate rating of positive.

Survey question twelve asked respondents how they would rate the change in school climate after the introduction of the transformative-based program (see Table 22). Table 22 represents data presented by respondents when asked how they would rate the change in school climate after the introduction of the transformative-based program. According to Table 22, 75% of respondents rated the change as positive. Also worth mentioning, is that while the rating for positive was at 75% while 16.67% of the participants rated the change in school

climate as neutral. The neutral ratings suggest that efforts to explore way to improve school climate ratings should be considered.

Table 23 demonstrates combined climate ratings of inclusive (41.67%) or encouraging (50%). 0% of the respondents selected non-existent or unsupportive. While survey question sixteen showed a need for growth in school climate ratings with 6.67% of the participants having rated the change in school climate as neutral, with regard to the overall change in climate within the transformative-based program, Table 23 provided encouraging data, revealing that a combined 91.67% of respondents selected encouraging or inclusive ratings (see Table 23).

Additionally, the study's virtual interviews presented the following supporting data:

- Participant 2B focused on the transformative-based program's climate and ability to offer electives noting that, "it's been my impression that (former program) this was more of a holding pin for classes in a very short day – it was at night – and the kids now go to a true alternative school. It's really, I feel, is much better at meeting the needs of students." When reflecting on the program's ability to offer electives, respondent 2B expressed that, "We now offer Art I, II, and III. It's been huge, not only from a credit perspective, but they have literally been able to put their mark on this building." Respondent 2B shared how the building that once looked "sterile" now student interest and the five counties that participate in the program by reflecting each mascot in some way with a goal being that we "want it to feel like a settling campus – you know – instead of a jail cell" (2B, 17).
- Participant 2D expressed the impact on teachers suggesting that, "Teachers see that it is no longer just a dumping ground, that it is a place for kids to be able to come back into their classroom without a total loss of learning." Participant 2D furthered the explanation by stating, "I think that teachers see it, and parents have seen that as well that students have a better chance at getting the credit and having the student learning, so it's certainly had a positive impact on that part of the school culture" (2D, 39-40). Participant 2D focused on inclusion, environment, and perception expressing that what has made the biggest impact on student success was, "Giving students the opportunity to feel like a normal student." 2D went on to describe how, "Allowing them to be a part of a school environment is slowly going to change the perception of alternative education being the dumping ground for bad kids" (2D, 39-40).

Pendergast et al.'s (2018) six interrelated themes for a sense of belonging in schools (SOBAS) include: school climate, social belonging and relationships, students' personal attributes, academic belonging, school transitions, and other factors (socio-economic status and gender). The studies reduced the related factors to five which include relationships in schools, school climate factors, pedagogical practices, specific programs and activities, and other factors such as family mental health, trauma, and poverty. The Pendergast et al. (2018) study concludes that, data reveal that a sense of belonging at school is, indeed, a key element of emotional engagement, sitting firmly between the behavioral and cognitive indicators of student engagement, (p. 5). As such, the Pendergast et al. (2018) research should be considered when establishing best practice for the alternative education stakeholders.

Similar to Pendergast et al.(2018), and Hart (2019) "Controlled Burn: A Story of Growth" supports the use of highly effective strategies to motivate students using alternative education as the vehicle. Hart suggests that we need to support students who are not successful in a traditional school environment and offers that we do so using the following strategies: start with strengths, make students feel competent, help students feel they belong, and offer autonomy. Similar to Mailett's (2017) findings, Hart recognizes that a focus on student strengths is where we will begin to show gains. According to Hart, "In emphasizing strengths, a teacher can positively impact a learner's sense of self-efficacy, or competence. When teachers emphasize students' interests and abilities, students begin to see themselves as capable" (Hart, 2019, p. 31). Division and school-based leadership should consider the ways in which Hart's findings, in conjunction with Pendergast et al. (2018) work on SOBAS, if incorporated could further develop the existing climate and culture of the transformative-based alternative education program.

Finding Four

Leaders in Alternative Education identified *alternative course offerings and credit recovery* as being critical components of program success.

Supporting data/supporting literature for finding four

Leaders of the transformative-based alternative education program have identified the value of course offerings and credit recovery options as being crucial elements for program success. Survey question eighteen asked survey respondents to rate the iMPACt program's variety of course offerings when compared to the previous model of instruction. Out of the 12 survey respondents, 58.33% rated the iMPACt program's variety of course offerings as a

significant improvement. An additional 25.00% of survey respondents rated the variety of courses as an improvement. The remaining 16.67% of respondents rated the course offerings as an improvement. Finally, 0% selected that the iMPACt program's course offerings as slightly decreased (see Table 27). Survey question nineteen asked survey respondents to rate the impact that course offerings have had on the students' ability to be successful in the iMPACt program. Out of the 12 survey respondents, 75.00% of survey participants selected that the course offerings have had a significant impact on the students' ability to be successful. An additional 16.67% of survey respondents selected that the course offerings have had a moderate impact on students' ability to be successful. 8.33% of respondents selected the course offerings have had no impact. Lastly, 0% of survey respondents selected that course offerings have had a slight impact on the students' ability to be successful in the iMPACt program (see Table 28). Survey data yielded positive results regarding the transformative-based program's improved course offerings and ability to provide credit recovery; however, both survey and interview data revealed areas for future growth. In addition to survey data, alternative education leaders provided additional qualitative data regarding course offerings and credit recovery during the virtual interviews.

