Building Capacity and Connectivity for Alternative Education:
The Evolving Role of the Educational Administrator

Carol A. Kochhar-Bryant and Dennis L. White

INTRODUCTION

Despite a plethora of youth intervention policies, school dropout rates have remained stable for the past two decades, with more than a million students leaving school each year. Researchers examining school dropout are concerned that high stakes testing and the resulting retention will cause the dropout problem to increase by 50 percent over the next five years (Schargel, 2003). Furthermore, a rising number of youth are suspended, expelled, or placed into alternative settings due to behaviors resulting from emotional/behavioral disabilities, school code violations, and general school alienation. One third of this country's young people ages 18-24, therefore, may enter adult society without adequate preparation.

At the same time, alternative education programs and schools are proliferating across the U.S. with approximately 10,000 alternative education schools now in place that provide educational and developmental support for children and youth who are at risk of failing in school and in life (White & Kochhar-Bryant, 2005, p. 29). As high school graduation rates have declined, the rate at which American children have been turning to alternative education has more than doubled. State education leaders report that they are now more likely to rely on alternative placements for students with learning and behavioral challenges, particularly in response to new student achievement accountability requirements (GAO, 2003; Lehr, 2004). Alternative schools are now receiving serious attention from education administrators and school improvement proponents at state and local levels. Data emerging from the states indicate that *administrators want and need help building capacity to develop a range of appropriate educational options or pathways that respond to the highly diverse needs of at-risk youth* (White & Kochhar-Bryant, 2005).

The authors explored the need for additional capacity and improved connectivity to support alternative education schools and programs. We propose a common definition of alternative education, describe an original connection between ancient pedagogy and modern alternative education, present the economic benefits and costs of alternative education, and discuss implications for administrators and instructional leaders to create quality programming.

RESPONSIBILITY OF THE ADMINISTRATOR TO CREATE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Traditionally, school and district administrators focused their roles on school resources, safety, and ceremonial duties of the school. Today, however, the administrator is accountable for improving the academic achievement of diverse students, becoming an expert on state standards and benchmarks, and developing new systems for decision making (Hess, 2003; Mazzeo, 2003; State Action for Education Leadership Project, 2003). To address these new expectations for student achievement and decision making, the education administration role is becoming defined more by exploring intellectual and emotional leadership as a way to flat-

Carol A. Kochhar-Bryant, The George Washington University
Dennis L. White, Hamilton Fish Institute on School and Community Violence, The George Washington University

ten traditional hierarchies, to empower teachers, and to build professional relationships and collaborative cultures, creating effective learning organizations based on principles and values (Covey, 1992: Hargreaves, 1994; Hargreaves, et al., 2000; Lambert, 1998; Speck, 1999).

Recent emphasis in the research on the administrators' role has been on the creation of a professional knowledge base for administrators and helping them become change agents (Donmoyer, Imber & Scheurich, 1995; Fullan, 1999; Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998). The expansion of the role of administrator has broadened the initial definition of instructional leadership to include leadership inside and outside the school, forming connections with the communities in which they are situated to support the work of the schools (Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium, Council of Chief State School Officers, 1996; Senge et al., 2000). *What is missing in the discussion* of change agency and collaboration is the discourse on relationships with students, the responsibility for creating emotionally healthy school environments, and the responsibility for creating effective options for students who could benefit from alternatives to conventional schooling.

ROLE OF THE ADMINISTRATOR IN RESPONDING TO LEARNER DIVERSITY

American public schools are under great pressure to create schools that are responsive to diverse students (Riehl, 2000). About 10% of children in the public schools have disabilities or are considered 'at risk' of not progressing in general education. More than 20% of children live in poverty, and the same proportion live in households headed by an immigrant (Olson, 2000). Education administrators must be equipped with legal, pedagogical, and cultural knowledge, and practical strategies to initiate and support effective programs for all students, including those at-risk and those with special education needs. It is important to ask – *is the administrative role structured to respond to the shifting education environment and needs of the student population?*

It is becoming increasingly clear in administrator credentialing that administrators are expected to evaluate whether all populations of students are benefiting from current instructional practices and school improvement initiatives (Thurlow, Elliott, & Ysseldyke, 1998). Furthermore, there is broad evidence of the interrelationships among the administrator or principal's behavior, school climate, teacher performance and attitudes, and student progress and motivation (Collins & White, 2001; Fullan, 2005; Salisbury & McGregor, 2002; Sergiovanni, 1992). What is much *less clear is the role expectation of the administrator for instructional leadership with students who do not 'fit' within the conventional general educational environment.*

