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UMI

AN EVALUATION OF AN INTERVENTION PROGRAM

FOR SECONDARY AT-RISK STUDENTS

by

Kimberley K. Saum

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of

The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Education

Major: Educational Administration

Under the Supervision of Barbara Y. LaCost

Lincoln, Nebraska

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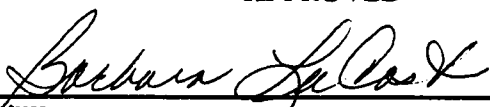
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GRADUATE COLLEGE
UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA

AN EVALUATION OF AN INTERVENTION PROGRAM

FOR SECONDARY AT-RISK STUDENTS

Kimberley K. Saum, Ed.D

University of Nebraska, 1999

Adviser: Barbara Y. LaCost

The overall purpose of the study was to evaluate the effects of an educational intervention program on students, parents, and teachers of the program. Qualitative research procedure was used. For the evaluation, eight themes addressed in the grant proposal for the intervention program were explored through interviews before the program was initiated and after one year into the program. These themes were, students' sense of belonging (community), students' perceptions of self, students' values of school, students' future goals, parent involvement, parents' perceptions of student, parents' perceptions of school, and teachers' perceptions of at-risk youth. The researcher found that many students experienced a sense of belonging (community) when they attended the At-Risk Program under study. However, over the time period of one academic year, students' perception of self did not change greatly. Furthermore, parents did not increase involvement in school nor did their perceptions about the school change. Teachers' perception that at-risk youth require interaction and individual attention remained consistent.

The researcher also gathered descriptive demographic data including the district data of failure rate, attendance, and discipline referrals of the eight at-risk high school students. Data were extracted from the district's comprehensive database to determine if a difference existed in the failure rate, attendance, and discipline of these students between

their year as participants of the At-Risk Program and their previous year as nonparticipants. Five of the eight students improved their percentage of passed classes during their year in the At-Risk Program. Four of the eight students had an increase of discipline referrals as participants in the At-Risk Program. One student improved his attendance as a participant in the At-Risk Program.

The researcher has made recommendations regarding development and changes that might be implemented in the At-Risk Program for students at this site. These recommendations may have merit for educators interested in improving education for at-risk students in other settings.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks go to many people who have contributed to this dissertation. Thank you to my advisor, Dr. Barbara LaCost and to all of my committee members, Dr. Martha Bruckner, Dr. Marilyn Grady, Dr. Stan Vasa, and Dr. Fred Wendel. Each professor contributed through his or her expertise and guidance. A special thank you to Phyllis Hasse for her competent technical assistance and her continued support.

I would also like to thank the students, parents and staff of the At-Risk Program for volunteering their time and opinions. Thank you to my principal, Dr. Dick Wollman and my secretary, Ms. Kathy Cinotto, for their emotional support.

A sincere thank you to all of my friends and family, who have laughed and cried with me during my doctoral program. I value the continued support you provided. I am rich because of your friendships.

Finally, I owe my biggest thank you to my parents, Steve and Sandy Saum. Your unconditional love has been the biggest influence on who I am today. My heart overflows with love for you.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Langston Hughes, author of the novel, <u>Harlem</u>, asked the question, "What happens to a dream deferred? Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun? . . . Or does it explode?" (Coley, 1995). Poor school performance results in failure and often in subsequent dropping out of high school. Surely students who follow this path are deferring, if not eliminating, a dream of a successful productive life. Coley (1995) explained the statistics regarding the economic and social effects to be suffered by the dropouts from the class of 1992. One such example was the loss of income a dropout earned. "In 1992, dropouts earned an average of $12,809, about $6,000 less than high school graduates" (p. 3). Dropping out of high school is not what most students want for their future. Dropouts are from every ethnic group and include both genders (Dorn, 1996). Dropouts and students at-risk usually share common characteristics (Rossi & Stringfield, 1997).

Pallas (1989) suggested that dropouts come from "at-risk" populations. The term, "at-risk" is increasingly being used in educational circles. Multiple definitions exist for at-risk students depending on the criteria selected. "One common definition of the term *at-risk students* is a category of students who are unlikely to graduate from high school" (Waxman, Walker de Felix, Anderson, & Baptiste, Jr., 1992, p. 3). Another definition of an academically at-risk student is one who has had poor experiences with education in the family, school, or community. Poverty, drug abuse, sexual activity, race, and ethnicity are identifiers of at-risk students (p. 12).

Coley (1995) reported that the most frequent behaviors observed just prior to students withdrawing from school included (a) missing school ten days or more, (b) cutting classes, and (c) being placed in in-school/out-of-school suspension or on probation. School personnel have tried to combat the problem of at-risk students dropping out of school by providing alternative educational programs for them.

The suburban school under study was awarded a quarter of a million dollar Nebraska Lottery Grant in the summer of 1997 to begin a three-year pilot alternative educational program. This alternative educational program, called a school-within-a-school, was intended to provide unique and engaging instructional strategies to meet the needs of the at-risk students. This alternative educational program was not a special education program, and special education students were not allowed in the program. Small student-to-teacher ratio and parent involvement were unique components of this program.

Providing relevancy to the curriculum was another goal of the alternative educational program. The students participating in this alternative program are easily distracted and bored with traditional methods of instructional strategy. Engaging the students' interest and maintaining their interest was a continuous goal.

The alternative educational program operated daily, from 8:00 AM to 12:47 PM. This was equal to periods one through five in the suburban high school. The program students ate lunch with the general student population and attended elective classes during the sixth and seventh periods of the school day. Elective classes include physical education, industrial technology, family and consumer science and business.

The alternative educational program's technology-based curriculum focused on skills in reading, math, and writing. Students had the opportunity to earn credits in English, math, social studies, science, and one elective. The program's elective class was based on life and social skills and a school-to-work component.

Curriculum integration was another goal of the program. During the 1998-99 school year, two integrated curriculum units were implemented. During the 1999-2000 school year, four integrated curriculum units will be implemented.

Purpose of this Study

The overall purpose of the study was to evaluate the effects of an educational intervention program on students, parents, and teachers of the program. Tyler (1965) supported educational research. "It is to assess programs, procedures, and materials so as to indicate what educational results are being attained, what they cost in time, effort, and materials, and under what conditions these results are being attained" (p. 8). Qualitative research procedure was used. For the evaluation, eight themes addressed in the grant proposal for the intervention program were explored through interviews before the program was initiated and after one year into the program. These themes were, students' sense of belonging (community), students' perceptions of self, students' values of school, students' future goals, parent involvement, parents' perceptions of student, parents' perceptions of school, and teachers' perceptions of at-risk youth.

The researcher also gathered descriptive demographic data including the district data of failure rate, attendance, and discipline referrals of the eight at-risk high school students. Data were extracted from the district's comprehensive database to determine if a difference existed in the failure rate, attendance, and discipline of these students between

their year as participants of the At-Risk Program and their previous year as

nonparticipants.

A major premise of the At-Risk Program was that failure rate and discipline

referrals can be decreased and attendance improved by offering a flexible team approach

to teaching and integrating the core curriculum with instructional strategies conducive to

at-risk learners (Felger, 1997).

<center>Research Questions</center>

<u>Grand Tour Question</u>

The grand tour question for this study was: What are the effects of an intervention

program on at-risk students, parents of at-risk students, and teachers of at-risk students?

<u>Sub-questions</u>

1.   How did the intervention program affect the at-risk students' sense of

belonging to the school community?

2.   How did the intervention program affect the at-risk students' perceptions

of self?

3.   How did the intervention program affect the at-risk students' values of

school?

4.   How did the intervention program affect the at-risk students' future goals?

5.   How did the intervention program affect the parents of at-risk students'

involvement with school?

6.   How did the intervention program affect the parents' perceptions of their

at-risk students?

7.   How did the intervention program affect the perceptions of school for

parents of at-risk students?

8.   How did the intervention program affect the teachers' perceptions of at-

risk youth?

<div align="center">Definition of Terms</div>

Dropout. A person of school age who has not earned a high school diploma or

GED and is not enrolled in school (Coley, 1995, p. 6).

Academically At-Risk Student. A student who has had poor experiences with

education in the family, school, or community. There is a great chance this student will

drop out of school (Pallas, 1989). For the purposes of this study, an at-risk student was

defined as one who had failed two or more classes during the Fall 1997 Semester.

At-Risk Program (as applied in this study). A program for 9th and 10th grade

students within the large suburban high school. This program offers low student-to-

teacher ratios, integrated instructional strategies, team approach to instruction, strong

parental involvement, and learning opportunities outside the classroom (Felger, L., 1997).

Alternative Education. Education intended to meet the needs of at-risk students.

It is based on a specific curriculum, different instructional strategies, and unique learning

opportunities (Barr & Parrett, 1997, p. 57).

Saturday/Thursday School. The Saturday/Thursday School affords students an

opportunity to serve their discipline obligations for committing offenses that normally

result in suspension from classes or school. The administration has the option to suspend

from school or offer the parent or guardian the opportunity to send their son or daughter

to Saturday/Thursday School in lieu of suspension (Millard South High School, 1999).

Assumptions

The following assumptions apply to this study:

1.   The 1997-98 and 1998-99 data for the school collected on attendance, failure rate, and in-school/out-of-school suspension of the participants of the At-Risk Program were correct and free of human error. District personnel considered these data reliable; the data have been collected by the district for the past decade and are used consistently in district demographic analysis (Crawford, personal communication, October 31, 1997).

2.   Information about alternative programs for at-risk students has interest and value to educators.

Delimitations

The researcher delimited the study in the following manner:

1.   Students attending the At-Risk Program were chosen based on their grades, attendance, and discipline data from the fall of 1997. Records from spring of 1998 had no effect on student placement.

2.   Students used in the sample as a whole are only a small percentage of the high school population at this large suburban high school in Nebraska.

Limitations

The limitations associated with the results include:

1.   No generalizations can be made beyond the students, parents, and teachers involved in this study.

2.   The researcher had no control over attrition of the participants.

3.   Total researcher bias was not eliminated in this study due to her role as an assistant principal in the high school under study.

Significance of the Study

By 2020, the majority of America's public school students will be at risk of educational failure (Rossi & Stringfield, 1997). The critical stage of adolescence at the ninth grade is particularly difficult for at-risk students. Alternative educational programs are needed for students when they reach the ninth grade level. At-risk students are facing a new, impersonal, and more challenging school environment (Ascher & Schwartz, 1987).

Teachers in the public educational system generally design lesson plans for one group of learners. Not all students learn alike. "At-risk students need administrators and teachers who are willing to take risks in providing new and innovative programs" (Waxman, et al., 1992, p. 12). Changes in curriculum and changes in instruction are needed to provide alternative ways of learning to America's growing numbers of at-risk students. Rossi and Stringfield (1997) report that if students are to benefit from curriculum developments, resources must be available to educators willing to implement ambitious curriculum changes. They studied various alternative programs across the country. Rossi and Stringfield (1997) determined four major resources needed to make significant reform.

Monetary Resources. Both internal (e.g., local budgets) and external (e.g., foundation grants, state funds).

People/Personnel Resources. In virtually every site studied, the building principal charged with general oversight of the schools was a "believer"; that is, he or she was willing to lend support or to take credit for the program's success because he or she believed it had improved the teaching-

learning situation in some way. In addition, each site we visited that evidenced success with students benefited directly and importantly by staff persons trained in the particular school-program approach. Other people/personnel resources that proved effective in implementing reform efforts included paid classroom aides, parent/adult volunteers, community volunteers, extra staff time, reform-tested advisors, and new teacher pipelines (professional networks to colleges or universities).

Material Resources. Each school we studied provided the required reform-related instructional materials (books, supplementary reading materials, manipulables) in addition to the typical array of general instructional materials.

Political resources. Affiliation with a college or university afforded some of our sites with additional monetary resources and considerable credibility. In addition, private-sector affiliations with local companies and firms provided schools with a degree of insulation from district-level policies, procedures, and requirements. (p. 8-9)

The purpose for conducting this study was to investigate the effectiveness of the innovative program at a suburban high school in Nebraska. The results generated questions that may incite more investigation and contribute to the body of knowledge of alternative education for at-risk students.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF SELECTED REFERENCES

In 1990, President Bush and the nation's governors created six national education goals. Goal 2 named a 90% high school graduation rate by the year 2000. Goal 2 was the official recognition given to a large number of school and community efforts over the last decade to deter "at-risk" youth from dropping out of school (Baas, 1991).

For Goal 2 to be successful, combined efforts of schools, communities, students, and families must occur. The social, physical, emotional, and intellectual growth of the students must be nurtured. Schools should examine exemplary dropout prevention programs. Hamilton (1986) cited 17 alternative programs that improved the rates of dropouts, their test scores, and absentee rates by providing resources like counseling, tutoring, health care, and employment.

Schools can request parental support. Parental support and input are one key to keeping students in school. Some districts choose to hire a parent educator to work with parents of at-risk children and offer support groups for parents in need of additional parenting help (Swanson, 1991).

People want to live the American Dream. The American Dream can be reached through education and the development of employable skills. "Unfortunately, our country is developing a class of young people who are undereducated, unskilled, and doomed to poverty status. These young people are our current and future dropouts" (Waxman, et al., 1992, p. 11).

In 1993, 381,000 students in America dropped out of school prior to graduation. Almost two-thirds of dropouts leave school before they enter the tenth grade (Schwartz, 1995). The number of students falling under the category of at-risk (those who dropout) has increased dramatically (Waxman, et al., 1992).

Who Is At-Risk?

There are several definitions of at-risk students and characteristics of at-risk students. Chalker (1996) provides a thorough literature review in his book, Effective Alternative Education Programs: Best Practices From Planning Through Evaluation. He describes a time during the late 1980s, when educators began to use the term "at-risk" to describe certain categories of students. The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction's definition of "at-risk" is one of the most comprehensive; it lists 14 factors that place students in serious jeopardy of dropping out, including the following:

> being one or more years behind their grade level in reading or math (in grades K-8) or three or more credits behind their age/grade level in credits earned toward graduation (in grades 9-12); being chronically truant; being a school-age parent; having a history of personal and/or family drug and alcohol abuse; having parents who have low expectations for their child's success or who place little value on education; being a victim of physical, sexual, or emotional abuse; experiencing a family trauma (such as death or divorce); being economically, culturally, or educationally disadvantaged; and coming from a family with a history of dropouts. Additional risk factors include low intelligence test scores, low self-concept and social maturity, feelings of alienation, and certain types of handicaps and limiting conditions. (Naylor, 1989, p. 1)

In 1989, Pallas predicted that barring any dramatic changes in U.S. society, the school-aged population of the future will be more at risk. The author described five social factors indicating at-risk students:

Poverty. Poor children are more likely to perform poorly in school and to drop out than children from higher income households. More than twelve million children under the age of 18--or one in five children--were living in poverty in 1987 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1988). Black and Hispanic children are three to four times more likely to live in poverty than non-Hispanic white children.

Race and Ethnicity. Black and Hispanic students frequently score lower on tests than do whites, and are more likely to drop out of school than are whites. About 19 million children under age 18 were black, Hispanic or Asian or Pacific Islanders in 1988.

Family Composition. Children growing up in single-parent households frequently spend much of their childhood in poverty (Ellwood, 1988). They score lower on tests than do children living in two-parent homes (Natriello, McDill, & Pallas, in press). More than 17 million children under age 18 lived in households without both parents present in 1988. (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1989)

Mother's Education. Highly educated mothers provide children with educational resources that less-educated mothers cannot; their children do better in school and stay there longer than do the children of mothers who have not completed high school. Nearly 13 million children aged under 18 in 1987, disproportionately black and Hispanic, lived with mothers who dropped out of school.

Language Background. Children with limited proficiency in English, and living in homes where English is not spoken, face barriers to success in which English is the language of instruction. Various estimates suggest that anywhere from 1.2 million to 2.6 million children had limited proficiency in English in 1986. (p. 2)

Most students are "at-risk" at some time or another because of the increasing number of divorces, the growing numbers of single parent families and families in which both parents work. In combination with divorce rates and the general complexity of modern life, even children of well-educated, middle-class parents can come to school with at-risk characteristics and unprepared for school because of the stress of family life (Liontos, 1991). For at-risk students, school is not a friendly place. Students who have

been unsuccessful at school and who receive little positive attention from adults while they are at school become invisible. Other students in the same situation act out and receive attention - albeit negative attention (Testerman, 1996).

Adults who show sincere concern for at-risk students appear to make a difference in students' attitudes about school. Whelage and Rutter (1986) conducted a study regarding student alienation and rejection that included the variable of teacher interest in students. "When those who eventually became dropouts were asked to rate Teacher Interest in Students on a 4.0 scale, marks of fair to poor were given by 56% of the Hispanics, 50% of the blacks, and 59% of the whites" (pp. 382-383). Whelage and Rutter reported, "Non-college-bound students were not much more positive, in view of the fair-to-poor ratings given by each racial group (Hispanics 49%, blacks 47%, and whites 49%)" (pp. 382-383).

Dropouts in the U.S.

According to Coley (1995), a dropout is a person of school age who has not earned a high school diploma or GED and is not enrolled in school (p. 6). Although the number of young Americans holding high school diplomas has increased from 1941 to 1990 (see Table 1), the dropout numbers in 1993 were still a staggering 381,000 (Coley, 1995, p. 3). Half of the dropouts left school before the eleventh grade and almost 40% of the dropouts had or were expecting a baby (p. 3).

Based on data collected since 1990, educators can recognize a likely school dropout. Schwartz (1995) identified personal behavior of dropouts during their last two years of school. Almost one-half of these dropouts interviewed missed at least ten days of

school and one-third of the students cut class at least ten times. Tardiness was also an

indication with one-quarter of the dropouts being late to their classes at least ten times.

Discipline problems were a significant indicator showing that one-third of the dropouts

interviewed were put on in-school suspension, out-of school suspension, or probation.

Eleven percent of dropouts have been arrested.

Table 1
Percentage of Americans 20-24 Years Old with School Diplomas, by Ethnicity

	1940 %	1950 %	1960 %	1970 %	1980 %	1990 %
All	44.2	49.9	64.0	79.0	83.7	84.8
White	47.9	54.1	67.3	81.6	85.7	87.3
All non-white	13.9	23.1	41.5	60.5	72.9	74.4
African Amer.	12.9	22.3	40.1	59.1	73.1	75.0
Hispanic	a	a	a	56.1	72.1	71.4
Spanish Surname	18.1	22.5	39.7	60.0	72.5	a

a = category did not exist for this census.

Source: Adapted from Dorn, S. (1996). Creating the dropout: An institutional and social history of school failure, p. 15. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers.

Economic Disadvantages for the Dropout

At the time students drop out of school, seldom do they have the entire knowledge

of how difficult earning an income will be without a diploma. Much of this knowledge

must be internalized through sheer experience. Students may have a part- or full-time job

earning minimum wage. It is estimated that the 381,000 students who dropped out of

school in 1993, will earn hundreds of thousands of dollars less over a lifetime than their

better educated peers (Coley, 1995). Coley reports the U.S. Census Bureau data. Over a

lifetime, high school dropouts will earn $212,000 less than high school graduates; they will

earn $384,000 less than persons who have some college education; $812,000 less than

college graduates; and $2,404,000 less than people with professional degrees (Coley,

1995).

Table 2
Annual Earnings Based on Educational Level

Education Level	Earnings for Persons 18+
Professional	$74, 560
Doctorate	$54, 904
Masters	$40, 368
Bachelors	$32, 629
Associates	$24, 398
Some College	$19, 666
High School	$18, 737
Dropout	$12, 809

Source: Coley, R.J. (1995). Dreams deferred: High school dropouts in the United States,
p. 5. Princeton: Educational Testing Service, Policy Information Center.

Dropouts do not contribute to a community's tax base. As data displayed in

Table 2 reflect, people who do not hold diplomas make less money than their

counterparts who do hold diplomas. Willis (1986) cited in Naylor (1987) estimated the

"lifetime earnings loss of a single male dropout is $187,000 and that of a single female

dropout is $122,000, the lost lifetime earnings from a high school with a 40 percent

dropout rate amounts to $3.2 billion." In 1988, it was estimated that almost 30% of the

students entering high school would drop out prior to graduation. Each dropout costs the nation a minimum of $26,000 during the dropout's working life (Naylor, 1989).

Dropouts do have an impact on society. Nearly half of the heads of households, supported from the federal welfare program, are dropouts. In 1992, half of the prison population in America had failed to complete high school (Coley, 1995). Portner (1996) pointed out that society pays $32,000 a year to keep a person in prison. With half of these prisoners being dropouts, one may consider the cost benefit of putting the money into education, rather than into prison.

Alternative Education

Alternative education is education intended to meet the individual needs of students. It is based on a specific curriculum, different instructional strategies, and unique learning opportunities (Barr & Parrett, 1997).

> Demographic data show growth in the population of students facing school failure, expulsion, or high dropout potential. Complicated economic and social forces exacerbate problems experienced by these students. The result in increased special learning needs and calls for more structured remediation through alternative programs. (Chalker, 1996, p. 3)

Several Omaha Metropolitan area alternative educational programs described in Chapter 2 implement individualized educational experiences. Chalker, however, advocates cooperative learning for at-risk learners. "Students who are usually behind in class, find it much less threatening to take instruction from other students than from teachers" (p. 86). Alternative education is a solution which communities may consider when seeking a resolution to problems associated with educating at-risk students. Not all children will succeed in the make-up of today's public education. Not every student can walk to seven or eight different periods of classes, with seven or eight different homework assignments

and instructors, and find success. Alternative education is unique to each school.

Different instructional approaches and curriculum with unique learning opportunities

designed to meet the needs of specific students can help students succeed in the school.

> The vast majority of alternative schools in the United States are designed to
> address the unique needs of a particular type of student. While many of these
> schools also involve career themes, their primary distinction grows out of an effort
> to meet the needs of the students they serve. (Barr & Parrett, 1997, p. 57)

There are multiple models of alternative schools. Alternatives that focus on the

different instructional strategies can be found at the elementary, middle and secondary

levels. Some of the instructional strategies associated with alternative programs appeal to

at-risk students. There are numerous types of alternative schools. The following is a brief

description of a few (Barr & Parrett, 1997; Chalker, 1996; Fantini, 1976):

Montessori Schools were established based on philosophy of Dr. Maria

Montessori. These schools are based on a unique set of ideas about the development and

growth of children. The approach to learning is highly structured and includes an

established and consistent curriculum (Barr & Parrett, 1997).

Open Schools were established in 1971 and are based on the British model that

developed learning centers for children. Fantini (1976) believes that "Children take a great

deal of initiative for their own education with the emphasis on pursuing their own

interests" (p. 13). "Young children are encouraged to pursue their own curiosity and

inquisitiveness, select learning activities, and to some extent, decide where and how long

they will pursue those activities" (Barr & Parrett, 1997, p. 60-62).

Continuous Progress Schools were established based on the research of the negative effects of retaining children who have not mastered basic skills. Due to the research of human growth and development, multi-aged groupings have allowed schools to individualize their education they provide children. With multi-aged classes, students who may be academically ahead in math but behind in reading receive attention at the appropriate educational level. Young (1990) advocates continuous progress schools because they are less competitive and more individualized. Young sees more potential for growth in students' personal/social development. Continuation schools have traditionally made up the majority of alternative schools.

Traditional Schools or Core Academies have developed from a need to serve children who benefit from the structure and drill of educational exercises. In addition to drill, these schools advocate uniforms and strict homework expectations. Parents who send their children to Core Academies tend to consider other schools as focusing too much on "fun and games." "The stress of the Traditional School will be on continuation of the fine quality and method of education that have transpired during years past and have proved to be successful for many young people" (Crocker, Haugh, & Price, 1976, p. 134).

The Alternative Classroom include individualizing instruction to meet the needs of the students. Chalker's (1996) definition includes "competency-based instruction, longer instructional periods, student contracting, basic skills emphasis, career and vocational activities, counseling services, tutoring and mentoring opportunities, parental involvement, and integrated teaching" (p. 13).

The majority of secondary alternative programs address the theme of careers since their

clientele will soon become adults and enter the world of work. To engage students and

teach them about careers, alternative educators first concentrate on meeting these

students' needs. Another strategy is to educate teen mothers and fathers or teens who

have drug and/or alcohol addictions.

> Serving the needs of teenage parents or pregnant teenagers may well be the
> most demanding job in public education. Not only do the students face the
> usual challenges of learning, earning credit, and graduating, they now have
> or soon will have an infant or young child to care for. Often these students
> are poor; they usually do not have adequate health services available. They
> usually have no child care, and many may not even have a home. Without
> carefully designed schools to address the many needs of the teen parent or
> pregnant teenager, these students almost always will drop out of school,
> have more children, and be on some form of public assistance for years,
> sometimes decades. And all too often, their children also grow up in poor
> and often dysfunctional settings only to perpetuate the cycle of despair into
> the next generation. (Barr & Parrett, 1997, p. 71)

Dropout Prevention Alternative Schools are probably the oldest form of alternative

education. Dropout prevention programs are provided for students who are likely to quit

school due to various academic and attendance problems (Chalker, 1996). Dropout

prevention programs can be found in school districts in the United States. Many of these

alternative schools use independent-paced learning and curriculum that is of high-interest

to their students. "Such programs often combine an array of services in a comprehensive,

multi-service approach that encouraged students to remain in school. One such strategy is

an acceleration program for helping students who have experienced past retention in grade

to catch up to their proper grade level" (p. 18).

Nebraska law (Neb. Rev. Stat. Section 79-266, 1997) requires public schools to have alternatives to expulsion. It mandates that school districts offer an alternative education program to students who have been expelled from the regular education program or pre-expulsion procedures for all expelled students. In a segment of Neb. Rev. Stat. Section 79-266 (1) the guidelines for school districts to follow when providing alternative education is explained. Schools may join together when providing the alternative education program or a school may send a student to another school district's alternative education program. The educational program may include individually prescribed educational and counseling programs or a community-centered classroom with experiences for the students in governmental functions, on-the-job training, or tutorial experiences. If a school does not have an alternative educational program, an expelled student should be provided with a conference held by the school officials that explains the educational plan for the student toward graduation (NCSA, M. Delaney personal communication, January 5, 1998).

The Sarpy County Educational Program is one example of how Omaha, Nebraska local officials have reacted to the Nebraska Statute regarding expelled students. Students who are residents in Sarpy County and have a mandatory reassignment from his/her home school district due to a serious school rule violation may be placed in the Sarpy County Educational Program (see Appendix A). Examples of serious school rule violations are:

1. Sexual assault/rape
2. Selling or possession of drugs with intent to deliver
3. Assault of students or staff
4. Arson
5. Possession of a weapon on school property
6. Terroristic threat toward students or staff
7. Possession or placement of explosive devices on school property
8. Other serious acts that affect the safety and well being of students and staff

Other school districts have responded to the Nebraska Statue regarding expelled students by participating in the University of Nebraska-Lincoln correspondence course program. Millard Public Schools utilizes this method. Students expelled from a Millard Public School may choose to participate in the UNL correspondence course program that is facilitated through the Millard Learning Center.

Barr and Parrett (1997) reported that schools have provided daytime incarceration programs to their more violent and aggressive youth. "Many of these programs emphasize drug and alcohol education, anger management, and conflict mediation as central themes throughout the academic curriculum" (p. 73).

Besides the alternative schools that focus on instructional approaches, districts have provided schools that focus on thematic, curricular, or career emphasis. In these schools, in addition to the usual high school requirements, students are connected to the professional world. Job shadowing and business internships are part of the curriculum.

Alternative schools that focus on creating new ways to organize the school day have also been successful. Some schools have an extended year calendar, while others choose to extend their school day. Yet other schools divide their school year into short blocks of time so that students concentrate on only a few subjects at one time.

School within a School is an organizational approach to alternative education where the program is housed in the traditional school building. The Coalition of Essential Schools has encouraged the school-within-a school concept. "Focusing on secondary schools, the Coalition seeks to renew the comprehensive secondary school model by creating small, autonomous, focused learning environments, quite similar to successful schools within schools" (Barr, & Parrett, 1997, p. 79).

Schools within schools have been implemented successfully. South Boston High School implemented a school-within-a-school program to target 9th and 10th graders who have reading scores below grade level. "A mini-school was established to emphasize experiential learning and individualized instruction for alienated students. . ." (Levine, 1992, p. 234). In Brooklyn, Wingate High School has school- within-a-school programs concentrating on career-oriented themes for students to learn more about labor studies, police science, and mass media.

One key to successful alternative education is community (Rossi & Stringfield, 1997 & Bates, 1993). Rossi and Stringfield (1997) defined community as ". . . concerned with the deep-structure fabric of interpersonal relations. Soundly woven, this fabric permits a shared frame of reference and supports mutual expectations" (p. 3). The relationships between adults in schools provide the models of behavior from which students learn. Rossi and Stringfield (pp. 3-4) identified 10 elements from their visits to alternative schools that represent strong communities: shared vision, participation, shared sense of purpose, caring, shared values, trust, incorporation of diversity, teamwork, communication, respect and recognition.

Implementation of an Urban School-Within-a-School Approach

Levine (1992) described the implementation and outcomes of a specific alternative school program in Kansas City, MO. The Kansas City School-Within-a-School program (SWAS) was created in 1984 to help ninth grade students improve reading comprehension and ultimately help them succeed in academic life. The program served 60 to 100 students who received instruction from four to five teachers in English, math, reading, social studies, and often science (p. 234). Placement was decided with criteria concerning grades, teacher and counselor opinions, attendance, and scores on their reading comprehension. Teachers were chosen to work in this program based on their willingness to work with at-risk students. In referencing the Kansas City program, Waxman (1992) found the major characteristics of the program were: (a) teachers having common planning periods to coordinate instruction; (b) teacher teams agreeing on the selection and use of texts, grading, and communication with parents; (c) motivating learning experiences for students including academic competition between teams and schools; and (d) intensive staff development (p. 234). The major philosophical premises that were the inspirations to create such a program were that if students were academically behind they would have more trouble achieving success in the adult world; a healthy self-image is most important for academic success; and the program should encompass improving academic skills and help developing student's positive image of self (Levine, 1992).

