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Principals' perceptions of meeting vision and collaboration standards in alternative schools

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PRINCIPALS’ PERCEPTIONS OF MEETING VISION AND COLLABORATION STANDARDS IN
ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Educational Theory, Policy and Practice

by

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B.A. Southeastern Louisiana University, 1987
M.Ed. Southeastern Louisiana University, 1998
December 2010
DEDICATION

In memory of

Jiachino Joseph DiCarlo
“Honey”

Your memories will never be forgotten.
You are still the inspiration in my life.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work has been a tireless but rewarding journey. I could not have done this without the assistance, encouragement, and support from many people. It is impossible for me to acknowledge all whom have been a part of this very rewarding accomplishment. First I am very grateful for the understanding and patience of my wife, Donna. She has been with me each step, never allowing me to give up on my ambition. She has spent many evenings tending and caring for our two children, Dominique and Christian. I hope our family can bask in the rewards from this degree.

The rearranging and addition of co-chairs, Dr. Dana Bickmore, and Dr. Margaret Mary Sulentic Dowell came during a crucial time for me. They have been truly angels of God. Dr. Bickmore came onboard without hesitation, and her encouragement, care, and guidance allowed me to continue pursuing my educational endeavors. Her guidance, along with Dr. Dowell’s straightforwardness, placed me on a road to recovery, always looking ahead and never behind. Dr. Dowell always made me feel important, and she always assisted in any capacity, giving up her time at home as well as at Louisiana State University. I have enjoyed working with both and hope to continue working with them in some capacity.

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ABSTRACT

The present research was designed to address principals’ perceptions of meeting vision and collaboration standards in alternative schools. A multiple case study was used to accomplish the goals of this study. The objective and questions of this research pertain to school leaders’ behavior, knowledge, and performance within the context of a school leadership situation. Ecological theory framed this study as it refers to a student’s life within and outside of the school walls. The six research questions were formed and the basis of this exploration of two alternative school principals and contributes to an eventual portrait of the importance of school within a child’s ecosystem. The leaders had a story to tell and this qualitative research study allows for the principals to divulge this story. Specifically, this qualitative research study was designed to contribute to the knowledge base of how Performance Standards and Indicators for Education Leaders (ISLLC) standard one, mission/vision, and standard four, parent/community relations, were being met by two Louisiana alternative school principals. One of the seven themes that emerged from this research provided a spotlight on the principals’ and school interaction with the child’s ecosystem – school structures/discipline. The school structure/discipline was a consistent result from the data and consisted of student discipline referral system, student movement throughout the day, orientation process, and other administrative driven procedures designed to focus strictly on behavior policies. In this study, discipline permeated school operation. These principals’ fell short with meeting the two ISLLC standards most associated with the child’s ecosystem, and thus struggled with supporting the child’s ecosystem. The findings from this study did not indicate a great connection between the actions of individuals in the school and to the standards. Specifically, ISLLC standard one, mission and vision, were discussed but did not guide the school.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“Since the publication of A Nation Prepared in 1986, parents, legislators, and school boards have all been demanding better outcomes from primary and secondary public schools” (Aron, 2003, p. 1). Drakeford and Leone (1999) insist that as a result of this report, school systems have been concentrating largely on new, higher standards and improving accountability to improve student achievement. The passing of the “No Child Left Behind Act” of 2001 led the education systems to track annual yearly performance (AYP) scores, both school and district performance scores, based on subgroup performance. Specific subgroups of students were identified within the law because of their vulnerability to failing to meet and reach the new, higher standards as evidenced by state required achievement tests.

By the early 2000s, the group of students who did not make annual yearly progress began dropping out of school. This figure had grown significantly to nearly 25% and these students were classified as high school dropouts. As a result, alternative schools also flourished in quantity. Constant pressure to meet accountability goals may contribute to the rapid growth of alternative schools. “These children need and deserve a quality education program for the same reason that their traditional school counterparts do: these students need the knowledge and skills that quality programs provide in order to succeed in the new global economy of the 21st century” (Aron, 2003, p. 2).

Statement of the Problem

Alternative schools have emerged as one way to serve youths who have not succeeded in the traditional public school setting. Alternative programs differ greatly in their configuration and focus. For instance, alternative schools can address any and all of the following: academic
standards, structure, basic goals and objectives, parent and community involvement, disciplinary consequences, and intervention policies. Because of the variations in alternative schools, an agreed upon definition for an alternative school is difficult to ascertain. In general, defining alternative education for specific schools remains broad, vague, and differs from state to state and local district to local district. The problem investigated in this study is not the alternative school itself but defining the possible leadership for the alternative school. Specifically, this research study is framed by the broad question: how are alternative school leaders addressing the child’s ecosystem, i.e. family, community, caregivers, in terms of school vision, mission, and family and community stakeholder interaction?

The need to serve students at-risk of dropping out of school is greater than ever. Hundreds of thousands of students in the United States drop out each year without successfully completing high school. Summaries from the National Center of Education Statistics (2002) confirm youth who are at increased risk of dropping out of school tend to be from a low socioeconomic background, single-parent background, large urban school system, and particularly of Hispanic or Native American decent.