There is no standard definition for the students 'at risk' of needing alternative education; they are not a homogenous population. Although the term has been defined in a variety of ways, it typically refers to students who are in school but at risk of school failure, are unmotivated and disengaged in the general education setting, have dropped out of high school, are seeking a General Education Diploma (GED), or have experienced an unstable family life, family poverty, single parent homes, divorce, physical abuse, or substance abuse (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2002; Kidscount, 2003; Smith, Polloway, Patton, & Dowdy, 2001; Vaughn, Bos, & Schumm, 2003). Students considered at risk often exhibit anti-social behaviors toward adults and their peers, or may be disengaged from learning, which causes them to fall behind academically. They come from every ethnic, religious, and socio-economic group. They may or may not be eligible for special education services, yet they need special learning interventions or supports to be successful in school (Smith et al., 2001). Frymier (2006; 1996) observed that motivation is an individual matter; children differ in personality, background, and

experience, in sociability, creativity, intelligence, and interests. The range of risk factors that can impede learning demands a range of learning environments and instructional strategies as well as close coordination with the human services sector in the community.

Several questions are relevant: What is the administrator's role in expanding the concept of 'learning environment' including:

    a.   intervening with students who do not respond positively to large, impersonal environments, regimented routines, fixed curriculum, or to traditional student management, incentives and reward structures;

    b.   discovering what makes students want to learn and improving student motivation – the precondition for academic achievement;

    c.   strengthening relationships between teachers and students;

    d.   creating alternative learning opportunities and programs (in school and out of school) for youth who are at-risk for failure and dropout or who do not 'fit' within the conventional educational structure; and,

    e.   creating linkages with the community to provide non-academic interventions and supports to help students overcome barriers to learning?

Within this context of unprecedented new challenges for the administrator, the preparation of educational leaders to plan for, administer, and evaluate alternative educational programs for youth, and connect with the community remains ill defined. Minnesota is currently the first state to elevate the position of administrator/ director of alternative education to one that requires licensure (University of Minnesota, 2006).

DEFINING ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

The argument over the essence of alternative education is at least as old as the alternative schools movement that began in the 1960s, and the semantic argument about labels continues. Primarily, it is a matter of educational organization and practice, and there are at least three distinctly discernible types of alternative schools. Classifications of types of alternative education schools and programs by Raywid (1990) and Lange and Sletten (1995) illuminate the "wrinkles." According to Raywid, there are "pure alternatives," or schools and programs that are more humane, more responsive, more challenging, and more compelling than regular schools (Type I); schools and programs that serve as the "last chance" for the worst and weakest students (Type II); and "compensatory alternatives," or schools and programs that are remedial for academic purposes (Type III). In the purest sense, Type I schools and programs are "alternatives," Type II are "disciplinary," and Type III are "compensatory." Lange and Sletten (1995) have described a fourth type of alternative school or program, actually a hybrid of Raywid's three types in that it combines elements of the pure, disciplinary, and compensatory alternatives. Since most alternative schools and programs today are hybrids, the authors propose the following common definition of alternative education:

> Alternative education refers to programs, schools, and districts that serve students and school-aged youth who are not succeeding in the regular public school environment. Alternative education offers to students and school-age youth who are under-performing academically, may have learning disabilities, emotional or behavioral problems, or may be deliberate or inadvertent victims of the behavioral problems of others, additional opportunities to achieve academically and develop socially in alternatively structured learning environments. (White & Kochhar-Bryant, 2005, p. 2)

In other words, alternative education can be a specific program for selected students, including for example, incarcerated youth, previously incarcerated youth, and dropouts who

cannot otherwise re-enter a regular school. The program can be operated within a regular school site or established as a separate alternative school within a school district, as a separate school district, or even as a point-of-service program for detained youth. The terms, alternative education programs and alternative schools, may be used as synonyms for alternative education; however, in general, an alternative education program co-exists in the same facility with the regular curriculum and instruction, but an alternative school resides in a separate facility. A common definition could enhance the public perception of and appreciation for alternative education and help define responsibilities for building capacity to serve students who need it.