The staff of the Kansas City program were excited about the increase of student attendance and motivation based on the data collected at the end of the 1983-84 school year. However, the staff was disappointed in the results of the students' lack of progress

in their academic performance. The concept, Degrees of Reading Power (DRP), was implemented during the 1984-85 school year. The DRP process was based on three components:

1. Administer the DRP Test in order to "measure students' ability to comprehend English prose."

2. Analyze the difficulty-level (i.e. "readability") of instructional materials and select materials in accordance with their match with students' current comprehension levels.

3. Provide instructional materials and support services to help teachers acquire and use instructional strategies for improving students' comprehension. (Levine, 1992, p. 237)

As in most new educational programs, a few years is needed to see if significant change has resulted due to the program. Efforts to implement the school-within-a-school model in the Kansas City school district were hampered during the first couple of years. The personnel of the KC school district conducted formal evaluations to identify the trouble spots. Personnel who had problems implementing the program identified that inadequate orientation or staff development were given; assistance from the district personnel was unavailable or unreliable; insufficient time and attention was given to the skills teachers needed to acquire in order to staff such a program; not enough technical assistance was provided, and administrators did not adjust the delivery of the program based on the data from the evaluations (Levine, 1992).

Although some of the programs faced years of wavering, most of the programs had adequate success after the initial two year period (Levine, 1992). The district evaluation of the programs reported that attendance of the programs in 1987-88 was 5 percentage points higher than the average attendance in the district. Classroom observations conducted by evaluators from the district level have shown the emphasis placed on the development of students' comprehension skills (Levin, 1992).

Levine (1992) concluded his evaluation of the Kansas City SWAS program as well-functioning units that can ". . . substantially improve the performance of previously low-achieving and alienated urban students and that effective implementation of systematic approaches for improving students' comprehension skills should be a central part of such an effort" (p. 245). He advised school personnel who may want to implement a SWAS program to address the problems in the first years of implementation so the program can be successful. Teacher and student selections, staff development, and strong leadership are among the prerequisites needed for a successful SWAS program.

Rural Alternative School

In 1993, Bates reported the results of a study conducted in 1986. Bates believed there was much written research about urban, inner city alternative schools, but not much attention had been paid to the 60 million young people dropping out of school in rural areas. Bates found that the four key characteristics found in successful urban schools for at-risk students could also be found in rural areas as well. The key characteristics were size, a caring staff, school as a community, and educators who were flexible. Bates also

found the two vital components for a successful alternative school were support from the principal and the goal of the school to be academic achievement.

Delivery Models for Alternative Education Programs

Chalker (1996) thoroughly explains the different delivery models used in alternative education programs across the U.S. Several Omaha metropolitan area alternative programs are described within Chalker's model descriptions.

School Transition Model

Potential dropouts and dropouts have the opportunity to finish their education with a school transition model alternative program. "The goals of such programs are the elimination of academic failure; improved social, career, and academic skills; and development of enhanced self-esteem and self-awareness" (Chalker, 1996, p. 15).

The Millard Public Schools Learning Center may be considered a school transition model. The MPS Learning Center is primarily targeted at special education students, but does allow a small percentage of regular education students to enroll. The mission of the Millard Learning Center is to ensure that all students learn the skills, acquire the knowledge, and develop the attitudes necessary for graduation and successful adulthood. This is accomplished through (a) a staff dedicated to maximizing opportunities for student growth, (b) effective teaching approaches, (c) individualization of student learning, and (d) utilization of educational and community resources (Millard Public Schools Board Report, Appendix B).

Omaha Public Schools in Omaha, Nebraska offer three alternative schools to their students in grades 7-12. These schools are called Wilson, Blackburn and Parrish. Unlike

other alternative programs in the Omaha Metropolitan area, OPS allows expelled students

to attend their alternative schools. OPS students enroll in the alternative schools because

of pregnancy, poor attendance and/or poor behavior in their regular school, or because the

students were reassigned by district administration (OPS Curriculum Office, personal

communication, November 24, 1999).

Behavior Intervention Model

A behavior intervention model program has great emphasis placed upon discipline

curriculum. "Behavior intervention can help at-risk children gain the attending and

survival skills required for school success" (Chalker, 1996, p. 16).

Boys Town in Omaha, Nebraska offers at-risk students a behavior intervention

model. According to the Boys Town Social Skills Workshop Manual (1991) the goals for

the Boys Town Education Model are:

1. Increase school attendance and punctuality.
2. Know and follow school and class rules.
3. Improve relationships and interactions with teachers and administrators.
4. Improve academic performance.
5. Build appropriate peer interaction skills.
6. Increase participation in class and school activities.
7. Improve student self-esteem.
8. Increase student satisfaction with school.
9. Decrease out-of-school suspensions.
10. Decrease probability of school drop out.
11. Build employability and life skills. (p. 7)

Assumptions of the Boys Town Program are:

1. Behavior is learned.
2. Treatment focus is on Teaching vs. Punishing, Accelerating v. Diminishing Behavior.
3. Direct care staff are the most effective treatment agents.
4. Program must be well-specified and staff well-trained.

5. Supervisors must support direct care staff who use the program.
6. Youth need to learn a wide range of prosocial behaviors. (p. 10)

Boys Town is a community where students live on campus in cottages. The adults at home and at school utilize the same behavior model. A public school district implementing this program in the Omaha area is Bellevue Public Schools. Both Bellevue High Schools utilize a dean of students at each grade level and teachers implement the Boys Town Social Skills Model within their classrooms.

Papillion-LaVista Public Schools, located in the Omaha Metropolitan area, also has an alternative school program called I.D.E.A.L. I.D.E.A.L. (Individual Development Program for Educating Alternative Learners) is designed to meet the educational needs of the student who, due to circumstances throughout his or her school history, is not adapting to the regular school environment. It is the goal of the I.D.E.A.L. Program to provide an academic and social environment, which enables students to develop a positive self-image, to improve life skills, and to successfully complete the requirements necessary for high school graduation (http://www.paplv.esu3.k12.ne.us/ideal/htmls/handbook.html, November 24, 1999). In addition to individualizing the instruction to meet the at-risk students' academic needs, the Boys Town Social Skills Model is also implemented. The staff at the I.D.E.A.L. Program believes that by implementing the Boys Town Social Skills Model, they are better preparing their students for employment after high school. Attendance, academic progression, and acceptable behavior are the three essential requirements for students to maintain active enrollment in I.D.E.A.L.

<u>Academic Intervention Model</u>

The Academic Intervention model integrates instructional strategies geared to the

remediation of potential dropouts.

> Alternative programs for students at-risk of dropping out are combined
> with consideration of ways to restructure the schools to respond better to
> students' varied educational needs. Remedial and pullout programs are
> examples of targeted strategies, whereas computer-assisted instruction and
> individualized instruction are examples of general classroom strategies.
> (Chalker, 1996, p. 17)

Ralston High School is located in Ralston, Nebraska. Ralston is within the Omaha

Metro area. Ralston High School began a pilot program in the fall of 1999 called Hillcrest

Education Center. This alternative education program targets 20 at-risk 9th-12th graders

from the Ralston High School general population. This program was created for students

to duel enroll at Ralston High School. Students can participate in elective classes in the

afternoon at Ralston High School and attend Hillcrest Education Center in the morning to

earn math, English, science and social studies credits (personal communication, Kathy

Thomas, Director of Hillcrest Education Center, November 24, 1999). The program is

an independent study program, which may be considered an academic intervention model

as described above.

Fremont, Nebraska is located approximately forty miles northwest of Omaha,

Nebraska. Fremont Public Schools has an alternative learning center that offers morning

and afternoon sessions for students interested in finishing high school. The Fremont

Learning Center was established in the 1973-1974 school year. The mission of the

Fremont Learning Center is to ensure educational achievement for nontraditional students,

enabling them to become self-reliant, problem solving citizens who are proponents of life

long learning. This will be accomplished by providing a caring, competent staff; a

relevant, individualized curriculum; and a structured, predictable environment. The

educational program is based on individualized instructional packets prepared for 9th-12th

graders who were not academically successful at Fremont Senior High School (personal

communication, Cindy Diers, Lead Teacher of Fremont Learning Center, November 24,

1999).

Vocational Intervention Model

Vocational Intervention programs prepare students for jobs after high school.

According to Chalker (1996), the goal of these programs is to make school meaningful

and prepare students for the world of work once they are through with their education.

"Support groups and part-time employment are strategies used in this type of program.

Successful programs preventing dropouts focus on the link between education and future

earning power and the use of businesses, schools, and local educational foundations to

assist students" (p. 17).

"Several delivery models are used for alternative education programs. One or

more of these models typically serve as individual components of alternative education

programs" (Chalker, 1996, p. 15). Several of the Omaha Metropolitan Area alternative

education programs have characteristics from more than one of the above described

delivery models.

Alternative Modes of Classroom Instruction

Failure begets failure. Students who continually fail at school will continue to fail as adults. "The Matthew Effect suggests that these disadvantaged students who are behind at the beginning of school or who learn at a slower rate will likely show a 'progressive retardation' as they continue in school" (Waxman, 1992, p. 4).

At-risk students do not perform as well academically as their classmates (Waxman, et al. 1992). Alternate modes of classroom instruction must be examined. Curriculum that engages students and demonstrates the relevancy to students' lives can entice student interest. Instruction should be geared toward a more active arrangement of learning activities, rather than the traditional teacher-lecture/student-listen mode. Cooperative learning, peer grouping or evaluations, and implementing technology are examples of more active instructional strategies.

Implementing technology to improve the academic achievement of students is a source of continuous debate. Johnson (1992) completed a set of studies to see if the implementation of a videodisc to tell the story, "Swiss Family Robinson," would have a significant affect on the comprehension of inner-city four to five year olds. Johnson worked with students whose teachers believed they were at risk. Half of the children were read the story while the other half viewed the same story. The group that received the story via technology recalled much more of the story. The average number of ideas recalled by each child was significantly greater if the child viewed the story on the videodisc. Four year olds who were read the story had an average recall score of 2.07 while their counterparts who viewed the story on videodisc had an average score of 6.53.

Five year olds who were read the story had an average recall score of 6.67 while the five year olds who viewed the story on videodisc had an average score of 11.93 (p. 92).

Overall, Johnson advocated that instructional use of technology can have a positive effect on at-risk students' learning. Johnson acknowledged that the incorporation of this technology into teaching aids students.

Vocational or school-to-work programs have also been implemented to help at-risk students stay in school. On the job experiences or internships allow for real-world learning. Career-focused curriculum has been shown to motivate potential dropouts to stay in school. "Since November, 1995 the Nebraska School-To-Work Initiative has been involved in forming strong partnerships between students, parents, education, businesses, and industries in local communities" (Nebraska Department of Economic Development, 1997).

<div align="center">Summary</div>

The literature regarding at-risk students is consistent. The causes and the costs for having at-risk students at school is a no-win situation for the students, the school, or society. Although dropout rates are decreasing in the United States, the number of at-risk students is increasing. Success of alternative education has been documented in several studies (Delatte, Jr., Orgeron, & Preis, 1985; Rossi & Stringfield, 1997; Shaw, 1994; Taylor, 1986-87); nevertheless, other theories of how to implement alternative education still require investigation. The key concepts of alternative education generally agreed upon by researchers in the field included: monetary resources, support from administration

and school personnel, innovative curriculum and instructional strategies, and staff development.

Rossi and Stringfield (1997) believed there are three rationales for preparing our public schools for the challenges of the at-risk student population. The first is the transmission of societal values, among which is the belief that all citizens of America must be able to read and write and live the American Dream. Democracy is the second rationale. For democracy to survive, a large percentage of American citizens must be able to read and make thoughtful judgments about politics. The final rationale is economics. When young people do not succeed and eventually drop out of school, the economic consequences to the individual and the country are staggering.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

Purpose of this Study

The overall purpose of the study was to evaluate the effects of an educational

intervention program on students, parents, and teachers of the program. Tyler (1965)

supported educational research. "It is to assess programs, procedures, and materials so as

to indicate what educational results are being attained, what they cost in time, effort, and

materials, and under what conditions these results are being attained" (p. 8). Qualitative

procedure was used. For the evaluation, eight themes addressed in the grant proposal for

the intervention program were explored through interviews before the program was

initiated and after one year into the program. These themes were, students' sense of

belonging (community), students' perceptions of self, students' values of school, students'

future goals, parent involvement, parents' perceptions of student, parents' perceptions of

school, and teachers' perceptions of at-risk youth.

The researcher also gathered descriptive demographic data including the district

data of failure rate, attendance, and discipline referrals of the eight at-risk high school

students. Data were extracted from the district's comprehensive database to determine if

a difference existed in the failure rate, attendance, and discipline of these students between

their year as participants of the At-Risk Program and their previous year as

nonparticipants.

A major premise of the At-Risk Program was that failure rate and discipline

referrals can be decreased and attendance improved by offering a flexible team approach

to teaching and integrating the core curriculum with instructional strategies conducive to at-risk learners (Felger, 1997).

Research Design

The research design was a qualitative case study and included descriptive demographic data. Qualitative research supplies the direct data collection that provides rich narrative descriptions and participant perspectives (McMillan, 1996). "Qualitative research tries to establish an empathetic understanding for the reader, through description, sometimes thick description, conveying to the reader what experience itself would convey" (Stake, 1995, p. 39). "The researcher is the key instrument in qualitative research" (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1993, p. 380). Merriam (1998) posits the key concern for a qualitative researcher is to understand the phenomenon of interest from the participants' perspectives, not the researcher's.

Bogdan and Biklen (1992) described five features of qualitative research. The first and second require that research be done in a natural setting with the researcher serving as the main instrument. Such a naturalistic research approach on the part of the qualitative researcher results in eventual trust and informality. This occurs because qualitative researchers spend time with the participants in places where the participants are at ease. In this study, all but one student interview were conducted at the school site, a natural part of the daily environment of students and teachers. Three parent interviews were conducted at the parent's home.

A third feature is that "qualitative research is descriptive" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 30). Students', teachers', and parents' own words have been used to share their experiences.

Fourth, qualitative research emphasizes process as well as results. This feature of qualitative research is particularly important in this study because post intervention interviews capture change related to alternative educational processes.

Finally, Bogdan and Biklen (1992) posit that meaning is an essential concern (p. 32). Qualitative researchers are mostly interested in how their participants view their reality. In this study, students, teachers, and parents were asked multiple questions about their views of the intervention program.

A case study was the particular type of qualitative research design selected to evaluate the At-Risk Program because "the case study, used alone or as part of large-scale quantitative study, is the method of choice for studying intervention or innovations" (Lancy, 1993, p. 140). "A case study design is employed to gain an indepth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved" (Merriam, 1998, p. 19). "It is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances" (Stake, 1995, p. xi).

The researcher had originally intended to conduct a quantitative study of 10th grade participants in the At-Risk Program of the school under study and compare the participants' attendance, behavior and failure rates to nonparticipating 10th graders at a different high school within the same district (see Appendix C). The researcher was going to examine the effect the At-Risk Program had on failure rates, discipline referrals, and

attendance of a sample of approximately 40 academically at-risk students. Three t-tests were to be used to compare the means of the treatment and control groups for each of these dependent variables. After sending out letters twice and placing phone calls, the researcher determined there would not be a large enough sample to complete the original research. With the permission of her chair, her committee, and the UNL Institutional Review Board, the researcher changed her focus and used a research design of a qualitative case study of 10th grade participants in the At-Risk Program. Thirty-two interviews were conducted as the main source of data collection for this study.

According to Bogdan and Biklen (1992), interviews may be used in two ways so "they may be the dominant strategy for data collection, or they may be employed in conjunction with participant observation, document analysis, or other techniques" (p. 96). Although descriptive student demographic data was examined, interviews were the dominant strategy for data collection in this study. The researcher mailed invitation letters to all 31 tenth grade students enrolled in the 1998-99 At-Risk Program (see Appendix D). Follow up phone calls were placed to verbally invite tenth graders who had not returned their participant informed consent forms (see Appendix E). Eight 10th graders volunteered and five of the 10th graders' parents volunteered. All three teachers consented to be interviewed. A copy of the pre and post interview questions was given to the participants (see Appendix F). The researcher interviewed each student, teacher and parent at the beginning of the 1998-99 school year and again at the end of the 1998-99 school year. Interviews were conducted at the school or at the subject's home based on the subject's preference. Interviews were conducted before or after school hours.

> Interviews may take several forms. Open-ended nature interviews allow for the interviewee to discuss his/her opinion about an issue. A second type of interview is a focused interview, in which a respondent is interviewed for a short period of time-an hour, for example. In such cases, the interviews may still remain open-ended and assume a conversational manner, but you are more likely to be following a certain set of questions derived from the case study protocol. (Yin, 1994, p. 84)

This researcher employed the focused interview. Anderson (1998) advises the interviews should last approximately 40 minutes. None of the interviews lasted more than an hour with the student interviews being the shortest in length. According to Bogdan and Biklen (1992) the interviewer should not control the content too rigidly, but encourage the participant to talk in areas of interest. McMillan (1996) posits that more accurate responses are obtained as the interviewer clarifies questions that the subject may have and follows up leads (probing). "The interview allows for greater depth and richness" (p. 154). The researcher probed more during the student interviews to try and extract more detailed answers. "Most interviews begin with small talk. Topics can range from baseball to cooking. The purpose this chit-chat serves is to develop accord: You search for common ground, for a topic that you have in common, for a place to begin building a relationship" (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992, p. 96). McMillan (1996) agrees with Bogdan and Biklen, "It is important for the interviewer to be pleasant, friendly, and relaxed in establishing a relationship with the subject that is conducive to honest interchange and little inhibition. This result is often accomplished by beginning the interview with 'small talk'" (p. 156). Merriam (1998) and Anderson (1998) advise the interviewer to be

respectful, nonjudgmental and nonthreatening. The researcher offered all participants

coffee or pop during the interview.

Qualitative interviews vary in the degree to which they are structured. "Some

interviews, although relatively open-ended, are focused around particular topics or may be

guided by some general questions" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 97). The researcher

created the interview questions after reviewing a previous study of at-risk students by

Novak (1989). According to McMillan (1996),

> structured questions give the subject choices from which an answer is
> selected. For example, in a study of student attitudes, there may be four
> possible answers to the question, "How important is it to you to obtain
> high grades in school? Is it critical, very important, important, or not very
> important?" Semistructured questions do not have predetermined,
> structured choices. Rather, the question is open-ended yet specific in
> intent, allowing individual responses. (p. 155)

Stake (1995) suggests to try out the questions in pilot form. Yin (1994) also recommends

piloting the interview questions so the researcher can refine his/her data collection plans.

The interview questions used in this study were tested during a pilot study and minor

adjustments were made based on that data. The interview questions used in this study

were both structured and semi-structured. The researcher interviewed a teacher of at-risk

students from a different district than the district under study. The researcher interviewed

an at-risk student from a different school than the school under study. The researcher also

interviewed the at-risk student's mother. Pilot interviews were conducted in June, 1998.

The interview questions used in this study were tested during a pilot study and

adjustments were made based on that data.

The descriptive data collection for the study was focused on student data on failed classes, absent days (not including suspensions or field trips) and number of discipline referrals (including Saturday/Thursday schools and in-school/out-of-school suspensions) for the 1997-98 and 1998-99 school years. The researcher compared the students' data from the 1997-98 school year when they were not in the At-Risk Program to the 1998-99 school year when they were participants of the At-Risk Program

Site

This large suburban high school has an approximate enrollment rate of 1950-2000 students. In 1997-98, 91 students utilized the Federal Free and Reduced Lunch Program (Millard Public Schools Office of Pupil Services, personal communication, December 1, 1997). This high school has 108.87 classroom teachers (Millard Public Schools Office of Personnel, pesonal communication, March 4, 1998). The minority population is relatively small. Table 3 outlines the ethnicity of the student population in the large suburban high school in Nebraska during the 1997-98 school year.

Table 3
Ethnic Populations For Selected Site, 1997-98

Ethnicity	Population	% Of Total School Population
White	1851	95%
Asian	39	<2%
Hispanic	37	<1%
Black	19	<1%
Native American	6	<1%

Source: Millard Public Schools Office of Pupil Services, personal communication, December 1, 1997.

The large suburban school district under study has grown substantially over the past five decades. This school district ranks third largest in the state. According to Dr. Rex Anderson, in his doctoral dissertation, A History of Millard Public Schools 1946-1989: Forty-four years of Suburban Growth, "this school district went from being the ninth largest school district in the state to the third largest district in the state in seven years" (p. 8). This rapid growth had an impact on the school district community. The growth of a three large high school district from within two decades impacts the community's identification. The high school under study is the oldest high school and has the lowest socioeconomic population of the three high schools. District enrollment can be examined in Table 4.

Subjects

The eight subjects included students, parents, and teachers. The student subjects included eight 1998-99 tenth-graders. These eight 10th graders were part of the 45 9th and 10th grade participants in the 1998-99 At Risk Program. The attendance, grades, and discipline referrals for fall of 1997 determined the students' eligibility for placement in the At-Risk Program. All 31 tenth graders enrolled in the At-Risk program were invited to participate in this study. Eight 10th graders volunteered.

Table 4

Plot of District Enrollment,1981-1999

District Enrollment

81 82 83 84 85 86 87 88 89 90 91 92 93 94 95 96 97 98 99
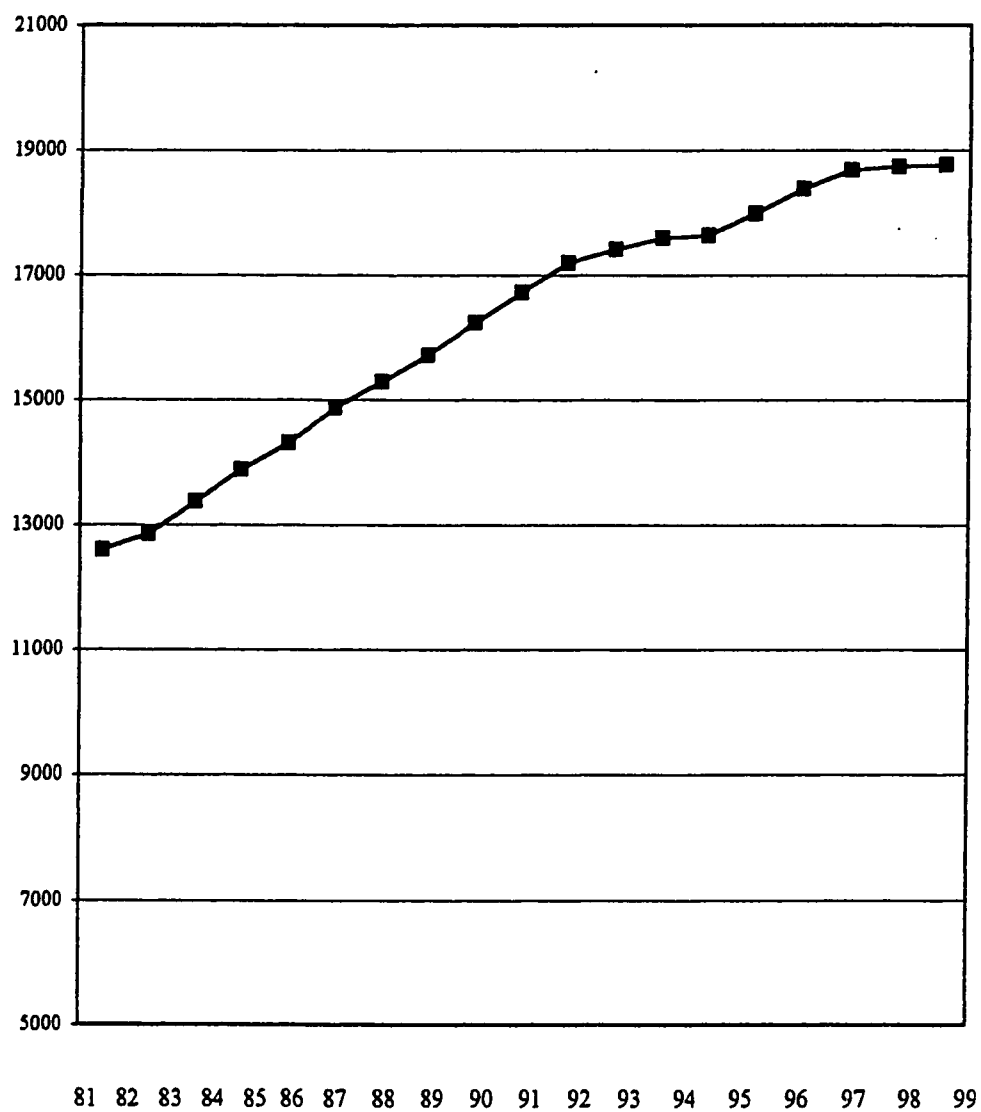
(1999 number is projected enrollment)

Source: Millare Public Schools Office of Planning and Evaluation, e-mail communication, November 24, 1999

All 31 tenth-graders' parents were invited to participate in this study. Five of the 31 tenth-graders' parents volunteered. All five who volunteered also had children participating in the study.

All three At-Risk Program teachers agreed to participate in this study. These three teachers had a combination of over 60 years of experience in education working with at-risk youth. A fourth teacher was later added to the program during the middle of the year when additional grant monies were secured. This fourth teacher was not invited to participate in this study.

Ethical Considerations

The following standards for ethical considerations (Bogdan & Biklin, 1992) were followed:

1. <u>Participant identities should remain confidential</u>. All of the participants were assured of confidentiality, and pseudonyms were used to report the data. Administrators at the site may be able to "guess" at the identity of teacher participants, but teachers were aware of this possibility.

2. <u>Promises should be kept.</u> Permission was granted to conduct the research study at the site institution. The researcher will provide a complete copy of the study to the school district.

3. <u>Data reported were true and correct</u>. No data were distorted or created for this study. The conclusions reached are honest interpretations.

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) Institutional Review Board granted approval for the revised qualitative study on July 1, 1998 and issued an approval letter for continuing review on May 27, 1999 (IRB # 98-06-403, see Appendix C). Millard Public Schools also granted approval for the revised qualitative study (see Appendix C). The researcher interviewed student participants of the At-Risk Program, parents of the student participants, and teachers who taught in the At-Risk Program in order to answer the following qualitative research questions.

1. How did the intervention program affect the at-risk students' sense of belonging to the school community?

2. How did the intervention program affect the at-risk students' perceptions of self?

3. How did the intervention program affect the at-risk students' values of school?

4. How did the intervention program affect the at-risk students' future goals?

5. How did the intervention program affect the parents of at-risk students' involvement with school?

6. How did the intervention program affect the parents' perceptions of their at-risk students?

7. How did the intervention program affect the perceptions of school for parents of at-risk students?

8. How did the intervention program affect the teachers' perceptions of at-risk youth?

Descriptive Data Collection Procedures

The descriptive data was gathered on students' discipline referrals, attendance

rates, and failure rates to examine the intervention program's effect on at-risk students.

Baseline data were collected during the fall of 1997. (A software program of the

Educational Service Unit #3 collected these data.) The criterion for selection of original

students selected for the program met the following fall semester 1997 data:

1.   Failures in two or more classes.

2.   Three or more rule infractions (In and out-of-school suspensions and
       Saturday/Thursday schools)

3.   Absent six or more times, not counting suspensions.

The above criteria were used to place the 1997-98 ninth-graders in the 1998-99 program.

The criteria were written in the Nebraska Lottery Grant to fill the At-Risk Program with

forty-five students so there would be a fifteen-to-one student-to-teacher ratio. Forty-five

students matching the above criteria could not be found at this suburban high school. The

lead teacher registered a few students who did not meet the above criteria. The lead

teacher placed emphasis on the potential participants' failure rates. Although all students

placed in the At-Risk program did not meet all three criteria, students must have failed at

least two core courses (math, English, science, or social studies) during the first semester

of the 1997-98 school year. Special education students were not considered for this

program.

Data Analysis Procedures

Qualitative research is thick, rich and full of description (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

Stake (1995) contends that analysis is based on first impressions as well as final

compilation. "Two strategic ways that researchers reach new meaning about cases are

through direct interpretation of the individual instance and through aggregation of

instances until something can be said about them" (p. 75). The goals relevant to the

qualitative data analysis included (a) uncovering patterns or explanations of the research

(McMillan, 1996, p. 249), (b) determining the differences on participants' perceptions at

the beginning of the first year of the program and at the end of the first year of the

program, and (c) finding description in the participants' interviews. "The search for

meaning often is a search for patterns" (Stake, 1995, p. 78). The researcher compared the

themes and patterns from all interviews.

The researcher analyzed transcribed interviews from the 16 case study participants.

Each person was interviewed at the beginning of the 1998-99 school year and at the end

of the school year. The analysis of the interviews was influenced by the nature of the data

and the study's qualitative research questions defined earlier in Chapter 3. The subjects

were given a copy of the interview questions when they gave their consent to be

interviewed. None of the interviews took more than an hour. The researcher analyzed the

descriptive data gathered from the interviews and reported the data in the subjects' words.

The researcher began this analysis by doing data reduction by coding the information. The

purpose of the analysis of this study was to discover the participants' perceptions of the

program under study.

The researcher also extracted data related to failure of classes, attendance and discipline referrals from both the 1997-98 and 1998-99 school years. The researcher calculated frequency counts for both years. The results are an indication of a difference in the failure rate, attendance, and discipline of these students between their year as participants of the At-Risk Program and their previous year as nonparticipants.