The effects of dropping out of school are spellbinding and have long-term ramifications for communities and the country as a whole. The economic, social, and emotional impact of failing to earn a high school diploma is very stressful to the child’s ecosystem, which includes the child, the family, and the community of the student; it is also stressful to the community at large. Each community in America contributes to a larger national community. As the society changes to a more technical world, additional skills are needed in order for America to be competitive with other countries and markets. An increasing unskilled and illiterate workforce costs businesses time, money, and resources to educate the pool of workers to be competitive in the business
industry. However, the social impact is just as important to society. A high school education, or the high school skill sets inherent in a diploma, equate to minimal survival in today’s workforce (Aron & Zweig, 2003). “By earning a high school degree, workers possess more skills that will help them either enter a higher level of education or better perform in the labor force” (Ingrum, 2006, p. 75). Additionally, high school dropouts are 3.5 times more likely than high school graduates to be arrested in their lifetime (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2003). Based on these data, students who do not obtain a diploma or do not finish a general education program are increasingly more at-risk to perform criminal activity and less likely to contribute to the economic stability of a community, also weakening the nation as a whole. Juvenile court system records indicate most juveniles who are incarcerated have failed at least once academically, have been truant from school, and have a lengthy school discipline record (Aron & Zweig, 2003). The cost of incarceration and welfare are extremely high for the government and eventually add to the taxpayers’ burden. Dropout rates continue to rise and are an ever growing concern for government systems, judicial systems, and social systems in all American communities. The cost of a student dropping out of school or being incarcerated has led to the obvious conclusion that schools and other community agencies must develop programs and provide services to these youth in an attempt to assist them in becoming productive citizens (Sprague & Tobin, 2000). Given the rise of alternative education programs and the critical nature of their purpose, it becomes critical to gain a better understanding of their operations. Specifically, to gain a deeper understanding of issues related to leadership appears warranted and overdue.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to describe the principals’ perception of leadership at two public alternative schools in a Southern state to create a portrait of alternative school principals.
There is a substantial base of literature regarding instructional strategies for alternative schools but
paucity of research about the role of the administrator and the implementation of the Interstate
School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) within an alternative setting. Two of these
leadership performance standards address school vision and community involvement. This study
seeks to identify the actions taken by two Louisiana alternative school principals to address the
perceived school vision and the vision’s relation to families and stakeholders of the child’s
community in an effort to add to the existing literature and to help create a portrait of the
alternative school principal.

**Theoretical Framework**

Ecological theory will frame this study as it refers to a student’s life within and outside of
the school walls. An effective transition and integration practice for alternative school students
can be traced back to the early 1960s, to a theory known as ecological theory, and best described
ecosystem is the environment in which the child lives his daily life, including the family,
community, and school. School occupying one-third of a child’s day becomes central to the
child’s ecosystem. Social ecosystems may be similar or very different. They may or may not
include a mother, father, sibling, babysitter, pediatrician, teacher, friend, church, and grandparent,
all of which are categorized as family, school, or community. In other words, each child has a
unique ecosystem. Hobbs’ work was mostly with children who had emotional issues, and he
believed that a child’s emotional disturbance did not reside solely within the individual student.
He offered that the disturbance was within the ecosystem that the child functioned, including the
school, family, and community that impacted the child’s behavior.
Cantrell, Cantrell, and Valore (2006) define ecology as the study of complex interactions in a natural setting. “The first step of ecological intervention is collecting information from all areas that impact a student with emotional behavioral disorder and assessing each area’s strengths and weaknesses” (Cantrell et al., 2006, p. 50). Each member who comes into contact with the student on a regular basis must participate in the information gathering. “Identifying the problems in the student’s ecosystem and understanding how those problems have impacted the child’s actions are important” (Cantrell et al., 2006, p. 50). Cantrell et al., (2006) stress that knowledge of the ecosystem provides everyone with a plan to impact the child’s life to meet all of their respective goals and aspirations. An ecological approach requires that professionals partner with the child, family, and significant others to build on the strengths within the social network and to find solutions to problems in order to restore the ecology to a desirable level of function (Valore, 1992). This study seeks to explore the school’s contribution as an important part of the ecosystem serving students in alternative settings.

James Coleman studied (1966) the effect of the students’ family background and determined background to be the main factor impacting a student’s success in school. This report generated a great deal of controversy in the education world as Coleman proposed that children from poor families and poor homes may not learn optimally because these children did not have the proper background and support from the family. Further, Coleman wrote that this outcome occurred no matter what the school did for the student.

In response to Coleman’s hypothesis, “follow up” or subsequent studies were done to understand what role the school might play to accommodate for the child’s life outside of school. This research was conducted based on the assumption that all children can learn. “Ronald Edmonds and others refused to accept Coleman’s report as conclusive, although they
acknowledged that family background does indeed make a difference” (Association for Effective Schools, 1996b, p. 1). Edmonds and others (1979) studied schools that had poor students who were learning in successful school communities to illustrate how public schools can and do make a difference in the students’ success. Their studies with these schools revealed that children from poor backgrounds could learn at high levels if the school contained certain characteristics.

The research by Edmonds and Birdsell (2005) evolved into Effective Schools Research Correlates (ESRC), characteristics that should be present in a school for effective instruction. Schools that not only acknowledged the correlates, but embraced them, demonstrated student success (Association of Effective Schools, 1996b). The correlates of effective schools are a mechanism to evaluate if schools are attaining high and equitable levels of student learning. When school improvement processes are based upon the effective school research correlates and are subsequently implemented, the ratio of students who achieve academic excellence often improves, or at minimal, remains constant (Association of Effective Schools, 1996a).

The seven ESRC correlates for effective school research are: 1) clear mission, 2) high expectations for success, 3) instructional leadership, 4) frequent monitoring of student progress, 5) opportunity to learn and student time on task, 6) safe and orderly environment, 7) home-school relations (Association of Effective Schools, 1996a). This research study will specifically examine two of the correlates that parallel the ISLLC standards of school vision/mission and community involvement/home-school relations. In particular, correlates one and seven will be used as a lens in which to view this research. Thus, this research will potentially contribute to studies designed to test Coleman’s (1966) hypothesis and add to the literature that supports schools as vital parts of a student’s ecosystem.
Research Questions

The following six research questions will form the basis of this exploration of two alternative school principals and contribute to an eventual portrait of the importance of school within a child’s ecosystem. Based on a review of the literature and exploration into alternative schools, the following six research questions were developed to guide this study.