- Participant 2A reiterated credit recovery, and replied, "I'm still thinking it goes back to credit recovery and being able to stay on target with their credits to earn towards graduation." Participant 2A reflected on the former night program where students would return to their home school behind. "To me, that just increases the risk of them either dropping out, acting out, or returning here because they're failing classes or not graduating on time" (2A, 6).
- Participant 2B responded that changes to being able to access curriculum in multiple ways, stating that, "I do think that we are meeting student needs in a wide variety of ways. The GED program, the virtual learning, and in person instruction, and it's a pretty well-rounded hybrid approach in my mind." "We still don't have a fully expansive curriculum, and for various reasons, I don't know if that will ever happen, but I think we are getting close" (2B, 18-19).
- Participant 2B focused on the transformative-based program's climate and ability to offer electives noting that, "it's been my impression that (former program) this was more of a holding pin for classes in a very short day – it was at night – and the kids now go to a true alternative school. It's really, I feel, is much better at meeting the

needs of students.” When reflecting on the program’s ability to offer electives, respondent 2B expressed that, “We now offer Art I, II, and III. It’s been huge, not only from a credit perspective, but they have literally been able to put their mark on this building.”

- Participant 2C expressed changes to the approach for addressing behaviors and the importance of flexibility with his students being able to transition back and forth to the high school and back to the transformative day program as needed. Participant 2C stated that, “Having more ways and more platforms where kids have that really transformative experience, so we can get down to the root cause of student behavior. With this program being smaller, and in its own building, I’d like to see if we can figure a way to react to those behaviors instead of them just being suspended again” (2C, 29-30). Participant 2A emphasized the transformative-based program’s ability to offer electives, maintaining pacing similar to the division’s high school, and credit recovery/early graduation. Participant 2A stated that “We have found that we can be ahead of where the home schools are, but most times we stay pretty on pace, so there are no gaps in instruction” (2A, 5).
- Participant 2C expressed an emphasis on the pacing of the program that was similar to Participant 2A along with the transformative approach that was mentioned by Participant 2B. Participant 2C explained that while, “The new program is not quite on the same scale, it is much more in synch, with what is being taught here at the high school, but more importantly, they have that transformative approach on student behaviors” (2C, 29).
- Participant 2D specifically noted credit recovery and transportation stating, “I think it was a step in the right direction for the kids so that they could have equal access” (2D, 36-37).

Dorn et al. (2020), outlined the significance of hybrid learning as of the result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Educational leaders across the globe learned that an unintended bi-product of COVID-19 was that students and educators demonstrated the ability to teach and learn remotely (para. 24). The necessity of continued remote learning cannot be an excuse for inaction or indifference. There are examples of high-quality online education, and reaching this level should be the general expectation. While no one knows exactly what level of in-class learning

will be possible for the 2020–21 school year, many students will probably need to stay home for at least part of it. Educators need to use the summer to learn how to make instruction more effective, whatever the scenario (Dorn et al., 2020, para 23). With the uncertainty that lies ahead for the state of education, IT virtual instruction must be further explored as a means of expanding course offering and increasing credit recovery options by offering virtual instruction in alternative education environment.

As outlined by Gray's (2005) dissertation, "Virtual High Schools: A Case Study to Explore Why Students, Parents, and Teachers Choose This Type of Alternative Education", Gray reports the findings of a 2005 case study intended to explore the motivation towards an increased growth in virtual learning as an alternative to the traditional education received in brick-and-mortar schools. In support of the benefits for virtual learning, as an alternative to traditional models, Gray states the following, "In most states, virtual schools help cover the gaps in public education by being open to all students, including gifted-and-talented, homeschool students, and students with special needs" (Gray, 2005). As such, Gray conducted a qualitative, mixed methods case study in which he conducted purposeful sampling in order to explore the increased motivation towards seeking virtual education as a means of receiving an education alternative to the traditional brick and mortar experience. The findings from Gray's study concluded that, "...students were pleased with their choice of involvement in Branson Online High School" (Gray, 2005).

Archambault et al. (2010), purport the strategy of mastery learning, within a virtual learning environment, increase in communication between student, teacher and home, along with early identification of at-risk students as a means of ensuring student success in a virtual setting, (p. 7). As indicated by the research, a virtual learning environment can be effective when accompanied by the specific strategies outlined within this section, By implementing strategies such as the role of teachers and support staff helping students progress through their classes, individualizing instruction through the affordances of technology, ensuring that students have ongoing access to the technology they need and specific instructional strategies that support achievement, programs serving the needs of students who may be "at-risk" have defined successful outcomes in a variety of ways, all of which deal with the progress that the student is making while in various courses and as a participant in the virtual school program (p. 8). Given the research available to support virtual instruction as a viable model for alternative education by

providing additional flexibility and support to students, virtual learning options should be considered when designing plans for expanding course/credit recovery offerings within the transformative-based alternative learning environment.

Finding Five

The perceptions of teachers, principals, and central office leadership is that, when compared to the former behavior-based program, they are more effective leaders in the alternative education program following the first year of program implementation.

Supporting data/supporting literature for finding four finding five

Survey question one asked alternative education leaders to rate his/her effectiveness as the leader of an alternative education program. Survey respondents were provided with effectiveness rating choices which included: strongly effective, effective, somewhat effective, somewhat ineffective, and not effective. Key data revealed that 53.85% of participants selected a rating of effective and 30.77% responded with an effectiveness rating of strongly effective. Table 3 provides quantified data regarding effectiveness ratings for the 13 survey participants. More importantly, these data presented in Table 3 demonstrates that all survey participants rated their effectiveness as Somewhat effective or better with a concentrated 53.85% of participants rating themselves as Effective (see Table 3).