Verification of Findings

In qualitative research, the researcher must collect the data so the findings can be validated. The researcher audio-taped all 32 interviews and had them professionally transcribed for accuracy. Creswell posits the need for verification of the findings (1998). Verification was established through member checks and an outside audit. Merriam (1998) and Lincoln & Guba (1985) support member checks. Member checks require asking the interviewees if the transcribed interviews are plausible (Merriam, 1998). The researcher sent copies of the transcribed interviews to each of the 16 subjects to check for accuracy (See Appendix G). No signatures were required and no subject challenged the information. The researcher also had an auditor attest the validity of the study (See Appendix H). Yin (1994) describes the importance of using an auditor to verify the findings. "A good guideline for doing case studies is therefore to conduct the research so that an auditor could repeat the procedures and arrive at the same results" (p. 37). " External audits allow an external consultant, the auditor, to examine both the process and the product of the account, assessing their accuracy. This auditor should have no connection to the study. In assessing the product, the auditor examines whether or not

the findings, interpretations, and conclusions are supported by the data" (Creswell, 1998, p. 203).

When examining the descriptive demographic data, the researcher assumed the 1997-98 and 1998-99 data for each student was correct and free of human error. District personnel consider these data reliable; the district has collected the data for the past decade and utilized consistently in district demographic analysis (Millard School District Office, personal communication, October 31, 1997).

<div align="center">Role of Researcher</div>

The qualitative research paradigm demands that the researcher serve as the primary instrument for both data collection and analysis, thus the research is interpretive (Merriam, 1988; 1998). "The ideal role of the interviewer is to act as a neutral medium through which information is transmitted. The interviewer should not have an effect on the results, except to make it possible for the subject to reveal information that otherwise would not have been known" (McMillan, 1996, p. 155). Bogdan and Biklen (1992) argue that the researcher cannot separate who he/she is from what he/she writes, however Yin (1994) warns that an investigator should not use a case study to substantiate a preconceived position. The researcher served as the data gathering instrument in qualitative research (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Lancy 1993; Merriam, 1988). Perceptions of at-risk students' involvement in the secondary setting, of teachers' roles in the school, and of parents' responsibilities are, of course, influenced by the researcher's role as an assistant principal at the high school under study; thus the interpretation of data in the report was likely influenced. This influence provided advantages and disadvantages. An advantage was a

familiarity with the program and the subjects who appeared to trust the researcher. A

disadvantage was the absence of complete objectivity. Total researcher bias was not

eliminated in this study. Efforts were made by the researcher to be aware of her status and

the participants' perception as interviews were conducted and information was

interpreted. Although the primary instrument tool for research was an "insider" of the

school under study, McMillan and Schumacher (1989) believe that some studies on highly

sensitive problems probably could not be done by an outside investigator.

Use of Literature

A literature review is a narrative essay that integrates, synthesizes, and critiques

the important thinking and research on a particular topic (Merriam, 1998, p. 55).

Literature was examined throughout the two years the researcher spent on this study. A

primary literature review was established to aid the researcher in creating her grand tour

question and sub-questions. According to McMillan (1996) the researcher should

summarize and analyze previous research on the same issue. A good review critiques the

studies and shows how the findings relate to the issue. In addition to the primary

literature review, an additional review was completed at the end of the study. The

researcher made contacts with local school districts to inquire about their alternative

schools. The second literature review was interlaced within chapter two of this

dissertation.

Dissemination

A follow up letter was mailed on June 22, 1999 to all eight students, five parents,

and three teachers (see Appendix G). The researcher thanked them for their participation

in the study and offered to mail them a copy of the completed dissertation upon

completion of her doctoral graduation.

Chapter 4

PRESENTATION OF DATA

Purpose of the Study

The presentation of data is based on the 32 interviews conducted during the 1998-99 school year. Chapter 4 is organized by providing background information on the staff, students, and parents and by answering the eight qualitative sub-questions as outlined in Chapter Three. Data provide a rich description of the perceptions subjects held with regard to the qualitative questions. Additional information emerged from the qualitative questions that formed the basis of 32 interviews, and this information is included.

The Staff

The At-Risk Program welcomed forty-five 9th & 10th graders on August 17, 1998. Three veteran teachers anticipated the beginning of this school year for which they had prepared for over a year. The teachers differed in both personality and expertise. Samantha had a language arts background, Bonnie had a special education background and Jerry's area of expertise was science. The lead teacher, Samantha, who had spent most of her teaching career working with at-risk youth, had the vision for this At-Risk Program. Samantha had previously taught basic English classes at this suburban school district and had spent the first few years of her teaching experience teaching at-risk youth in the largest school district in the state. Samantha was considered an expert in curriculum design and in putting into practice that which she had researched. Samantha gave up her responsibilities as a classroom teacher during the 1997-98 school year so that she could collaborate with the building principal, an assistant principal, and the district grant writer.

Samantha spent 1997-98 school year planning the curriculum, working with administration

to hire the remaining staff, recruiting students for the program, and establishing

relationships with Junior Achievement and a nearby university's continuing education

program (See Appendix I). Samantha was instrumental in generating resources, through

additional grants, for the purchase of computer hardware and software in preparation for

the 1998-99 school year. As the lead teacher, Samantha helped the building principal in

presenting information to the Board of Education. Both board reports are included in

Appendix J. Samantha and the building principal had envisioned what this At-Risk

Program could be for their students and on August 17, 1998 the At-Risk Program opened.

The principal shared his belief that the program they designed was not replicated anywhere

in the United States.

> During the 1995-96 and 1996-97 school years, {Samantha} and I did a
> great deal of reading on alternative education. In addition, I attended any
> sessions possible at national conventions on alternative education. We also
> made a trip to Chicago in the fall of 1995 to a workshop on alternative
> education in an attempt to get connected with other schools grappling with
> the alternative education challenge.

> While there were programs around the country, most fell into three general
> categories: (a) Separate schools focused on behavioral issues, (b) Magnet
> Schools, and (c) Packet Education programs students in grades 11 and 12.

> We found no programs with a focus exclusively on students in grades 9-10.
> The closest one we found was in suburban Chicago for ninth graders. It
> had some components of our {At-Risk} program, but was not nearly as
> comprehensive. It identified one teacher in each department and students
> traveled from teacher to teacher around the building during the course of
> the day. Students were divided into three groups.

> We found that there were no schools with in-house programs for 9th-10th
> graders that focused on the following:

Extensive technology experiences
High level of counseling
Interdisciplinary instruction
Credits given in small pieces
Discipline that was not purely punitive
Partnerships with businesses
Strong career education experiences
Involvement of parents
A "family atmosphere" in the program
Schedule that allowed teaching team flexibility
Partnership with college/university
Involvement with extra-curricular program

The {At-Risk} program was proposed to try and incorporate as many of these things as possible. Our purpose was to prepare students to succeed in the regular program at grades 11-12 and to ultimately graduate. Other programs are not designed to help student return to the mainstream. They are designed to keep students in the alternative setting. (Wollman, D. Personal Communication, November 24, 1999)

The At-Risk Program room was refurbished during the summer of 1998 with building budget funding. A large area (approximately the size of 1½ classrooms) was painted and carpeted. The cabinets were also refurbished. All new student furniture and room accessories were purchased. As part of the district bond issue, a new heating/air duct system and unit were installed along with a movable wall. Through several small grant sources and building budget, 15 computers and furniture were purchased for the classroom (February 1999 Millard Public Schools Board Report, Appendix J). In addition to this large room, the teachers found it necessary for classroom management purposes, to split the large group into three sections at times and one third of the class would move to a nearby classroom. Future renovations are planned with the current construction project at

the high school. The room will be enlarged by another classroom size to accommodate

the active learning that takes place in the At-Risk Program.

The characteristic held in common by the three teachers was years of experience

working with at-risk youth. All had chosen to work with at-risk youth, and all had desired

to be a part of the teaching team of the At-Risk Program. Not all teachers enjoy working

with at-risk youth. When Samantha was asked how the teachers at the high school under

study treat at-risk youth, she replied,

> I don't know; I guess there are two sides of the spectrum. You know this
> is a generalization, but there are some of us that just dismiss the kids and
> have this agenda, and if they don't meet it, it is their problem. And there
> are--well I see the other side though, which I don't necessarily support--
> that is, if a kid is having a hard time, we tend to really attempt to make him
> fit into our SPED box and make them qualified for that, when really all we
> need to do is alter some of our approaches to the kid. Or maybe there is
> nothing we can do, based on what they come into the building, their mind-
> set, no. Either we try to overcompensate for them, or we just kind of blow
> them off, and everything in between . . . , so there is a big variety in our
> building.

Jerry was also asked how the other teachers at the high school under study treated

at-risk youth.

> Oh boy, that goes into a whole bunch of categories. The minute you put an
> "at-risk" on somebody and they see that the kid is "at-risk" there is all
> kinds of ideas to what an at-risk kid is. I think it scares some of them. I
> think it scares some of them a lot to see kids at-risk. What does that really
> mean? Why is the kid at-risk? At-risk is a pretty big term; or I am not sure
> at-risk should be the terms used because it throws a connotation on them
> that is a little bit tough to live down sometimes. In being called at-risk,
> kids might try to live up to it, so you have that problem too. I think there
> are some teachers who are flat scared; other ones it doesn't matter to.
> They have been around, and it is usually the veterans who have been
> around the at-risk kids and worked with them before and they understand,
> but at the same time you have veterans who it scares--"at-risk, I can't do
> those kids, I can't do it." So it is very much an individual thing as to really
> get to them.

Bonnie and Jerry met with Samantha a few times during the planning phase of the program but did not work full time on the project until the summer of 1998. Although the three teachers appeared to have a positive professional relationship during their 1998 summer of writing curriculum, they soon realized the difficulty associated with team teaching with people of different philosophies. Samantha's philosophy of working with at-risk youth including holding them to high expectations and standards of behavior. Bonnie and Jerry's philosophy of working with at-risk youth included being flexible with students and looking at each student's behavior needs. Bonnie had previously taught special education students at the high school under study. Bonnie had experience in individualizing the curriculum for each student's needs. Jerry had previously taught basic science classes. Jerry's relaxed approach with students had been a strength of his in the classroom.

In fact, when asked, during initial interviews, how they thought their At-Risk Program students might describe them, each of the three teachers in the program responded in terms of personality. Samantha thought the students would describe her as mean but caring. Jerry believed the students would think he was a nice guy who didn't hassle them and gave them chances. Bonnie was sure the students would remark on her being a stickler for enforcing the tardy rule yet being flexible when it came to turning in late assignments. Differences in these teachers that, at first, appeared complimentary soon became the catalysts for the breakdown of the teaching team. By the middle of the first implementation year, a fourth teacher would join this three-person team and by the end of the first implementation year, the lead teacher would resign a long and successful career in teaching.

The Students

Eight students volunteered to be a part of this case study. All were 10th graders during the implementation year (1998-99). Ninth grade records of grades, attendance and discipline referrals were the variables influencing selection of participants. The original intent was to find students with 1997-98 first semester data who had:

- failed two or more classes

- been absent six or more times, not including suspensions or field trips, and

- earned three or more discipline referrals resulting in Thursday Night

  School/Saturday School, in-school suspension or out-of-school suspension.

Although the grant was written with the intent to match students with these specific criteria, the lead teacher, Samantha found it impossible to find 45 students who met the qualifications. Failure of two or more classes during the fall of 1997-98 was then designated as the primary criterion. The primary intent of this At-Risk Program was to assist these at-risk 9th & 10th graders in graduating high school. Students who had failed two or more classes were placed in the program. All of the eight students in this sample had failed two or more classes. Five of the eight students failed 50% or more of their classes during their ninth grade year. Tables 5, 6, & 7 display the pre-intervention data for the eight students in this case study. Tables 5, 6, & 7 also display the data collected at the close of the first year of intervention.

Descriptive demographic data from all 10th grade participants of the At-Risk Program who completed the entire 1998-1999 school year is listed in Tables 8, 9, & 10. The data of the eight student volunteers from this study are included in Table 8, 9, & 10. During the comparison of the study group and the group at large, there was not a significant difference in the data from the student volunteers to the 10th grade counterparts

in the At-Risk Program. The seven volunteer students (excluding Keith) passed 68.5% of their classes during the 1998-1999 school year. The other eleven 10th graders in the program, who did not volunteer to be interviewed, passed 66.6% of their attempted classes during the 1998-1999 school year.

The first semester of 1997 data was used to place students in the program. The seven volunteer students (excluding Keith) passed 40% of their attempted classes as 9th graders when they were not in the At-Risk Program. The eleven 10th grade nonvolunteers passed 50% of their attempted classes as 9th graders when they were not in the At-Risk Program (See Table 8). Not all students placed in the program met the intent of the grant,

- failed two or more classes
- been absent 6 or more times, not including suspensions or field trips and
- earned 3 or more discipline referrals resulting in Thursday Night School/Saturday School, in-school suspension or out-of-school suspension.

Failure of two or more classes during the fall of 1997-1998 was designated primary criterion. All eight 10th graders placed in the At-Risk Program for the 1998-1999 school year, who had volunteered for this study, had failed two or more classes during the 1st semester of their 9th grade year (1997-1998).

Julie was a quiet and reserved student during our first interview. Julie had passed only 7 of her 13 classes during her ninth grade year. She was absent only two days and had no qualifying discipline referrals. Julie was from a divorced family. Her mom remarried and Julie lived with mom; according to Julie, dad was more involved in Julie's progress at school. Julie dramatically improved her pass/fail ratio at the close of her year in the At-Risk Program by passing 13 of 14 classes attempted. Julie believed that At-Risk Program helped her academically succeed ". . . because I got a lot more individual help than just group help."

Table 5
Attempted Classes/Passed Classes

	1997-98	1998-99
Julie	13 – 7 (54%)	14 – 13 (93%)
Sheila	14 – 6 (43%)	13 – 6 (46%)
Martin	12 – 6 (50%)	13 – 13 (100%)
Star	12 – 7 (58%)	13 – 4 (30%)
Nadine	11 – 1 (09%)	12 – 2 (6%)
Keith	13 – 10 (77%)	*12 – 5 (42%)
Mickey	**12 – 1(08%)	12 – 12 (100%)
Art	12 – 5 (42%)	12 - 4 (33%)

*Withdrew 2nd Semester
**Enrolled in March 1998

Table 6
Behavior Referrals (Thursday/Saturday School, In-School, Out-of-School Suspensions)

	1997-98	1998-99
Julie	0	4
Sheila	5	11
Martin	0	0
Star	3	20
Nadine	3	23
Keith	1	*1
Mickey	**8	1
Art	6	5

*Withdrew 2nd Semester
**Enrolled in March 1998

Table 7
Absences Not Including Suspensions or Field Trips

	1997-98	1998-99
Julie	2	5
Sheila	15	19
Martin	13	12.5
Star	19	48.5
Nadine	12	23
Keith	12	*8.5
Mickey	**42	54
Art	9	11

*Withdrew 2nd Semester
**Enrolled in March 1998

Table 8
Attempted Classes/Passed Classes: All 10th Graders Who Completed At-Risk Program 1998/1999

	Fall 1997		Fall 1998		Spring 1999	
	Attempted/Passed Classes	%	Attempted/Passed Classes	%	Attempted/Passed Classes	%
1	6/2	33	6/5	83	6/6	100
2	7/5	71	6/6	100	7/5	71
3	7/2	29	7/6	86	6/6	100
4	7/4	57	7/6	86	7/6	86
5	7/5	71	7/2	29	7/1	14
6	4/2	50	6/5	83	6/6	100
7	7/3	43	7/6	86	7/7	100
8	6/3	50	7/3	43	6/6	100
9	6/2	33	6/1	16	6/2	33
10	5/2	40	6/1	16	6/2	33
11	6/4	67	6/2	33	6/2	33
*12	7/3	43	7/7	100	7/6	86
*13	7/4	57	7/2	29	6/4	67
*14	7/5	71	7/7	100	7/6	86
*15	6/2	33	7/4	57	6/0	00
*16	6/0	00	6/2	33	6/0	00
*17	6/1	16	6/2	33	6/0	00
*18	6/3	50	6/2	33	6/2	33
**19	7/4	57	6/5	83	--	--

*Participants in At-Risk Study
**Keith who quit school in Spring 1999

Table 9
Behavior Referrals (Thursday/Saturday School, In-School, Out-of-School) All 10th Graders Who Completed At-Risk Programs 1998-1999

	Fall 1997	Fall 1998	Spring 1999
1	0	1	1
2	4	10	1
3	2	1	5
4	0	0	0
5	N/A	5	2
6	3	2	1
7	1	1	1
8	0	1	1
9	0	14	5
10	2	2	1
11	2	10	10
*12	0	2	4
*13	3	5	4
*14	0	0	0
*15	1	9	11
*16	0	14	9
*17	N/A	8	1
*18	1	5	0
**19	0	0	--

*Participants in At-Risk Study
**Keith who quit school in Spring 1999
N/A Transfer student records not available

Sheila could barely be heard during the first interview in August, 1998. Her hair covered her face, and she rarely made eye contact. (The tape recorder volume was on a high setting to record her mumbles.) Sheila demonstrated little self-confidence. Although she had volunteered to be a participant in the study. She appeared reluctant to talk. Sheila had passed only 6 of her 14 classes during her ninth grade year, was absent 15 times, and had earned five qualifying discipline referrals. Sheila was the youngest of three girls; neither of her two older sisters had finished high school. In August, Sheila's goals were to improve her grades so that she might get a car. She aspired to be in a rock band because she liked to attend concerts. Although Sheila did not dramatically improve her academic standing by the May interview, the change in her demeanor was astounding.

Table 10

Absences Not Includng Suspensions or Field Trips for All 10th Graders Who
Completed At-Risk Programs 1998-1999

	Fall 1997	Fall 1998	Spring 1999
1	11.5	15	12
2	4.5	1	2
3	1.5	8	10
4	4.5	4	2.5
5	N/A	2.95	33
6	4.5	20	13
7	11	1.5	7.5
8	.5	8	4.5
9	3.5	10.5	22.5
10	8.5	7.5	9
11	13	7	16
*12	0	0	4.5
*13	9.5	7.5	11.5
*14	4	4.5	8
2.5	18.5	18	11
*16	2.5	6.5	14.5
*17	N/A	25	31.5
*18	.5	3.5	6.5
**19	3.5	8.5	--

*Participants in At-Risk Study
**Keith who quit school in Spring 1999
N/A Transfer student records not available

During the May interview, Sheila made eye contact, smiled, and spoke positively about

herself, about school, and about the At-Risk Program.

Sheila was proud of her second semester accomplishments while in the At-Risk

Program. "Well, first semester, I skipped all the time. I was getting into a lot of trouble.

And this second semester, I've been doing 10 times better. And I got student of the

month." Sheila also expressed great pleasure when describing her favorite activity she

participated in while a student in the At-risk Program. "I had fun at that brochure and

display thing. It was a different kind of project. It wasn't something you normally would

do. I won best display."

Martin was an exceptional interviewee who described himself as a unique thinker. Martin believed he should have been born at a different time because he did not see himself as a representative of today's image of a teenager. In his ninth grade year, Martin passed 6 of 12 classes, was absent 13 times, and was never sent to the principal's office. Unlike other students in the sample, Martin was the only one to have participated in an extra-curricular school activity. Although Martin belonged to the German Club, he participated minimally. Martin was also one of the few who did not embrace the "community" that the At-Risk Program teachers were trying so desperately to provide their students. Martin experienced aftermath of the Columbine school shooting in Colorado since he had often worn a trenchcoat to school. It was his brother's coat and Martin took great pride in wearing it. After the Columbine High School shooting in Littleton, Colorado, in which two students wearing trenchcoats killed several classmates and a teacher, fear filled the halls of schools across the country. The administration received parent phone calls requesting that Martin not wear his trenchcoat to school. Hurt and upset that he would be considered a threat to anyone, Martin grudgingly stopped wearing his beloved trenchcoat to school. This became one more indicator to Martin that he did not fit into this high school. Academically, Martin made dramatic strides by passing all 13 classes attempted in the 1998-99 school year.

Star said exactly what she thought. Star displayed minimal tactfulness and little reserve in detailing her frustration with high school, her family, and the At-Risk Program. Star, a naturally beautiful young woman, looked and acted like a typical tomboy. Star wore no make up and when her hair was fixed it was pulled to the nape of her neck by a rubber band. Star took pleasure in making fun of her female peers who were concerned with both appearance and how they were perceived by young men. Star described herself

as a bully and the At-Risk Program teachers confirmed this description. Star passed 7 of 12 classes during her ninth grade year, was absent 19 days, and had three discipline referrals resulting in Thursday Night Schools. Star's major complaint about high school and the At-Risk Program was the number of rules. She reported that she felt as if she was in prison and that she did not like people telling her what to do. In August, Star was asked to provide an example of a "stupid rule."

> Yesterday I got in-school suspension for not switching chairs. I was, we have tables, they are like oblong tables, and then there are two people sitting at them and the kid next to me didn't care where he sat, he just wanted to sit at our table, so I said fine sit right there and I am going to sit right here. All my books were on the floor and I didn't want to get up and move them, so you have like seven books and they are big books and I was just like, I am going to leave them here, it is not that big of deal, I am just going to sit here. She says [Star] get up and move, and I am like no, because I don't want to have to move my books. Any normal class, I mean we have done that, I used to do that all the time, like Mr. [Green's] class or something and he would just mark us there because we were there and we would listen the same and everything. And so she yelled at me and told me I had to go to the office. Now I blow up easy; it is real easy for me to just snap and so that is it, I am out of here. So I went and sat outside for an hour then I got an in-school suspension and I was so mad that I was like alright fine, I am going to make it pretty much difficult for you guys for the rest of the day. So they have stupid rules and then the kid next to me got that just because he wanted to see the projector, he moved chairs when his partner wasn't there, she didn't come or something, he moved over and he got yelled at and he is like I am not moving so they gave him a detention, so I was pretty I think that is a stupid thing, I just think that is retarded, they should just let me sit there.

After listening to this long explanation of Star's stupid rules, Star surprised me when she announced that her career aspiration was to be a Navy Seal. I also found it intriguing that Star described her father (the parent with whom she was living due to divorce) as a "friend" and not an authority figure.

Dad is like, well we are really good friends. He is really cool and he has always helped me out with all my other friends' problems. Like I have a friend that is pregnant, and he told me that he would take her to the doctor and do all this. So he has been really supportive about everything I wanted, and we had some difficulties these last few years because of my mom, but we always, we hang out and stuff like that. We go to the mall and stuff like that, so yea, me and my dad are pretty close.

Star had even more trouble with authority during her first year in the At-Risk program. Star failed a greater proportion of classes attempted in the At-Risk Program (9 of 13) than she had failed in the qualifying year (5 of 12). Also during the implementation year, (1998-1999) Star was absent 48.5 days, and had earned 20 qualifying discipline referrals including out-of-school suspensions. Star believed administration would describe her as "careless, belligerent, strong willed, same thing as the other teachers do." Star expressed confidence about herself in her August interview.

In May, not only had Star's confidence ebbed, but also she had become more defiant of authority. "I don't like being here and the teachers that I have, we don't get along, and the administrator, we don't get along and there is not many people I like here. I only have a few friends here anymore." Immediately after Star walked out of our May interview, the secretary gave her a pass to report to the assistant principal's office in charge of discipline. Instead of following this directive, Star walked out of the high school ensuring another out-of-school suspension consequence.

Nadine was another quiet interview. Nadine, like all the other interviewees except Martin, did not participate in extra-curricular activities. Nadine could explain nothing important about herself and enjoyed study hall as her favorite class because no one expected anything of her. Nadine had failed 10 of 11 classes during her ninth grade year, was absent 12 times, and had earned three qualifying discipline referrals. Nadine did not

find herself an important part of society or this school. Nadine became involved with students who took drugs, and personal problems dominated all aspects of her life. Nadine believed peers influenced her in a negative manner. "They are acting like they are going to be lifetime friends, but they got me into doing all this stuff, which I really regret now."

Nadine ended her 10th grade year passing 2 of 12 classes, one more class than she had passed the year before. During Nadine's May interview, a quiet and remorseful young women answered a question as to whether the at-risk program had helped her.

> That's kind of a stupid question to ask me. Well, it did, but I didn't really
> do anything to show that it did. It definitely helped my attitude, I don't
> know the teachers in there are like really good about that stuff. They-like-
> really get to know you. And they help you as best as they can. They put a
> lot of time and effort into helping people.

Nadine was ambivalent about the possibility of graduating high school. She hoped to graduate. Nadine should begin 11th grade in the fall of 1999 but only has earned 15 credits of a possible 140. She needs 205 credits to graduate from this high school. Nadine ran away from home during the summer of 1999.

Keith entered the At-Risk Program as the participant who had passed the most classes (10 of 13 classes during his ninth grade year). Also in 1997-98, he had been absent 12 days and had earned only one discipline referral resulting in a Saturday School. Keith described himself as a leader; this personality characteristic was confirmed by the At-Risk Program teachers and his mother, who was also one of the study's parent participants. Keith was handsome, charismatic, and expressed belief in himself. Although coursework had not been easy for Keith, he always managed to pass to the next grade level. Keith

believed he needed to earn his high school diploma. When asked how important education

is to having a successful future, he replied:

> I think it is real important, because in my parents' terms, it is like school is
> the foundation of what you are going to become later in life, and my
> parents have always been telling me that, because my dad, my mom has her
> high school diploma and my dad dropped out, and my mom has always
> been stressing how she doesn't want me to end up like my father because
> he dropped out. So I guess my parents have always been stressing to me
> that school is probably the important part of your life, because later on it
> life, it will help you to get bigger pay checks.

Unfortunately, Keith did not take his parents' advice. While in the At-Risk Program,

Keith joined a gang, did drugs and was placed under house arrest for being the driver of a

drive-by shooting. Keith will soon be a father, as his girlfriend is pregnant. Keith dropped

out of school during the second semester of his 10th grade year and had passed only 5 of

12 classes. During our May interview, Keith explained that he planned to earn his GED

and not return to the high school.

Mickey could have been the poster child for this At-Risk Program because she

embodied multiple at-risk characteristics. Mickey lived with her mom, brother and aunt in

a tiny apartment. Mickey's mom was a waitress who recently moved her family back to

Nebraska during March of Mickey's ninth grade school year. Mickey's mother was a high

school dropout, and Mickey did not know where her father lived. Although Mickey

wanted to be a cheerleader, poverty kept her from participating. Mickey had passed only 1

of 12 classes during her ninth grade year. Since Mickey had not attended the high school

under study for her entire ninth grade year, Mickey's attendance and discipline records

covered the period from March 1998 to May 1998. Mickey was absent 42 days during

those three months and earned eight qualifying discipline referrals. Mickey was a prime

candidate for dropping out of school. Mickey's self-image was low; she answered "don't

know" when asked if she was an important part of society and an important part of this

school. The positive changes that Mickey demonstrated during her 10th grade year make

her the poster child for this program. By our May interview, Mickey had passed all twelve

of her classes, and had been referred to the principal only one time. Although her

attendance was still poor, there were mitigating factors that contributed to her 54

absences. Mickey became pregnant and contracted chicken pox during the first year of

implementation of the At-Risk Program. Although becoming pregnant as an unwed 16-

year-old does not sound like a success story, there were some successes. Mickey reported

pride in her academic accomplishments. She found a sense of community in the At-Risk

Program. When asked how teachers would describe Mickey as a student, she said:

> As a very good student. Because they always do so far, because I have
> been doing really good so far. I'm proud of myself. Probably my
> last year teachers are probably surprised and impressed.

Mickey reported that although she was still unsure of her importance to society, she did

believe she was an important part of school. Mickey was all smiles during the May

interview. She beamed with the pride she felt in passing all of her classes. She talked

about her career and how she planned to finish high school and still raise her baby.

Mickey also spoke positively about the At-Risk Program. When asked how she would

change the high school Mickey said:

> I would make it, like [At-Risk Program], a lot more lenient, because
> that is what helped me out a lot. And they were more lenient on my
> homework and stuff like that. They were actually like family there. And

the teachers that aren't in [At-Risk Program], they don't really talk to you about a lot of things.

Art is the eighth interviewee. Art did not find the academic success that he and his parents had hoped this At-Risk Program would help provide him. Art was placed in the At-Risk Program because he failed 7 of his 12 classes during his ninth grade year. Art had been sent to the principal's office six times and had been absent nine days. During our August interview, Art expressed concern about his 10th grade year and was very unsure of himself. Art indicated he was "sort of uncomfortable" as he began his 10th grade year because he was worried about getting into fights. Art's mom described him as a student who was unpopular and who was "picked on" by other kids. Art described himself as having a short temper. He did not know if he was an important part of this school and did not know if he cared what his teachers thought of him. He thought "possibly" he would graduate high school. During the May 1999 interview, Art had expressed enjoyment of his 10th grade year. "Well, I'm satisfied that I didn't get in trouble this year." Art met new friends and no longer feared getting into fights. Although Art passed only 4 of 12 classes, he reported experiencing the "community" that the At-Risk Program teachers were trying to instill. Art believed his teachers would describe him as "outgoing." Over the school year, Art sustained his original career goal of going into the military. However in May, he expressed the belief that he might need an additional year to finish high school. Art took responsibility for his poor academic performance in the initial year of the program. He expressed belief that the At-Risk Program was a good program but, because

he was "lazy" and didn't do his work, he didn't take advantage of the program. "Well, it probably helped other people, just didn't help me. Because I didn't feel like doing it."

The eight students in this case study displayed characteristics of at-risk youth. Four of the eight students were from divorced families. One of the eight students experienced such poverty that she could not participate in the extra curricular activity of cheerleading. Two of the eight students admitted to taking drugs. All had experienced years of academic failure and all had hoped that this At-Risk Program would help them find academic success.

The Parents

Five parents volunteered for the study. Each was a parent of a student participant. At the onset of the 1998-99 school year, all parent volunteers expressed great hopes that their children would have a successful school year in the At-Risk Program setting. Some ended the year pleased, while others expressed disappointment. Four of the five parent volunteers graduated high school; one attended two years of college; a fifth parent volunteer dropped out of high school during her junior year. None of the five parents volunteered their time to their children's school. Four of the five parent volunteers were either in a first marriage or were re-married. All parent interviews were conducted at the school except for Traci's post interview and both of Jessi's interviews. The parents appeared and acted like other high school students' parents. These parents had high hopes for their children's academic success.