1. How does the alternative school leader understand the mission of alternative education?
2. How are alternative school leaders developing and implementing a shared vision of learning?
3. How does the alternative school leader collaborate with families and key stakeholders who represent diverse interests?
4. How does the alternative school leader organize community resources to help children attending alternative schools?
5. How does the child’s total ecosystem influence leadership decisions?
6. What are the perceived challenges for leaders in alternative education?

Definition of Terms

The nature of alternative schools makes definitions of terms essential to the discussion. Therefore, clarification of certain terms is important. For this study, the term alternative school refers to a setting for students who have been expelled from the regular school setting or have been placed in an alternative setting due to a long-term suspension. For the purpose of the study, a student’s ecosystem refers simply to the child’s family, school, and community in which they live. Other terms used in this study include the following:

1. school leader or instructional leader- the principal at the alternative school site
2. student subgroup- subgroups may include students without disabilities, students with disabilities, minority students, and majority students; each group must consist of at least 10 students

3. at-risk student- a student who is in danger of dropping out of school due to economic status, race, age, or gender

4. community stakeholder- community members and groups that have competing or conflicting perspectives about education (Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium, 1996)

5. dropout- a person who does not receive a high school diploma or general equivalency exam certificate within a specified time period

6. performance standards-professional expectations as they are observed in practice (Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium, 1996)

7. vision- the goals the school community intends for students to achieve (Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium, 1996)

8. youth- a human being who is between the ages of 5 and 17

**Study Design**

A multiple case study (Yin, 1993) will be used to accomplish the goals of this study. The objective and questions of this research pertain to school leaders’ behavior, knowledge, and performance within the context of a school leadership situation. The leaders have a story to tell. When researchers conduct qualitative research, they explore feelings, beliefs, attitudes, experiences, movements, and interactions. According to Yin (1993), “multiple-case studies should follow a replication; not a sampling logic” (p. 34). “This means that two or more cases should be included within the same study; precisely, because the investigator predicts that similar
results will be found” (Yin, p. 34). If similar results are found in the different cases, more confidence can be presented in the overall results. This study strives to create rich descriptions of the subjects involved in the research. Descriptions include ordinary vocabulary mixed with imagery, color, and scenes. “Description is needed to confirm what was or is going on, what the setting looks like, and what the people involved are doing” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 53-54).

The descriptions will be obtained from direct observations of the subjects in the study. These annotations will be from day-long observations at the school site, which will help to create a portrait of alternative school leadership.

As a researcher, my goal is to generate diverse interpretations of what is actually happening in these alternative school settings. I will utilize a multiple case study design and follow the grounded theory approach to analyze the data. The goal of my design is to assess each subject at one specific point in time without making inferences or causal statements.

**Limitations**

The study includes a sample of two alternative public schools located in Louisiana. The alternative school sites were selected from the Louisiana Alternative School Directory published by the state’s Department of Education. The schools were specifically chosen because of grade make-up and the geographic region of the facility. Also, only alternative schools whose student population has been expelled for behavioral reasons was used in determining the school sample. Leader characteristics were not considered when choosing the alternative school participant. The school curriculum, faculty, staff, and facility were not confirmed before the sites and participants were chosen. The geographic location within the state of Louisiana was a major selection factor in determining the participants. Each school chosen was within a 120 mile radius of the state’s capitol, Baton Rouge. This allowed me to conduct the study in a concentrated area centralized in
the state of Louisiana. This is recognized as limitation of the research. Another limitation to the study is the availability of published documents from each school or school district. These documents varied in media type, presentation, and included information. Due to the cost of these documents, not all schools have them available. Examples of these documents may include parental newsletters, student handbooks, and policies concerning attendance and dress code, as well as admission procedures.

**Organization of the Study**

Chapter 1 provided the statement and development of the problem in this study, listing the research questions as well as the background information on alternative schools and terms associated with alternative education. Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature relative to the current study. Chapter 3 describes the research design along with the rationale for the selection of the particular design. Procedures used to accomplish the research are also noted in Chapter 3. The findings of the research project will be presented in Chapter 4. In the final chapter, Chapter 5, will contain a summary of the entire project, conclusions drawn from the research, and implications and recommendations for further study, resulting from this work.

**Summary**

State statutes often mandate that all school districts provide an alternative program for expelled students. Although decision-makers assumed that alternative education was uniform, few guidelines are available from which school leaders could devise a program. It is necessary, therefore, to understand what administrators perceive as the mission of alternative schools and how they address the families and stakeholders of the students attending alternative schools as it relates to the implementation of the ISLLC standards and the Correlates of Effective Schools.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE AND RESEARCH

This chapter is a comprehensive review of literature of the history, current descriptions of alternative schools, mission and vision of alternative schools, and potential successes and challenges of alternative schools. Effective leadership at alternative schools and examples of successful alternative schools was also examined. Lastly, the history of ecological theory will be investigated and its continued existence in today’s schools will also be revealed.

Defining Alternative Environments

The most general definition of an alternative school is a public elementary or secondary school that addresses needs of students that typically were not met in a regular school. According to the United States Department of Education (2002), alternative schools provide nontraditional educational services to students. These schools act as an adjunct to a regular school. Characteristics of many alternative schools may be a flexible schedule, diverse curriculum, unique campus, various student performance objectives, and specific attendance regulations. These schools often fall outside the categories of a regular special education service or vocational education service.