Survey question three asked survey respondents to rate their leadership effectiveness using the following prewritten descriptions: I was a more effective school leader under the previous instructional model; my school leadership effectiveness has remained the same between the previous and current models of instruction; my school leadership effectiveness has remained the same between the previous and current models of instruction. Key findings from table three demonstrated that zero percent of survey participants chose I am a less effective leader under the current model of instruction, or I was a more effective school leader under the previous instructional model. Moreover, I am a less effective leader under the current model of instruction, and I am a more effective school leader under the current instructional model accounted for the selections of 83.33% of the 12 survey respondents.

Similarly, table 5 represents the responses to survey question three which asked respondents to select the statement that describes the candidates' self-rating for school leadership effectiveness. Table 5 represents the responses that respondents selected to describe the candidates' self-rating for school leadership effectiveness. As seen above, 83.33% of the

respondents selected that they are a more effective school leaders under the current instructional model. Also worth noting, 0% of respondents selected that they were more effective under the previous model, nor did any respondents select that they are a less effective leader under the current model of instruction (see Table 5).

As a means of furthering the development of leadership efficacy within the alternative education program, building and school-based leadership should consult with, “WE CAN DO IT: Preparing Leaders to Lead in Alternative Education Schools” (Price, 2009). Price punctuates the need for preparation with the following assertion, “Clearly, leaders of schools with an at-risk student population require specific preparation with appropriate training and support so they can lead staff toward teaching effectively and for at-risk students to learn successfully” (Price, 2009, p. 1). Among several of Price’s (2009) proposed recommendations for leading a successful alternative education program, include the following, “a change in culture (support for leadership excellence) and an increase in the use of technology to support communication among leadership candidates” (Price, 2009, p. 10). The presence of leadership is a viable strategy for promoting an appropriate atmosphere within an alternative education program. Price’s work could provide support and guidance as the alternative education program seeks to increase the percentage of effectiveness ratings within the highly effective and effective categories.

Finding Six

Teachers, principals, and central office leadership perceive that program implementation has increased their ability to meet the needs of students participating in the alternative education program.

Supporting data/supporting literature for finding six

Survey question seven asked respondents to describe the influence that the current model of instruction has had on building-level leadership’s ability to meet the needs of students using the predetermined statements provided for survey question seven. A combined 91.67% either selected that the iMPACt program has increased my ability to meet the needs of students (41.67%) or that the iMPACt program has allowed me to effectively meet the needs of students (50%) (see Table 13).

Interview question six asked participants to reflect the way on which students’ needs have or have not been met, and to describe the ways in which the changes have been most impactful to the student experience. The theme that emerged from interview question six, when

respondents were asked to state the ways in which the transformative-based program as impacted building-level leadership's ability to meet the needs of students, was electives.

Electives. Participant 2A and 2B emphasized the transformative-based program's ability to offer electives, maintaining pacing similar to the division's high school, and credit recovery/early graduation. Participant 2A stated that "We have found that we can be ahead of where the home schools are, but most times we stay pretty on pace, so there are no gaps in instruction" (2A, 5). When reflecting on the program's ability to offer electives, respondent 2B expressed that, "We now offer Art I, II, and III. It's been huge, not only from a credit perspective, but they have literally been able to put their mark on this building" (2B, 17). Participant 2D stated, "I think it (course offerings) was a step in the right direction for the kids so that they could have equal access" (2D, 36-37).

While the theme of electives emerged, the information below represents qualitative data from respondents who did not reflect upon electives as being the way in which the transformative-based program has allowed building-level leadership to meet the needs of its students:

- Participant 2B responded that changes to being able to access curriculum in multiple ways, stating that, "I do think that we are meeting student needs in a wide variety of ways. The GED program, the virtual learning, and in person instruction, and it's a pretty well-rounded hybrid approach in my mind." "We still don't have a fully expansive curriculum, and for various reasons, I don't know if that will ever happen, but I think we are getting close" (2B, 18-19).
- Participant 2C expressed changes to the approach for addressing behaviors and the importance of flexibility with his students being able to transition back and forth to the high school and back to the transformative day program as needed. Participant 2C stated that, "Having more ways and more platforms where kids have that really transformative experience, so we can get down to the root cause of student behavior. With this program being smaller, and in its own building, I'd like to see if we can figure a way to react to those behaviors instead of them just being suspended again" (2C, 29-30).
- Participant 2D focused on inclusion, environment, and perception expressing that what has made the biggest impact on student success was, "Giving students the

opportunity to feel like a normal student.” 2D went on to describe how, “Allowing them to be a part of a school environment is slowly going to change the perception of alternative education being the dumping ground for bad kids” (2D, 39-40).

In order to continue prioritizing and advancing the measure of students’ needs being met, building and division leadership should consider, “Providing a supportive alternative education for environment for at-risk students” (McGee & Lin, 2017). McGee and Lin’s (2017) work is based on “The data-driven decision-making process influences the Alternative Education (AE) program development through the collaboration of all stakeholders, including but not limited to the school, the parents, the students, and the community. Data collected through continuous evaluations of student information pertaining to academics, attendance, and discipline reshapes and refines the program’s nucleus” (McGee & Lin, 2017, p. 181). The four “components” of the data-driven decision-making process include the following: preconditions, planning, delivery, and collaboration. Each of the four components work together as an integrated, yet individual unit, to establish the most effective learning strategies for each student (p. 181). Building and division leadership could use the strategies contained above to use data as a means of ensuring that the alternative education program is effective in meeting students’ needs.

Finding Seven

Teachers, principals, and central office leadership perceive that the program had a positive impact on student behavior.