Glen was Sheila's father. Sheila was the extremely quiet student interviewee, who rarely made eye contact in the August interview, but whose demeanor changed dramatically by the May interview. Glen, a high school graduate, believed teachers tried

their best with his daughter. Glen hoped that the small teacher-to-student ratio in the At-Risk Program would provide the much needed assistance that Sheila required. Glen believed parents could make a difference in a child's success at school.

> Of course parents can make a difference, we can either sit back and let her do what she wants and she may or may not do well, but we have to urge her to keep on task and try and make sure she gets her homework and any projects of anything like that done.

Glen and his wife had two older daughters who dropped out of high school for various reasons (including pregnancy). Glen was disappointed that his older daughters did not serve as role models to Sheila but expressed great hope that Sheila would be the first in the family to graduate. Glen recognized that coursework was hard for Sheila, but believed she could graduate. "Personally I hope her goal is to graduate; I would like to see one of our daughters graduate. That is the main goal right now, and in the future, if she goes to college, that would be great too, but right now I want to see her graduate."

Shelby was Martin's mother. Martin was the unique student interviewee, who did not believe he represented a "typical" adolescent. Martin had been the student interviewee who had been asked to refrain from wearing his trenchcoat to school. Shelby was a high school graduate and a mother of four sons. Shelby and her husband valued education and believed Martin could graduate and go onto college as he aspired. Shelby communicated with teachers on the phone when problems arose. Shelby described her son as a well-mannered student with organizational problems that hindered his academic success. Shelby hoped the At-Risk Program teachers would teach Martin the organizational skills needed to be a successful student.

Traci was Keith's mother. Keith was the dropout on house arrest. The post parent and student interviews of Traci and Keith were conducted at their home due to Keith's

house arrest situation. The house was located in a middle class neighborhood within the high school's attendance area. Small neighborhood children were playing in their driveways as the researcher approached the house. The house was two-story with a well-manicured lawn. The décor of the living room centered on several figures and pictures of Jesus Christ. It was evident that the family took care of their home and their belongings. Traci was a high school graduate, but Keith's father dropped out of high school prior to graduation. They emphasized to Keith the importance of graduating and mentioned that their older daughter was a high school graduate. Traci expressed dissatisfaction with Keith's school experiences during our August interview and indicated even greater dissatisfaction in our May interview. In August Traci expressed her dissatisfaction with Keith's school experiences during his ninth grade year.

> My biggest dissatisfaction is with the teachers and their lack of caring. Keith had several subjects last year that he failed the subjects. I had no contact from the teachers, no letters were sent home, no phone calls were made to me. I didn't know that he was failing classes until his report card came home, at which point it is too late to do anything about it. When I called, I was told, well you get progress reports. I had never seen a progress report, the entire year, and they put the blame on Keith, and yet, I still felt that somehow, somewhere along the line, a teacher could have taken a minute to pick up the phone and call me and say "your son has a problem, can we do something?" and nobody did and he failed four classes. The other thing was, two of the classes he dropped out of Spanish and English, he was moved to a basic English, both of those happened about the middle of the school year last year, and then this year when he came to register, he was told he couldn't get his schedule until he paid $115 for books that were missing. Both instances I called the teachers and was told, no his books are here, we just must not have had the book cards at the time he turned the books in, but yet it took us three trips to the school in order to find that out and in order for him to get his schedule, and in the meantime, his father just blew up at him, and he had done nothing wrong, the teachers made a mistake, they didn't even apologize to Keith and say sorry we made a mistake, it was like "well, what do you want us to do about it?" go find your books and he didn't have the books, so there were a

couple of, there are just things like that where the teachers don't seem to care about him.

Initially, Traci stated that dropping out was not an option she would give her son, Keith. (Six months later, Keith dropped out of school.) Traci believed that teachers did not really care about her son, and, in the August interview, she could not think of one thing a teacher had ever done to show her son that he/she cared about him. Traci expressed disappointment in the lack of teacher to parent communication when Keith was failing classes. When asked if Keith was an important part of the school she answered no. In the May interview, Traci had become even more negative toward the school and the teachers.

> I saw over the course of the year, the three different teachers treated him in three different ways. At least from what I could tell. One of the teachers was totally disinterested in him at all. She, very obviously, could have cared less. And I say that after several phone conversations with her, letters that she has sent home, weekly progress reports. One of the teachers seemed to be interested in Kevin. Said he was a nice young man, friendly, did what he was asked to do. And she kept trying to work with him. And then the third teacher, was just, whatever. It was an attitude of "oh well, if he's going to pass or fail, it's up to him. And it's his problem." I just was really unhappy. Throughout the year, it got worse.

Traci placed much of the blame for her son turning to a gang, using drugs, and dropping out of school on the teachers of the At-Risk Program. Traci was sure that the At-Risk Program teachers should have seen signs that Keith was headed for trouble and should have contacted her immediately. When progress reports did not make it home because Keith was taking them out of the mail, Traci blamed the teachers.

Christy was Art's mom. Art was the student interviewee who did not improve his academic standing during his year in the At-Risk Program, but felt that he had made friends and was not in trouble as much as he had been prior to his placement in the At-Risk Program. Christy, the only parent of the sample to have any post high school

education, attended two years of college. During the August interview, Christy was

positive toward the school and the teachers. Although Art had never had extremely

successful years in school, Christy believed that most of the teachers were doing their best.

Christy described Art as a wonderful and sensitive person, who was sometimes picked on

by other students. In August, Christy was anticipating Art would be successful due to his

participation in the program. Christy knew the program could not solve all of Art's

academic deficiencies but would help his self-confidence.

> The main thing that I am hoping will happen is that he will feel the success
> that a student should feel in high school, I am not expecting him to
> graduate with As or Bs at the end of the year, but I want him to be
> successful that he can then go on to the rest of his high school and do what
> needs to be done. It is not going to be as much of a struggle for him.
> Obviously, one program is not going to be able to take care of everything
> that at this point he hasn't succeeded at, but I think to give him that self-
> confidence and that feeling that it is going to be OK. I will be able to do
> whatever it is that I choose to do.

By the May interview, Christy was more disappointed in her son's school

experiences. She was surprised that Art had not been more successful in the At-Risk

Program since the student-to-teacher ratio was so low. Christy was disappointed that she

did not receive more phone calls from the At-Risk Program teachers when Art was failing

his classes.

> We didn't hear from them [teachers] as frequently as we would have liked
> to. I think throughout the year...at the beginning of the year we got quite
> a few calls because Andy was disruptive. That was taken care of. When
> his grades were not, and he wasn't turning in schoolwork, we heard very
> little from them. The only time that we could hear from them was through
> progress reports. And I personally only took one phone call from a
> teacher.

Although Christy, like all the other parents in my sample, had not volunteered at school, she recommended that the At-Risk Program teachers solicit parental help. Christy said she was never asked to volunteer and would have volunteered had she been asked.

Jessi was Mickey's mother. Mickey was the student interviewee who could have been the poster child for the At-Risk Program. Jessi, an unmarried high school dropout, did not know where Mickey's father lived. Jessi was living with her two kids and her sister in a small apartment. The two-bedroom apartment was decorated with older furniture including Coke posters, bean bags, and a TV. The ashtrays were full of cigarette butts. Jessi continued to smoke during the interview. In August Jessi had no idea what Mickey's personal goals were. Jessi explained her frustration when teachers called her at work to discuss Mickey's problems.

> I know somebody called me because of [Mickey] missing classes last week
> and the week before, but they called me...right at rush hour lunch and it
> was pretty tough.

Jessi did not want Mickey to drop out of high school. The family moved back to Nebraska in March of Mickey's ninth grade year because Mickey was skipping so much school. Jessi wanted a better life for her daughter.

> Look where I am at, I am raising two kids on my own. I mean it is a job. I
> said [to Mickey] I am not no high class person, I said I am below average
> here and you don't want to turn out like my life, I want it to be better. I
> am hoping it has sunk in somewhere.

In May, the post interview was conducted at their new home. The house was outside of this school district's attendance area but Jessi asked me not to tell anyone that Mickey no longer lived in the suburban school district attendance area. The house was a two story home with a large porch attached to the front. When the researcher entered the home, she

was introduced to Mickey's aunt, younger brother and to Mickey's new boyfriend and

father to her unborn child. Mickey's boyfriend was shirtless with boxer shorts and kept a

cigarette hanging off his bottom lip when he talked. The new home afforded the family

more room. Jessi expressed amazement that Mickey had progressed from passing one

class during her 9th grade year, to passing all of her classes during her 10th grade year.

Jessi now knew that Mickey's personal goal was to graduate high school. Jessi repeatedly

told me that she was proud of her daughter's accomplishments this year. Although

pleased with her daughter's academic progress, Jessi's concern for her daughter's future

due to Mickey's pregnancy was apparent.

> The only thing I can say is that I didn't think she was going to pull it
> through school. I thought she was going to give it up by the time she hit.
> And she sure showed me. Well, right now I know she's going to have this
> baby. We've already tried. Me and my sister have tried to tell her to give
> it up for adoption or something, but she wants it. I'm going to stand by
> her on it. I told her, I said, I'm not going to be no babysitter though. But
> because she's old enough. She even has the smarts as an older person,
> older than what she is.

Research Questions

Students' Sense of Belonging to the Community

Research Question One -How did an intervention program affect at-risk students' sense of
belonging to the school community?

Establishing a community for at-risk youth is key to providing successful

alternative education (Rossi & Stringfield, 1997 & Bates, 1993). Rossi and Stringfield

(1997) defined community as "...concerned with the deep-structure fabric of interpersonal

relations. Soundly woven, this fabric permits a shared frame of reference and supports

mutual expectations" (p. 3). The relationships between adults in schools provide models

of behavior from which students learn. Rossi and Stringfield (pp. 3-4) identified 10

elements from their visits to alternative schools that represent strong communities: shared

vision, participation, shared sense of purpose, caring, shared values, trust, incorporation of

diversity, teamwork, communication, respect, and recognition.

One of the original goals of the At-Risk Program was to provide students with a

sense of belonging to the school. The At-Risk Program teachers believed that building a

strong community for these students was a critical key to the success of the program. The

teachers reported trying to build community through encouraging the students'

involvement in extra-curricular activities and providing students with positive awards.

Samantha explained that one criterion of the program was that the students would be

required to participate in at least one extra curricular activity.

> Well, in our grant we had said that we were going to require the kids to
> participate in at least one extra curricular activity to make that connection,
> and will encourage that through some community talks, plus I think we are
> going to create a club or some clubs just for us to make, to see if there is a
> need there for something. In some form or another, they will experience
> extra curricular activities.

In our May interview, when I asked Samantha if extra curricular activities are important,

Samantha had changed her mind about forcing kids to participate.

> I don't know if it's as important as it was that we thought it would be. I
> think there is more urgent, more prevalent things that we need to deal with
> before that. Creating a smaller sense of a community with them first before
> they go on to that larger community. I think I would have made a shift in
> that.

Although all three teachers believed that extra curricular activity involvement was

important for kids, providing another type of community was just as important. The At-

Risk Program provided a place for these students to feel wanted. At-risk students are often invisible in their large classes or receive negative attention from their teachers due to the students' rebellious behavior. In the At-Risk Program, a team of three teachers taught 45 students during the first semester, and the teaching team was expanded to four teachers during the second semester. This team of teachers knew the students and cared about the students' personal problems. For comparison purposes, in the regular classes at this large high school a teacher can have as many as 150-180 students on their class rosters and not even know the students' other teachers. Administrators at this high school see little to no communication among teachers regarding the student unless the child is verified as special education.

Samantha knew that a student's perception of whether they were cared about became reality to the student. All three teachers cared about their students. Samantha felt that the students in the At-Risk Program knew the three teachers cared about them.

> The one thing that over and over again that I knew and have read in studies
> is that their perceptions, the kids' problems, . . . no, their perceptions is
> that no one cares about them within a building. And I know if there is
> anything that we have accomplished, they all know that, they cannot deny
> that.

Bonnie believed the students felt a connection to the high school because of their experience in the At-Risk Program.

> I think some students that never had a friend before have gained some
> pretty close friendships with other school mates that they probably
> wouldn't have run into otherwise. I think some of the kids have really
> begun to fit in at [the high school] and feel a part of the educational
> process now and are really looking forward, some of the sophomores
> especially, to going out and being with the regular kids and taking the rest

of the classes, yet knowing that they can come back and always be welcome with us.

Chalker (1996) and Wager (1993) found that a student recognition system where academic mastery, good attendance, and appropriate behavior was important to effective alternative educational programs. The At-Risk Program teachers also tried to build community by promoting positive awards. A student of the month was selected and taken to lunch by the building principal and At-Risk Program counselor. Students were given lottery tickets for good behavior and a weekly drawing was conducted on Fridays for gift certificates to local businesses. Two field trips were taken during the year to conduct team building. Students who had originally been upset for being placed in the At-Risk Program were asking if this program could be extended during their junior and senior years. Mickey wished that the high school could be more like the At-Risk Program.

> I would make it, like [At-Risk Program], a lot more lenient, because they helped me out a lot. They were actually like family there. And the teachers that aren't in [At-Risk Program], they don't really talk to you about a lot of things.

Although the At-Risk Program provided services to students for the first five periods of a seven period schedule, the students assigned to study hall during periods six and seven would often return to the At-Risk Program room and study with their At-Risk Program teachers. Furthermore, students would arrive as early as 7:00 AM to get into the room when classes did not officially begin until 8:00 AM. Students appeared to value this community that the At-Risk Program teachers were trying to provide.

In the May interviews, the eight volunteer students were asked to describe good things that happened to them during the school year. The most common response to this

answer was meeting friends. Six of the eight students described meeting new friends as a

good thing that happened to them during the school year. Having friends at school helps

to provide a sense of community. The students' answers support Rossi and Stringfield's

research regarding the need for teachers to provide a sense of community to at-risk

students.

Students' Sense of Self / Parents' Perceptions of Students

Research Question 2 – How did an intervention program affect at-risk students'
perception of self?

Research Question 6 – How did an intervention program affect the parents' perception of
their at-risk students?

Like typical teenagers, the eight students in the sample were struggling with a

sense of self. For at-risk youth, sense of self is much lower than their non at-risk peers.

When asked what was important and/or interesting about them, 5 of the 8 students

answered that they didn't know. When asked if they were an important part of society

and/or school, half answered that they didn't know or did not agree with that statement.

Table 11 displays information provided by students during the pre and post interviews. In

this set of questions, students were asked to indicate the degree to which they should

agree with a set of statements intended to assess self-worth. The questions were asked of

each student during the August and May interviews.

Table 11
Students' Sense of Self

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Don't Know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. I am able to do things as well as other people	Pre-3 Post-5	Pre-5 Post-5			
2. I feel that I will be successful in life	Pre -3 Post-1	Pre-6 Post-5	Post 2		
3. Good luck is more important than hard work for success.	Pre-1		Pre-3 Post-3	Pre-3 Post-5	Pre-1
4. My life is what I make of it	Pre-5 Post-1	Pre-3 Post-7			
5. I have the skills to deal with life's problems.	Pre-1 Post-2	Pre-5 Post-4	Pre-2 Post-1	Post-1	
6. Teachers believe I can succeed in school	Pre-1 Post-2	Pre-6 Post-4	Pre-1 Post-2		
7. I feel I a an important part of this school		Pre-4 Post-5	Pre-2 Post-1	Pre-2 Post-1	Post-1
8. I feel I am an important part of society		Pre-5 Post-3	Pre-1 Post-4	Pre-2	Post-1
9. I care what my parents think of me	Pre-4 Post-2	Pre-4 Post-4	Post-2		
10. I care what my teachers think of me	Post-2	Pre-6 Post-3	Pre-2 Post-2	Post-1	
11. I care what my classmates think of me	Pre-1 Post-2	Pre-5 Post-2	Pre-1 Post-1	Pre-1 Post-3	

SA = Strongly Agree; A=Agree; DK=Don't Know; D=Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree

Data displayed in Table 11 illustrates the students' sense of self. All eight students

agreed or strongly agreed that they were able to do things as well as other people. The

students' sense of self was positive. During the August interviews, all eight students

believed that they would be successful in life. In the May interviews, the range of

responses was wider, with two students indicating that they "don't know."

In both August and May, all eight students agreed that their lives are what they

make of it. The responses from Art, Nadine, and Star, three students who did not succeed

academically during their year in the At-Risk Program, were particularly representative of

this position. Art admitted that the program did not help him because he did not apply

himself. "Well, it probably helped other people, just didn't help me. Because I didn't feel

like doing it." When Nadine was asked how she would describe her school year she

answered, "Terrible. I slacked off really bad. I have a bad attitude about it." Star

admitted that she could have applied herself more. When asked what she could have done

to make this school year better, she answered:

> Listened. Pay attention. Come to school. Not give everybody such a hard
> time. I mean I gave [the assistant principal a hard time], I was like the
> devil child. I have done every single thing, I think, that I could do to that
> poor woman. And I know she doesn't like me. I just know it. Because
> I'm a pain in her butt. The whole thing, yeah, I guess I should've just
> stayed and stuck it out. I didn't. So...

Parents in the study reported that their children had caring big hearts. Christy

described her son, Art, as having a great personality. When asked what was the most

interesting thing about Art, Christy answered.

> There is so many; it's hard to pinpoint it. I guess I find it interesting that
> his broad interest in different areas, whether it be sports or movies or
> whatever. I find it very interesting that a child that age...knows a lot of
> little facts about a lot of different things that I wouldn't think someone that
> age would know.

Glen perceived Sheila as having a strong will to do that which is right. Glen

seemed impressed that

> ...she has got her own mind and she isn't terribly swayed by people going
> in the wrong direction. She's strong in that she can maintain what she
> believes, even though she doesn't always go in the right way herself, but
> she does maintain what she believes even when other people are trying to
> lead her astray.

Glen also perceived Sheila having to work hard for her academic success. When asked if

Sheila could do things as well as other people, Glen replied:

> Most things. I think she has to struggle harder with school. Of my three
> daughters, I don't think the other two had to work as hard. Although they

didn't take advantage of that. [Sheila] has to work a little harder to get
where she is at.

Keith's mom, Traci, had changed her perception of her son from her August

interview to her May interview. Keith was the interviewee who dropped out of school

and was placed under house arrest for being the driver of a drive-by shooting. Keith had

joined a gang, used drugs, and was about to become a teenage father. In August, Traci

positively described her son, Keith.

> [Keith] is quite a character. He is very special in that he has a very big
> heart, a very loving, caring person, loves everybody, gets along well with
> everybody, very friendly and open to people.

In May, Traci compared her son to other students.

> I think most students have a better sense of reality than [Keith] has had.
> Most students-by the time they are in 10th grade-realize that they are setting
> up the foundation for what is going to be their future and I think
> somewhere along the line, [Keith] totally missed that. It's like he didn't
> really grasp how important school was. And he just blew it off.

All of the parents reported that their children had more potential than their

academic records had so far indicated. In August interviews, all the parents believed their

children would graduate. In May, one student had dropped out, one was pregnant, and

the others had experienced various degrees of academic success.

Students' Values of School

Research Question 3 – How did an intervention program affect at-risk students' value of
school?

Although the eight students believed that graduation would provide the basis for a

successful future, not all thought they could graduate. In August interviews, graduation

appeared plausible to all but Art; in May, Keith, Star, and Nadine had joined Art declaring

uncertainty about graduation. In August, most of the students were unable to articulate the number of classes passed during their ninth grade year. All but Star believed they would do better in school during their 10th grade year because of the influence of the At-Risk Program. Star alone did not know whether she would do better. At the end of the initial year of the program, Julie, Sheila, Martin and Mickey believed they had done better in school as a result of being in the program. Nadine, Art, Star and Keith all felt they had not done better, but took responsibility for not trying.

All of the eight students made positive comments about the communication between the At-Risk Program teachers and themselves. Keith compared the communication he had with the At-Risk Program teachers to what he had experienced the previous year as a ninth grader with the non-At-Risk Program teachers.

> When I was doing bad, they talked to me like, well, these are your missing assignments. Then they'd hand me a list of them and they'd be like, well, everyday they consistently be like, "Well [Keith] did you get this done yet?" And it was like a daily routine for them. They'd just be like; "Well did you get this done yet? Do you got this done?"

> Like my freshman year, if you want to know what your missing assignments are, you have to ask.

Parents' Perceptions of School

Research Question 7 – How did an intervention program affect the perception of school for parents of at-risk students?

Not all the perceptions of the program or the school were positive. Keith's mom, Traci, had been upset with the school district for quite some time.

> I guess I have a lot of bitterness. Mostly because a lot of what he's gone through has been happening right under my nose. And I didn't see it and I didn't catch it in time. But I kind of thought that the people at the school,

the teachers, the counselors, the administrators are all professionals. And I didn't feel that they were doing anything to help me, I mean help him. Do you know what I mean? I don't mean to sound like it's all their fault, because it isn't. They constantly, the entire time both of my children have been in the school system. They constantly portray this triangle that we are all in this together, the student, the parents, the teachers, the school. But where were they when my son was in trouble? They didn't care. They probably saw it coming and said nothing. They allowed him to come to class and sleep because he was probably up all night because he was doing drugs. I didn't know that, but they probably did. I don't know.

By May, Traci saw her son drop out of school and be placed on house arrest. Traci blamed the At-Risk Program.

I just hope that this program is not allowed to continue. I think based on what happened with [Keith], it's a total failure. I don't know what happened to other children. All I know is what happened to [Keith]. And I don't blame everything that he has gotten into this year on those teachers, or on the [At-Risk Program]. But, I also know that he has never failed so miserably as he did this year. And my husband and I saw it more of instead of taking all these at-risk children and putting them in an atmosphere where they are going to learn, they took all these at-risk children and put them all together in a room where they could all aid and assist each other in failing, rather than succeeding. Being totally surrounded by 25 other at-risk kids, turned [Keith] into a criminal. It didn't help him. It hurt him. And I believe that with all my heart. He got involved with the wrong kids and he's now on house arrest and is a high school drop out and his girlfriend is pregnant and he met all those kids in the program.

When Traci was asked what she could have done to make the school year better for Keith, Traci again placed blame on the At-Risk Program teachers.

[I could have] sat in the classroom and held his hand. I really believe that. He is a very lazy student. And I know that. I can't put all of the responsibility on the teachers, but I think they should have been sitting on him, and they weren't. I think they saw him failing, they saw his attitude growing worse and they did nothing. You know, I don't know why. I got progress reports where the teachers would say, Keith comes to class without his books. And my response was "why don't you march him right down to his locker and get his books? Why do you allow him to get away with this kind of crap? Well, it's his responsibility. OK. Yes, it's his

responsibility, but if he's not doing it, force him to do it. He's the child; you're the adult." And I didn't get any of that from the teachers.

Traci was the only parent who had an extremely negative attitude about the At-Risk Program. In May, Glen, Sheila's father, praised the At-Risk Program.

> I generally have praise for the program. I think it's an effort where most kids in this program probably were going to go the other direction as far as success. I think at least it was an effort where there is some hope for those kids and I think some of them succeeded and some of them didn't.

In May, Jessi reported that her daughter, Mickey, found great success in the At-Risk Program. "I don't think I would want to try to even change anything on that. I think they're doing a good job."

Students' Future Goals

Research Question 4 – How did an intervention program affect at-risk students' future goals?

During the August interviews, the future goals expressed by the eight students included: get grades up/graduate, go to college and pursue architecture/wild life management, and go to the military. The students' goals did not change too much from August to May. Even Keith still dreamed of being an architect as he sat at home on house arrest waiting to take his G.E.D. While the students' goals remaining fairly consistent, participation in the At-Risk Program appeared to have little effect on the students' future goals.

Parental Involvement

Research Question 5 – How did an intervention program affect parents of at-risk students' involvement with school?

The five parents had minimal responses regarding parental involvement in school,

however, the teachers held strong beliefs about the importance of parental involvement.

None of the five parents interviewed in this study had volunteered time at school. Art's

mother, Christy, however, stated in our May interview that she would have volunteered if

she had been asked. Christy believed that the At-Risk Program could be improved if

parents were more involved.

> Have activities with parents that physically come to the classroom. You
> know, if I had to take vacation days or whatever, I would be perfectly
> willing to have done that in a situation like that. And help to participate.

The At-Risk Program teachers reported numerous attempts to connect with parents.

Initially, the At-Risk Program teachers coordinated a picnic at the beginning of the 1998-

99 school year to get the At-Risk Program families involved. Approximately one-fourth

of the At-Risk Program families attended the picnic. During the academic year, they

placed more than 150 phone calls in the first semester, sent home progress reports every

two weeks, and conducted parental conferences as needed. Swanson (1991) advocates

parental support and input as a major key to keeping students in school. All three At-Risk

Program teachers agreed with this assertion. Samantha stated:

> No matter what their [parents] response is, our obligation is to, outside of
> the street, is to communicate with them. I have had so many experiences
> where you expect a certain kind of communication coming back or any or
> none, there is nothing that is predictable. But I think that is just part of our
> job, that we need to; that is just part of our job. If the message isn't
> received well, or it the message is encouraged, I have noticed a lot, and it is
> not always true, not the whole population, but I have noticed a lot of times
> I will get into conversations with parents, and I am sure administrators
> have that experience too, where we get off on tangents and you almost in a
> sense start counseling them. So, but if we can be successful with 1 out of
> 10 tries about communication, make them feel a part of, then the other nine

probably raped us verbally, then I think it is worth it for that one. Now I hope I remember that when I have a bad day talking to the other nine, but I think it is true when I can stand back from that.

Bonnie agreed with Samantha's point of view.

Well, in the area of at-risk, you really need parents who understand where you are coming from and it has to be a team, or we are not going to be able to accomplish very much. We have to have the back-up home, and you can only get that by communicating with each other.

Jerry's comments paralleled Bonnie's.

Especially for at-risk youth, if the parents or in most cases the parent or guardian should have something to do with that. If they are not directly involved with what is going on, no matter what we do is not going to work. They have to be part of it. If they sit outside and don't give, it doesn't matter a whole lot what we do. Some kids will still respond, but most of them, I don't think, will.

Teachers' Perceptions of At-Risk Youth

Research Question 8 – How did an intervention program affect teachers' perception of at-risk youth?

I asked similar questions to all three teachers during the August and May interviews. The teachers' responses varied and shifts in positions occurred from August to May. In August interviews, when asked what is the most important thing to remember when working with at-risk youth, Bonnie replied:

I think all the baggage that they are bringing in, that you can't react to what they are saying without realizing that there is a lot of non-verbal behind them.

In May, Bonnie believed,

I think that you can't have the same exact expectations with this type of student that you would in a normal classroom with regular situations in terms of home and school.

In the initial interview, Jerry remarked,

> Remember that they have been in situations before where they have not
> succeeded and you are going to have to be awfully patient with getting
> them to change that.

By May, Jerry's answered more concisely, "Be patient. And have a lot of it."

Samantha's answer changed from August to May. Samantha advocated in August that the

most important thing to remember when working with at-risk youth was, "To be flexible.

Be flexible with the kids to meet their needs." By May, Samantha had changed her

position and advocated, "Consistency. Being consistent with them." Samantha believed

she could make a difference when dealing with at-risk youth. Teachers can make a

difference in how well students do in school. Samantha sees a student having a great

responsibility in his/her success.

> And I think any educator knows this. Yes, I can influence kids at some
> point. And each kid there is a different point. They have to pick it up and
> go with it. They have to accept responsibility. Some educators that I see
> really don't expect the kids to accept any responsibility for their success or
> failure. I think it is harming them. Parents are that way too. But at some
> point, I will help you, but you've got to meet me half way and at least
> accept some of the responsibility.

After interviewing all three teachers and observing the At-Risk Program in the high

school where the researcher serves as one of the assistant principals, the researcher

suspected that Samantha's May comments were derived from some of the causes of the

teacher team splitting up. Providing consistent rules with these at-risk students had been a

struggle for this three- teacher team. Samantha believed in enforcing consistent rules and

the other two teachers believed in being more flexible with the students. A common

philosophy was never established and this began the erosion of the three-person team. A

fourth teacher was brought into the program at second semester with a different source of grant monies. This teacher was a first-year teacher who took over Samantha's teaching duties. Samantha spent time out of the classroom conducting the registration efforts for the following school year and creating the second integrated curriculum unit based on genetics. Samantha spent more time than the other two teachers planning for the integrated units of study. Her comments reflect her frustration of providing all of the instructional design leadership.

> I have spent quite a few years exploring and implementing instructional design, creative instructional design. I have kept up with the research, didn't realize until this last summer, for a number of reasons, and I don't mean to be arrogant, but there are so many things that I do that I just assume everybody does or that everybody has the knowledge base, and it is not so. So, you know, where am I at in the room with the kids in terms of research and instructional design, I think I am pretty far. I am not the type of teacher that sticks to, because I have it down in my lesson plans I have to do it. I think there are teachable moments where we tend to pass it up because we blow it off, because we have that schedule.

Finding teachers with successful teaching traits was important to the principal when deciding on the staff for this At-Risk Program. The principal believed he was hiring teachers with different characteristics that would compliment each other when working on a team. I asked the three teachers what characteristics they believe strong teachers of at-risk youth possessed. Samantha told me in August that a successful teacher of at-risk youth is a person who is "multi-tasked."

> One who can address the kids' personal needs besides the academic needs. The ability to adjust to them and their needs versus what I think "the" curriculum should be. It is not that you are bending the curriculum, it is that you approach it in a different way. So I guess it is that notion of flexibility and addressing all their needs, addressing different kinds of learners and different kinds of modalities of learning.

In May Samantha's answer expressed her frustration with the lack of a consistent

discipline philosophy by the teaching team. Her responses reflected that frustration.