“The literature on alternative education, (Aron, 2003, p. 17), presents features or characteristics which are thought to be essential to the success of alternative education efforts.” An alternative school can be an establishment apart from the regular school complete with policies and rules, educational objectives, staff, and resources designed to accommodate student needs. An alternative program is designed to accommodate specific student educational needs such as work-related training, reading, mathematics, science, communication, social skills, physical skills, employable skills, study skills, or life skills. Alternative education is often defined as educational
activities that fall outside the traditional K-12 school system which includes home schooling, general equivalency diploma (GED) preparation, and charter schools. These nontraditional institutions establish a more flexible program for students who are gifted, overage, expelled, or suspended. Males and females, pregnant teens and parenting teens, students who are suspended or expelled from traditional school settings, juvenile delinquents, low achievers, and recovered dropouts can be found in various alternative programs throughout the United States. Many programs exist for these low-achieving students. Career awareness programs, apprenticeships, vocational and technical training, internships, work experiences, modified programs, and other occupational exploration programs exist. “Alternative schools are one educational option serving students who are most at-risk, including students with disabilities, students from minority backgrounds, those who are pregnant or parenting, those who have been suspended or expelled, and those who are most disenfranchised from the traditional high school experience” (Lange & Lehr, 2003, p. 60). “Many youth who attend alternative schools either have been strongly encouraged to leave the traditional campus or have been officially excluded from the mainstream education setting” (Denti & Guerin, 1999, p. 76). Many students who attend alternative schools come from poverty backgrounds, have some type of disability, speak English as a second language, lack adult supervision, and are from minority groups (Aron & Zweig, 2003). The three most frequently reported student commonalities are a history of social-emotional problems, truancy problems, and home school referrals (Aron, 2003). School districts report physical aggression, chronic truancy, and verbal disruptive behavior as the most frequent criteria for removal of a student from a general education program. “Many of these disruptive students exhibit learning difficulties and behavioral problems; many of these students have suffered neglect or abuse” (Denti & Guerin, 1999, p. 76).
State by State Variances

States vary widely on the authorization and purposes of alternative programs. Some states include magnet schools as alternative schools; some states have schools within a school; many states have separate schools labeled as alternative schools (Lange & Lehr, 2003). As more alternative schools were forming throughout the United States, legislation within the states had to be developed. These alternative school policies were created to protect at-risk students and to assure them and all stakeholders that they are being given effective instruction to improve student achievement. Katsiyannis and Williams (1998) reported formal alternative education legislation appeared in twenty-two states. “In 2003, preliminary research suggests similar legislation for alternative schools appeared in forty states” (Lange & Lehr, 2003, p.61). New definitions and policies began to be formulated; for example, “the Virginia Department of Education defined alternative education as a means of providing learning opportunities that accommodate the needs of students not optimally served by a regular program, alternative education aims for students success through varying degrees of departure from standard school organization, programs, and environments” (Mottaz, 2002, p. ix). In Wisconsin, an alternative education program is defined under s. 115.28(7)(e), as “an instructional program approved by the school board that utilizes successful alternative or adaptive school structures and teaching techniques and that is incorporated into existing traditional classrooms or regularly scheduled curricular programs or that is offered in place of regularly scheduled curricular programs” (Aron, 2003, p. 6). In Louisiana, administered in the Division of Family, Career and Technical Education (DFCTE), the purpose of Alternative Schools/Programs is to provide students at-risk of dropping out of school an alternative to regular education. The Louisiana DFCTE promotes reform, innovation, and continuous improvement in alternative education to ensure that at-risk students acquire the skills.
and knowledge they need to meet challenging State academic standards and to prepare for a successful future. Louisiana also requires Local Education Agencies (LEA) to offer Alternative Schools/Programs under R.S. 17:7.5 (Department of Education, 2009).

Today’s alternative schools include diverse educational programs and service delivery models intended for students with special education needs, students at-risk of dropping out, disruptive students, advanced placement students, charter schools, home-schooled children and youths. Alternative schools typically strive to offer a caring, collaborative, and engaging learning environment with ambitions to develop a community of learners (Lange & Lehr, 2003). Through these communities it is hoped that students will demonstrate acceptance of others, leadership skills, and experience further academic success.

“Many alternative schools possess several characteristics that are described as key elements of effective strategies for reaching students at-risk of dropping out of school, including individualized flexible programming, high expectations, an emphasis on care and concern, and small school size” (Lange & Lehr, 2003, p. 62). Sprague and Tobin (2000) described best and preferred practices for educating students at-risk with and without disabilities in alternative education programs. “Some strategies for alternative schools include alternative assessment, thematic units, portfolios, high interest topics, technology, affective education, transition skills, and closure” (Denti & Guerin, 1999, p. 77). “Best practices suggest settings that are primarily punitive or non-rehabilitative are inappropriate because harsh discipline and efforts focused on quick fixes have been shown to be ineffective” (Lange & Lehr, 2003, p. 62).

**History of Alternative Schools**

An alternative school, however, is not a recent development in American education. Young (1990) has actually traced the roots of alternative schooling in the United States to colonial
times when education was offered to the general population by the wealthy or through religious groups. Early proponents of alternative education, such as Friedrich Froebel, believed education should support a child’s natural growth rather than simply meet the demands of society. At the turn of the previous century, John Dewey brought forth the progressive education movement, a movement based on the belief that also posited that education should serve the needs of the children. The progressive movement occurred during the 1920s with the development of the Progressive Movement Association and continued with the United States’ progressive acts in space exploration during the 1950s (Hobbs, 1982).

Despite a presence in American education since colonial times, the most effective transition and integration practices of alternative schools can be traced back to the early 1960s. Freedom schools, actually alternative programs outside the public education system, were established to provide a quality education with equity for minority children in the South, especially in Mississippi. The Freedom School movement, in essence, paved the way for alternative programs. Free Schools were similarly structured to Freedom Schools except they focused on student exploration and discovery learning. These innovative movements lead to the development of other alternative programs.