Supporting data/supporting literature for finding seven

Survey question fourteen asked survey respondents to rate the decrease of student behavior incidents under the iMPACt program. Descriptive ratings for the decrease in student behavior incidents include the following: transformative, positive, neutral, slightly worse, and significantly worse. When asked to select a rating that represents the decrease in student behavior incidents, a combined 75% of survey participants selected either Positive or Transformative rating for the decrease in student behavior incidents. Additionally, 25% of survey respondents selected a rating of neutral, which suggests a need to investigate the root cause of student discipline incidents (see Table 23).

Survey question fifteen asked survey respondents to select a predetermined description that most accurately reflects the way in which discipline problems are managed. Predetermined descriptions included the following selections: equitable, consistent, acceptable, and inconsistent.

Out of the eleven participants (one failed to answer), had a 100% combined rating of acceptable, consistent, or equitable. These data suggest consistency and equity towards the way in which discipline incidents have been managed since the inception of the transformative-based program (see Table 24).

While ratings indicate positive findings for the decrease in behavior incidents under the transformative-based program, opportunities still exist for exploring ways to reduce the number of behavior incidents and suggestions for meeting the behavioral needs of alternative education students. Danker (2019) asserts that students suffering from mental illness and/or behavior disorders - along with juveniles introduced to the Juvenile Justice System - have a higher likelihood of performing at an academic level that ranks inferiorly when compared to their peers. Danker further suggests that, “even when an arrest does not lead to any further disciplinary action, psychologically, school-based arrests can precipitate the breakdown in trust between young people and the adults in their lives, turning what should be a nurturing atmosphere into one that is intimidating and hostile” (Danker, 2019, pp. 589-590).

Evidence supports a need for alternative education strategies in mainstream education to support students with mental and behavioral challenges. As such, additional consideration should be given towards determining best practice and strategies for supporting the at-risk population in schools. Danker’s findings support these data which suggest that additional research in transformative-based discipline programs are necessary in order to meet the behavioral needs of alternative education learners.

Finding Eight

Teachers, principals, and central office leadership perceive the iMPACt program had a positive impact of academic performance.

Supporting data/supporting literature for finding eight

Survey question seventeen asked survey respondents to rate the academic performance of students participating in the iMPACt program when compared to the previous model of instruction. Ratings for academic performance of students in the iMPACt program include the following ratings: significant improvement, improvement, neutral, slight improvement, and no improvement (see Table 26). As seen in Table 26, these data indicate a need for additional exploration of why only 50% of the program’s leadership indicate significant improvement in student academic performance.

Additionally, survey question eighteen asked survey respondents to rate the iMPACt program's variety of course offerings when compared to the previous model of instruction. Ratings for the iMPACt program's variety of course offerings included the following ratings: significant improvement, improvement, slight improvement, slightly decreased, and decreased (see Table 27). While the majority of leadership stakeholders rate the course offerings as improved or significant improvement, the 16.67% of participants who rated the course offerings with a slight improvement rating should be considered during the planning and staffing process for subsequent school years.

Survey question nineteen asked survey respondents to rate the impact that course offerings have had on the students' ability to be successful in the iMPACt program. Ratings for the impact that course offerings have had on the students' ability to be successful in the iMPACt program included the following: significant impact, moderate impact, some impact, slight impact, and no impact (see Table 28). Table 28 presents data from survey question nineteen which revealed that 75% of respondents found the impact of course offerings to have a significant impact on the transformative-based program. One outlier indicated that course offerings have had no impact. While this outlier represented only 8.33% of the survey respondents, the selection of no impact should be examined as the program continues to build on its ability to provide a variety of course offerings.

As building and division-based leadership continue exploring ways to enrich the alternative education program's academic offerings, it is recommended that Hanover's research be consulted to offer additional solutions for advancing academic growth. Hanover's Research (2018) classifies current alternative education models into four categories: charter schools, magnet schools, career and technical schools, and dropout prevention and credit recovery schools. Further investigation of program models could increase academic ratings. For example, incorporating a Career and Technical element to the alternative education program could increase credit recovery and on-time graduation rates. As a result, building and division-based leadership should give additional consideration to program design which could increase course offerings, certifications, and alternative routes to graduation, (Hanover Research, 2018, pp. 5-7).

Implications for Finding One

Division and building-level leadership should explore ways to enhance positive perceptions of building and community stakeholders involved with the transformative-

based alternative education program. This implication is in response to finding one in which respondents expressed the value of transforming the perception of building and community stakeholders. Moreover, consideration should be given towards exploring perceptions with additional specificity, which could include surveying stakeholder subgroups (i.e., perceptions of students, staff, parents, in addition to the perception of community stakeholders). Additionally, exploring subgroups could enable leadership members to be strategic and intentional with their efforts and any funding needed to support the goal of increasing program perception. Leadership members should seek to involve stakeholders and community representatives by providing opportunities that grant access into the building where they can simultaneously serve students and transform any preconceived notions resulting from the previous alternative education model. Finally, division and school-based leadership should consider the creation of a task force comprised of students, staff, parents, and community representatives seeking stakeholder involvement/input as the Leadership Team begins the pursuit of transforming the perception of the Transformative-based program.