ANCIENT PEDAGOGY AND MODERN ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

The ancient history of alternative education might well focus on the *paidagogos* [*paidos* (boy, *agogos* (leader)], the Greek word for the slave who led children, literally, to and from school. The women of the family and the family nurse supervised the development of both the boys and girls of the family until about age 7. From then to about age 14, the *paidagogos* replaced the family nurse and supervised the boys at home and at school, regularly observed the actual school lessons, and escorted them to and from school. The *paidagogos* was responsible for teaching the boys good manners (Amos and Lang, 1979;1982, pp. 161-162). The *paidagogos* was considered more important than the schoolmaster and the *grammatistes* who only taught the boys their "letters"; but the *paidagogos* taught them how to behave, a much more important matter in the eyes of their parents (Castle, 1961, pp. 64-65). Within this historical context, Watt (2006) described pedagogy as a relationship in which one party [the *paidagogos*] guides the other [the student] through sometimes difficult terrain, perhaps breaking a path where it has become overgrown with weeds, perhaps extending a helping hand. The *paidagogos* might have been practicing alternative education as it is practiced today.

A second history of alternative education might focus on the alternative school movement that began in the 1960s. Alternative education evolved along two paths, public and private, with multiple variations in each.

Early Public Alternative Education

Open Schools represented the early public alternative school movement. These public Open Schools were characterized by parent, student, and teacher choice (Lange and Sletten, 2002). During the late 1960s and early 1970s, and under the influence of the counterculture of that period (Raywid, 1990), other public alternative schools were established. These schools appeared "at a time of great innovation and movement in the educational system with lasting implications for public schools with respect to curriculum, delivery, and structure" (Lange and Sletten, 2002). These early schools, which could be called choice-based "learning alternatives," resembled Raywid's Type I alternative schools.

A Federal Initiative

The postal academy program represents the direct federal experience in alternative education. From 1969 until 1973, the U.S. Post Office Department operated the postal academy, "to motivate and train hard core dropout youth to obtain a high school equivalency diploma and become productive citizens. It did this by establishing small storefront schools and by staffing these storefront schools with postal employees who served as teachers and street-workers, or

counselors" (Bentley Historical Library, 2005, p. 1). The primary objective to educate and motivate disadvantaged school dropouts was the strongest part of the program (U.S. Department of Labor, 1971, p. 62). At its peak, the postal academy program operated at 17 sites in six U.S. cities including Atlanta, Chicago, Detroit, Newark, San Francisco, and Washington.

Early Private Alternative Education

The nonpublic alternatives included community schools and Free Schools. The community Freedom Schools were intended to provide high quality education to minorities in response to the substandard education they received in the regular public school system. These schools stood at one end of the continuum of community and individualism. At the other end of the continuum was the Free School Movement, based on individual achievement and fulfillment. According to proponents of this movement, mainstream public schools, which were inhibiting and alienated many students, should be structured to allow students to freely explore their natural intellect and curiosity—free of restrictions. In these Free Schools, of which Summerhill is the best known, formalized teaching was the exception rather than the rule, academic achievement was considered secondary to individual happiness, and achievement was valuable only where it helped the individual attain self-fulfillment (White & Kochhar-Bryant, 2005).

Diversity of Programs in Alternative Education

The focus on the individual student/learner is the core of the Raywid (1990) classification, introduced earlier. For instance, the Type I alternative is, effectively, a "learning alternative" that emphasizes the learner and that can be viewed as a replacement for regular school. The Types II ("disciplinary alternatives") and III ("compensatory alternatives") emphasize the person and the person's difficulties rather than the school's or the system's flaws and can be viewed as enhancements for regular school.

The hybrid of Types I, II, and III, the Type IV alternative or "second chance" programs (Lange and Sletten, 1995), and the variations of Type IV represent what is commonly perceived as alternative education programming in U.S. public schools. Hartzler (as cited by Morley, 1991), presented a matrix of strategies upon which alternative schools are designed (see Table 1). The Hartzler matrix represents the variations in curriculum, form, and individual student/person needs that are commonly addressed in alternative education and is an example of the disaggregation of the Types I, II, III, and IV alternative education classification.

More recently, Roderick (cited in Aron, 2006) proposed another type--the Roderick proposal is either a Type V or a new typology--where a student's educational needs are emphasized above risk factors, demographics, or program characteristics. In a somewhat different conceptualization than Hartzler, Aron (2006) illustrated the consequential and necessary diversity in alternative education. The authors described this diversity as versatility and agility in the structures and delivery of services in modern alternative education (White, 2003). However, even in alternative education, Gregg (1998) advised that a fix-the-student focus in place of a fix-the-system focus, as implied in all prominent classifications, is problematic. "[In particular,] a focus on 'problem' students may obscure or ignore real problems in the school system. . . Programs that target individuals divert resources from everyone else. . . A focus on problem students may threaten system equity by segregating poor, disabled, [or] minority students in alternative programs" (Gregg, 1998, pp. 1-2).