During this same period in the 1960’s, an approach known as Project Re-Ed was implemented with success. “The National Institute of Mental Health funded Project Re-Ed as an eight year pilot project created to launch a new paradigm in the treatment of children with severe emotional disturbance” (Cantrell, Cantrell & Valore, 2006, p. 49). This move toward alternative schools appeared to develop from the progressive, learner-centered, free schools founded in the 1960s. The free schools’ movement was a catalyst for positive integration of alternative schools and alternative programs for students. Alternative schools began gaining popularity in the late
1960s and 1970s as a fundamental drive to create changes in the traditional schools and to create more innovative schools, so the education of all children could move forward (Lange & Lehr, 2003). “A 1972 report by the President’s Commission on School Finance called for an increase in options in the form of alternative education, and as a result, the number of alternative schools increased from 464 in 1973 to 5,000 in 1975” (Mottaz, 2002, p. vii). The dropout rate began to be a major reference point for alternative schools. In reality, many alternative schools began to be called dropout prevention schools (Mottaz, 2002).

During the 1980s, remedial schools were developed which targeted and served more students who were falling behind academically and causing disruption in traditional school settings. This trend continued in the 1990s, and alternative schools were being viewed by educators and communities as schools for students who have had to “struggle with” disciplinary problems. This seemingly negative perception hurt the continued rise in alternative programs. However, “between 1980 and 2000 a dramatic rise in school violence and aggression resulted in public concern and several legislative responses to the problem” (Van Acker, 2007, p. 5). Schools, especially urban schools, began taking action to decrease the growth of antisocial, violent, and aggressive behavior. Many schools adopted increased security measures, such as security guards, metal detectors, and video surveillance of public areas in and around schools. Many states adopted zero-tolerance policies, which often punished students who did not follow policies. Harsh and punitive consequences such as suspension and expulsion were distributed as a result of target behaviors. According to Van Acker (2007), due to zero tolerance policies and harsh, punitive measures, suspension and expulsion rates skyrocketed in the United States. This legislation brought about changes, and alternative schools began to embark on the endeavor to educate these suspended and expelled students.
These strict, zero-tolerance policies and subsequent punitive measures such as expulsion came with some unforeseen consequences. Instead of reducing the rate of violent behavior, strict zero tolerance policies actually escalated the dropout rate. “The tendency to criminalize school behavior is associated with increased school dropout, producing higher levels of juveniles being incarcerated, and minorities began to be overrepresented in juvenile detention facilities” (Raush, Ritter & Skiba, 2005, p. 217). According to Van Acker (2007, p. 5) “approximately 2% or roughly 280,000 youths attended alternative schools in the United States in 1999”. The National Center on Educational Statistics (2002), reported “for the academic year 2000-2001, 10,900 public alternative schools operated in the United States, offering alternative programs to 612,000 students”.

As these data indicate, school systems may have tried to ensure a safe school environment while continuing to provide quality education to students who displayed perceived antisocial, violent, and aggressive behavior. Therefore, schools turned to alternative school programs where these at-risk students with challenging behaviors were removed from the typical traditional school population, and they were placed in settings away from the traditional school campuses.

**A Local Look at Alternative Schools: Louisiana**

As of 2009, the Louisiana State Department of Education (DOE) on behalf of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) reported a total of 143 alternative programs in Louisiana (C. Leggett, personal communication, July 22, 2009). These alternative programs provided services for 21,804 Louisiana students (C. Leggett, personal communication, July 22, 2009). These numbers have grown in recent years as BESE began calculating high school dropouts in each Louisiana schools performance data.
Variance of Descriptors and Characteristics of Alternative Schools

Given the historical movements that have contributed to the establishment of current alternative schools in the United States (US), it is not surprising how descriptions of alternative schools in Louisiana and in other states display variances. Lange and Sletton (2002) summarized common characteristics used to describe currently functioning alternative schools. Typically, current alternative schools have small enrollments, one-to-one interaction between teachers and students, supportive environment, beyond what is found in traditionally schools, opportunities and curriculum relevant to student interests, wide flexibility in structure, and an emphasis on student decision making (Lange & Sletton, 2002). Portions of or all of the aforementioned characteristics appear to be consistently used to describe alternative schools. Additionally, due to the uniqueness of student populations, it appears alternative schools actually have more fluid boundaries than traditional settings. “Alternative schools have operated with a relatively high degree of autonomy; little is known about the school’s governance or the consistency of program policies across various states or regions” (Lange & Lehr, 2003, p. 60). Alternative schools continue to have considerable flexibility in operation at the local level with regard to entrance and exit procedures, program design, staffing, and curriculum (Aron, 2003). Additionally, policies impacting traditional school do not appear to extend effectively to many alternative sites, as evidenced by the following quotation, “the lack of comprehensive policies or legislation on alternative programs in many states and the potential for limited involvement at the state level has implications for alternative programs especially when circumstances call for leadership and advocacy” (Lange & Lehr, 2003, p. 61). Due to the limited visibility of facilities and autonomy of alternative schools, many schools do not receive proper services such as staff development or technical assistance, nor do they receive adequate funding (Lange, Lanners & Lehr, 2004). This is a primary concern
identified by school personnel. This suggests the possibility of poor quality programs existing in most states.

A brief review of the characteristics and descriptions yields a seemingly wide variance. While Raywid (1994), Kellmayer (1996), Dugger, and Dugger (1998) have all suggested characteristics of effective alternative programs, each researcher has also listed characteristics of alternative schools that are important to the success of the program.

Raywid (1994, p. 26) pointed out, “school reforms in the past decade have pursued many of the practices of alternative schools, such as smaller student teacher ratios, common themes, teacher and student choice, community involvement, empowering staff members, active learning, and authentic assessment.” Many students excel in alternative schools and parents may not want their children to leave this setting. The alternative school environment offers many opportunities to students besides the obvious change in settings. The size of the class, the size of the facility, the personal feeling of care, and an integrated curriculum has made finishing school a reality for many students in such settings. Mottaz (1998) examined the coping strategies of at-risk students. This research showed that alternative school students cope differently than those in traditional school settings. “These students desperately need small school size, small class size, extended roles for teachers, cooperative roles for students, voluntary membership, student involvement in governance, and an absence or minimization of tracking, ability grouping and other kinds of labeling” (Mottaz, 1998, p. 13).