Implications for Finding Two

Division and building-level leadership should prioritize strong relationships with all stakeholders along with integrating Social-emotional Learning to provide access to a well-rounded alternative approach to learning. According to survey question and qualitative data from the virtual interviews, participants shared that an alternative approach to learning was a critical component in the transformative-based program's ability to provide access to learning and successful graduation rates for all learners. The need for stakeholder involvement has never been greater as it takes more than just a school's staff to meet the growing needs of today's students. In conjunction with involving stakeholders for mentoring and academic partnerships, the need to incorporate the social-emotional needs of alternative education students, as demonstrated within survey data, is an integral component for success in the alternative environment. Not only can the community help to enrich the students' academic opportunities, but community partnerships can also contribute towards meeting the social-emotional needs of students. In order to investigate strategies for enriching school and community collaboration efforts, school division and school-based leaders should establish a task force comprised of students, family representatives, staff, and community members. The meetings, along with any mentoring opportunities that stem from the collaboration efforts, will provide a simultaneous

effect of providing educational and social-emotional enhancements for students while exposing community stakeholders to the transformative-based program's climate and culture. The greater the exposure to the public, the greater the potential for reducing any residual connotations stemming from the previous behavior-based program.

Implications for Finding Three

Division and school-based leadership should investigate strategies to continue developing the climate and culture of the transformative-based alternative education program. This implication is in response to finding three. Based on the survey and interview data, alternative education leaders have identified climate and culture as a focus area. While these data present improvement from the former disciplinary-based program, there was a noted area for additional growth. A recommendation for the creation of a student-centered focus group in order to determine what the students, themselves, believe to be essential elements for further developing the could further increase the growth of an already improved (when compared to the former program) climate and culture within the alternative education program. This focus group would provide a remarkable way for the program's students to leave their legacy upon the transformative-based program in which they helped to create.

Implications for Finding Four

Division and school-based leaders should consider further expansion of course offering/credit recovery options by incorporating electronic and hybrid learning approaches. This implication is in response to finding four. COVID-19 altered the delivery of public education, and perhaps the unintended outcome was not a bad thing. Electronic and/or hybrid approaches to learning do not appear to be going away. Division and school-based leaders have identified the need for additional course/credit recovery options. The same leaders also noted limited funding for the creation of new positions. In response to the need for additional course offerings/credit recovery options to meet on-time graduation for all students, and to offset the inability to fund new teaching positions, additional consideration should be given towards the benefits of expanding upon the existing usage of electronic course offerings.

Implications for Finding Five

Division and school-based leaders should continue to explore and provide professional development opportunities to further increase the effectiveness ratings of alternative education teachers, principals, and central office leadership. This implication is in response to the perceptions of teachers, principals, and central office leadership as being more effective regarding their roles as building leaders following the first year of program implementation (see Table 4 & 6). These data reveal opportunities to further increase alternative education leadership effectiveness. Transforming the culture for teachers and leaders could continue to increase the effectiveness ratings for alternative education teachers, principals, and central office leadership. While climate and culture ratings are increasing for students, the program appears to be ready to consider how to foster a similar culture for alternative education teachers and leaders to complete the transformative process.

Implications for Finding Six

Central office leadership should continue to explore ways to provide access to additional opportunities for electives and other course offerings. As referenced in Table 27 & Table 28, survey data yielded positive results regarding the transformative-based program's improved course offerings and ability to provide credit recovery; however, both survey and interview data revealed areas for future growth. While data reveal improvements to course offerings, an opportunity exists to explore new program models (i.e. Career and Technical) that would allow the alternative education program to offer additional course offerings, program certifications, and routes to graduation. Providing paths to certification programs would not only increase existing course offerings, but it would also nurture the community collaboration efforts that the transformative-based program seeks to establish and provide potential mentorship opportunities that could aid in credit recovery and on-time/early graduation for alternative learners.

Implications for Finding Seven

To continue increasing the perceptions of teachers, principals, and central office leadership regarding the program's ability to have had a positive impact on student behavior, building and central office leadership should provide additional professional development on current behavior programs and/or incentive-based curriculums. This

implication is in response to finding seven, which demonstrated a decrease in student behavior incidents. Data reveals that opportunities exist for expanding upon or incorporating new behavior programs (i.e. Social-emotional Learning), in order to continue increasing the perception ratings of teachers, principals, and central office leadership regarding the program's ability to have had a positive impact on student behavior. In conjunction with implementing research-based programs such as Social-emotional Learning, alternative program leaders should consider ways to utilize community partnerships as mentors, which could also positively influence student behavior.

Implications for Finding Eight

To continue increasing the perceptions of teachers, principals, and central office leadership regarding the program's ability to have had a positive impact on academics, building and central office leadership should continue to explore ways to expand course offerings within the alternative education program. This implication is in response to finding eight, which revealed that the transformative-based program has had a positive impact on academics. When participants were asked to rate the academic performance of students who participate in the transformative-based program, survey respondents provided an array of data which suggests a need for further expansion of course offerings within the alternative education program (see Table 26). Opportunities for consideration could include virtual learning, Career and Technical programs, and Cooperative learning/internships. By including certification programs, the variety of course offerings would increase, and by incorporating cooperative learning opportunities, students would have a greater chance to recover credits more quickly or to expedite their graduation dates. One final consideration for improving the transformative-based program's academic impact would be to implement a tutoring program that involves student volunteers from the Division's High School. Volunteers could prosper by satisfying required volunteer hours for Clubs such as National Honors Society and Beta Club while alternative education students would receive free tutoring that could increase the alternative program's academic ratings.

Suggestions for Future Studies

Throughout this study, especially during the collection and analyzation of data, several future areas for study were identified. Conducting studies with a concentrated effort on the findings in this study would provide a more extensive list of next steps for ensuring future

success of the transformative-based alternative education program. The following includes recommendations for additional studies that could influence the growth, perception and performance outcomes for the alternative education program.