Table 1

Strategies for alternative education schools and programs

Curriculum-based		
Specialized school	Magnet school	Academic/college prep
Community-based school	Fundamental/structured school	Magnet program
Career education/vocational program	Advanced placement	Work experience/internship
	Outreach activities	Experience-based learning
Form or Structure-based		
Comprehensive school	Year-round school	K-12 multigrade school
School without walls	School-within-a-school	Regional occupational program
Summer school (remediation	School/class learning center	Teacher/peer tutoring
CORE proficiency program)	Flexible scheduling	Home schooling
Student Need-based		
Multicultural or ethnic center	Opportunity school	Continuation
Alternative school	County community school	Court school
Open school	Adult school	Adult corrections
Opportunity program	Gifted and talented education	Special education
Migrant education	Compensatory education	Bilingual education
Teenage pregnancy and maternity	Competency-based	Adult basic education
program	GED prep	Intensive guidance
Independent study	Learning-style based	Student-parent education
Tenth grade counseling	Job development and placement	Counseling-based
		Open entry-open exit

This table is adapted from Morley (1991), as provided by Lynn Hartzler of the California Department of Education.

Today, alternative education is not always for students with social and/or academic deficiencies–actually, there are many schools-within-a-school (SWS) or alternative schools with very high achieving populations. Interestingly, many of the progressive practices that were once found in elite progressive schools are now being implemented in urban schools with high risk populations (personal communication with S. Semel, September 18, 2000).

In a review of the literature, Tobin and Sprague (1999) identified seven best and preferred practices in education of at-risk students. They include (a) low ratio of students to teachers; (b) highly structured classroom with behavioral classroom management; (c) positive rather than punitive emphasis in behavior management; (d) adult mentors at the school; (e) individualized behavioral interventions based on functional behavioral assessment; (f) social skills instruction; and (g) high-quality academic instruction (Tobin and Sprague, pp. 8-11, see table I on p. 9). Alternative education has become a type of educational reform that has continued to grow and develop, even during times of fiscal austerity (Barr (2001). These alternatives have contributed to the national discussion regarding choice in education, have helped desegregate city schools in almost every major city in America, provided specialized programs for the gifted and talented, and been *instrumental in addressing the needs of at-risk youth* (personal communication with R. Barr, February 24, 2001, italics added by authors).

ECONOMIC BENEFITS AND COSTS

The economics of alternative education is complex, but it can be framed in the answers to three basic questions: What is the direct per-pupil cost of alternative education? What are the individual and social sectors that are impacted by alternative education? How can the benefits and costs associated with those sectors be calculated or estimated? Without a more complete directory of alternative education programs and schools than currently exists, the authors cannot answer the first question, and the answer to the third question involves an analysis that is beyond the scope of this paper. There is some consensus among scholars on the budget line items for the per-pupil cost of alternative education.

Direct per-pupil costs of alternative education generally exceed those of regular schools and programs due to lower student-teacher ratios, additional services for students, customized intervention and prevention programming, and other factors. The cost that is most relevant for an economic analysis is the *additional, indirect* per-pupil cost in alternative education, a cost that might be as difficult to calculate as the acceptable cost for providing adequate public education for all students (Hoff, 2005).

The complexity of the economics and the challenges for calculating the costs are related to the impacts of alternative education on individuals and social sectors; some are more direct than others. There are at least 21 of these impacts, which have been summarized from Haveman & Wolfe (1984) and Butts, Buck, & Coggeshall (2002):

- Charitable giving
- Child quality through home activities
- Consumer choice efficiency
- Crime reduction
- Entertainment
- Fertility (viz., changed preferences for family size)
- Fertility (viz., attainment of desired family size)
- Income distribution
- Individual market productivity
- Individual productivity in knowledge production (i.e., the capacity to learn)
- Intrafamily [economic] productivity

- Labor market search efficiency (including migration)
- Leisure time
- Marital choice efficiency
- Nonmarket individual productivity (i.e., do-it-yourself)
- Nonwage labor market remuneration
- Own health
- Savings (financial)
- Social cohesion
- Spouse and family health
- Technological change

Research on risk factors inform us that learning and human development occur within larger systems -- the child welfare system, juvenile justice system, and the school system – coordinated around the child as the focus of service (Laszlo, 1996). Therefore, the above list of 21 impacts of alternative education could be easily expanded.