**Vision/Mission of Alternative Schools**

Due to the varied historical movements and subsequent variance in characteristics and descriptors of alternative schools, visions and missions are also understandably varied. Despite the varied configurations, the literature yields three distinct types of alternative schools. Raywid
(1994) created a classification system for alternative schools. She distinctly identified three pure types which individual alternatives programs appear to approximate to varying degrees in implementation. This system is known as Raywid’s typology (1994). Each type is based on distinct characteristics of alternative schools and subsequent programs.

**Type I Alternative Schools**

A Type 1 school (Popular Innovations) was categorized as having full-time students for multiple years. The educational options for students attending a Type 1 school included those needing more individualized instruction and students seeking an innovative or challenging curriculum (Raywid, 1994). It also included students who were previously considered dropouts and then decided to earn a high school diploma. In a typical Type 1 school, a full instructional program is offered to students who are still receiving credits toward graduation. Students attending Type 1 alternative schools choose to attend the school. Other characteristics of this type of school include a caring staff, flexibility in daily schedules, administrative autonomy, low teacher pupil ratio for all classes, a self-paced curriculum, individual and/or group counseling, and skills focusing on various careers (Raywid, 1994). Occasionally, these schools are referred to as magnet schools. Such magnet schools are theme-based schools offering innovative programs, all geared toward a particular theme, such as communication, creative arts, technology, or basic skills just to name a few.

**Type II Alternative Schools**

A second alternative school classification is a Type 2 (Last-chance Programs) alternative program. These programs aim to segregate, to contain, and to reform behaviors of disruptive students. Students attending Type 2 schools typically do not choose to attend, rather they are recommended to attend, based on behavior. In some cases, students are adjudicated to Type 2
schools. These students are characterized as chronically disruptive and face long-term consequences in the future if the behavior persists and does not positively change (Raywid, 1994). Students are sent to such schools for specified time periods or until a particular behavior objective is met. The time requirement is usually a predetermined period of time. Placement at these alternative schools is often short-term; therefore, the curriculum is usually limited to a few basic required courses students may need for promotion to the next grade level (Raywid, 1994). In some cases, assignments are sent from the home-base school to the alternative school for students to complete. Examples of Type 2 schools include in-school suspension programs, cool-out rooms, time-out rooms, and also long-term placements for chronically disruptive students (Raywid, 1994). Often, these schools are known as last chance schools or last chance programs, allowing students ‘one more chance’ to succeed before they are expelled from their traditional school.

**Type III Alternative Schools**

Raywid (1994) determined Type 3 (Remedial Focus) alternative schools are the third and last classification. According to Raywid, “these programs usually provide short-term stints, but a very therapeutic setting is developed for students who are presumed to need remediation or rehabilitation academic, social/emotional, or both” (p. 27). Thus, students attending Type 3 alternative schools have identified social and emotional issues that create academic and behavioral barriers to learning. Parents and students can elect not to participate. Such schools are strictly a voluntary program to help students who have fallen off track or made a series of bad decisions. In such cases, these bad decisions have led to extreme consequences and the need for equally extreme extra assistance. Many students attending Type 3 schools are substantially behind their grade level peers. Type 3 schools are designed to assist in moving the students back to the traditional school setting over an agreed upon period of time. As students are significantly behind
academically, the Type 3 alternative setting is designed with a strong remedial focus on academic issues, social-emotional issues, or often both (Lange & Sletton, 2002).

Despite the historical developments leading to the variance of alternative school characteristics and descriptors, specific models of alternative schools have developed in an effort to serve the specific needs of students and communities. Simply put, these models have varied degrees of success. The National Dropout Prevention Center (NDPC) at Clemson University espoused Hefner-Packer’s (1991) five models of alternative schools.

1. alternative classroom
2. school-within-a-school
3. separate alternative school
4. continuation school
5. magnet school

The alternative classroom was one model designed as a self-contained classroom within a traditional school. This simple model had various school offerings in a different setting. “The school-within-a-school model is housed within a traditional school, but has semiautonomous or specialized educational programs” (NDPC, 2007, p. 2). Another alternative school model is separated from the regular school campus and is called the separate alternative school. This school had different academic and social adjustment programs for students. “The continuation school model was developed for students no longer attending traditional schools, such as street academies for job-related training or parenting centers” (NDPC, p. 2). The last model Hefner and Packer (1991) delineated was the magnet school. The magnet school is a self-contained program offering an intensified curriculum in one or more subject areas such as math or science. They can be located on the traditional campus or have a dedicated campus. Magnet schools may also have
fixed enrollments, such as an equal percentage of majority and minority students. They may also have academic admission requirements.

**Effective Schools and Alternative Schools**

Returning to Coleman’s (1966) hypothesis that poor children lack the foundation to succeed in school, no matter what supports a school provides, juxtapose his hypothesis to the work of Edmonds and Birdsell’s development of effective school research correlates. I now apply later correlates to alternative schools. My assumption as a researcher is that the correlates of school vision/mission and community involvement/home school relations become a viable lens from which to examine leadership in alternative school settings. In particular, I offer Lezotte’s (1991) second generation correlates as a means of examining what alternative school principals might facilitate.