- Create a study that enables the collection and analyzation of student surveys in order to evaluate the student perspective.
- Implement a longitudinal study that collects and analyzes student data in order to measure academic and behavioral performance outcomes and graduation rates.
- Explore a study that measures climate as related to student and staff retention.
- Construct a study that collects and analyzes perception data for subgroups of stakeholders for the purpose of identifying next steps for targeting the stakeholder perception.

Chapter Summary

Chapter Five was constructed to reveal these data obtained throughout this study which was designed to explore the development of a transformative, alternative education day program in a small rural Virginia school division. In order to reveal perceptions of alternative education teachers and building-level/division-level leadership, perceptions were explored as were the correlation between those perceptions and student performance outcomes. This mixed-methods study was conducted in order to examine the following research questions:

1. What are the perceptions of teachers, principals, and central office leadership regarding their effectiveness in their roles as building leaders following the first year of program implementation?
2. What are the perceptions of teachers, principals, and central office leadership regarding the ways that program implementation has impacted building-level leadership's ability to meet students' needs?
3. What are the perceptions of teachers, principals, and central office leadership regarding the program's impact on school climate, behavior and academics?

Chapter Five presented the four findings that were presented in this study along with the implications for each finding. The findings included the following:

- Leaders in alternative education identified *stakeholder perception* with being a critical factor for program success.

- Leaders in Alternative Education identified *alternative approach* as being an integral component of program success.
- Leaders in alternative education have identified the value of the alternative education program's climate and culture and its impact on students' success.
- Leaders in Alternative Education identified *alternative course offerings and credit recovery* as being critical components of program success.

Chapter Five concluded with an acknowledgement of future studies. Opportunities for future study included, but were not limited to, the student perspective, increasing stakeholder perception, and the impact of hybrid/electronic instruction on alternative education. For the purpose of advancing the transformative-based program to a program that is focused on the whole child while being able to meet the needs of twenty-first century alternative education learners, a thorough evaluation of the findings, implications, and future studies should be conducted by members of both division and school-based leadership.

Personal Reflections

As a graduate of an alternative education program, I found it a profound journey to be able to design a study with alternative education at its core. Being afforded the chance to delve in to a small rural division's newly redesigned transformative- based alternative education program was an incredibly special opportunity for me to be a part of. This research study fulfilled my dream of being able to give back to the alternative program that has allowed to me be where I am today, but it has also been gratifying to be able to contribute data and next steps that can enhance the educational journey of alternative education learners for years to come. It is with many thanks and sincere appreciation that I acknowledge the school division stakeholders that provided me with this opportunity – your voices have been heard.

Conducting a study amid a global pandemic certainly presented some hindrances to the research process. Certainly, I feel that it would be beneficial to be able to conduct in-person interviews, but I was appreciative of the division and school-based leadership members who willingly participated in this study. It was noted how genuinely appreciative each participant was for the completion of this study and their chance to be a contributor. In addition to the manner in which interviews were conducted, after reflection, I have realized that there was room to be more intentional with my interview questions within each subgroup – specifically as it relates to

program perception and next step recommendations for program success. Finally, I realize, now, how impactful including the student voice would have been for this study. The pandemic did not lend itself to incorporating the students' perspective into this study, but it is worth considering for future studies. Deleted the next paragraph regarding COVID as Dr. Brinkmann recommended shortening the reflections.

It is my plan to share the knowledge gained throughout my research regarding best practice, successful studies, and strategies to enhance the academic performance of alternative education students with my school division and its stakeholders. Additionally, I look forward to being able to highlight the innovative work being done within the transformative-based alternative education program. The ways in which we access education have changed, and that change is particularly important to acknowledge within the realm of alternative education. With limited funds, division and school-based leaders must be creative and innovative in how they intend to meet the growing needs of alternative programs and their learners. It is my greatest hope that the work conducted within this study can provide inspiration and next steps for any school division or individual willing to invest in alternative education.

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Appendix A

A Survey of Alternative School Leaders' Perceptions of Program Effectiveness One Year After Implementation

Dear colleague:

My name is Alecia Clements, and I am a doctoral candidate at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. My case study focuses on the perceptions of alternative school leaders following the first year of program implementation. This case study is designed to analyze data that could reveal information related to student outcomes along with potential next steps for program success. Completion and submission of the survey will satisfy your consent to participate. Data collected will remain confidential; no identifying information will be revealed throughout the sharing of data. If you no longer wish to complete the survey, please close the survey window at this time. Do you acknowledge the purpose, potential risks, and benefits and agree to participate in the study by completing the survey?

Do you consent to this electronic survey?

☐ **Yes**

☐ **No**

Part I: Demographic Information:

1. Alternative School:
2. Highest degree held:
3. Years of experience in alternative education:
4. Years of experience as an alternative education principal/leader:

Part II: Alternative Education Experience:

How do school leaders rate their effectiveness as building leaders following the iMPACt program's first year of implementation?