> It depends on what you buy into, what your idea of a successful teacher is.
> Is a successful teacher one who is very popular? Is a successful teacher
> one who moves the student from point A to B? To me that's one who
> helps the student grow. And sometimes pulling them towards growth
> rather than cheering them on. Setting up standards and asking them to rise
> to the situation—and they can. It's just a matter of how high [of standard]
> you are going to hold. It's the notion of, and we know that through
> others' research, that the expectations of a teacher breaks or makes a kid.
> And I think consistently with these kinds of kids there has been low
> expectations and they don't produce.

Jerry and Bonnie maintained their positions that flexibility is the key to working with at-

risk youth. Bonnie responded in May,

> First of all, I would say someone who is very flexible and very open to the
> different situations that each kid is bringing every day to the classroom.
> Being able to bend and accept some of the students' excuses and yet know
> which ones are not actually real ones. Having a good sense of the
> curriculum so that there is not a lot of planning to wear you out so that
> when they come up during your planning period, you can drop the
> curriculum and work with the kids.

Jerry responded with a similar answer but elaborated with a specific instance in which he

demonstrated sensitivity and flexibility to a student.

> Wear many, many, many hats. In many cases, sometimes for a boy you
> may be the only, as a teacher, and this happens with all teachers, you may
> be the only decent male figure they see. So how do you deal with that at
> the same time you are their teacher, you are making demands on them, you
> are asking them to meet certain goals and objectives that they have to come
> to, so you have those things to deal with and for boys or for girls it may be
> the same situation. Where they may have been, and we have had this, the
> girls have had it pretty tough with the males in their lives, and all of a
> sudden now here you are, a male, and you have to be this model, and they
> may be watching. So you have that hat to wear. Sometimes you are a
> counselor. Sometimes you've got to really, really be somewhat intuitive

and sensitive to the kid and try to understand where they are coming from. Basically you have to learn every kid, every one of those kids is different and if one of them is having a bad day, you may know that at home. I had one last night, I think Dad walked out last night. And I happen to see them walk out of a restaurant I was in. And then I saw the girl today and she just flat said, 'Oh, yeah, he walked out.' Matter-of factly. Now what do you do? It's rough.

In addition to showing sensitivity and being flexible, Jerry also believes a teacher makes the difference in how students do in school.

The teacher is probably one of the biggest influences on how a kid is going to do in school. There are those kids that, in spite of you, no matter who you are, who they are, personality differences, they are going to succeed, those upper level kids. When they take a look at those middle of the road kids and those below average kids, there is nothing that cam mess them up worse than a teacher who is bad for kids and there is nothing that can pick them up more than a teacher who is good for kids.

Additional Information

In addition to the eight qualitative research questions, additional information emerged from the data. The goals of the teachers changed from August to May. The teachers expressed their thoughts regarding the year and also expressed recommendations for the program.

Teachers' Goals

Providing career direction to the at-risk students was an initial goal of the program. One of the five classes in which the students enrolled was called Career Elective. The teachers had hoped to assist the students in creating an individual plan for their future careers. This was not accomplished during the initial year of the program, but portfolio software was purchased for the implementation of this goal in the program's second year. For the 1999-2000 school year, the principal of the school has assigned a

non-At-Risk Program teacher to create job-shadowing experiences for the At-Risk

Program students. The team of teachers have prioritized the career provision goal for the

at-risk students during the second year of implementation.

The teachers' individual goals changed from August to May. Samantha's

professional goals in August were to create an instructional program. In May, Samantha

desired a formal leadership position other than being the lead teacher for the At-Risk

Program. (Samantha resigned her position in the school district after the first year of

implementation.) Bonnie had initially reported that she wanted to work with at-risk kids

and become a better teacher. In the follow-up interview, she was hoping to expand the

At-Risk Program so that more students in the entire district could attend. In August, Jerry

aspired to be "good at what he did;" in May, he emphasized retirement.

Teachers' Thoughts of Implementation Year

The teachers all reported in May that they were tired. I asked them how they felt

as they ended their first year in this At-Risk Program. Jerry responded:

> Spent! It's been a long, tough, tough, year, you know. You've been
> teaching 20 years and get into something new, you know it's going to be
> tough, but the demands on time and the demands on your emotions, your
> energy. You know they are a high maintenance group of kids. There is
> just nothing else you can say about that. And quite truthfully, if you don't
> have the experience under your belt, a year like this would have eaten some
> teachers up. They'd have been done. So, it's been tough, but it's been
> good. We've got our kids that really make it worth while.

Bonnie also reported being tired:

> Completely worn out, brain-dead. Kind of frustrated that we didn't have
> the success we expected. Frustrated that some of the kids are really
> capable and want to do it but because of situations they are unable to, still
> looking very positive to next year and anxious to start planning for that,
> and get it under control.

Samantha responded:

> How do I feel? Well, I feel fine. One thing that I predicted at the very
> beginning and this is so true. I knew there would be changes that weren't
> measurable; that were more attributes of affective kind of changes. And I
> knew that may or may not hold up for the district when they look at its
> success. And I knew that there would be internal changes that would
> happen, and have happened. But I can't show them to you on paper.

Samantha alluded to her disappointment of district support. Samantha was tired of trying

to prove to the district that this program was needed so that the district would start

funding the program once the Nebraska Lottery Grant was completed.

> I feel like we have to sell this idea to the district. And I find that totally
> ludicrous within our district. This is reality. We have [at-risk] kids here.
> I'm sure there are some [at-risk kids] of them in other buildings. And I'm
> very idealistic. That's my biggest problem--one of them. And I understand
> that. But to have to sit there and convince the leaders within our district
> that there is a need for this [At-Risk Program]. I think that makes a heck
> of a statement.

Jerry was disappointed in a parent's response to Jerry's unsuccessful efforts with

her son. The student asked to be removed from the program at the end of the first year.

Jerry felt that he had provided an inordinate amount of time and energy with a male

student. The mother had begged Jerry for his assistance first semester and praised his

efforts. The team of teachers felt they had gone an extra step for this student and the

parent and student did not appreciate their efforts. Jerry responded to my question of

whether he had gone out on a limb for any student and how the student responded.

> He cut it off. I'm thinking anyone else we've tried for, if they didn't make
> it the parents still understood and was on our side. We were dealing with
> Mom and for the first semester we were great, and all of a sudden we were
> dog meat. That's a little tough to take. I can understand she is trying to
> save her kid, but I got a feeling I've been played like a cheap fiddle and it
> doesn't sit very well.

<u>Teacher Recommendations</u>

All three teachers expressed the desire for a better facility for the At-Risk

Program. Although the At-Risk Program's classroom setting was newly carpeted, had

new furniture and fifteen new computers, the room was too small for the active learning

experiences that needed to take place. The students would often be split into three groups

with a temporary wall splitting the room in half and one third of the students moving to a

room across the building. The current remodeling of the school will allow for the At-Risk

Program to grow and have the room developed to compliment the instructional strategies

needed to teach hands-on, active learning. Jerry elaborated on this idea.

> I'd like to have our own rooms, so I don't have to run downstairs when we
> do need to divide up. Have the rooms connected and I know that is going
> to happen when the remodeling is finished.

Although Samantha resigned from her teaching position in April, she worried

about the team sticking to the original vision of the At-Risk Program. Samantha had been

irritated all year that her vision was not being carried out, and she felt the students were

not engaged in the best program possible. Providing greater variety in instructional

strategies was a recommendation from lead teacher, Samantha. All of the students liked

the different instructional strategies that the At-Risk Program teachers included, however

many students felt that much more could have been done. Samantha was upset with the

limited extent that integrated curriculum units were implemented during the 1998-99

school year. Two units were included in the year's curriculum. Samantha envisioned the

program base to be integrated curriculum units, hands-on technology based learning, and

career exploration. Samantha was disappointed that the teaching team continued to rely upon the traditional modes of lecture format. I asked Samantha for her recommendations for program improvement:

> Embrace our vision more with integrated curriculum. And just pretty much do what we said we were going to do. Implement it. And not have to convince people within the program to do it.

Students also expressed this opinion. In our May interviews, students overwhelmingly indicated that their favorite class activities were the two integrated curriculum units, the field trips, group work, and the computer based activities. Least favorite activities were sitting and reading, researching, and listening to the teachers' lectures. Samantha offered her opinion of what is needed to make the At-Risk Program succeed in continuing years. Samantha had resigned and she worried that the resignation would contribute to the erosion of vision of the program.

> This particular program will fly if we keep our vision and I am real concerned about that. I think I've shared that with you informally, is that what makes this program unique and what really gives it a purpose, that's why we're here in the building is to teach the kids, but what's going to make or break this program to make the uniqueness and not just a hooding tank and that is the integrated curriculum. And in that, technology based, because that is where these kids are coming from. That's the type of learners that they are. And if we forget that, or if we don't pay as much attention to it, if it isn't as important to us as it should be, I think, we'll have a mediocre program. So, somebody needs to carry the torch.

Jerry and Bonnie recommended to administration that a new lead teacher be found as soon as possible so that person could provide leadership during the summer curriculum writing. Jerry and Bonnie felt somewhat betrayed by Samantha's resignation since she was the original leader of this program. They both agonized about the future of the

program without Samantha on board. Jerry expressed his concern about Samantha's

departure in the following responses about bad things that happened this year:

> Bad things. That is a tough question. It will take a moment. Our lead
> teacher left and didn't tell us why or where, or what for. That sort of
> leaves you swinging in the wind a little bit as to exactly what you are going
> to do. I would've liked to have an intact team of teachers for two years.
> I'm a little worried about that.

Jerry also recommended that the administration find a replacement teacher who is

confident in his/her teaching ability. Jerry shared his opinion of what it takes to work with

at-risk youth.

> I think you have to realize that anyone who is going to put themselves in a
> situation where they are going to be working exclusively with at-risk
> people, have to be extremely confident in their own teaching, their own
> abilities and in their personality. You've got to be tough because things are
> going to be said to you, things are going to happen in your class that you
> can't take personal. There are a lot of teachers who would take something
> personally and a lot of it has nothing to do with you. It can be something
> totally outside some place that makes this kid or group of kids behave the
> way they do that day, and you are just not going to get your job done that
> day within that class or framework or whatever you are doing. You have
> to be, it sounds really bad, but you have to be a hard person inside., And at
> the same time you have to be soft. And that is a real, real, tough mix., So
> it has to be an experienced individual. You've got to be able to take it. I
> mean, a kid calls you a son of a bitch to your face, it may not be personal at
> all. Something happened at home and the kids blew off the handle. If a kid
> blows of the handle and says, "Fuck you," and I come right back. Now
> your first reaction is to fight back, and lot of people will. You've just
> escalated something that is just "bang." And you may have found out that
> last night the kid's dad whipped him. You've got to be able to say, "Whoa,
> are you doing all right? You've never talked to me like that before." It
> will come out. But a lot of people immediately would take offense to that
> and attack back and then you have a situation that just blew. That can
> happen. That can happen real easily.

Summary

   The data collected in this case study were intended to provide insight to the eight

qualitative research questions:

1. How did the intervention program affect the at-risk students' sense of belonging to

    the school community?

2. How did the intervention program affect the at-risk students' perceptions of self?

3. How did the intervention program affect the at-risk students' values of school?.

4. How did the intervention program affect the at-risk students' future goals?

5. How did the intervention program affect the parents of at-risk students' involvement

    with school?

6. How did the intervention program affect the parents' perceptions of their at-risk

    students?

7. How did the intervention program affect the perceptions of school for parents of at-

    risk students?

8. How did the intervention program affect the teachers' perceptions of at-risk youth?

   Additional information also emerged in addition to the eight qualitative research

questions (teachers' goals, teachers' thoughts of implementation year, teacher

recommendations.) The data collected regarding teacher goals and teacher

recommendations provide the reader with additional insight.

   The primary intent of this At-Risk Program was to assist these at-risk 9th & 10th

graders in graduating from high school. All of the eight students in this sample had failed

two or more classes. Five of the eight students failed 50% or more of their classes during their ninth grade year prior to being participants in the At-Risk Program.

The attendance rate and behavior referrals for these students did not improve while they were in the At-Risk Program. Martin was the only student who had better attendance during his year as a participant of the At-Risk Program. Art and Mickey were the only two students to have earned less behavior referrals as participants in the At-Risk Program. Five of the eight students improved their percentage of classes passed while participants in the At-Risk Program. Three of those five students made tremendous progress.

Chapter 5

RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUMMARY

Recommendations

Poor school performance results in failure and subsequent dropping out of high

school. The causes and costs for having at-risk students at school is a no-win situation for

the students, the school, or society. This At-Risk Program was implemented in this

suburban school district for 9th and 10th graders who were displaying behaviors that are

most commonly linked to high school dropouts. These at-risk students were failing

classes, not attending classes, and earning discipline referrals resulting in Thursday /

Saturday School and suspensions. The eight at-risk students who volunteered to be a part

of the study had a variety of at-risk characteristics. As described earlier in this

dissertation, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction's definition of "at-risk" is

one of the most comprehensive; it lists 14 factors that place students in serious jeopardy of

dropping out, including the following:

> being one or more years behind their grade level in reading or math (in
> grades K-8) or three or more credits behind their age/grade level in credits
> earned toward graduation (in grades 9-12); being chronically truant; being
> a school-age parent; having a history of personal and/or family drug and
> alcohol abuse; having parents who have low expectations for their child's
> success or who place little value on education; being a victim of physical,
> sexual, or emotional abuse; experiencing a family trauma (such as death or
> divorce); being economically, culturally, or educationally disadvantaged;
> and coming from a family with a history of dropouts. Additional risk
> factors include low intelligence test scores, low self-concept and social
> maturity, feelings of alienation, and certain types of handicaps and limiting
> conditions. (Naylor, 1989, p. 1)

The eight students who volunteered to be a part of this study possessed at least

three of the above at-risk characteristics. Academic success eluded students during their

10th grade year in the At-Risk Program. Only five of the students improved the percentage of classes passed from the previous academic year. Nevertheless, three of those five students made tremendous progress. Julie passed 93% of her classes, and Martin and Mickey each passed 100% of their classes. Although Sheila only passed 46% of her classes, she felt strongly about the positive changes the teachers in the At-Risk Program instilled in her. At the beginning of the school year, Sheila had requested that she not stay in the At-Risk Program. By the end of the year, even though her grades had not significantly improved, Sheila advocated for the At-Risk Program.

> It helped me raise my grades, and it helped me a lot because I can hand stuff in late. And if it wasn't like that, I would have been failing. It's a good program. If anybody is recommended for it, I don't think they should get out of it, because it helps.

The students who did not make significant improvements in their academic standing during their year in the At-Risk Program did take responsibility for their failing. Star described what she could have done to make the year more successful for her.

> Listen. Pay attention. Come to school. Not give everybody such a hard time. I was a devil child. The whole thing, yeah, I guess I should've just stayed and stuck it out. I didn't. So...

The attendance rate and behavior referrals for these students did not improve while they were in the At-Risk Program. Martin was the only student who had better attendance during his year as a participant of the At-Risk Program. Art and Mickey were the only two students to have earned fewer behavior referrals as participants in the At-Risk Program. The other six students earned more behavior referrals as participants in the At-Risk Program.

The researcher was troubled by some of the comments made by Keith's mom,

Traci. Traci placed most of Keith's lack of success in his 10th grade year on the shoulders'

of the At-Risk Program teachers. Traci believed that Keith's problems were due to his

involvement in the program and the other at-risk students placed in the program. As

unfortunate as Keith's poor decisions were, they were his decisions. The researcher, in

her role as assistant principal at the school under study, was not aware of any other At-

Risk Program student's involvement with gangs or involvement in Keith's crime that led

him to his arrest. The young girl who Keith became a parent with was not a student of the

At-Risk Program. Keith and Traci admitted that Keith had not been a successful student

prior to his placement in the At-Risk Program. It is the researcher's opinion that the small

student-to-teacher ratio, the increased parental communication, and the community that

the At-Risk Program teachers instilled was to Keith's advantage and not to his detriment.

The initial year of the program came to a close without a replacement for the lead

teacher. The second year of the program will open with additional personnel. A first-year

social studies teacher, who had completed his student teaching in an at-risk program,

replaced Samantha. The At-Risk Program staff continued to grow during the summer of

1999. Additional grant monies were awarded and in July of 1999, a veteran English

teacher with administrative aspirations was hired to provide leadership to the program.

The high school reading coordinator was also assigned to work with the At-Risk Program

during the 1999-2000 school year to help the team of teachers. The reading coordinator

was instructed to integrate reading strategies into the curriculum and help implement the

new social skills curriculum. Chalker (1996) supports providing students with individual

and group academic and social counseling. The counselor already assigned to the program was now directed to have more of an active role in implementing counseling curriculum in the 1999-2000 school year. The counseling curriculum would be designed to target the personal needs that many of these at-risk students possess.

Levine (1992) advised school personnel implementing a school-within-a-school program, to address the problems that arise in the first years of implementation. The administration analyzed the progress and success of the At-Risk Program during its first year of implementation and made changes. Examination of the original vision of the At-Risk Program became the goal of the administration. Implementing a more structured discipline model became the driving goal for the second year of implementation. Funds were allocated to summer projects targeted at the inconsistent discipline philosophy of the team and the lack of integrated curriculum units. In June 1999, a group of six non-At-Risk Program teachers were hired to write four 6-8 week integrated curriculum units with emphasis on technology and active learning. In July 1999, a three day discipline workshop was tailored to meet the needs of the At-Risk Program so there would be a discipline philosophy and plan consistently followed by all the teachers. In addition to the four At-Risk Program teachers attending the July discipline workshop, the counselor for the program, the reading coordinator for the building and an assistant principal also attended.

In June 1999 the district accepted the At-Risk Program as a pilot program. This signal of support allowed the district to contribute financial aid to the At-Risk Program. Another signal of support from the district became evident in the fall of 1999. The District Strategic Planning Committee focused on one of the district's strategies. We will

develop and implement plans in partnership with our community to assist students who are at risk of not achieving identified learner outcomes (See Appendix K). The At-Risk Program's Lottery Grant funding ends with the completion of the 1999-2000 school year. For the At-Risk Program to survive, the district must provide funding. The District Strategic Planning Committee met on November 29, 1999 to review all reports from the action plan committees. Recommendations from this committee will go to the Board of Education. During the budget process in the spring of 2000, the Board of Education will decide if district funds will support the continuation of the At-Risk Program.

The researcher served as the primary research instrument in this study by conducting 32 pre/post interviews, and served as one of the assistant principals at this suburban high school. Although not documented in the case study, daily observations were noted by the researcher of the successes and struggles of the At-Risk Program. The consistent support of the principal of the high school was apparent. The principal was one of the original writers of the Nebraska Lottery Grant and had spent numerous days working with the lead teacher, Samantha, in creating this At-Risk Program. Even though the vision of the program was not met completely during the first year of implementation, all of the staff members involved in the At-Risk Program appeared to have the best intentions for students. After conducting this study, and reviewing the literature outlined in Chapter 2, the researcher has four recommendations for this program: (a) develop a more structured discipline philosophy through staff development, (b) return to the original vision for the curriculum and instruction, (c) provide resources for continued improvement, and (d) increase parental involvement.

Implement Effective Discipline Philosophy

One explanation for limited success in the initial year of the program was related to classroom management. Chalker (1996) posits effective classroom management as the most critical ingredient in effective classroom management. "Effective classroom management dynamics with respect to teacher and group behavior is facilitated by consistency in classroom management" (p. 76). Although the team was comprised of veteran teachers with over sixty years of experience, they had limited success in team teaching and were inconsistent in enforcing classroom management rules. There was limited structure to providing good classroom management. The teachers reverted the instruction to lecture format to three small groups of students because the unruly student behavior was not conducive to always implement unique instructional strategies that allowed the students to be active learners. The teachers were better able to control a small class of 15 students by themselves rather than team-teach the class of 45. The administration at the high school also saw this as an obstacle and provided resources for a 1999 summer discipline workshop to customize a plan that will work for all the teachers in the At-Risk Program. Implementing a structured social skills program into the At-Risk Program was the focus of the discipline workshop. Administrators hoped that the resolution of classroom management issues would foster and support the use of unique instructional strategies, and the active learning projects would inspire the students to stay engaged.

Return to Vision for the Curriculum and Instruction

Johnson (1992) and Chalker (1996) endorsed the instructional use of technology as having a positive effect on at-risk students' learning. Johnson acknowledged that the incorporation of this technology into teaching formats aids students. The technology-based curriculum envisioned for the At-Risk Program was to be focused on English, math, social studies, science and career development encompassed in integrated curriculum units. The students were to be actively engaged through unique instructional strategies. Chalker (1996) advocates cooperative learning for at-risk learners. Several Omaha Metropolitan area alternative educational programs described in chapter two implement individualized educational experiences. "Students who are usually behind in class, find it much less threatening to take instruction from other students than from teachers" (p. 86). Data from student and teacher interviews demonstrated that classroom management issues were so great that the teachers were too tired by the end of the day to plan for integrated curriculum units. Teachers surviving each day became the norm and the curriculum and instruction fell short of the vision. The original vision had been to provide several integrated curriculum units with a strong emphasis placed on technology based instruction. Students had been promised that this program would provide different modes of instruction than with which they were accustomed, but the teachers fell short of fulfilling this promise. Two integrated curriculum units were taught, a few computerized programs were implemented, and two field trips were taken. During the post interviews, the students chose these active learning experiences as their favorite activities during the year.

Career exploration had also been a major vision for the At-Risk Program. Chalker (1996) also finds great merit in career exploration.

Workplace readiness is one variable in the push for effective school-to-work transition of alternative education students. Preparing for the world of work after school completion is an important goal for any successful school-to-work transition program. Alternative education programs need to make school-to-work transition a top priority in their efforts to serve students in more productive ways than afforded by regular schools. (p. 97).

Provide Resources for Continued Improvement

Rossi and Stringfield (1997) outlined four major resources needed to make significant reform.

Monetary Resources. Both internal (e.g., local budgets) and external (e.g., foundation grants, state funds).

People/Personnel Resources. In virtually every site studied, the building principal charged with general oversight of the schools was a "believer"; that is, he or she was willing to lend support or to take credit for the program's success because he or she believed it had improved the teaching-learning situation in some way. In addition . . . students benefited directly and importantly by staff persons trained in the particular school-program approach. Other people/personnel resources that proved effective in implementing reform efforts included paid classroom aides, parent/adult volunteers, community volunteers, extra staff time, reform-tested advisors, and new teacher pipelines (professional networks to colleges or universities).

Material Resources. [Schools]. . . provided the required reform-related instructional materials (books, supplementary reading materials, manipulables) in addition to the typical array of general instructional materials.

Political resources. Affiliation with a college or university afforded some . . . sites with additional monetary resources and considerable credibility. In addition, private-sector affiliations with local companies and firms provided schools with a degree of insulation from district-level policies, procedures, and requirements (pp. 8-9).

The researcher agrees with these recommendations. Finite grant dollars funded the At-Risk Program. The fourth teacher, who was added during the

second semester by additional grant monies, proved to be very valuable. Due to

the need for a small student-to-teacher ratio, this program may need to be

implemented with at least four teachers. One lead teacher needs to be able to

spend time with curriculum development, registration efforts, establishing

community relationships for possible student internships, and helping with the

classroom management issues. For the 1999-2000 school year, this fourth teacher

was afforded once again by grant monies.

During the 1997-1998 school year, Samantha had been given a year off from her

teaching duties to help the principal create this program. The district benefited from

Samantha's innovative ideas and lost a valuable educator when she resigned in the spring

of 1999. Samantha strongly believed that the leaders of this very large school district do

not see the need for alternative education.

> I feel like we have to sell this idea to the district. And I find that totally
> ludicrous within our district. This is reality. We have kids here. I'm sure
> there are some of them in other buildings. And I'm very idealistic. That's
> my biggest problem—one of them. And I understand that. But to have to
> sit there and convince the leaders within our district that there is a need for
> this. I think that makes a heck of a statement.

Funds are very limited in education and, although dropouts have an impact on society,

educational programs for at-risk students generally do not get the monetary resources

needed to successfully implement the programs. Nearly half of the heads of households

supported from the federal welfare program are dropouts (Coley, 1995). Monetary

resources must be provided and the program should not have to rely so heavily upon soft

money from grants.

Although Sanders (1994) believes education programs should be evaluated so improvements can be made, when evaluating a program, not everything can be measured. Samantha had high hopes in her pre-interview that success may be attributed to this program even though the degree of success cannot be measured.

> I also think there is that affect part of it that we won't be able to measure, but I think the kids will feel much better because of all of the—because of the focus and the approach. It is not so much that we have three teachers loving them, I think it is the delivery system too.

Increased Parental Involvement

Strong parental involvement increases a student's academic success (Rossi & Stringfield, 1997). One goal of the program was to actively involve parents. Teachers made 150 phone calls, sent progress reports home every two weeks, and held parent teacher conferences. This parent communication is to be commended. the researcher does, however, recommend that the teachers become even more proactive in finding strategies that will involve parents. Teachers should offer continuous opportunities for the parents to have an active role in the classroom, for example, as a guest speaker or an instructional aide. Providing more structured opportunities for parents to volunteer is likely to increase parental involvement.

Opportunities for Further Study

Rossi and Stringfield (1997) contend that by 2020, the majority of America's public school students will be at risk of educational failure. Alternative education programs are a viable answer, but the various components and structures must be evaluated. This particular case evaluated the first year of implementation of an innovative

program in a suburban high school. Substantive changes have been planned for the program's second year. For further study, follow up on the eight students with observation of their last two years of high school would prove educational. Will Keith leave the gang and drugs and earn his GED and raise his baby? Will Mickey return to high school after the birth of her baby? Will Nadine return home and stay off drugs and away from the wrong crowd in order to stay in school? Each of the eight students has the potential of earning a high school diploma and becoming a productive citizen.

Following students throughout all four years of high school would provide interesting data. A researcher could also conduct a quantitative study with a control and treatment group of students in the At-Risk Program and compare them to a group or comparable students outside of the At-Risk Program.

Summary

A case study was the chosen type of design used for the qualitative part of the study. "The case study, used alone or as part of large-scale quantitative study, is the method of choice for studying intervention or innovations" (Lancy, 1993, p. 140). The overall purpose of the study was to evaluate the effects of an educational intervention program on students, parents, and teachers of the program through both qualitative and quantitative research approach. For the qualitative evaluation, eight themes addressed in the grant proposal for the intervention program were explored: students' sense of belonging (community), students' perceptions of self, students' values of school, students' future goals, parent involvement, parents' perceptions of student, parents' perceptions of school, and teachers' perceptions of at-risk youth.

The researcher also examined descriptive demographic district data of failure rate, attendance, and discipline referrals of the eight at-risk high school students. Data were extracted from the district's comprehensive database to determine if a difference existed in the failure rate, attendance, and discipline of these students between their year as participants of the At-Risk Program and their previous year as nonparticipants.

> The real business of case study is particularization, not generalization. We take a particular case and come to know it well, not primarily as to how it is different from others but what it is, what it does. There is emphasis on uniqueness, and that implies knowledge of others that the case is different from, but the first emphasis is on understanding the case itself (Stake, 1995, p. 8).

The results of this case study adds to the body of knowledge about the effect of decreasing drop-out rates among today's high school students and alternative educational programs.

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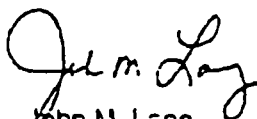
APPENDIX A

Sarpy County Educational Program

SARPY COUNTY EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

The enclosed information has been developed to serve as a guideline that will govern the operation of the Sarpy County Educational Program.

These guidelines have been developed by an advisory committee consisting of representatives from each of the Sarpy County school districts that will be involved in the program. Input was also received from Sarpy County law enforcement.

The purpose of the Sarpy County Educational Program is to provide an alternative placement for students who have been suspended for serious and dangerous behaviors. This program will allow students to continue coursework towards graduation during the period of exclusion from the traditional educational setting. The Sarpy County Educational Program will also provide instruction in life and social skills that are necessary in order to change negative attitudes and behaviors.

John M. Lang
Program Director

SARPY COUNTY EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM
October, 1999

STAFF/CURRICULUM

The staff consists of one certified teacher, one instructional aide, and the availability of one corrections/police officer. Support staff from the CARE facility will also be available on an "as needed" basis

For special education students, each participating school district has designated a team to aid in the student's education. This team consists of a special education consultant, school psychologist, and an administrator. There are also available, through each district, a variety of services such as hearing-impaired therapists, computer specialists, media services, and so forth.

Each student is placed at their instructional level in the PLATO system. Counselors from the student's home school will aid in establishing the subjects to be covered. Special education students each have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) established by the home district's staffing team. The responsibility for coordinating this plan within the PLATO system lies with the alternative school teacher working consultatively with the home school's special education teacher/case manager.

The course offerings through the PLATO computerized curriculum are designed to provide each student with the necessary basic credits for progressing towards graduation from high school in the state of Nebraska. This allows for transition from this setting to another alternative site or back to the home school. Students are also expected to progress through a social skills program through PLATO.

SOCIAL SKILLS

Each student will be required to complete course work that will teach such life skills as: being polite, use of appropriate responses, resolution of conflict or disagreement without physical action, how to apologize, etc.

These skills and many other life skills can be taught as part of the PLATO computer program. Students will have to complete work in this area before credit can be given allowing them to transfer back to another school setting.

PEER MEDIATION/PEER COUNSELING

Students will be taught the basic concept of a "positive peer culture" and being responsible for creating a positive learning environment. However, due to the probable rapid turnover of students through the school, the necessary time to establish a consistent peer group, instruct them in the process of peer mediation and/or peer counseling, and allow the system to function would not be available.

RULES AND REGULATIONS

A student handbook will be developed to explain the general and specific rules and regulations that must be followed by each attending student. Some of the classroom management rules will be:

No talking between students allowed without permission.
Students must be respectful and considerate when addressing staff (no sir, yes sir, etc.).
Students must raise their hand to seek permission to speak or leave their seat.
Students must wear the school uniform.

