

Alternative Education: Finding Solutions to Educational Shortcomings

Educators have long struggled to understand why some students fail to thrive in traditional classroom settings (Quinn et al., 2006). Some contended the problem lies within educational programming, whereas others pose the problem lies within the student (Quinn et al., 2006). Regardless of the perspective on where the failure to thrive originates, all students and districts have the same accountability standards (Quinn et al., 2006). If students do not meet standards academically and behaviorally and school districts fail to provide an appropriate educational setting, severe consequences follow (Hamilton & Stecher, 2004).

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), proposed by President George W. Bush and passed by Congress in 2001, requires greater accountability through assessment scores, annual yearly progress, and higher standards (Hamilton & Stecher). The aim of alternative-education programs is to support students who are at risk of dropping out of a traditional school setting or students who display behaviors that repeatedly result in suspension (Quinn et al., 2006).

According to Ishee (2004), students often suffer from "learned irresponsibility" (p. 5), which indicates a person feels a sense of powerlessness. Indifference or defiant, rebellious behaviors can mask feelings of powerlessness. Students in alternative-education programs tend to display behaviors such as refusal to comply with reasonable staff requests, faking effort, and peer isolation (Ishee). The traditional school setting discourages some students who have lost their sense of purpose. The students lack a connection to the curriculum, their teachers, and classmates. Alternative-education programs provide students with the opportunity to start over in a new educational setting to meet their high school graduation requirements, including state assessments (Genesee Valley Board of Cooperative Education Services [BOCES], 2007b).

National, state, and local governments provide policies and procedures to address unacceptable behaviors in an educational setting (Ingersoll & LeBoeuf, 1997). Safety in schools is a critical component of managing a school system in which all students have the opportunity to learn (Ingersoll & LeBoeuf). When a student's behaviors interfere with learning, districts must provide an educational program for the student. The student's home district does not need to implement the educational program (Ingersoll & LeBoeuf).

The development of alternative-education programs increased as more students became at-risk for school failure (Hughes & Adera, 2006), and program development is critical because of the needs of the youth (McCurdy, Mannella, & Eldridge, 2003). According to Emmer, Evertson, and Worsham (2000), a well-organized alternative-education program includes classroom conditions conducive to learning, clearly articulated expectations, and structured student behavior plans. Districts must provide a learning environment

that is nonthreatening and conducive to meeting the state accountability standards set forth by NCLB.

Albrecht and Joles (2003) noted holding all students accountable to proficiency standards requires schools to improve educational services to all students, including students with disabilities and behavioral issues. Student assessments are vital to the identification of interventions necessary to support student needs.

Alternative-education programs provide opportunities for students to participate in state-mandated curriculum and proficiency assessments while participating in a program that includes behavioral interventions to deter students from dropping out of school.

The implications of research confirm the need for alternative-education programs in meeting the needs of today's youth who struggle with social-emotional issues, and for those with learning disabilities. It is the job of educators to gain information relating to student success rates in order to make effective decisions relating to program development.

By statistically analyzing multiple measures of success, alternative-education programs display proven methods of success. It appears that alternative-education programs provide a structured, individualized environment that retains students in order to continue working towards a high school diploma. The alternative-education model showed an increase in course completion rates, improvements in school attendance rates, and a decrease in referral rates which could result in suspension or expulsion. This study confirms the need for alternative education programs. The success that students who are at-risk of school failure display in an individualized program where course content relates to future job opportunities is evident in the studies findings.

Alternative-education programs can meet the needs of at-risk youth (Foley & Pang, 2006). This research adds significant findings for educational leaders and proves that through individualized programming, small class sizes, and real-life learning opportunities, at-risk youth find success in alternative-education programs (Foley & Pang).

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About the Author

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Hello. My name is Dr. Julie Donlon. I live in Rochester, New York. I enjoy staying busy with my profession as the Principal of Alternative Education.. Over the years, I have worked as a special education teacher in the public school system. I truly enjoy working with today's youth. They all have so much to offer and many of them need the additional motivation from school personal due to difficult family situations.

In addition to my work in education, I am a co-owner of a web development business called Lucky Solutions. As the content manager, I meet with clients to assess their needs so we can assist them in designing a web site that will increase their customer base. We also provide an educational component to the business, which empowers our clients to make changes to their own web site.

I spent my summer boating, kayaking, running marathons, and of course, picnics with friends and family. Spending time engaging in sports and enjoying family allows me to take a break from my busy career and current studies. My time spent outdoors provides me the relief I need from the stress of a busy but enjoyable daily routine.

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