1. How do you rate your effectiveness as the leader of an alternative education program?
 - A. Not effective
 - B. Somewhat ineffective
 - C. Somewhat effective
 - D. Effective
 - E. Strongly effective

2. When thinking about the attributes related to your effectiveness rating, which of the following has had the most positive impact on your effectiveness rating?
 - A. Professional Development
 - B. Division-level support
 - C. Funding
 - D. Administrative support for discipline
3. When thinking about your school leadership effectiveness, how would you rate yourself given the choices below: (Please choose only one answer.)
 - A. I was a more effective school leader under the previous instructional model.
 - B. I was a less effective leader under the previous instructional model.
 - C. My school leadership effectiveness has remained the same between the previous and current models of instruction.
 - D. I am a less effective leader under the current model of instruction.
 - E. I am a more effective school leader under the current instructional model.
4. If you were still participating in the previous model of instruction, rate the likelihood that you would have remained in your position for more than one school calendar year.
 - A. Unlikely
 - B. Somewhat unlikely
 - C. Neutral
 - D. Somewhat likely
 - E. Likely
5. When thinking about, iMPACt, the current model of instruction, rate the likelihood that you will choose to remain in your position for more than one year.
 - A. Unlikely
 - B. Somewhat unlikely
 - C. Neutral
 - D. Somewhat Likely
 - E. Likely
6. When thinking about iMPACt, the transformative day program, which area of leadership do you feel the most comfortable?
 - A. Student leadership
 - B. Staff leadership
 - C. Curriculum
 - D. Budget
 - E. Stakeholder involvement

How has the iMPACt program's implementation impacted building-level leadership's ability to meet the needs of students?

7. How would you describe the influence that the iMPACt program has had on building-level leadership's ability to meet the needs of students?
 - A. The iMPACt program has not impacted my ability to meet the needs of students.
 - B. The iMPACt program has had a slight impact on my ability to meet the needs of students.
 - C. The iMPACt program has not impacted on my ability to meet the needs of students.
 - D. The iMPACt program has increased my ability to meet the needs of students.
 - E. The iMPACt program has allowed me to effectively meet the needs of students.
8. How would you describe the impact on transitioning from a behavior-based to a transformative-based program?
 - A. The transformative-based program has not impacted the ability to meet the needs of students.
 - B. The transformative-based program has had a slight impact on the ability to meet the needs of students.
 - C. The transformative-based program has impacted the ability to meet the needs of students.
 - D. The transformative-based program has increased the ability to meet the needs of students.
 - E. The transformative-based program has been effective for allowing the needs of students to be met.
9. When thinking about transportation, how would you rate the changes to transportation after the introduction of the iMPACt program?
 - A. Negative
 - B. Slightly negative
 - C. Neutral
 - D. Slightly positive
 - E. Positive
10. When thinking about program scheduling (day vs night), how would you rate the changes to program scheduling after the introduction of the iMPACt program?
 - A. Negative
 - B. Slightly negative
 - C. Neutral
 - D. Slightly positive
 - E. Positive

11. When thinking about meeting the needs of the whole child, how would you rate the iMPACt program's ability to meet the needs of the whole child? (Ex. Social opportunities, extra-curricular activities, etc.)
- A. Negative
 - B. Slightly negative
 - C. Neutral
 - D. Slightly positive
 - E. Positive

How do school leaders rate the program's impact on school climate, behavior and academics?

12. When thinking about school climate, how would you rate the change in school climate after the introduction of the iMPACt program?
- A. Negative
 - B. Slightly negative
 - C. Neutral
 - D. Slightly positive
 - E. Positive
13. Which word below would you use to describe the school climate of the iMPACt program?
- A. Unsupportive
 - B. Non-existent
 - C. Formal
 - D. Encouraging
 - E. Comprehensive
14. When thinking about student behavior incidents under the iMPACt program, how would you rate the decrease of incidents under the iMPACt program?
- A. Significantly worse
 - B. Slightly worse
 - C. Neutral
 - D. Positive
 - E. Transformative
15. When thinking about discipline problems, which word below most accurately reflects the way in which discipline problems are managed?
- A. Poor
 - B. Inconsistent
 - C. Acceptable
 - D. Consistent
 - E. Equitable
16. How would you rate your involvement in the student discipline process?

- A. Not applicable
- B. No involvement
- C. Slight involvement
- D. Moderate involvement
- E. Significant involvement

17. How would you rate the academic performance of students participating in the iMPACt program when compared to the previous model of instruction?

- A. No improvement
- B. Slight improvement
- C. Neutral
- D. Improvement
- E. Significant improvement

18. When compared to the previous model of instruction, how would you rate the iMPACt program's variety of course offerings?

- A. Decreased
- B. Slightly decreased
- C. Slight improvement
- D. Improvement
- E. Significant improvement

19. Rate the impact that course offerings have on the students' ability to be successful in the iMPACt program.

- A. No impact
- B. Some impact
- C. Slight impact
- D. Moderate impact
- E. Significant impact

*If you are willing to participate in a virtual interview regarding your experience(s) in alternative education leadership, please include your contact information in order to schedule your interview:

Appendix B
Alternative School Leaders' Interview Questions

Dear colleague:

My name is Alecia Clements, and I am a doctoral candidate at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. As a component of my qualitative research study, I am researching the perceptions of alternative education program leaders. My study focuses on the perceptions of alternative school leaders following the first year of implementation. The title of my dissertation is: Transformative-based Alternative Education Program: A Study of Teacher and Leadership Perceptions. This study is designed to analyze data that could reveal information related to student outcomes and potential next steps for program success in a newly implemented alternative education program.

Thank you for your time in completing this virtual interview. Completion of the interview will satisfy your consent to participate. Data collected is confidential and all information will be kept confidential; no identifying information will be revealed throughout the sharing of data. If you no longer wish to complete the interview, please state your wish to exit the interview at any time. There are minimum risks to participate in this study which include the general risk of participation in a survey regarding the division in which you are currently employed. There are no compensatory or major benefits for your participation, but a potential benefit may result from gathering information necessary to continue the advancement of the alternative education program and its leaders. Do you acknowledge the purpose, potential risks, and benefits and agree to participate in the study by completing the survey?