Other specific rules would be:

No pagers, cell phones, or other electronic devices
No possession of drugs, alcohol, tobacco, weapons, or contraband.
No abusive or profane language
No destruction of property (students to pay for damages).
No physical confrontations.
No discussions among peers relating to drugs, sex, or gang activities.
No use of hand signs.

DISCIPLINE

Students can be held after normal school hours for inappropriate behavior or being late to school. If a student commits a minor rule violation or is disrespectful to a staff member or peers, he/she will be given a standing time out. The student will be required to explain what they did wrong and what they will do differently next time. Apologies will be required prior to the student being returned to good standing in the classroom.

If behavior becomes unmanageable or the student refuses to cooperate, they will be returned to the detention center, home, or the CARE facility. They will not be re-admitted until a conference can be held with the student and the administrator. Probation officers, CARE staff, parents, etc. may also be included in this process.

A referral back to CARE or to Juvenile Court Officers is used for severe behavioral infractions or when all attempts to help the student remain in the alternative school setting have failed. A referral may result from:

Physical/sexual confrontation toward others while under school supervision.
Possession and/or use of drugs, alcohol, weapons, contraband.
Destruction of property.
Being under the influence of drugs/alcohol.
Theft from staff, student, agency property/school property.
Unauthorized departure from the alternative school setting.
Non-compliance with school rules/expectations.

Students may be expelled from the Sarpy County Education Program for violations of rules, or for violation of state law. If a student is expelled from this program, he or she will be referred back to the juvenile court, and possibly be placed in secure detention.

REFERRALS

Entrance referrals to this program will come from the participating school districts. A team consisting of the home school principal, the Sarpy County School administrator and a representative from the CARE Program and/or probation will determine admittance to the program based on entrance criteria and availability of space.

Exit students will be able to exit the program by:

> Completion of course work for graduation or GED.
> Becoming eligible to return to their home school.
> Termination for disciplinary reasons in accordance with Nebraska state law.

Transition - An integral part of the program is the coordination of progress and reintegration of the student with the sending school. The staff will coordinate transfer of credit, facilitate re-integration, and provide follow-up information and support. A team consisting of at least three people will determine if a student is ready to leave the program and return to the home school, or another alternative program. Team members would include the Sarpy County School administrator, the home school administrator, the home school counselor, and SPED personnel when necessary.

COUNSELING

Each student s home school counselor will be asked to make weekly visits to the Sarpy County Educational Program to discuss various issues, behaviors, and personal problems.

Counselors will be asked to spend approximately one hour per week visiting with their student, in a private setting.

ATTENDANCE

Attendance every day is mandatory. Students will be excused for illness or court hearings. When a student is reported as ill, a representative from the CARE Program will make a home visit during the day to verify the illness. If a student is ill, he/she will be required to be at home or at the doctor. The school administrator will have the final decision on excusing absences. Unexcused absences will be handled as follows:

> 1st unexcused absence - requires parent conference before re-admitted.
> 2nd unexcused absence - requires parent conference before re-admitted.
> 3rd unexcused absence - student is terminated from program.

The Sarpy County Educational Program will follow the Bellevue Public Schools calendar If the Bellevue Public Schools are not in session due to inclement weather, the Sarpy County Education Program will not be in session.

TRANSPORTATION

Each student, or their parents, will be responsible for transportation to and from the school.

Individual school districts may provide transportation, but will not be obligated to do so.

SAFE ENVIRONMENT

Students coming from home will be searched by a deputy or CARE personnel prior to the start of school.

A law enforcement officer will be available to ensure the safety of staff and students.

LUNCH

Student lunches will be provided by Sarpy County Law Enforcement.

APPENDIX B

Millard Public Schools Board Report on
The Millard Learning Center

AGENDA SUMMARY SHEET

AGENDA ITEM: Millard Learning Center

MEETING DATE: April 26, 1999

DEPARTMENT: Special Education

TITLE AND BRIEF DESCRIPTION: Millard Learning Center Program Overview

ACTION DESIRED: INFORMATION ONLY   X

BACKGROUND: The Millard Learning Center (MLC) is an alternative school program for students who are not successful in traditional school settings. The MLC program has been in operation for a number of years allowing many students to graduate from the Millard Public schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS: None

STRATEGIC PLAN REFERENCE: Strategy 3, Plan 7, and Strategy 5, Plan 7

TIMELINE: N/A

RESPONSIBLE PERSON(S):   Ted Esser and Angela Bahnsen

ASSOCIATE SUPERINTENDENT APPROVAL: _Jonas H. Krwal_
                                    (Signature)

BOARD ACTION:

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Millard Learning Center
Program Overview

Mission Statement

The mission of the Millard Learning Center, an innovative, alternative, educational setting, is to ensure that all students learn the skills, acquire the knowledge, and develop the attitudes necessary for graduation and successful adulthood. This is accomplished through:

- A staff dedicated to maximizing opportunities for student growth
- Effective teaching approaches
- Individualization of student learning
- Utilization of educational and community resources

Purpose

The Learning Center is designed to help prepare students to become successful members of their communities and to guide students to complete district requirements for graduation.

Goals

The Learning Center has several goals:

Increase the likelihood of school completion

Individually designed programs are based on the needs of the student. Materials presented by the teachers are on a standard basis with lecture, discussion and activities presented on each topic. Topics are attempted to be life-skill oriented and many are vocationally based.

Teach alternatives to inappropriate behavior

Alternatives are taught in an effort to show the student ways to succeed in traditional society. The student is presented with alternative behaviors and learns to take responsibility for his/her choices, thus making motivation internal and the prime responsibility of the individual involved rather than externally forced. The student becomes aware of appropriate behaviors needed to achieve goals.

Increase self-esteem

The student works on an educational curriculum that attempts to fill in the gaps which may have been created by inappropriate behavior. The student thus experiences success, increased self-worth and educational growth. The student learns to deal with a curriculum which is challenging and meaningful.

Improve student/teacher relationship

The student learns to trust his/her teachers and to see them as stable, caring people. Once that trust is established, the student learns to be honest about his/her behaviors knowing that he/she will be treated fairly and honestly in return.

Advise for post-secondary transition

The student is also guided in future decisions such as vocational education, college and job placement. The overall goal of the Learning Center is to provide a caring atmosphere of trust and honesty in order to change behaviors that have not been successful in the past to behaviors that will enable the student to be successful in the future.

Criteria For Placement

Before placement at the Millard Learning Center each student must meet the following criteria:

- Student is currently enrolled in one of Millard's Senior High Schools.
- The student's history demonstrates that he/she cannot function due to behavior, attendance, and/or academic performance in a large school setting.
- IEP Team recommends placement based on student needs and placement alternatives

The following symptomatic behaviors are those most frequently seen in students who have been able to profit from a setting such as the Learning Center:

- Student has demonstrated an inability to maintain interpersonal relationships with peers and/or adults
- Student has demonstrated inappropriate expression of feelings

Page 2

- The student has demonstrated moodiness, severe depression, and social withdrawal
- The student has developed physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems
- The student is making a transition back from a mental health facility/hospital

Program Description

The MLC runs a parallel curriculum with regular high schools. We offer a variety of classes like the other high schools so students earn credit toward their graduation. Students participate in athletic events, proms or any other activities sponsored by their home school.

The MLC is considered a special education program. We are not a separate high school even though we are housed at a different building. The MLC has designated openings for non-verified students. They are allowed to attend the MLC by recommendation from their home school.

There are 75 spaces available for students. There are 40 spaces for students who receive special education, and 35 spaces for non-verified students. There are 8 teachers at the Learning Center, six are special education teachers and two are general education teachers.

School hours are from 8:00-1:17. There are seven, 40 minute periods per day. Students are able to have a shortened day because we do not have a lunch program. There are two breaks built in the schedule for students, and at those times they may purchase snack and drink items from the school store.

Personnel

Eight teachers are assigned to the MLC. Six of the eight teachers are special education teachers and two are regular education teachers. (See section on teacher's responsibilities for assignments).

The MLC currently has one half time para professional. Another full time para professional position is available. We have a full time secretary who is responsible for monitoring daily attendance, record keeping, and other duties as assigned.

The Community Counselor is assigned to the building for 40% of her time. She provides individual counseling and crisis intervention. She also attempts to work

with the families of the students who attend the MLC.

A School Psychologist comes to the building to do testing and evaluation of students.

Teachers' responsibilities

Teachers at the MLC must prepare for a variety of classes. Three teach seven different classes, and four of the teachers teach five to six different classes. Planning for up to seven different classes is very challenging. However, the staff at the MLC is dedicated to offering a variety of classes so that students can complete the requirements for graduation.

The only time for teachers to plan for the number of different classes and to have a lunch break is between 1:17 and 3:45 p.m. This time is also used to work with students who need extra help or who are on an afternoon program.

Advisement is a very important aspect of the MLC program. Each teacher is assigned a group of students that they meet with individually and as a group on a regular basis. Teachers do the scheduling for these students and keep track of credits received towards graduation. As students near graduation, teachers direct and counsel students toward appropriate post-high school plans.

▆▆▆▆▆▆▆▆ is the middle school teacher. The middle school program runs from 12:30 - 2:30 p.m. and serves the most "at risk" middle school students who are unable to function and experience success in their home schools. In the morning, Mr. Harrington teaches two classes to Learning Center students. He also delivers special education services to suspended and expelled students.

The MLC does not have an on site administrator, therefore the department head assumes some of those duties. These duties include:

- discipline of students

- scheduling and testing of re-evaluations/completion of all compliance

paperwork
- run weekly staff meeting-plan staff development
- daily communication with teachers at lunchtime regarding students
- write monthly newsletter to parents
- budgeting building supplies and materials
- multiple daily parent contacts regarding student performance
- pre-staffing/staffing all student placements
- development of individual behavior plans for students
- communication with department heads regarding district materials
- communication with special education coordinator on district level concerns
- serving on district discipline committee
- working with various directors regarding budgeting, ordering materials, remaining up to date with staff development
- creating master schedule for registration
- completion of annual opening and closing of building

The administrator for the MLC is the Coordinator for Secondary Special Education. The administrator is housed at the board office.

Student Demographics

The average student takes 7 classes per semester. Students can earn an average of 70 credits per year. Currently, the MLC has 1 freshman, 3 sophomores, 25 juniors and 38 seniors. Also, 7 middle school students are attending the Learning Center in the afternoon.

Graduation

The MLC has provided students who were not successful in the traditional high school setting an opportunity to graduate from the Millard Public Schools. The students at the MLC are required to meet the same graduate requirements, both in Carnegie Units and ELO assessments, as any other student in the district. The number of students that have graduated from the MLC fluctuate from year to year but average 28 students per year. See Chart 1 for a year to year break down of the number of graduates.

Chart 1

Number of Graduates by Year at MLC
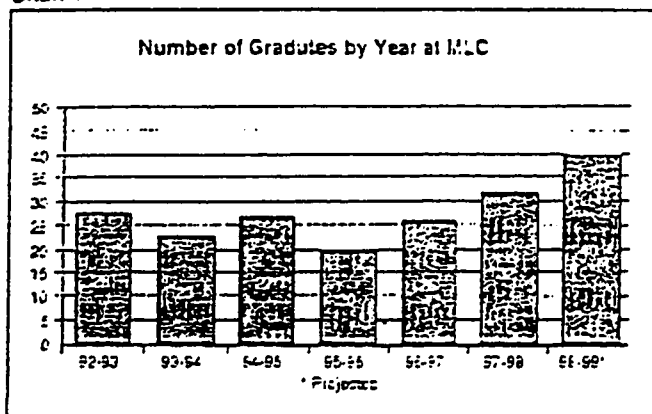
Attendance

Most students at the MLC have a history of significant attendance problems. These attendance problems are related to a number of factors, most out of the control of the school. The MLC has developed several programs to improve student attendance. These programs recognize and reward consistent attendance in school. These programs have improved student attendance although it is not as high as the other high schools in the district. Improving student attendance is an ongoing goal of the MLC. See Chart 2 for a year to year break down of student attendance.

Chart 2

Attendance Rates by Year at MLC
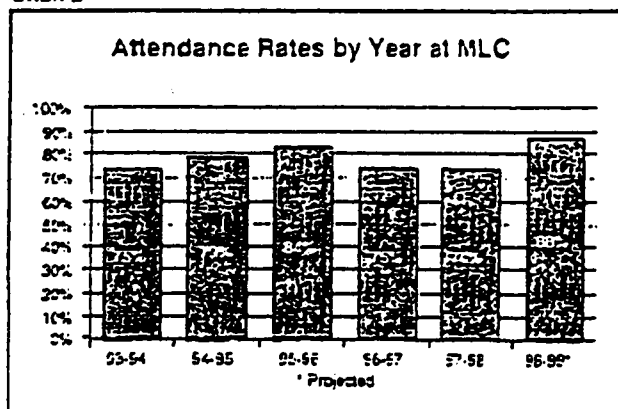
Facility issues/limitations/needs

Page 6

- Building built in 1930 - has many structural challenges. The layout of the building is awkward (offices located on the third floor, not handicap accessible, isolated classrooms)
- Facility layout limits enrollment to 75 students
- Middle school program located at the MLC is inappropriate (12-14 year old students with 18-20 year old students)
- No facilities for a lunch program
- Limited course offerings due to limited classroom space and number of staff
- Teachers are required to teach multiple classes with limited planning time
- Need a full-time counselor with experience with drug/alcohol programs
- Limited access to vocational training and job shadowing opportunities
- No on site administrator to deal with student discipline, personnel issues, and daily management issues

APPENDIX C

Institutional Review Board Consent
Millard Public Schools Consent

University of
Nebraska
Lincoln

July 1, 1998

Ms. Kim Saum
12314 Stonegate Drive. #301
Omaha NE 68164

IRB # 98-06-403 EP

TITLE OF PROJECT: A Qualitative and Quantitative Study of At-Risk Students

Dear Ms. Saum:

This letter is to officially notify you of the approval of your project by the Institutional Review Board for
the Protection of Human Subjects. It is the committee's opinion that you have provided adequate
safeguards for the rights and welfare of the subjects in this study. Your proposal seems to be in
compliance with DHHS Regulations for the Protection of Human Subjects (45 CFR 46).

1.   Enclosed is the IRB approved Informed Consent form for this project. Please use this form when
          making copies to distribute to your participants. If it is necessary to create a new informed
          consent form, please send us your original so that we may approve and stamp it before it is
          distributed to participants.

We wish to remind you that the principal investigator or project director is responsible for keeping this
Board informed of any changes involved with the procedures or methodology in this study. You should
report any unanticipated problems involving risks to the subjects or others to the Board. It is also the
responsibility of the principal investigator to provide the Board with an annual review and update of the
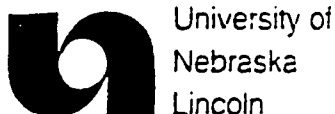research projects each year the project is in effect.

If I can provide you with additional information. please call me.

Sincerely,.

Robert Reid, Chair
for the IRB committee

xc: Dr. Donald Helmuth
        Faculty Advisor
        Unit Review Committee

University of
Nebraska
Lincoln

May 27, 1999

Ms. Kimberley Saum
1008 Bison Circle
Papillion NE   68046

IRB # 98-06-403 EP

TITLE OF PROTOCOL: A Qualitative and Quantitative Study of At-Risk Students

Dear Ms. Saum:

This letter is to officially notify you of the approval of your project's Continuing Review by the
Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects. It is the committee's opinion that
you have provided adequate safeguards for the rights and welfare of the subjects in this study. Your
proposal seems to be in compliance with DHHS Regulations for the Protection of Human Subjects (45
CFR 46).

We wish to remind you that the principal investigator or project director is responsible for keeping this
Board informed of any changes involved with the procedures or methodology in this study. You
should report any unanticipated problems involving risks to the subjects or others to the Board.

It is the responsibility of the principal investigator to provide the Board with a review and update of
the research project each year the project is in effect. This approval is valid until July 1, 2000.
If I can provide you with additional information, please call me.

Sincerely,

Robert Reid, Chair
for the IRB

cc: Faculty Advisor

January 31, 1998

Dr. John Crawford
Assistant to the Superintendent
Don Stroh Administration Center
5606 South 147th Street
Omaha, Nebraska 68137

Dear Dr. Crawford:

I am respectfully submitting my application to conduct research in the Millard Public
Schools. I am a doctoral candidate in the Educational Administration College at the
University of Nebraska at Lincoln.

The research I am conducting will be beneficial to Millard South High School. As the
application explains, I am conducting useful research that will aid in the evaluation of the
At-Risk Program (New Frontier School) being implemented at Millard South High
School. At the December 15th Board of Education meeting, Shari Hoffman updated the
Board on the progress of the At-Risk Program. The only questions regarding her update
were of the evaluation of the program. President, Mike Pate asked Shari Hoffman, How
will we know if we made a difference? I see my research as part of the answer to Mr.
Pate's question.

I will be presenting my proposal to my doctoral committee on February 20, 1998. I need
a letter of approval from Millard Public Schools approving my research so I can apply to
the institutional Review Board (IRB) at UNL

I will anxiously await your response to my proposal.

Sincerely,

Kim Saum
Assistant Principal
Millard South High School

enclosure

June 8, 1998

Dr. John Crawford
Assistant to the Superintendent
Don Stroh Administration Center
5606 South 147th Street
Omaha, Nebraska 68137

Dear Dr. Crawford:

I am respectfully submitting a second application to conduct research in the Millard Public Schools as a doctoral candidate in the Educational Administration College at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln.

After receiving permission to conduct research in February, 1998, I sent my letters out twice and made phone calls to Millard South and Millard North parents. This effort was to no avail. My sample at MNHS was not large enough to follow through with my original research. I also found that the sample of students from Millard North I had originally formed was not comparable to the sample of students from Millard South.

I am not giving up on this subject because I am very interested in finding out if the New Frontier School-Within-A-School program will make a difference to at-risk youth. I also want to conduct research that will be beneficial to Millard South High School. I plan to revise my study a little and use qualitative data to investigate the effectiveness of the New Frontier program. I am aware that qualitative data is not generalizable, but I do look forward to finding rich descriptive data from my interviews.

I plan to interview 12-15 1998-99 New Frontier 10th graders whose parents have already given me permission to access their attendance, grades, and discipline records. I will interview the 3 teachers who will be running the New Frontier program. I will also interview 5-7 parents of the sample population of 12-15 students. I will conduct all interviews at the beginning of the school year and again at the end. I have enclosed the sample copies of the interview questions.

In addition to this qualitative research, I will also conduct quantitative research. I plan to compare the 1997-98 data of the 12-15 student subjects to their 1998-99 data. This comparison of their grades, discipline and attendance will show their data when they were nonparticipants of the New Frontier program and when they were participants of the New Frontier program.

I need a letter of approval from Millard Public Schools approving my research so I can apply to the institutional Review Board (IRB) at UNL. I will anxiously await your response to my proposal.

Sincerely,

Kim Saum
Assistant Principal
Millard South High School

Enclosure

APPENDIX D

Letter of Invitation

July, 1998

Dear Parent or Guardian:

I am an assistant principal from Millard South High School. As part of my research at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, I am conducting a study that examines the effectiveness of the New Frontier Program at Millard South High School.

In addition to the quantitative research that I will conduct utilizing your child's discipline, attendance, and grade reports, I have added a qualitative piece to my research. I plan to interview 12-15, 1998-99 10th grade student subjects.

In order for me to interview your child and/or you, I need your consent. I would appreciate your reading over the enclosed consent form that describes the study. If you agree to allow me to interview your child and/or you, please sign and return the form(s) by July 15, 1998. If you have any questions that are not answered in this letter or the enclosed form(s), please call me at (402) 895-8268.

Although you are free to decide not to participate in this study or withdraw at any time without adversely affecting your relationship with the investigators, UNL, or Millard Public Schools, I encourage you to participate in this important educational issue. This study will contribute to our ability to provide effective alternative education to students in Millard Public Schools and in the state of Nebraska. I will be the principal investigator in this study and will work with my advisor, Dr. Barbara LaCost, Associate Professor at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. This study has been approved by the Millard Public Schools and by Dr. Dick Wollman, principal of MSHS.

Respectfully,

Kim Saum
Assistant Principal

APPENDIX E

Participant Informed Consent
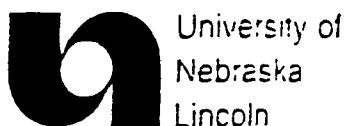
University of
Nebraska
Lincoln

Teacher Informed Consent Form

IRB APP # 98-06-403EP

Identification of the Project
Multi-Case Study of a School-With-in-a-School Program

The purpose of this research study is to determine problems and issues related to at-risk students and to determine the effect of alternative education interventions on the performance of 1998-99 tenth grade Millard South High School students. The researcher will be relying on attendance reports, grade reports, and discipline reports that are a part of Millard Public School District's regularly collected data base in 1997-98 and 1998-99. In addition to this data the researcher will be relying on data gained from interviews with 12-15 1998-99 tenth graders, 3 New Frontier teachers, and 5-7 parents of the 1998-99 tenth graders. Interview will not last more than an hour and will be audiotaped.

You have been selected because you are a teacher of the New Frontier School-With-in-a School Program. I am seeking your permission to interview you twice during the 1998-99 school year. I have enclosed the sample interview questions. Your name will not be used and your answers will remain confidential. At the close of the study, a summary report will be developed and you will not be identified personally in the report. You may have a copy of the report by contacting me at Millard South High School after September 1999.
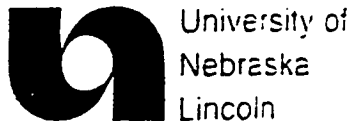
Your participation is voluntary. You may also withdraw your permission at any time in the next two years without adversely affecting your relationship with the researcher, Millard Public Schools, or the University of Nebraska – Lincoln. However, your consent to be interviewed will assist in this research intended to help Millard Public Schools make more informed decisions about ways to offer educational opportunities to students. Please contact the investigator, Kim Saum or her advisor and secondary investigator, Dr. Barbara LaCost, at the numbers listed below if you have concerns or questions now or at any time during the study. If you have questions about your rights or your child's rights as a research participant, please call the University of Nebraska Institutional Review board at 402.472.6965.

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your signature certifies that you have read and understood the information presented. A copy of this consent form will be returned to you.

Signature _____ Date _____

Kim Saum, Primary Investigator, 402.895.8268
Barbara Y. LaCost, Secondary Investigator, 402.472.0988

Please return to me by July 15, 1998.

University of
Nebraska
Lincoln

IRBAPP#98-06-403EP

Parent Informed Consent Form - For Self

Identification of the Project
Multi-Case Study of a School-With-in-a-School Program

The purpose of this research study is to determine problems and issues related to at-risk students and to determine the effect of alternative education interventions on the performance of 1998-99 tenth grade Millard South High School students. The researcher will be relying on attendance reports, grade reports, and discipline reports that are a part of Millard Public School District's regularly collected data base in 1997-98 and 1998-99. In addition to this data, the researcher will be relying on data gained from interviews with 12-15 1998-99 tenth graders, 3 New Frontier teachers, and 5-7 parents of the 1998-99 tenth graders. Interview will not last more than an hour and will be audio taped.

You have been selected because you gave me permission to use your child's data for this study. I am seeking your permission to interview you twice during the 1998-99 school year. I have enclosed the sample interview questions. Your name will not be used and your answers will remain confidential. At the close of the study, a summary report will be developed and you will not be identified personally in the report. You may have a copy of the report by contacting me at Millard South High School after September 1999.
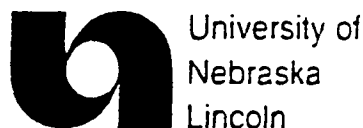
Your participation is voluntary. You may also withdraw your permission at any time in the next two years without adversely affecting your relationship with the researcher, Millard Public Schools, or the University of Nebraska - Lincoln. However, your consent to be interviewed will assist in this research intended to help Millard Public Schools make more informed decisions about ways to offer educational opportunities to students. Please contact the investigator, Kim Saum, or her advisor and secondary investigator, Dr. Barbara LaCost at the numbers listed below if you have concerns or questions now or at any time during the study. If you have questions about your rights or your child's rights as a research participant, please call the University of Nebraska Institutional Review board at 402.172.6965.

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your signature certifies that you have read and understood the information presented. A copy of this consent form will be returned to you.

Signature _____ Date _____

Kim Saum, Primary Investigator, 402.895.8268
Barbara Y. LaCost, Secondary Investigator, 402.472.0988

Please return to me by July 15, 1998.

University of Nebraska Lincoln

Parent Informed Consent Form - For child

IRBAFP#98-06-402EP

Identification of the Project
Multi-Case Study of a School-With-in-a-School Program

The purpose of this research study is to determine problems and issues related to at-risk students and to determine the effect of alternative education interventions on the performance of 1998-99 tenth grade Millard South High School students. The researcher will be relying on attendance reports, grade reports, and discipline reports that are a part of Millard Public School District's regularly collected data base in 1997-98 and 1998-99. In addition to this data the researcher will be relying on data gained from interviews with 12-15 1998-99 tenth graders, 3 New Frontier teachers, and 5-7 parents of the 1998-99 tenth graders. Interview will not last more than an hour and will be audio taped.

You have been selected because you gave me permission to use your child's data for this study. I am also seeking your permission to interview your student twice during the 1998-99 school year. I have enclosed the sample interview questions. Your child's name will not be used and his or her answers will remain confidential. At the close of the study, a summary report will be developed and your child will not be identified personally in the report. You may have a copy of the report by contacting me at Millard South High School after September 1999.

You are free to decide not to allow me to interview your child. You may also withdraw your permission at any time in the next two years without adversely affecting your relationship with the researcher, Millard Public Schools, or the University of Nebraska – Lincoln. However, your permission to use the data will assist in this research intended to help Millard Public Schools make more informed decisions about ways to offer educational opportunities to students. Please contact the investigator, Kim Saum or her advisor and secondary investigator, Dr. Barbara LaCost at the numbers listed below if you have concerns or questions now or at any time during the study. If you have questions about your rights or your child's rights as a research participant please call the University of Nebraska Institutional Review board at 402.472.6965.

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your signature certifies that you have decided to allow your child to be interviewed and that you have read and understood the information presented. A copy of this consent form will be returned to you.

I give permission for Kim Saum to interview my child _____ . (your child's name)

Parent/Guardian Signature _____ Date _____

Kim Saum, Primary Investigator, 402.895.8268
Barbara Y. LaCost, Secondary Investigator, 402.472.0988

Please return to me by July 15, 1998.

APPENDIX F

Interview Questions

Initial Student Interview

Name _____

Age ____   Years at High School _____   Years in District _____

Father's Occupation _____ Mother's Occupation _____

Guardian's Occupation _____

Siblings

_____

Ages _____ Education _____ Occupations if Adults _____

Current Family Structure

_____

1.   What is the most important thing about you?

2.   What is the most interesting thing about you?

3.   Have you ever participated in extra-curricular school activities? If so, what, when? If not, why?

4.   What are your personal goals?

5.   What do you want to be doing in five years?

6.   What do you want to be doing in ten years?

7.   Do you feel you need to finish high school?

8.   Do you think you will finish high school? If not, what grade will you complete?

9.   How much schooling do you think your best friend will complete?

10.   How do you feel as you begin another school year?

11.   How would you describe yourself as a student?

12.   How would you compare yourself to other students you know?

13.   How satisfied are you with your school experiences?

14. How do teachers in the school treat you?

15. How do administrators in the school treat you?

16. How do other students in the school treat you?

17. How do your teachers communicate your progress in class with you?

18. What has a teacher done to show you that he/she cares about you?

19. What do your parents do to show you that they care about you?

20. What do your parents think about you as a student?

21. What do your parents think about your school?

22. Have your parents volunteered at school? If so what did they do?

23. How do your parents communicate with your teachers?

24. What materials do you have at home to help you with your schoolwork?

25. How well do you think you will do in school this year? Why?

26. What is your favorite activity to do at school?

27. What was your favorite class last year? Why?

28. If you could improve your high school, what would you do?

29. Do you think you can make a difference in how well you do in school? If so, what could you do?
    If not, why not?

30. How important is education to a successful future?

31. How do you feel about the following questions? Tell me if you strongly agree, agree, don't know, disagree, or strongly disagree.

    I am able to do things as well as other people.
    I feel that I will be successful in life.
    Good luck is more important than hard work for success.
    My life is what I make of it.
    I have the skills to deal with life's problems.
    Teachers believe I can succeed in school.

I feel I am an important part of this school.
I feel I am an important part of society.
I care what my parents think of me.
I care what my teachers think of me.
I care what my classmates think of me.

End of Year Student Interview

Name _____

1. What is the most important thing about you?

2. What is the most interesting thing about you?

3. Did you participate in extra-curricular school activities this year? If so, what? If not, why?

4. What are your personal goals?

5. What do you want to be doing in five years?

6. What do you want to be doing in ten years?

7. Do you feel you need to finish high school?

8. Do you think you will finish high school? If not, what grade will you complete?

9. How much schooling do you think your best friend will complete?

10. What were some good things that happened to you at school this year?

11. What were some bad things that happened to you at school this year?

12. How would you describe your school year?

13. How would you compare yourself to other students you know?

14. How satisfied are you with your school experience this year?

15. How would your New Frontier teachers describe you? What about the other teachers in the school?

16. How would administrators at school describe you?

17. How would other students in the New Frontier describe you? What about the other students in the school?

18. How do your teachers in the New Frontier communicate your progress in class with you? What about the other teachers in the school?

19. What has a New Frontier teacher done to show you that he/she cares about you? What about other teachers in the school?