Costs of Inadequate Alternatives to Regular Schooling

Student absences from regular school are costly. Several studies reveal that even more costly than truancy to society and the individual are the costs associated with dropping out of school (Catterall, 1987; Cohen 1998; Heilbrunn, 2002). For example, Veale (2002, p. 6) examined five cost factors associated with dropping out of school in Iowa: reduction in personal income and loss in state revenue, increase in the welfare burden, increased risk of incarceration, deceleration of human growth and potential, and reduced sense of control over one's life.

Veale concluded that the individual dropout loses $540,000 in personal income during his or her 45-year working life, the state loses $2,400,000 each year in reduced revenues from all dropouts, and the welfare burden is increased by $1,300,000 each year for all dropouts. Additionally, the high school dropout is 5.6 times more likely than the graduate to be incarcerated.

In their analysis of Current Population Surveys administered in 1998, 1999, and 2000, Day and Newburger (2002) estimated that high school graduates without any post-secondary education earn $250,000 more than high school dropouts in work-life earnings, or average annual earnings from age 25 to age 64. Furthermore, Catterall and Stern (1986) found that alternative high school education is associated with higher employment rates for former students and higher rates of compensation and that subsequent graduation from high school enhances these labor benefits. Cohen (1998) estimated the present value of high-school graduation at $243,000–$388,000 over the graduate's lifetime. It is clear that the economic benefits of alternative education are nontrivial.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CAPACITY BUILDING

Capacity Building for Alternative Education

The United Nations (2004) defined capacity building as efforts aimed at developing human skills or infrastructures within a community or organization in order to achieve a particular goal. Applying this concept in education, if the capacity of the system is insufficient to accomplish the goal of providing a sufficient range of educational options, then it may be strengthened by using a variety of strategies: (a) building collective commitment and cultural norms; (b) reforming organizational and service delivery structures; (c) improving performance of administrators and teachers; (d) expanding access to new knowledge, resources, and ideas; and (e) establishing evaluation and accountability mechanisms (adapted from O'Day, Goertz, & Floden, 1995).

Build Collective Commitment and Cultural Norms

The following recommendations are synthesized from program directors and educational administrators of alternative programs across the U.S. (Center for Learning Excellence, 2006; Goetten, 2005; Hosley, 2003; National Research Council; 2004; Riordan, 2006; Ruzzi & Kraemer, 2006; Swarts, 2002).

Use a strategic approach to refine definitions of purpose, application, and success. There are advantages with a strategic approach to defining alternative education. 'Strategic' means involving all key stakeholders (contributing groups and individuals) in planning, defining roles and responsibilities, and decision-making. Commitments are made to core values, the mission of alternative education, children and youth, core competencies and their improvement, and a vision for alternative education. Exemplary practices can be systematically benchmarked, needs assessed, and management and evaluation tools developed.

Develop a well-connected, community-wide strategy. Planning and development of a community-wide strategy must involve coordination and integration of the efforts of schools, not-for-profit youth serving organizations, family support and intervention programs, health and mental health care providers, substance abuse treatment programs, law enforcement organizations, and the private sector. "Community-wide efforts are as important as efforts on the organization, family, and individual levels" (Benson et al., 2006, p. 8). The mobilization

of key stakeholders will help to build public support and commitment to improving opportunities for at-risk youth (Murphy 2006, p. 36).

Encourage Postsecondary Connections. Partnerships with community colleges show particular promise, especially for older out-of-school youth seeking to complete high school and continue education. State and Federal funds should be leveraged to encourage community colleges to partner with school districts and community-based organizations to offer alternative education programs, both GED and high school completion. Existing dual-enrollment programs should be examined carefully to learn if they hold promise for accelerating learning for at-risk students.

Reform Organizational and Service Delivery Structures

Whether the student's need is for an alternative, compensatory, or disciplinary learning environment, a balanced availability of effective *prevention, short-term interventions, and long-term interventions* is necessary for the range of needs of at-risk students (synthesized from the Center for Learning Excellence, 2006; Goetten, 2005; Hosley, 2003; National Research Council; 2004; Riordan, 2006; Ruzzi & Kraemer, 2006).