Interview Consent: *If you are willing to conduct an interview, please email adc5613@vt.edu to provide your contact information.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Part I: Demographic Information:

School Division/Alternative School:

Highest degree held:

Years of experience in alternative education:

Years of experience as an alternative education principal/leader:

Part II: Alternative Education Experience:

1. How long have you been an employee of the _____ iMPACt program?
2. What former position(s) did you host prior to your current role?
3. Please state what you consider to be essential or non-negotiable elements of alternative education.
4. How does your leadership experience under the transformative, day program compare to your experience with the behavior-based, night program? If you were not a participant of the behavior-based program, your answer will be indicated as “N/A”.
5. In which area did your leadership skills grow the most, and to what do you attribute that growth?
6. How would you describe the ways in which the transformative-based program has impacted your ability to meet the needs of your students? Please provide specific details and/or accounts that may be relevant to this study.
7. Regarding the ways in which students’ needs have/have not been able to be met, describe the change that has been most impactful to the student experience.
8. Do you believe that students want to be a part of the alternative education program? If so, to what do you attribute the students’ desire to participate in the program? If you do not believe that the students want to participate, what changes do you believe could be made that would increase the desire to participate in the program?
9. What impact has the transformative-based program had on school climate? Describe the way(s) in which the impact differs from the behavior-based program.
10. What recommendations do you have in order to continue advancing student success? What recommendations do you have in order to continue advancing the success of the alternative education program?

Appendix C
(Email) Letter Disseminated to Program Superintendent

Dear Superintendent,

My name is Alecia Clements, and I am a doctoral candidate at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. My doctoral dissertation is titled: “Transformative-based Alternative Education Program: A Study of Teacher and Leadership Perceptions”.

The purpose of this correspondence is to respectfully request your permission to include your alternative education stakeholders in my study. As a component of my data collection, it is my intention to provide alternative education stakeholders with an electronic survey and a virtual interview in order to identify the perceptions of school leaders regarding the effectiveness of an alternative education transformative day program following one year of implementation. Please be assured that the information provided will remain *confidential*, and no identifying information be disclosed.

Should you have any questions regarding this study, you may contact me at 678-925-9203 or at adc5613@vt.edu. Additionally, my committee Co-chairs are Dr. Carol Cash and Dr. Jodie Brinkmann. Further, I have received approval to conduct this study from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), and the IRB Chair, Suzie Lee, can be reached at 540-231-9297 or at irb@vt.edu should you have additional questions about this study.

I hereby request your permission to contact stakeholders invested in the division’s alternative education program to extend the offer to participate in this study. Should you be interested, I would be honored to share the results of my findings. Please forward the approval to conduct research to the following email address: adc5613@vt.edu. You may click the link below to access and disseminate the survey to alternative education stakeholders.

[Qualtrics Perceptions Survey](#)

With great appreciation,

Alecia D. Clements

Appendix D

Letter to Alternative Education Stakeholders

January 11, 2021

Dear Colleague:

I am a doctoral candidate at Virginia Polytechnic Institute State & University. As a component of my case study, I am researching the perceptions of alternative education program leaders. My case study focuses on the perceptions of alternative school leaders following the first year of implementation. The title of my dissertation is: “Transformative-based Alternative Education Program: A Study of Teacher and Leadership Perceptions”. This case study is designed to analyze data that could reveal information related to student outcomes and potential next steps for program success in a newly implemented alternative education program.

As a component of my study, I will be conducting electronic surveys and virtual interviews with alternative education stakeholders invested in the iMPACt program. The purpose of this qualitative study, phenomenological in nature, is to examine how the development of a transformative, alternative education day program in a small rural Virginia school division could reveal perceptions of alternative education teachers, principals, and central office leadership to correlate those perceptions with student performance outcomes following the first year of implementation. Once perceptions have been identified, the data will be analyzed to determine the program’s strengths, weaknesses and areas for future consideration.

It is my sincere hope that you will grant approval to participate in this study. The electronic survey should take approximately 25 minutes to complete. The first portion will collect demographic information. The second portion will collect data related to your alternative education experience. I will be reaching out via email or phone in order to schedule a Google Meeting for virtual interviews. The data collected throughout this study will be kept confidential; no identifying information will be revealed. Participants have the option to exit the study at any time. Additionally, if you have any questions regarding this study, you may reach me at 678-925-9203. My committee Co-chairs for this study are Dr. Carol Cash and Dr. Jodie Brinkmann. I have obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct this study. Should you have any questions or concerns regarding your participation or rights as a participant, you may contact the VT IRB Chair, Suzie Lee at 540-231-9297 or at irb@vt.edu. The deadline for completing this survey is Friday, February 26, 2021. Please forward approval to conduct research to the following email address: adc5613@vt.edu. Thank you in advance for participating in this study.

Sincerely,

Alecia D. Clements

Please follow the link below in order to access the survey:
[Qualtrics Perceptions Survey](#)

Appendix E
Training in Human Subjects Protection Certificate

		Completion Date 10-Aug-2020 Expiration Date 09-Aug-2024 Record ID 37820219
This is to certify that: Alecia Clements Has completed the following CITI Program course: Not valid for renewal of certification through CME. Research Conflict of Interest (COI) Training for Investigators (Curriculum Group) Research Conflict of Interest (COI) Training for Investigators (Course Learner Group) 1 - COI (Stage) Under requirements set by: Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University (Virginia Tech)		
 Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative		
Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?wbe745365-3f54-427a-ad1b-a603c6fe113d-37820219		