20. What do your parents do to show you that they care about you?

21. What do your parents think about you as a student?

22. What do your parents think about your school?

23. Have your parents volunteered at school? If so what did they do?

24. How do your parents communicate with your teachers in New Frontier? What about the other teachers in the school?

25. What materials do you have at home to help you with your schoolwork?

26. Describe a few of your favorite class activities you participated in this year.

27. Describe a few of your least favorite class activities you participated in this year.

28. What could you have done to make this school year better?

29. What could others at school have done to make this school year better?

30. What could others outside of school have done to make this school year better?

31. How important is education to a successful future?

32. If you could improve New Frontier, what would you do?

33. If you could improve your high school, what would you do?

35. Did the New Frontier experience help you this year? If so, how? If not, why?

34. How do you feel about the following questions? Tell me if you strongly agree, agree, don't know, disagree, or strongly disagree.

I am able to do things as well as other people.
I feel that I will be successful in life.
Good luck is more important than hard work for success.
My life is what I make of it.
I have the skills to deal with life's problems.
Teachers believe I can succeed in school.
I feel I am an important part of this school.
I feel I am an important part of society.
I care what my parents think of me.
I care what my teachers think of me.
I care what my classmates think of me.

Initial Parent Interview

Name _____

Age Range Less than 35_____ 36-42_____ 43-49_____ 50+_____

Marital Status S _____ D _____ M _____ W _____ Gender F _____ M _____

Education High School Diploma _____ G.E.D. _____ Two Year Degree _____
Four Year Degree ____ Post Graduate Degree _____

Occupation _____ Spouse's Occupation _____

Children

_____

Ages _____ Education _____ Occupations if Adults _____

Current Family Structure

_____

1. What is the most important thing about your child?

2. What is the most interesting thing about your child?

3. Does your child participate in extra-curricular school activities? If so, what, when? If not, why?

4. What are your child's personal goals?

5. What are your goals for your child?

6. What do you want your child to be doing in five years?

7. What do you want your child to be doing in ten years?

8. How much schooling do you think your child's best friend will complete?

9. Do you feel your child needs to finish high school?

10. Do you think your child will finish high school?

11. How do you feel as your child begins another school year?

12.   How would you describe your child as a student?

13.   How would you compare your child to other students you know?

14.   How satisfied are you with your child's school experiences?

15.   How do teachers in the school treat your child?

16.   How do administrators in the school treat your child?

17.   How do other students in the school treat your child?

18.   How do teachers communicate your child's progress in class with you?

19.   What has a teacher done to show your child that he/she cares about him/her?

20.   What do you do to show your child that you care about him/her

21.   Do you volunteer at school? If so what do you do?

22.   How do you communicate with your child's teachers?

23.   What materials do you have at home to help your child with his/her schoolwork?

24.   How well do you think your child will do in school this year? Why?

25.   If you could improve your child's high school, what would you do?

26.   Do you think you can make a difference in how well your child does in school? If so, what could you do? If not, why not?

27.   How important is education to a successful future?

28.   How do you feel about the following questions? Tell me if you strongly agree, agree, don't know, disagree, or strongly disagree.

My child is able to do things as well as other people.
I feel that my child will be successful in life.
Good luck is more important than hard work for success.
My child's life is what he/she makes of it.
My child has the skills to deal with life's problems.
Teachers believe my child can succeed in school.
I feel my child is an important part of this school.
I feel my child is an important part of society.

End of Year Parent Interview

Name _____

1.   What is the most important thing about your child?

2.   What is the most interesting thing about your child?

3.   Does your child participate in extra-curricular school activities? If so, what, when? If not, why?

4.   What are your child's personal goals?

5.   What are your goals for your child?

6.   What do you want your child to be doing in five years?

7.   What do you want your child to be doing in ten years?

8.   How much schooling do you think your child's best friend will complete?

9.   Do you feel your child needs to finish high school?

10.   Do you think your child will finish high school?

11.   How do you feel as your child ends another school year?

12.   How would you describe your child as a student?

13.   How would you compare your child to other students you know?

14.   How satisfied are you with your child's school experiences this year?

15.   How do New Frontier teachers treat your child?

16.   How do administrators in the school treat your child?

17.   How do other students in the school treat your child?

18.   How do teachers communicate your child's progress in class with you?

19.   What has a teacher done to show your child that he/she cares about him/her?

20. What do you do to show your child that you care about him/her

21. Do you volunteer at school? If so what do you do?

22. How do you communicate with your child's teachers?

23. What materials do you have at home to help your child with his/her schoolwork?

24. How well do you think your child did in school this year? Why?

25. What could you have done to help make this school year better for your child?

26. What could others at school have done to make this school year better for your child?

27. What could others outside of school have done to make this school year better for your child?

28. How important is education to a successful future?

29. If you could improve New Frontier, what would you do?

30. If you could improve your child's high school, what would you do?

32. Did the New Frontier experience help your child this year? If so, how? If not, why?

31. How do you feel about the following questions? Tell me if you strongly agree, agree, don't know, disagree, or strongly disagree.

My child is able to do things as well as other people.
I feel that my child will be successful in life.
Good luck is more important than hard work for success.
My child's life is what he/she makes of it.
My child has the skills to deal with life's problems.
Teachers believe my child can succeed in school.
I feel my child is an important part of this school.
I feel my child is an important part of society.

Initial Teacher Interview

Name _____

Age Range   Less than 35_____   36-42_____   43-49_____   50+_____

Marital Status   S _____   D _____   M _____   W _____   Gender F _____   M
_____

Education   High School Diploma _____   G.E.D. _____   Two Year Degree _____
                 Four Year Degree _____   Post Graduate Degree _____

1.   What is the most important thing to remember when working with at-risk youth?

2.   Is student participation in extra-curricular school activities important? If so, why?

3.   What are your professional goals?

4.   Do you feel all students need to finish high school?

5.   Do you feel all of the New Frontier students will finish high school?

6.   How much schooling do you think most of the New Frontier students will complete?

7.   How do you feel as you begin your first year as a teacher for the New Frontier?

8.   How would you describe yourself as a teacher?

9.   How would you compare yourself to other teachers you know?

10.   Describe the characteristics of a successful teacher who works with at-risk youth.

11.   How satisfied are you with your experiences with at-risk youth?

12.   How do teachers in the school treat at-risk youth?

13.   How do administrators in the school treat at-risk youth?

14.   How do other students in the school treat at-risk youth?

15.   Please explain how you communicate your students' progress in class with them.

16.   What do you do to show a student you care about him/her?

17.   Please explain the importance of communication with parents.

18. How do you involve parents of at-risk youth?

19. How well do you think New Frontier students will do in school this year? Why?

20. Describe your favorite activity to facilitate in class.

21. If you could improve your high school, what would you do?

22. Do you think you can make a difference in how well students do in school? If so what could you do? If not, why not?

23. How do you feel about the following questions? Tell me if you strongly agree, agree, don't know, disagree, or strongly disagree.

At-risk youth are able to do things as well as other people.
I feel that the New Frontier students will be successful in life.
Good luck is more important than hard work for success.
Life is what you make of it.
At-risk students have the skills to deal with life's problems.
Teachers believe at-risk youth can succeed in school.
I feel at-risk youth are an important part of this school.
I feel at-risk youth are an important part of society.
I care what my students think of me.
I care what my colleagues think of me.
I care what my students' parents think of me.

End of Year Teacher Interview

Name _____

1. What is the most important thing to remember when working with at-risk youth?

2. Is student participation in extra-curricular school activities important? If so, why?

3. What are your professional goals?

4. Do you feel all students need to finish high school?

5. Do you feel all of the New Frontier students will finish high school?

6. How much schooling do you think most of the New Frontier students will complete?

7. Were you surprised at how many New Frontier students dropped out of school this year?

8. How do you feel as you end your first year as a teacher for the New Frontier?

9. What were some good things that happened at New Frontier this year?

10. What were some bad things that happened at New Frontier this year?

11. Describe the characteristics of a successful teacher who works with at-risk youth.

12. How satisfied are you with your experiences with New Frontier?

13. After this school year, how would you compare yourself to other teachers you know?

14. How would administrators in the school describe you?

15. How would other New Frontier teachers describe you?

16. How would students in New Frontier describe you?

17. How do you communicate your students' progress in class with them?

18. What do you do to show a student you care about him/her?

19. Please explain the importance of communication with parents.

20. How do you involve parents of at-risk youth?

21. Describe your favorite activity you facilitated this year.

22. What could you have done to make this school year better?

23. What could others at school have done to make this school year better?

24. What could others outside of school have done to make this school year better?

25. If you could improve New Frontier, what would you do?

26. Do you think you can make a difference in how well students do in school? If so what could you do? If not, why not?

27. How do you feel about the following questions? Tell me if you strongly agree, agree, don't know, disagree, or strongly disagree.

At-risk youth are able to do things as well as other people.
I feel that the New Frontier students will be successful in life.
Good luck is more important than hard work for success.
Life is what you make of it.
At-risk students have the skills to deal with life's problems.
Teachers believe at-risk youth can succeed in school.
I feel at-risk youth are an important part of this school.
I feel at-risk youth are an important part of society.
I care what my students think of me.
I care what my colleagues think of me.
I care what my students' parents think of me.

APPENDIX G

Letter to Confirm

June 22, 1999

Dear _____ :

I am a doctoral student in Educational Administration at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. I am finishing my dissertation, and part of this requires verification of my interviews.

I am asking that you review the enclosed transcribed interviews. Please check for content accuracy. If you feel that there is inaccuracy in the content (not grammar of spelling), please contact me at Millard South High School, 895-8268. If I do not hear from you by July 5, I will assume the content of the transcribed interviews is correct, and I will proceed with my writing.

Thank you once again for participating in my doctoral research. Your input was invaluable to me. I plan to graduate in December and am willing to share my completed dissertation with you. If you are interested in receiving a copy of my completed dissertation, please contact me in December at Millard south high School.

Respectfully,

Kim Saum
Assistant Principal

Enclosures

APPENDIX H

External Audit Attestation

External Audit Attestation

By Kaye L. Peery, Ph. D.

Kimberley K. Saum requested that I complete an educational audit on her

qualitative and quantitative dissertation entitled, "A Qualitative and Quantitative

Study of At-Risk Students." The purpose of the audit was to determine the degree

to which the results of her study are trustworthy. The audit was conducted in

October and November of 1999.

Huberman and Miles (in Denzin and Lincoln, 1994) note that audits "seem to have decidedly salutary effects, notably the encouragement of systematic record keeping and reflexivity" (p. 439). Although systematic record keeping requires additional time and energy by the researcher, the methodological process itself as well as the resulting "audit trail" serve to support the credibility of the research process and findings.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) define the audit process as an examination of both the *process* and *product* of the inquiry. Examining the process is designed to ensure that the informants are fairly represented in the recorded accounts; examining the final product is designed to ensure the accuracy of the findings as supported by data.

To examine both the research process and the product, I completed the following steps in reviewing materials for the audit:

1.) Reviewed and examined the audiocassette tapes and transcriptions of informant interviews.

Informants interviewed for this study included eight students, five parents and three teachers. Each participant was interviewed twice, once at the beginning of the school year and again at the end of the school year. Tapes were professionally transcribed verbatim.

I listened to all interviews in their entirety.

Findings: As I reviewed the taped interviews, I checked for added, omitted, or incorrect words, and inverted wordings. Transcription errors were negligible; there were no errors that affected or altered the meaning of data. Therefore, the effect of transcription errors on data analysis and findings is deemed to be non-existent.

2.) Reviewed contents of two three-ring notebooks containing all research materials.

The two notebooks included the following types of information:

> Transcriptions of each informant's interviews
> Attendance records for the eight student participants for school years
> 97-98 and 98-99
> Grade reports for the eight student participants for school years
> 97-98 and 98-99
> Discipline reports for the eight student participants for school years
> 97-98 and 98-99
> Signed Consent Forms
> Researcher notes
> > Correspondence with School Site

Findings: The files did not include signed copies of transcripts, however, on page 33, Kim states, "The researcher sent copies of the transcribed interviews to each of the 16 subjects to check for accuracy. No signatures were required and no subject challenged the information."

3.) Checked permission forms from informants and school site.

Permission forms were approved by the Institutional Review Board and were to be completed by all participants

I checked the forms included in the notebooks to ascertain whether each participant had signed a consent form. A consent form was signed by each informant. Parents signed a separate permission form for their children.

I reviewed the correspondence from the school district giving permission to conduct this study within the district. The letter was signed by an appropriate official.

Findings: Each informant signed a permission form and a letter of approval was received from the school site to conduct this study.

4.) Examined the notebook containing transcripts and major coding categories.

Findings: The researcher states, on page 3, "...eight themes addressed in the grant proposal for the intervention program were explored: student's sense of belonging (community), students' perceptions of self, students' values of school, students'

future goals, parent involvement, parents' perceptions of student, parents' perceptions of school, and teachers' perceptions of at-risk youth." Bogdan and Biklen (1998) mention the possible use of "preassigned coding systems" when "researchers are employed by others to explore particular problems or aspects of a setting or subject."

5.) Read and examined the dissertation draft provided by Kim.

The manuscript totaled 120 pages with provision for eight appendices.

I read the draft in it's entirety, directing my attention to Kimberley's adherence to the purpose of the study and research questions as outlined; design of the study including data collection and sampling; the researcher's role in the study; data analysis procedures; verification strategies; and use of theory and literature. I paid particular attention to determining whether the findings were supported by the data.

Findings: Theory and literature were important to understanding the data in this study. Kim used literature on at-risk youth to aid in interpretation of data. Her use of description and direct quotations added to the strength of Kim's study.

In the section entitled "Dropouts in the U.S." Kim discusses the dropout rate. Discussion regarding how dropouts are counted and how this differs from school to school may be useful to some readers.

6.) Revisited primary questions of the audit and completed final review of the dissertation draft.

The focus of the audit was two part: to review process and product.

As a final check, I reviewed both the overall process Kim used in her study and the product that resulted in the procedures she used.

Findings: Appropriate procedures were used in producing the product with the collected data; the data were accurately reported in the product.

Based on the preceding, the following conclusions are offered:

It is my opinion that the focus of the study remained consistent with the purpose as stated in the IRB Consent to Participate in Research:

to determine problems and issues related to at-risk students and to determine the effect of alternative education interventions on the performance of 1998-99 tenth grade Millard South High School students

And more concisely in the dissertation:

to evaluate the effects of an educational intervention program on students, parents, and teachers of the program

Procedures used in the study, including data collection and analysis as well as the attending verification strategies were followed as outlined. The process as explained by the researcher was clear.

The data were clearly and concisely presented using the participants' own words. Kim's knowledge of at-risk students and experiences as an administrator in the at-risk program in this study also lends credibility to the data analysis.

The summary and conclusions presented and discussed in Chapter Five are supported by Chapter Four data. The conclusions of the study appear to be warranted; the fact that these conclusions are grounded in the data further establishes the trustworthiness of the study.

Although generalizability of this study to other contexts, as is the case with qualitative research, may or may not be possible, therefore making the issue of "reliability" problematic, there is a clear audit trail in this study. The process Kim used ensured fair representation of the participants; the data clearly support the accuracy of the findings.

Attested to this 24th day of November 1999.

Kaye L. Peery, Ph. D.

APPENDIX I

At-Risk Program Time-Line

New Frontier High School Time Line

August 1997

- ■Establish criteria for text selection and create rubric
- ■Review text catalogs for samples
- ■Contact publishers for text samples and set up individual meetings
- ■Begin designing parental and student attitude surveys
- ■Contact UNL's Continuing Studies Director: internet courses available
- ■Meet with building reading coordinator: materials and model creation
- ■Visit curriculum office: catalogs and resources
- ■Research: integrated curriculum models
- ●Meet with Curt Anderson: future of computer decisions
- ■Meet with Kim Saum: 9-10 grade curriculum characteristics and focus; 11th grade student look
- ■Meet with Carol Jurgens: State dept. regulations for school-to-work programs
- ■Meet with Margo Bassinger and Lora Felger: District payback partners and business community connections
- ■Continue to work on program design
- ■Continue to write curriculum

September 1997

- ■Create software criteria rubric
- ■Create hardware specifications: student and teacher models
- ■Contact Wendy Winans (Educational software Institute): software program needs
- ■Meet with Greg Kelly (GE Capital): computer design and future purchases; selection
- ■Payback Breakfast: Sept. 5
- ■Meet with Eve Callaghan (Omaha Job Clearinghouse): program needs
- ■Write parental and student attitude surveys
- ■Create informational packet for middle school administrators
- ■Meet with middle school administrators: program and selection process; time lines
- ■Create handouts/transparencies for MSHS inservice meeting
- ■Contact Susan Forslund (ESU): data collection on past variables for 1996-97 7th and 8th graders
- ■Review materials
- ■Team meeting: Sept 18
- ■Met with Bassinger/Felger: articulation of school-to-work program
- ☐Establish discipline policies and procedures
- ■Establish curriculum development time line
- ■Meet with Mark Feldhausen: technology implications and curriculum
- ■Meet with Ron Roth (Success Prep): evaluate curriculum program
- ■Visit IDEAL School (Papillion LaVista School District), alternative program: Chuck Lambert
- ■Visit Fremont Alternative High School: Cindy Deers
- ■Continue to work on program design
- ■Continue to write curriculum

October 1997

- ■Attend Boys Town Conference: Oct. 8-10
- ■Apply for Boys Town Partnership grant
- ■Interview in-house candidates for teaching team
- ■MSHS inservice meeting: program and selection process (Oct. 21)
- ■Design optional day student schedules for review
- ■Revise parental and student attitude surveys

☐ ongoing   ■ completed   28 May 1998

☐Create parental involvement model
■Begin information packet for selected students and parents
■Review materials
■Meet with Jeff Petersen: facilities options
■Create mission and belief statements; get feedback
■Contact Junior Achievement Inc. for materials
☐Begin designing Life Skills course according to district standards
■Visit Council Bluffs alternative sites: Kanesville High and P.A.C.T. (Tom Bond)
■Visit Lincoln alternative sites: Northeast (Lesli Pnieffer) and Bryan Alternative High (Gary Sandstrom)
■Attend Windows 95 workshop
■Continue to work on program design
■Continue to write curriculum

November 1997

■Attend Technology + Learning Conference in Denver (Nov. 5-7)
■Analyze published parental and student surveys for selection
■Revise parents/selected students packet
■Review materials
■Team Meeting: Nov. 25
■Attend Success Prep Workshop: Nov. 19
■Attend PDK Discipline Workshop: Nov 13
■Attend Windows 95 district classes: Nov 18-Dec. 3
■Collect all curriculum frameworks for 9-10
■Determine alternative credit-granting system
☐Develop career portfolio components
■Finalize the student selection process
■Evaluate first quarter data
■Collect and evaluate all 1996-97 data on current 8th and 9th graders
■Attend Multiple Intellegence Workshop Nov. 11
■Visit UNL's College of Continuing Studies: Internet courses
■Contact UNO Center for Economic Ed, Mary Reiser: Economics materials for program
■Continue to work on program design
■Continue to write curriculum

December 1997

■Continue to work on program design
■Continue to write curriculum
■Revise and finalize parents/selected students packet
■Revise and finalize parental and student attitude surveys
■Jeff Petersen meeting: facilities
■Finalize alternative credit-granting system
■Continue to discuss data collection with ESU #3
■Team Meeting: Dec. 3
■Attend OJC workshop: Dec. 5
■Prepare report update for Executive Board and Board of Education
■Present to Executive Board: program update
■Present to School Board: program update
■Meet with Helen Ryan, Junior Achievement: economics program with businesses
■Contact Mutual of Omaha: brochure design
■Meet with Tribune Company: Becky Welte
■Begin designing program brochure
☐ ongoing   ■ completed   28 May 1998

■Meet with graphic artist for brochure design
■Lightspan presentation to the district (software company)
■Meet with middle schools to further articulate student placement in the program

January 1998

■Team meeting: Jan 13
■Basic 10 classes (2) preview student survey for readability
■Parent faculty members preview parent survey for readability
■Meet with ESU#3 to design and print parent and student surveys
■Collect middle school data for 9th and 10th grade candidates in selection process
■Select 9th and 10th grade 1998-99 candidates with middle school administrators
■Notify parents of student selection (phone and letter)
■Informational meetings with students for New Frontier High (1/28, 1/29, 1/30)
■Dessiminate pre-surveys to students
■Review materials
■Faculty meeting: status of selected students for program and process
■Continue to work on program design
■Continue to write curriculum
■Team meeting: Jan. 22 and 23
■Review at ESU #3 Skillsbank program for remediation (Integrated learning systems software)
■Continue negotiations with UNL's distance learning programs
■Meet with Lucent Technologies: brochure printing
■Preview software with former students for input
■Gather all data on Mat results, cut scores, and DAWA scores for New Frontier High students
☐Analayze the above data
■Write NETA grant
■Meet with master carpentar re: classroom

February 1998

■Team meeting: Feb 4
■Write Millard Education Foundation grant
■Register 1998 9th grade candidates (February 17)
■Call parents of Frontier High students as follow-up to letter (74 phone calls)
■Meet with each student individually to discuss Frontier High
■Meet with Josten's Technology: integrated learning systems
■Call each parent to confirm Feb. 26th meeting time, place, and attendance
■Work on building budget for 1998-99 purchases
■Meet with Ed Rockewell. design of the classroom and needs
■Informational meeting with Frontier High parents: Second chance meeting, Feb. 26
■Meet with 1998 9th graders (each shcool) in small group to discuss the registration process
■Meet with 1998 10tn graders to discuss the registration process
■Finalize resources' selection
■Attend Success Prep workshop: Feb. 26
☐Continue to work on program design
☐Continue to write curriculum
■Determine budget needs for 1998-1999
■Meet with Ed Rockwell: furniture needs and computer shelves for school
■Meet with parents who were unable to attend previous meetings offered

☐ ongoing   ■ completed   28 May 1998

March 1998

■Register 1998 10th grade candidates
■Contact parents who were unable to attend either offered meetings; confirm individual meeting times
■Team meeting: March 20
Determine criteria for student-governing board
☐Continue to work on program design
☐Continue to write curriculum
■Request parents, administrators, and teachers to participate in the novel selection process
■Design business cards and order
■Meet with UNL's continuing Studies to analyze Study Skills curriculum
■Negotiate with UNL concerning their distance learning curriculum
■Meet with mechanical/electrical and carpenter personnel to design classroom changes
■Meet with district technology person to determine computer drop needs and design of room
■Determine building textbook needs and request from different departments
■Present program to Iowa principals' meeting
■Begin second wave of slection process for Frontier candidates
■Present to MOEC: New Frontier High
■Meet with Ed Rockwell: Finalize room design and needs
■Finalize second wave selection of students
■Contact new candidates' parents

April 1998

■Invite AP students to participate in the novel selection committee
■Create novel selection critique forms
■Order novels for committee review
■With ESU #3, do an analysis of parent/student surveys
■Meeting with UNL: to finalize the beta site at Millard South proposal
Establish communication procedures with parents
☐Analyse MAT7 student scores and correlate to an integrated learning system
■Attend Multiple Intellegence conference in New York: April 23-25
☐Continue to work on program design
☐Continue to write curriculum
☐Meet with ESU #3 (Pat Geary) to analyze parent/student survey data

May 1998

■Team meeting: May 12
☐Begin ordering instructional materials
■Meet with information manager from Burke High to discuss cooperative activities
■Attend Omaha Community Foundation meeting re: grants
■Organize refurbishing of rm. 207 with contractors
■Meet with novel committees (3) to determine adoption of 3 novels for curriculum
■Finalize formative and summative evaluation process for UNL's distance learning project
■Wrap up evaluations of second-wave Frontier candidates
■Visit two Phoenix, Arizona schools: technology and at-risk focus (Josten Co providing accomodations)
■Complete analysis of integrated learning systems samples and order
■Present at the Lyons Club: New Frontier High program
☐Final analysis of parent and student surveys
■Meet with mechanical, carpentry, technology support groups to finalize room refurishings and ordering process
■Write 17 thank you notes to readers on the novel adoption committee
■Meet with district evaluator to determine formative and summative evaluation time lines and procedures.
■Meet with Deyo Photography: group and student-of-the-month pictures for next school year
☐ ongoing   ■ completed   28 May 1998

Summer 1998

Plan end of the summer party for students and family
Plan Woods Day for beginning kick-off
WorkKeys training for teachers
WorkKeys Overview at Metro Community College: July 30
Boy Town discipline model training for teachers: June 8-9
Prepare room for fall: July-August
Finish curriculum writing
True Colors training for team
Junior Achievement coordination meetings with Helen Ryan: June 4
Windows 95 seminar: June 16
Order curriculum materials
Order materials from NETA and Millard Education Foundation grants
Meeting with Marvin Allff: WorkKeys assessment @ TAC, June 15
Complete end-of-the-year report for Lottery grant
Meet with UNL June 3 re: formative and summative evaluations of internet course (and throughout the summer)p

28 May 1998

Millard South's New Frontier Time Line July-August 1997

Task	July	August	September	October	November	December	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August

•Grant awarded

•Metro site visitations

•Staff Selection process

•Curriculum research

•Curriculum development

•Selection and placement of students process

•Development of parental component

•Technology research

•Technology development

•Program development

•Resource review/selection

•Teacher training

•Room preparation

•Other grant writing

APPENDIX J

Millard Public Schools Board Reports:
At-Risk Program Updates

AGENDA SUMMARY SHEET

AGENDA ITEM:

MEETING DATE: December 15, 1997

DEPARTMENT: Educational Services

TITLE AND BRIEF DESCRIPTION:
    Millard South Alternative High School Program: An update

ACTION DESIRED: Information only

BACKGROUND: Last winter three of the Millard South staff and administrators wrote a $257,000.00 lottery grant to create a school-within-a-school program for at-risk students, and the application was approved by the board in March. South was awarded the grant in July 1997. Since then, a number of activities have been taking place in preparing the opening of the program for the fall of 1998. This report is an update of those activities.

RECOMMENDATIONS: NA

STRATEGIC PLAN REFERENCE: Strategy 3

TIME LINE: See following pages

RESPONSIBLE PERSON(S):   Dr. Dick Wollman
                         Shari Cole Hoffman

ASSOCIATE SUPERINTENDENT APPROVAL: _____
                                    (Signature)

BOARD ACTION:

188.

Millard South Alternative High School Update

As of December 1997, we have accomplished the following in designing and creating the Millard South Alternative Program.

Curriculum

The primary focus this semester has been to determine the scope and depth of the curriculum, along with the delivery system. After extensive research, we have determined that:

■Each student will individually review math and reading skills for thirty minutes on a daily basis through an integrated learning system. Currently we are reviewing several delivery systems of this nature. We are applying for a Millard Education Foundation grant to provide 3 computers to implement this program.

■Much effort has been employed to determine the most appropriate curriculum structure for at-risk students. Problem-based learning, service learning, thematic learning, product-based learning, case studies, and performance learning have been selected as those structures.

■Multiple intelligence cognitive theory will be the basis for all activities designed in the classroom. Students are smart in different ways, especially these types of students. All curricula is written to incorporate this theory.

■We are creating a career portfolio design for each student to accomplish over a two-year period.

■Numerous negotiations are occurring with several technology-based institutions in regards to utilizing their software within the curriculum. (Ex: College of Continuing Studies-UNL, NASA/Wheeling University, University of Ill.-Urbana). Several opportunities exist for us to become a beta test site for one or more of these programs.

Placement

In order to implement our placement procedure, we are reviewing first quarter data to determine student trends at the two middle schools and our high school. Based on this year's first quarter statistics alone at the high school level, 63 ninth graders possess one criteria for qualification, 14 have 2 of the criteria, and 1 qualifies for the program now. Central Middle School has 4 students who qualify and 3 who have already met 2 of the 3 variables so far. Final selection will be based on first semester results.

Highlights

Our third teacher has been selected. The three-member team expects to begin team writing one day a month during second semester and continue throughout the summer. The preliminary foundation has already been established.

Seven school sites within the Lincoln, Council Bluffs, Fremont and Omaha area were visited to observe current alternative programs. We are also planning to visit Turner Technical High School in Miami, Florida, which is composed of 7 academies within a 2,200 student population.

Millard South Alternative High School Program

•Rationale

Millard South High staff believes all students can succeed, given the appropriate environment, instructional methods, and curricula addressing individual needs. However, not all our students are succeeding due to a number of variables within our reach. By addressing these variables, we believe our 9th and 10th grade alternative program will significantly increase successful experiences for struggling students.

•Student Identification

Forty-five non-SPED 9th and 10th graders for the 1998-1999 school year will be selected to participate in this program based on the following preceding semester variables:
- •Failing two or more classes
- •Suspended three or more times (in and out-of-school)

Note:Saturday schools for middle school candidates
- •Absent six or more times, not counting suspensions

•Staff

The staff will consist of three teachers and one paraprofessional. These three teachers will team-teach the entire curricula with a "fourth" teacher comprised of different specialized "experts," both in and out of the building, to be utilized as our needs arise. For example, an art teacher may come in to share complementary information relevant to a current project of focus, or a farmer may share experiences with soil and water conservation issues.

Selection of the team's teachers will not be content-driven but rather determined by their expertise in instructional methodology, flexibility, ability to take risks, innovative approaches to curricula design, and commitment to at-risk students.

•Curricula/Structure

In briefer increments of time, students will earn semester credits in science, math, social studies, Life Skills and English through an integrated approach of delivery and design. Along with these core courses, students will also vigorously study comprehensive strands of career development, social skills, and literacy. The district's Essential Learner Outcomes will drive all curriculum decisions. Students will attend this block of curricula in the morning and have a number of options in the afternoon based on their needs and interests. They will participate in other electives, our afternoon tutoring program, other credited programs outside of our building, and/or a variety of work-study programs for credit.

•School-to-Work Program

The placement of students in working experiences is a significant aspect of this program. Based on age, abilities, goals, and interests, students will be placed at work sites throughout the metropolitan area where they will not only earn money, but also credits. Preceding these placements, all students will be required to participate in a rigorous career development program along with shadowing employees of self-selected professions. Further research in establishing an academy-like school environment is currently being pursued.