Prevention strategies do not target specific students, but rather, are based on the assumption that everyone in the student population needs to be "inoculated" against emerging problems. The critical distinction between prevention and intervention is that prevention programs are implemented before problems arise and do not target selected individuals. Prevention involves the multiple strategies put in place within "feeder" schools that aim to deter placements in alternative education programs and other more restrictive environments. Examples include providing all students in a given school with drug and alcohol resistance training; or sending parenting tips home to all of the parents in a school about staying alert to signs of substance abuse. Prevention efforts are not effective with children and youth already experiencing a variety of difficulties.

Secondary prevention and short-term interventions include programs that focus on targeted students for five days or less. Such programs are often alternatives to, or substitutes for, suspensions and expulsions and many create special learning environments for students that are frequently located outside the school. However, the base school is typically engaged with the intervention. For example, multiple school districts might send students to another physical location for 3-5 days instead of suspending them for disruptive behavior in the classroom. Students focus on academics and are introduced to a range of services and activities designed to help promote more prosocial behavior. However, a focus on academic maintenance or attendance alone may not be effective if underlying reasons for the student's placement are not addressed.

Contact time is limited in these programs and therefore they should focus on comprehensive and sustainable support, assessment and transitions back into base school environments. Comprehensive and sustainable support can be achieved by connecting students with available mental health, drug and alcohol, and juvenile justice services. Student assessments of (a) history of problem behaviors and interventions attempted and successful; (b) family background; (c) individual mental health profile; and (d) assessment of student talents, strengths, and career interests can be extremely useful in developing a sustainable program and providing follow-up once students leave the short-term program. Short-term programs are not likely to be effective with students who have an extensive and complex history of school disengagement and/or challenging behaviors and are already receiving services from multiple agencies.

Long-term interventions involve intensive work with students in alternative settings over much longer periods of time, often months. Students enter a long-term alternative school at some point during the academic year and may remain in that program until year's end or through to graduation. These schools may or may not be voluntary alternatives for students. An example of such an alternative is a year-long middle school that is made available for students who are struggling academically, disengaged in their regular school, and, as a result, exhibit emotional distress or disruptive behavior and are given the option to attend the smaller alternative school.

These schools provide students extended time to build skills and develop confidence in an environment that has a lower teacher-student ratio, an opportunity to build relationships with adults, and provide multiple services to address non-academic needs. The development of generalizable skills and post-school goals for employment or college is an important focus. Individualized instruction, coupled with coordinated mental health, juvenile justice, and drug and alcohol services can have a sustained impact if the skills and support systems they develop carry over into new student environments. For many students, the nature of the environment, the additional supports, and the relationships with adults promote student engagement and positive outcomes and reentry into the environment from which they came is often not an appropriate goal (Center for Learning Excellence, 2006). Accommodations in regular school environments should be fully explored as the most cost-effective and sustainable alternatives before out-of-school placements are considered. *Out-of-school placements should only be made when there is a clear* justification of the value added benefits of these placements. Moreover, the added value of the placements should be concretely defined.

Redefine Curricular Requirements, Allow Program Flexibility, and Expand Options. Since the traditional high school (or elementary or middle school) is not appropriate for all students, a range of schools and programs are needed along with multiple pathways to a recognized credential, with options such as flexible scheduling, compressed and expanded programs, dual-enrollment, credit recovery, career-based programs, and adult high schools. In addition, states should increase flexibility around other curricular requirements, such as school day length and time in classroom. Curriculum, materials, and instructional strategies are needed that have demonstrated effectiveness with young people who are disengaged and at risk of school failure. Furthermore, better diagnostic tools are needed to determine reading and math levels and specific difficulties among very different learners in the same classroom.

Reexamine the duration of programs and credential attainment. While the GED remains the most viable option for many older students and some younger students who are ready to begin college, many educators worry that it bears a stigma and call for greater validation. An additional worry is that even if learning is accelerated, programs report that students may not be able to attain a GED or a high school diploma during their abbreviated stay in the programs. Students who are far behind academically (or face crises in their lives) often need significant amounts of time to catch up with their peers. Programs must be cautioned not to establish unrealistic targets for students. There is a need for interim milestones, which students can attain, that are portable and recognized across educational institutions. Options are needed that allow students to work while they continue in school (Ruzzi & Kraemer, 2006).