Further research on effective schools was conducted by Lezotte (1991). He developed what is known as ‘second generation correlates’. Second generation correlates were delineated in *Learning for All*. “Lezotte’s *Learning for All* mission attempts to incorporate the recent research on school improvement findings and offers an even more challenging developmental stage to which schools committed to the “*Learning for All*” mission ought to aspire” (Lezotte, 1991, p. 1). Birdsell also developed models for schools to follow in order to become more effective, based on Coleman’s research. This model was called *More Effective Schools* and incorporated professional development in collaboration and team approaches to align the practices and routines of the school districts and individual schools with Effective Schools’ research and practices (Birdsell, 2005).

The correlates are the same; however, more in-depth learning is needed once the correlate is satisfied. Once Lezotte’s research is shared and accepted by teachers, the responsibility for student learning is clear. “Birdsell’s research focuses on designing and delivering a curriculum
which responds to the demands of accountability, and is responsive to the need of increasing the levels of learning” (Lezotte, 1991, p. 3). This will require substantial staff development. The faculty and staff will need to know how to address the issues of high level learning as well as understand how to meet the minimal standards for accountability or annual yearly progress (AYP).

**High Expectations**

Establishing high expectations for the success of all students and the implementation of this belief by all staff members make up the Effective Schools Research (first generation). *Learning for All* (second generation) goals suggests that the equalization of opportunity for all students proved to be insufficient to assure mastery for many learners (Lezotte, 1991). The teachers felt ineffective when high expectations were in place and were acted upon, yet some students still did not learn. Therefore, Birdsell’s research suggests the implementation of additional strategies, and proposes a receiving of a broader array of responses may be necessary to assure that all students achieve mastery (Lezotte, 1991). Alternative settings can provide equalization of opportunity in an equitable manner for many students not adequately served in traditional schools.

Many studies have been completed since Lezotte’s Effective Schools Research. Balfanz and McIver (2000) and Cotton (1991) focused their research on inner-city schools specifically urban, high poverty middle schools. “A review of the research on promising practices for educating inner-city minority youth reveals that it is highly congruent with the general effective schooling research” (Cotton, 1991, p. 3). However, other strategies along with those are needed to enhance the performance of minority students. One of the findings included setting high expectations. Others such as safety, discipline, parental involvement, and setting up and providing incentives were also strategies for high poverty children. Balfanz and McIver exited the
Philadelphia study hopeful of reform efforts to improve low-performing and high-poverty schools.

“The five year study has seen the schools achieve substantial and systematic improvements in student learning and student achievement as well as teacher support and teacher performance” (Balfanz & McIver, 2000, p. 156).

**Research-based Practices for Alternative Schools**

Alternative schools have shown success in many areas. According to the studies of Cash (2004), school administrators felt alternative schools can be an effective reactive discipline method; thus, alternative programs need to be expanded. Cash (2004) reported “anecdotally that alternative education is effective in a) reducing truancy, b) improving attitudes toward school, c) helping students accumulate high school credits, and d) reducing behavioral problems” (p. 7). Lange and Sletton (2002) reported on successes of alternative education for students who dropout, students with disabilities, and students with high risk health issues. Munoz (2002) found improved attendance and a general reduction in behavioral problems for students’ enrolled in alternative schools. These successes and others attribute to the sustained growth of alternative schools throughout the United States. The principle findings from a 1995 study by Cox, Davidson, and Bynum, were that alternative programs can have positive effects on school performance, school attitude, and self-esteem. However, alternative schools did not significantly change participants’ delinquent behavior. Two additional significant findings came from the Cox, et. al. (1995) review. First, alternative schools for low academic achievers or delinquent youth produced larger effects than schools that were not intended for that target population.

**Individualized Instruction**

Secondly, according to Cox, et al. (1995) more successful programs had a curriculum and structure centered on the specific needs of a designated target population. Programs that were not
as successful did not identify a target population and lacked the necessary resources to benefit students. Second, less rigorous research designs consistently resulted in more positive effects than did experimental designs. For instance, pre-post research designs without a control group produced positive results more often than did comparison group designs. Consistent with earlier reviews, Cox, et al. (1995) pointed out that methodological shortcomings continue to plague the alternative school literature. Van Acker (2007) found that programs targeting a specific population of at-risk youths produced larger effects than those with open admissions.

However, researchers have suggested that alternative education programs are not effective, when targeting the display of antisocial or juvenile delinquent behavior. More and more evidence is being accumulated to suggest that students attending specific alternative education programs that target the same behavior issues are getting better results from the students who attend those schools (Van Acker, 2007).

**Home/Parent Engagement**

“Parents taking part in instruction, in supporting classroom and extracurricular activities, and participating in school governance is related to both positive student learning outcomes and positive student attitudes” (Cotton, 1991, p. 7). Parent engagement or home involvement can be a key aspect in alternative education students persisting in school and achieving either a high school diploma or general equivalency diploma (GED). Continued support of the parents and the whole ecosystem surrounding the child has shown benefits to enhancing the student’s success. Community based services and other wraparound services can be important to the success of students in alternative school settings. Wraparound services include mental health professionals, pupil appraisal personnel, case managers, and other personnel who assist the child outside of the
school environment. These services may offer a specific scope service such as psychiatric treatment, and many have insurance limitations for students.

**Frequent Monitoring**

The frequency of monitoring student progress will continue to be important for student success in mastering basic skills. According to Lezotte (1991) testing will begin to move away from standardized tests to more norm referenced and teacher-made tests in the second generation. “This means that there will be less emphasis on the paper pencil, multiple choice tests, and more emphasis on assessments of products of student work, including performances, portfolios, and other authentic assessments” (Lezotte, 1991, p. 5).