·Parent Involvement

Another major goal of the alternative program is to actively involve parents in the education of their children. Parents and students will be asked to sign a mutually agreed upon contract that identifies what we expect from them and what they can expect from us. For example, we will make at-home and/or at-work visits to update parents of their children's progress. We will also call parents every two weeks as ongoing progress reports. In addition, we will encourage parents to spend some time in the classroom with us as often as they can. Parent-student-teacher conferences will be scheduled appointments and take on a more in-depth approach.

·Evaluation

As stipulated in the grant application, the program's success will be measured both quantitatively and qualitatively. Credits earned, absences, and infraction occurrences each semester will determine the program's success. These are the 3 variables used in identifying students for the program.

Parents and students will be interviewed and given a survey before the program begins and at the end of each school year. Again, as determined in the grant, parental and student attitudes towards school and learning will be measured.

Essential Learner Outcomes/Assessments

All curricula are designed around the district's Essential Learner Outcomes. These outcomes drive the areas taught. As with all students, these students in the program will be required to meet the district assessments: the 6-trait writing sample and the math criterion reference test, both administered in 10th grade. Any students not meeting the reading, writing, and math district cut scores will receive additional help.

Time Line

See the following page.

Millard South's Alternative High School Time Line
July 1997–August 1998

Task	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	March	April	May	June	July	Aug.
• Grant awarded														
• Metro site visitations														
• Staff selection process														
• Curriculum research														
• Curriculum development														
• Selection and placement of students process														
• Development of parental component														
• Technology research														
• Technology development														
• Program development														
• Resource review/selection														
• Teacher training														
• Room preparation														
• Other grant writing														

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AGENDA SUMMARY SHEET

AGENDA ITEM: New Frontier

MEETING DATE: April 26, 1999

DEPARTMENT: Educational Services

TITLE AND BRIEF DESCRIPTION: Millard South's New Frontier Report (an alternative school-within-a-school program)   This report summarizes New Frontier's first semester accomplishments, celebrations and future challenges.

ACTION DESIRED: INFORMATION ONLY _X_

BACKGROUND: In the spring of 1997, Millard South received a $257,000.00 state lottery grant for a school-within-a-school program to help struggling students succeed. This past school year was the program's first year of implementation with 48 students.

RECOMMENDATIONS: None

STRATEGIC PLAN REFERENCE: Strategy 3. Plan 7, and Strategy 5, Plan 7

TIMELINE: N/A

RESPONSIBLE PERSON(S):   Dick Wollman, Kim Saum, Shari Hoffman, Mark Feldhausen

ASSOCIATE SUPERINTENDENT APPROVAL: _____
                                            (Signature)

BOARD ACTION:

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Millard South's New Frontier Program:
1998-1999 First Semester Report

Background

In 1995, some Millard South administrators and teachers evaluated students who were not succeeding in the traditional high school environment. Common characteristics of these students were identified, along with possible solutions. A proposal for an alternative school-within-a-school evolved from this analysis and was presented to the district; however, no funding was available at that time.

In the spring of 1997, a state lottery three-year grant proposal requesting $257,000.00 was written, approved by the district, and awarded by the state of Nebraska to Millard South. During the 1997-98 school year, research and development was conducted in preparation for the program's execution. This year is New Frontier's first year of implementation.

New Frontier Goals

1. Give students critical tools to successfully mainstream into the traditional educational system so they may graduate on time.

2. Significantly reduce the following for New Frontier students:
   Failure rate
   Absenteeism rate
   Behavioral-referral rate
   In-school and out-school suspension assignments

3. Increase student attachment to school.

4. Increase positive parental attitudes toward Millard South.

Every decision made in New Frontier is based on these four goals and their measurements. For example, see attachment A and B which are student parent surveys disseminated each February to next year's freshmen and each May to outgoing sophomores. The student survey attempts to measure future directions, sense of belonging, academic success, and life skills. The parent survey attempts to measure school communications, parent involvement, and their

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perceptions of their children and the school. These two surveys will measure goal #3 and #4. Student statistics gathered each semester and at the end of the year will measure goals #1 and #2. These results are one of many measurement tools identified earlier in the lottery grant application.

Selection Process

New Frontier students are selected based on the following criteria. So far this criteria appears to be a valid selection process.

1. Students must fail at least 2 core courses (math, English, science, or social studies) first semester the preceding school year.

2. Students with 2 or more failed classes who are not likely to succeed in high school are selected, based on professional observations of counselors, teachers, advisors, and, in some cases, parents. However, all students who fail 2 courses are not automatically considered. Some students do not pass 2 courses first semester, but despite situational circumstances, will probably succeed. Situational circumstances are defined as illness, academic adjustments to new environment (9th graders), loss in the family (divorce, death, etc.), and developmental adjustments.

3. Non-sped students

4. 9th and 10th graders for the next school year.

5. First semester data from the preceding school year.

6. Six or more absences first semester.

7. Three or more rule infractions first semester (Rule infractions are defined as out-of or in-school suspensions, Saturday or Thursday schools.)

Criteria #6 and #7 are reviewed but not necessarily adhered to due to middle school philosophy with discipline and social natures of adolescents in regards to attendance. Therefore, attendance is not always a dominating factor.

Facilities

The New Frontier room was refurbished this last summer with building budget funding. A

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large area (approximately the size of 1 1/2 classrooms) was painted and carpeted. The cabinets were also refurbished. All new student furniture and room accessories were purchased. As part of the bond issue, a new heating/air duct system and unit were installed along with a movable wall. Through several small grant sources and building budget, 15 computers and furniture were purchased for the classroom.

Staff

During first semester, 3 full-time faculty members taught in New Frontier: ████ ████████████████████████████████ At the beginning of second quarter, ████. ██████. a paraprofessional, was finally employed with state grant funding after an extensive search. Due to her personal class schedule, █████ works only two days a week, 4 hours per day ██████████, in addition to her responsibilities as community counselor for Millard South and the Millard Learning Center, is the counselor for all New Frontier students. Second semester, █████████ an additional full-time teacher, was added to the team. His position was procured by Special Education flex funding and is only for one semester.

Communication

Throughout first semester, New Frontier staff focused on significantly increasing communication with parents in the following ways.

Verbal communication:

- The New Frontier staff had 160 telephone contacts with parents and guardians.
- Seventy-eight percent of New Frontier parents attended and actively participated in parent-teacher-student conferences. (Second semester, 57% of the parents participated.)

Written communication.

- Every 1 1/2 weeks, progress reports were sent to parents, totaling 10 mailings.
- Seven separate informative letters were sent to all parents/guardians throughout first semester.
- Three sympathy cards were sent to New Frontier families.

Enrollment Status

The New Frontier program began this school year with 48 students, 22 freshmen and 26 sophomores. Tenth graders were included this year so more students could be serviced even though their inclusion inhibited initial success of the total program.

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As of February 1999, 39 students remain enrolled, nine students left the program. Two freshmen families moved out of town; 1 sophomore and 1 freshman were placed in alternative living situations; 3 sophomores and 1 freshman were released from the program due to non-compliance; and 1 sophomore was released as per parent request at the end of the first quarter. Five of the 9 students, who stayed at Millard South, moved back to the traditional student population. None of them passed 5 or more classes first semester.

Outside Requests and Contacts

Many inquiries have been made so far concerning the New Frontier program. Omaha, Papillion-LaVista, and Council Bluffs school districts requested information, along with a consortium of western Iowa rural school principals. Visitations have been extremely limited, and no requests for presentations have been accepted because it is important to have at least 2 years of data before advising others about starting programs.

Curriculum

Each semester, New Frontier students earn 25 credits for the following courses: English, social studies, science, math, and Career Awareness, an elective. Most units are thematic or integrated in nature. For example, students work on writing skills as they address scientific concepts and issues in their science course. This way two or more focuses are integrated into a larger learning experience.

Career Awareness is a New Frontier elective which focuses on electronic and print literacy, employability skills, social skills, learning skills, and life skills. Work Keys assessments are given to students in the fall to help personalize curriculum throughout the year.

The district's ELO's are addressed in the curriculum to the same degree as they are addressed in other courses. Remediation in reading, writing, and math is offered to New Frontier students.

First Semester Data

Attendance. Data for 9th and 10th graders first semester compared to first semester last year is derived from three schools: Anderson Middle School, Central Middle School, and Millard South.

In the first semester of 1997-98 school year as 8th graders, current 9th graders missed 139 days at their respective middle schools. In the first semester of the 1998-1999 school year, current 9th graders missed 115 days at Millard South. In the 1997-1998 school year as 9th graders, the current 10th graders missed 142 days. Two of these sophomores did not attend

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Millard South first semester as 9th graders so no data is available, and these students historically are high absentees. In the first semester of 1998-1999 school year, current 10th graders missed 236.5 days.

Attendance for 9th graders increased; however, 10th grade attendance significantly decreased. Two factors at Millard South contributed to this decrease. First, the school has been revamping its attendance procedure the past two years, so the results reflect this change. Secondly, New Frontier teachers strictly enforce attendance documentation procedures; therefore, accounting for student attendance is more in sync from teacher to teacher.

Referrals   Referral data reflects Thursday or Saturday school, in-school suspension, and out-school suspension only. Again, the referral data is collected from three separate buildings. At the secondary level, the referral process is utilized more since certain behaviors are considered entrance skills. In the middle schools, referrals occur after a number of other steps are taken because students at that age are still developing social responsibility skills.

The current 9th graders received 14 referrals during their first semester of the 1997-98 school year as 8th graders. During the 1998-99 school year first semester, current 9th graders received 31 referrals, with 1 student accounting for 10 of these referrals.

The current 10th graders received 51 referrals during the first semester in the 1997-98 school year, with 1 student accounting for 27 of these referrals. During the 1998-99 school year first semester, current 10th graders received 116 referrals, with 6 students accounting for referrals of 10 or more. Historically within the school's general population, 10th graders tend to receive more referrals than any other grade levels.

One major factor influencing these results is that New Frontier teachers consistently enforce student accountability for their behaviors. Prior to this, 10th graders had a number of different teachers with a variety of expectations.

Academics   Academic success in the New Frontier program is defined as passing 5 or more classes in one semester. Difficulty arose in analyzing last year's 8th grade 1997-1998 academic statistics with first semester this year because 8th graders take a significantly greater number of survey or interest classes both semesters. For example, a few students took 10 classes and 1 even took 11 classes first semester last year. At the secondary level, ninth graders may only take a maximum of 7 classes each semester. Because of this discrepancy, the comparison of these numbers then becomes skewed.

First semester, 53% (20) of New Frontier students passed 5 or more classes. Of those 20 students, 35% (7) passed 6 classes, and 30% (6) passed 7 classes.

Of the 10th graders, 13% of the students passed 5 or more classes first semester last year. First semester this year, 45% of the 10th graders passed 5 or more classes.

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Highlights

Woods Day. In September through a grant from Metro Tech's Omaha Job Clearinghouse program, students spent a day at the YMCA facility near the Elkhorn River. Team-building activities and group problem-solving challenges were provided by the camp's facilitators. Students feel this event was the best experience so far this year.

Power Point. New Frontier students collaborated with ██████████ independent computer study class to create power point presentations for their relocation of the wolves project. Computer students mentored Frontier students in designing and creating these multi-media presentations.

NETA Software. New Frontier was awarded a small NETA grant to purchase two new software programs, "Hot Dog Stand: The Works" and "Math For The Real World" which were tremendous successes. "The Hot Dog Stand" software focuses on problem-solving and the decision-making process. Students run a simulated hot dog stand at a sports field and must calculate purchases and sales in order to make a profit. Throughout the experience, uncontrollable factors (such as weather) are programed into their daily affairs, and they must contend with these variables in their decisions. Students came up during their lunch hours just to work on this project. They were actively engaged throughout the activity.

"Math For The Real World" simulation is a program in which students are members of a rock and roll band touring the United States. Their task is to earn money (by correctly answering mathematical questions) as they tour and then create a music video with the money earned. Students hurried to do their work so they could earn extra time on this software.

Business Support. Some Millard businesses supported New Frontier. A variety of stores donated gift certificates as incentives for Frontier students. Students earn opportunities (i.e., good behavior, complete assignments, attentive in class) to have their names placed in a drawing once a week for one gift certificate donated by businesses or purchased by the school.

Junior Achievement. A business man from Junior Achievement taught New Frontier students 10 classes on economics. Students were able to hear about real-world applications from the business arena.

Student Recognition. Each month a New Frontier student is selected as "Student of the Month." With that honor, the student receives a free sitting and photograph from Deyo's Photography. In addition, they go to lunch with ██████████████████ the new Frontier counselor.

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This past semester, special recognition was also given to the following students:

███████ (Highest G.P.A.--on the school's honor roll)

███████ (Kindest Student to Others)

███████ (Most Improved Student)

███████ (Best Attendance).

When students were given these awards in class by ███████ other students cheered them on as evidence of their support and their values.

Student Comments. As the year goes on, New Frontier's success comes in small increments. The following are personal excerpts from current students. These are comments taken from letters or notes to teachers and reflective thoughts at the end of first semester.

"One thing I do wish is that we were in there for junior and senior years... Another thing I learned was that in order for me to raise my grades, it has to be for myself. Not for my parents or anyone else, but me and I thank you."

"If I wasn't in New Frontier, I don't think my grades would be this high, or I wouldn't want to stay in school...I'm glad to go to Millard South because if I didn't, I wouldn't be here....We also have teachers to help us with whatever we need."

"I think the New Frontier is a good program and I am glad it's here, but I don't want to stay in New Frontier all my life. But yet I'm kind of scared to take on all the other classes. I'm not sure what I am going to do."

"I think the New Frontier is OK. It's different but it is not horrible. If I didn't have New Frontier, my grades would probably be all zeros. But, at times, some of the teachers get on my nerves."

"At the beginning of the year, I hated the thought of being in the New Frontier, but after the first semester, my feelings are starting to change. I don't think it is as bad as I wanted to think it was."

"...and I think the teachers are great because they try to help you bring up your grades."

"I feel the New Frontier program has helped me want to try. If I were in regular classes, I would not have tried at all. Because of this program, I've widened my horizons. I put the consideration of graduation in my head. Before, it never crossed my mind. Never before have I

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wanted to come to school, let alone try and improve my grades. I thank you...for giving me a second chance."

"I may have come in biting and spitting, but now I am open to the program."

"I think that this program will be really helpful in a couple of years when you learn about what you need to do to punish or help some of the kids. You people started a really great thing. I hope they start more of them around other schools."

"My feelings about New Frontier is that I don't care what other people think. As long as I get smarter and better grades, it is fine with me. I don't care if other people make fun of me, just as long as I get help on my homework."

"I feel that if it wasn't for the New Frontier program, I would have dropped out long before now."

"My feeling about the New Frontier varies from day to day. Some days I don't want to be there; other days I do want to be there."

"My feelings about New Frontier are simple. It's a good program that teaches kids what they really need to know. It shows them responsibility and how it feels to do good in school."

"I feel that it is wonderful because they take time to help you with anything you don't understand."

"My feelings about New Frontier. Oh boy! It's not really all I thought it would be. We do a lot of fun stuff, but most of it is kind of boring. I want all of you teachers to know that I am very grateful for you guys putting up with me. Any other teachers would have kicked me out."

New Frontier Challenges

Facilities. The current facility for New Frontier is too small for the type of learning environment needed. The majority of the students are kinesthetic learners who need room to move around and a variety of spaces to utilize. However, what the Frontier program has now is a very warm and visually comfortable space. Yet It needs to be expanded.

Personnel. After 2000, all FTE's and the paraprofessional will have to be supported

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through the building's budget. The district's support will be necessary in order for New Frontier to continue.

This last year a paraprofessional was not hired until second quarter. The team discovered most paraprofessionals do not want to work at a secondary building, much less in a program with challenging students.

Student Needs. Each year an increasing demand for a more structured placement is needed for some students. New Frontier is unable to address these student needs. It was never intended to help all students. If students will not be successful in New Frontier or in the traditional educational program, where should they be placed? Currently, the district does not have a viable option.

Integrated Curriculum Development. Designing and implementing an integrated approach to secondary curriculum is an extremely challenging task. Creating a rigorous curriculum that addresses the course outcomes and offers authentic demonstrations has really stretched the team. Lack of time, expertise and experience in integrated studies, and energy to develop the curriculum are significant factors influencing the team's progress.

Team Teaching. The team's challenge this first year was to work in absolute sync as a unified entity with all students. Prior to the New Frontier program, each teacher functioned within the building, within a department to some extent, in an autonomous manner. The everyday management of classroom procedures, discipline approaches, and teaching priorities were developed based on individual philosophies.

However, this first year in New Frontier, teachers have had to abandon individual approaches to all aspects of teaching and function as group members. All decisions and actions of every team member impacted not only the students, but the other team members as well. Creating unified expectations and standards is a continuous evolving process for the team.

Student Considerations. New Frontier students offer many challenges to the teaching team. Although there are similarities, there is no one common type of New Frontier student. Students bring to the room unique strengths and weaknesses which aren't different from a traditional room. However, their strengths and weaknesses significantly spread across a continuum not only within individuals but also within the group. This creates an intensity unlike any special education or basic or even traditional classroom. The group dynamics is such that what evolves from this group is a powerful environment with emotional swings. No two days are alike. Students seem to waffle with acceptance to any given situation in unpredictable ways. The group dynamics is an ongoing learning experience (research and development) for the teaching team.

One change implemented in the middle of first semester brought the group within a more

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manageable parameter. At the beginning of the school year, students were in 2 groups with approximately 24 students each. Later in the year, students were then divided into three groups with a 14-to-1 student-teacher ratio. These groups either rotate from teacher to teacher or stay with 1 teacher, depending on the instructional focus at the time. The teaching team varies the group make-up, the settings, and the length and tasks of group experiences to maintain a stimulating yet comfortable atmosphere. Any larger teacher-student ratio is nonproductive, and a smaller one is even better.

<u>Student Responses</u>. The following are comments from students who are still struggling with the program, school, or both. These responses were written as a reflective activity at the end of first semester.

"I actually haven't improved as a student. I've actually turned away from school. I don't want to be here. I'd rather be with my dad or my youngest sister. My attitude towards school needs to be better, but I don't want to be. I just want to get school over with so I can move out of the hell hole I live in."

"I feel that New Frontier is wasting our time because you aren't really teaching us things we need to know."

"I think New Frontier helps people in some ways but not in others."

"I don't really feel anything for New Frontier except that you are like trapped in here with strict teachers. That's all I think about it. Other than that, it's fine."

"This program is meant to help everyone who needs it, but the kids feel threatened that they might successfully learn something out of this program. If they could shut up for a five minutes, everyone will benefit."

"I think this should only be freshmen in New Frontier. It's a joke for sophomores. We're not learning anything."

"My feelings for the New Frontier program is that it's not the best program, and it's not the worst either."

"I'm not too happy with New Frontier because we have twice as much homework as the regular classes do."

"I think New Frontier as a whole is a good idea, but the way you select people to be in it

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is kind of a bad way to do it. I like most people in the class, but a lot of them I could care less for. I will not name names because I believe that is wrong."

APPENDIX K

Millard Public Schools Memo
November, 1999

DRAFT

Millard
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

November, 1999

Dear District Strategic Planning Committee,

Our Action Team addressed Strategy #2, "*We will develop and implement plans in partnership with our community to assist students who are at risk of not achieving identified learner outcomes.*" Thirty-four parents, community members, and Millard staff indicated an interest in participating. Thirteen members attended at the initial meeting. Between six and twenty-one members attended subsequent meetings.

One of the first tasks of the Action Team was to clarify the intent of Strategy #2. The Team identified key words and defined them as follows:

- A partnership is a cooperative alliance among collegial teammates.
- A community is a network of people who have some common interests and goals.
- Assisting students means to facilitate learners through teaching, guiding, helping, and enabling.
- At-risk of not meeting ELOs refers to learners who have difficulty at school and/or in life.

Next, the group discussed and prioritized a total of twenty-seven questions. Among those generated were:

1. What current programs provided by the Millard Public Schools are working: providing appropriately for the needs of at-risk students?
2. What truly is our scope with this strategy (all areas of academic, high/low achievement, social, emotional)?
3. How can Millard Public Schools work more effectively with the business community, mental health organizations, PAYBAC partners, mentors, higher education, etc.?
4. How can a vocational program (trades, non-academic) be implemented in an alternative program?
5. How can this strategy and the counselor plan/program support one another?
6. How can we better support/educate parents of at-risk students?
7. What current programs are not working and need to be revised, eliminated, or replaced?
8. What type of intervention programs can be implemented at an early stage?
9. What programs already exist in the metro area schools that are successful in dealing with at-risk students?
10. How do the needs of students vary from level to level and how do we address or meet their needs?

Ultimately, the Team researched four questions.

1. What is the current research for alternate programs/best practices for the at-risk students and the implication for Millard at-risk students?
2. How will Millard define, identify, evaluate, and determine the needs of at-risk students at prek-12?
3. How will we develop and implement plans in partnership with our community?
4. What programs are working and what needs to be revised, eliminated, or replaced?

As a result of this research, seven major themes surfaced: *class size, community, counseling, teacher training, vocational education, alternative programs, and identification of the at-risk.*

After eight formal meetings, which did not include the Team's homework commitment and research time, we reached consensus on four Action Plans. The Specific Results statements for these Action Plans are as follows:

· Develop a comprehensive system to identify and place students who are not meeting age/grade-appropriate learning and life skills outcomes.
· Develop accept programs to meet identified student needs at prek-5, 6-8, and 9-12.
· Develop/accept specific alternative educational programs to meet at-risk student needs.
· Develop an awareness and outreach program to involve our community with at-risk students.

We believe that the implementation of these Action Plans will help us meet the intent of Strategy #2. We respectfully submit these plans for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Strategy #2 Action Team Members

ACTION PLAN

STRATEGY NUMBER: 2
PLAN NUMBER: 1
DATE: 11/29/1999

STRATEGY: *"We will develop and implement plans in partnership with our community to assist students who are at risk of not achieving identified learner outcomes."*

SPECIFIC RESULT: Develop a comprehensive system to identify and place students who are not meeting appropriate age/grade level learning and life skills outcomes.

#	ACTION STEP (Number each one)	Assigned To:	Starting Date:	Due Date:	Completed Date:
1.	Gather information to determine student needs which would include, but are not limited to. : · Individual school and/or grade level needs · District needs · Community/business/parent input · Social service agencies				
2.	Categorize at-risk students at each level (prek-5, 6-8, 9-12) to include, but not limit to. : · Continuous academic progress · ELO mastery · Continuous social / emotional / personal progress · Special education needs · Graduation requirements · Vocational programs				
3.	Create identification procedures based on categories identified in #2.				
4.	Develop criteria by which a student returns to regular environment.				
5.	Provide staff training.				
6.	Implement procedures for identification and placement of students.				
7.	Evaluate effectiveness of the identification system.				

Responsible: [   ]

Cost Benefit Analysis

STRATEGY: "We will develop and implement plans in partnership with our community to assist students who are at risk of not achieving identified learner outcomes."

SPECIFIC RESULT: Develop a comprehensive system to identify and place students who are not meeting appropriate age/grade level learning and life skills outcomes.

COSTS	BENEFITS
Tangible:	*Tangible:*
• S4006 – Summer curriculum writing (200 hours @ S20.03) • S1.252 – Staff development (100 hours @ S12.52)	• Better understanding of student needs and direction • Improved understanding of definition of at-risk
Intangible:	*Intangible:*
• Stress on buildings to implement • Time	• Reduced frustration regarding at-risk • Increased awareness level of staff in working with at-risk

ACTION PLAN

STRATEGY: "We will develop and implement plans in partnership with our community to assist students who are at risk of not achieving identified learner outcomes."

SPECIFIC RESULT: Develop adapt programs to meet identified student needs at grades prek-5, 6-8, and 9-12.

#	ACTION STEP (Number each one)	Assigned To:	Starting Date:	Due Date:	Completed Date:
1.	Determine program type. · Assigned program · Referral program · Choice program				
2.	Determine program setting. · Classroom-based · School-Within-A-School · Alternative (separate site)				
3.	Determine delivery model. · Academic (continuous progress) · ELO: academic and life skills assessments · Vocational/School-to-Work/internship · Graduation credit acquisition · Dropout intervention/prevention				
4.	Determine program structure. · Student services · Curricular practices · Instructional practices · Continuous assessment procedures · Transition procedures				
5.	Determine facility needs.				
6.	Determine staff needs.				
7.	Determine budget requirements.				
8.	Provide staff training.				
9.	Evaluate ongoing program.				

Responsible:

Cost Benefit Analysis

STRATEGY NUMBER: 2
PLAN NUMBER: 2
DATE: 11/29/1999

STRATEGY: *"We will develop and implement plans to ensure safety throughout our schools."*

SPECIFIC RESULT: Develop/adapt programs to meet identified student needs at grades preK-5, 6-8, and 9-12.

COSTS	BENEFITS
Tangible:	*Tangible:*
Monies for curriculum development and training	· Improvement of academic and social skills
	· Lower dropout rate
	· Lower graduation rate
	· Improved student behavior and referrals
Intangible:	*Intangible:*

ACTION PLAN

STRATEGY: "We will develop and implement plans in partnership with our community to assist students who are at risk of not achieving identified learner outcomes."

SPECIFIC RESULT: Develop/adapt specific alternative educational programs to meet at-risk student needs.

#	ACTION STEP (Number each one)	Assigned To:	Starting Date:	Due Date:	Completed Date:
1.	Develop a Millard ninth through twelfth grade night school program that reflects district graduation requirements and curriculum.				
2.	Expand the Millard Learning Center's ability to address special education and/or regular education student needs by significantly increasing its capacity.				
3.	Evaluate and support the New Frontier Program (Millard South High School) as a school-within-a-school model of alternative education.				
4.	Develop any additional programs deemed necessary as a result of the identification process and/or site plans.				
5.	Evaluate the effectiveness of the program.				

Responsible: [   ]

Cost Benefit Analysis

STRATEGY NUMBER: 2
PLAN NUMBER: 3
DATE: 11/29/1999

STRATEGY: *"We will develop and implement plans to ensure safety throughout our schools."*

SPECIFIC RESULT: Develop/adapt specific alternative educational programs to meet at-risk student needs.

COSTS	BENEFITS
Tangible:	*Tangible(1):*
1. Night School	• Reduced dropout rate
• 4 teachers x 2 hours x 2 days x 30 weeks – planning (1 hour per 5 hours of teaching) = 576 hours	• Reduced course failures
• $12,976 – Minimum for teacher	• Reduced infractions at buildings
• $6,409 – Curriculum and development	• Decreased SPED contracted services
• $3,480 – Clerical aide (480 hours)	• Better utilization of facilities
• $500 – Materials	• Increased quality of night school program
• $23,365 – *Total*	
--$15,000 – *Curriculum budget*	
$8,365 – *Added cost*	
2. Millard Learning Center (assuming that program doubles its capacity)	(2)
• $226,200 – 6 teachers	• Reduced dropout rate
• $24,000 - .5 administrator	• Reduced course failures
• $15,225 – 1.5 paraprofessionals	• Reduced infractions at buildings
• $9,585 - .5 secretary (10-month)	• Better utilization of facilities
• $20,116 - .5 psychologist	• Increased quality of Millard Learning Center
• $24,140 - .6 counselor	
• $16,000 – Materials	
• $20,000 – Transportation	
• $1,800 – Staff development	
• $357,366 - *Total*	
Intangible (1 & 2):	*Intangible (1 & 2):*
• Building "stress"	• Relieve building stress and pressure.
• Increased work load (custodial)	• Reduce frustrations of staff and students.
• Increased utility costs	

Cost Benefit Analysis

STRATEGY: "We will develop and implement plans to ensure safety throughout our schools."

SPECIFIC RESULT: Develop adapt specific alternative educational programs to meet at-risk student needs.

COSTS	BENEFITS
Tangible:	**Tangible (3):**
3. New Frontier · $170,395 - 4 teachers · $5,000 - Curriculum writing · $5,000 - Materials/supplies · $5,500 - 5 paraprofessional · $1,202 - Staff development · $1,292 - Substitutes · $193,526 (includes 3% increase) - **Total**	· Reduced dropout rate · Reduced course failures · Reduced infractions at buildings · Better utilization of facilities · Increased quality of New Frontier Program
Intangible (3):	**Intangible (3):**
· Building level stress · Increased workload (custodial)	· Relieve building stress and pressure. · Reduce frustrations of staff and students.

ACTION PLAN

STRATEGY NUMBER: 2
PLAN NUMBER: 4
DATE: 11/29/1999

STRATEGY: *"We will develop and implement plans in partnership with our community to assist students who are at risk of not achieving identified learner outcomes."*

SPECIFIC RESULT: Develop an awareness and outreach program to involve our community with at-risk students.

#	ACTION STEP (Number each one)	Assigned To:	Starting Date:	Due Date:	Completed Date:
1.	Educate the school system and the community about the unique needs of at-risk students to include: educational, personal, social, and career needs.				
2.	Establish a partnership with community resources to provide mental health services for at-risk students and their families.				
3.	Establish a partnership with community organizations, businesses, and other educational institutions for specific vocational training.				
4.	Establish a formal mentoring program at each building site for at-risk students.				
5.	Involve at-risk students in volunteer experiences.				
6.	Expand volunteer opportunities for community members to work with at-risk students.				
7.	Evaluate the effectiveness of the community awareness and outreach program.				

Responsible: [   ]

APPENDIX L

Interview Analysis Rubric

Analysis   **Student:**

	Pre	Post
Community		
Sense of self		
Value of school		
Future goals		

Analysis   **Parent:**

                         Pre   Post

Involvement

Perception of
Student

Perception of
School

Analysis   **Teacher:**

Pre	Post

Most important thing to remember
when working w/at-risk youth

Extra-curricular importance

Professional goals

Characteristics of successful
teacher w/at-risk youth

Parent involvement/communication