Improve transition into and out of programs. The successful transition of students into and out of alternative education programs is one of the most critical indicators of long-term success for the student and for the sustainability of the program. Alternative programs must work closely with the "feeder" schools that send students to and receive students from these programs. Follow-up and transitional supports must be in place when the alternative education experience is completed.

Strengthen family engagement in programs for high-risk children. Many students in alternative education have problems that reside within the family system and affect their learning and motivation. Meaningful family involvement in education is extremely important with the at-risk child. In many alternative programs, funding does not appear to support adequate and ongoing family programming and counseling efforts. Legislators are encouraged to look seriously at mechanisms to promote services designed to engage families of high risk children in the educational process.

Improve Performance of Administrators and Teachers

Strengthen professional development for teachers who work with high-risk children and youth in alternative education settings. Alternative education programs report high teacher turnover and lower teacher pay than in the K-12 school system. Professional development and training opportunities should be readily available to persons working in alternative programs and in collaborating agencies. Wherever possible, professional development and training activities should be conducted in cooperation with college or university faculty members or others with particular expertise in the areas to be addressed. Opportunities should include attention to cognitive and non-cognitive barriers to school success. State and school district funding must account for the different needs of these teachers and administrators in allocating funds for professional development.

A Normative Model for Professional Teacher Education Programs. Alternative education programs vary dramatically from carefully structured, well-regulated options embedded within a district's school system, or interagency model, to small, unregulated, private programs of questionable quality. Attention is needed to the quality of these programs and the professionals who teach in them. Teacher behavior, or the responses of teachers in the classroom during behavioral incidents, is a predictor of a student's removal from the classroom and placement into alternative settings. Many are unfamiliar with the social/emotional needs of these students, or do not know the most effective strategies, or wait too long before intervening. Further, many teachers in alternative education settings need additional training to meet the "highly qualified teacher" definition under NCLB. Better trained teachers are able to keep students in their classrooms longer and tend to have a positive impact academically.

The authors propose a model post-baccalaureate degree program, designed to prepare teachers for a variety of Alternative Education settings that would offer a choice of either (a) dual certification in special education (emphasis on learning disabilities and emotional/ behavioral disabilities) and a content area specialization, or (b) non-categorical special education preparation for educators and youth workers. The model program would address the following competencies and expect students to demonstrate:

- Knowledge of the spectrum and classification of alternative educational programs and settings, their philosophy, organizational and administrative structures, target populations, and legal issues
- Mastery of teaching methods in a content area (mathematics, science, language arts, social studies, etc) and prepare for completion of Praxis III in a content area
- Understanding of the relationship between learners' physical, cognitive, emotional, social, and
- Skills in use of valid assessment approaches, both formal and informal, that are age-appropriate and address a variety of developmental needs
- Knowledge of career-vocational development and curriculum options and of legal requirements to assist youth in transition from high school to adult settings
- Skills in using computer and computer-related technology in instruction
- Knowledge of strategies for collaborating

cultural development and their academic progress

- Knowledge and skills in planning, designing, and delivering instruction to students with learning, emotional and behavioral disabilities
- Skills in organizing and managing a classroom, guided by the principles of positive behavioral supports, well grounded in evidence-based practices
- Knowledge of emerging research and an understanding of the relationship between adolescent brain development and behavior
- Knowledge of strategies for differentiated instruction and the integration of students with special needs into the general education curriculum
- Knowledge and skills in reading development, assessment and instruction

with the broad educational community, including parents, businesses, and social service agencies

- Knowledge of evidence-based practices in alternative education, through extended internships in alternative education settings
- Knowledge of the referral process (voluntary and involuntary) and transitions to and from alternative settings
- A multicultural perspective that integrates culturally diverse resources, including those from the learner's family and community
- Skills to design and deliver professional development in order to expand more quickly the competency of the alternative education community
- Ability to track graduates in order to assess the effectiveness of the program

Those who successfully complete the preservice program should be able to help students in their school districts to attain seven outcomes: (a) improved test scores aligned with state curriculum standards; (b) increased community service and responsibility; (c) increased enrollment in and completion of higher education; (d) greater employment success through and after high school; (e) increased maintenance of students in public schools; (f) reduction in serious disciplinary offenses in schools; and (g) decreased involvement in crime and the juvenile justice system.

Strengthen professional development for administrators of alternative education settings. Even though standards for the preparation of school leaders do address the creation of school cultures that are conducive to learning for all students and address collaboration and community connections (Herrington & Wills, 2005; Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium standards, Council of Chief State School Officers, 1996), these standards are general and reference conventional school structures, administrative roles, and students (Mazzeo, 2003). The standards for licensure assessment of administrators, which are currently under review, could provide more specific guidance for developing knowledge, dispositions, and performances that relate to creating positive behavioral interventions, preventing school dropout; identifying, planning and monitoring options for at-risk and non-traditional students; or developing alternative pathways to graduation.

Expand Access to New Knowledge, Resources, and Ideas

Although alternative education is viewed as primarily having its roots in the educational discipline, scholars from a variety of disciplines have contributed diverse perspectives on the development of models and theories. These include psychologists, philosophers, economists, special educators, sociologists, and many others. Because alternative education is a complex issue, intervention strategies need to be multifaceted and comprehensive to be effective. Such an approach unites the work of researchers and practitioners from multiple disciplines in the search for solutions to the problems of youth who are at risk and those who educate them, employs a spectrum of intervention strategies, and includes actions at local, state, and national levels. The quality of alternative education will be enhanced through interconnectedness and

shared communication among researchers and administrators, and through increased access to alternative professional sources and professional voices.

Establish Evaluation and Accountability Mechanisms

Analyze national, state, and local public policies. As they attend to educational redesign, many states are considering policies to increase available pathways through education. States should be encouraged to facilitate the development of quality alternative education programs that reconnect youth to education, self-development, and the workplace. In addition to accurately measuring and reporting graduation rates, states should direct districts to provide alternative education options not only as a means of supporting struggling students and reengaging out-of-school youth, but also as a part of their high school reform efforts. State legislation directing districts to focus specifically on students at risk of not graduating, including those who have left school, helps districts to focus their efforts.

Further evaluate the efficacy of a predominantly disciplinary approach. The funding regulations and discipline policies that have been intended to keep disruptive and marginal high-risk students in school may lead to a separate and unequal education experience for alternative education students and teachers. For example, separate facilities and/or separate administration and staffing sometimes include inadequate administrative structures, inadequate curriculum, inadequate facilities and/or equipment and supplies, and student and teacher disengagement from the home school. Often, for these high-risk students to succeed in the long run, they will require the best that can be offered in each area of service (Hosely, 2003).

Analyze benefits and costs comprehensively. The benefit and cost analyses cited earlier were studies of not finishing high school. Consequently, the findings from those analyses represent proxies for the benefits and costs of alternative education. Further study is needed.

Develop Systems for Tracking Students. As previously mentioned, states need to develop systems for unique student identifiers. Currently in the states, there is inconsistent data collection and little focus on long-term data. Limited staff resources make it difficult to collect long-term data or spend time analyzing program data that is collected. Many collect data only to satisfy funding requirements, not to monitor or improve programs. Multiple years of data collection on each student served by alternative education programs will be important to provide evidence of student and program outcomes and effectiveness. The National Governors Association's efforts to develop consistent high school graduation reporting rates is also driving states to develop systems that allow tracking of students after high school to determine if they returned to obtain a GED or other certificate. States should be encouraged to develop comprehensive legislation calling for increased local attention to struggling students and out-of-school youth.

Allow schools to receive average daily attendance funding for students at least until age 21. States should enact policies that allow students to continue to receive ADA funds at least until age 21 if they have not completed a high school diploma. More often than not, these over-age students will be outside of the traditional K-12 system and, therefore, funds will need to flow to the non-traditional alternative education system. Also, states need to review their compulsory school attendance laws. In some cases, when students are allowed to leave at age 16, it is questionable whether ADA funding would continue to flow to that student even if he or she reentered a public alternative education or training program. Easing the Flow of Funding for Alternative Education States could facilitate the smoother flow of funding by creating official mechanisms for funds to follow students into alternative education settings, including those outside of the public K-12 system (Martin & Brand, 2006).

SUMMARY

The subject of alternative education is timely for communities across the nation that face staggering social and economic costs resulting from the growing numbers of alienated and undereducated youth and young adults. After operating for decades on the fringes of public education, alternative schools are now receiving serious attention. Quality alternative education programs, with strong leadership and well prepared educational administrators, have successfully reengaged some of the hardest-to-teach young people. Furthermore, effective alternative schools and programs are accumulating vital information about what works in educating young people facing the greatest life challenges – information that can inform efforts to improve all schools. Educational administrators have a key role to play to help youth and advise policymakers to consider ways to improve the integration of those programs within a school districts' education and training systems.

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