**Supportive Environment**

Learning must occur in a supportive environment. Schools must offer students many opportunities for high quality learning to increase the level of learning (Balfanz & McIver, 2000). Prosperous programs combine intensive individualized staff development in the basic skills of work-related projects. When the relation between education and work become clear, most of these potential dropouts can be motivated to stay in school and to perform at a higher level (Butler & Druian, 1987). “Research has consistently demonstrated the most effective deterrents against inappropriate classroom behavior are active, engaging, and relevant academic instruction” (Adera & Hughes, 2006, p. 27). This is similar to Louisiana’s rigor and relevance focus in the high-schools-that-work platform. Students’ success in learning tasks is important for students to build self-esteem. Failure, which most at-risk students are very familiar, will send a negative message to the students. Challenging at-risk students to perform at a high standard decreases time off-task and can lead to improved student achievement. Virtually, all students can master basic learning objectives with the teacher’s continuous communication of high expectations, encouragement, and
support (Cotton, 1991). This encouragement and support is also crucial to improving student achievement especially for students of high poverty. Small size groups also help with the culture of the classroom.

**School Culture**

Creating an effective school culture can be manifested by providing individual attention to students. Closely monitoring student performance and bestowing excellent feedback to students can produce a positive school culture. Smaller school size sometimes leads to more individual attention and more face to face teaching and monitoring. “Successful programs do not suppress criticism but instead provide a positive and constructive atmosphere in which criticism can occur” (Butler & Druian, 1987, p. 6). This is generated from an administration and faculty firmly believing all children will succeed academically. A school culture with high expectations for student achievement is embedded in a caring and nurturing environment, where young people alike treat each other with respect (Clements & Kannapel, 2005).

**Student Self-involvement**

Student involvement in their learning is also a very important component needed in high poverty schools. Students achieve greater satisfaction, personal growth, and higher levels of performance in classrooms characterized by student engagement and student activity. Other factors that can increase student satisfaction are clear roles for students, demonstrated caring for students as people, the use of best practices in teaching methods, and promoting a positive rewarded system for academic work in the classroom (Moos, 1979). Building a trusting relationship with adults helps students grow and learn appropriate actions (Sprague & Tobin, 2000). Thus a trusting and mentoring relationship is an important factor in the success of an ecological program as the social structure in the students’ ecosystem is being fulfilled. An
ecological program is set up to have a teacher-counselor who interacts with the child on a daily basis and provides support and nurturing to the child.

**Focus on Academic Achievement**

Since some alternative programs are for children exhibiting academic difficulties, it is paramount that educators keep academic achievement at the forefront. “Effective alternative programs must place a priority on providing effective instruction and utilizing a meaningful and engaging curriculum” (Adera & Hughes, p. 27). And, effective schools research emphasizes the expectation that all students are both involved in their own learning and understand and respect the school as a place designed and dedicated to learning (Butler & Druian, 1987). Another way for students to become involved in their learning is to set clear goals for both academics and behavior (Butler & Druian, 1987).

**Program Size**

The size of the alternative program must be intentionally small in student population (Duke & Griesdorn, 1999). Smaller student populations are more successful than larger student populations in alternative schools. One drawback of having small schools is that their small size denies them much auxiliary or specialized staff, such as librarians, counselors, or deans. But, the advantages outweigh the disadvantages. Mottaz (p. 102) reports “the primary goal of an alternative school program is to first make connections with each student, and then be sure to maintain these connections”. Small student populations allow this to occur. Besides one-to-one instruction, “one of the strongest forces driving adolescent behavior is the need to belong” (Mottaz, p. 29). A history of rejection creates in the student an expectation of future rejection. Students should feel as though they have come home to a place that cares, regardless of their problems. As a result of negative responses, failures, and dismissals, a “last chance” traditional
school is very unfortunate because it only gives the student a perception that it is not any different from the discouraging world around them (Drakeford & Leone, 1999). It is not the nurturing, caring atmosphere that is essential for vulnerable students to succeed. It is merely more of the same.

**Program Design**

Another characteristic of an effective alternative program is program design. Program design may be crucial to the success of the students. The organizers and designers should include the operator or leaders of the program. Empowering the teacher to become a part of the design process and allow the teacher to exhibit a leadership role can be a helpful factor to the success of the overall program. The teachers’ strengths and interests should be considered when developing the themes of the alternative program. The teachers hired should be those who choose to be employed in an alternative program, which makes the staffing of the alternative school essential. The teachers and staff should feel valued in their positions at the alternative school; they must want to be there! Placing administrators and faculty members at these sites because they have not been successful in other settings is a recipe for disaster. Staff members must model the kind of behaviors they are trying to elicit from students in both a highly structured and an extremely flexible setting.

**Choice to Attend**

When children attending an alternative school have a choice of attending, it is called “volunteering”. Some alternative schools may appear to be a desirable option for students at-risk of school failure; whereas, other schools are a mandatory placement for students and can be considered as a last resort. This distinction is important in that it is tied to the motivation, outcome, and overall program differences. A majority of alternative schools today are viewed as
schools for students with discipline issues or students who need intensive academic remediation. Programs that allow for enrollment via student or parental choice tend to be characterized by more flexible scheduling, innovative teaching and instructional strategies, and individualized programming (Raywid, 1994). Mandatory placement programs are characterized by strict disciplinary actions, short-term placements, and a focus on remediation of skills, conflict resolution, and anger management (Raywid, 1994). Many proponents of alternative education cite “choice” as an essential ingredient in determining the success of the students and the alternative school (Raywid, 2001). Therefore, an alternative school characterized as voluntary or involuntary may have a diverse range of programs to offer students and varied results to publicize.

**Curriculum Focus**

The teaching curriculum must meet the needs of the students and the school community. Most alternative school curriculums focus on academic interventions, vocational interventions, and social/emotional supports of the children (Cash, & Reimer, 2003). Students attending most alternative schools have faced numerous rejections in their educational lives. The faculty and staff should promote a positive personalized outlook for the student (Duke & Griesdorn, 1999). The curriculum must be delivered in a different manner than previously delivered at the student’s traditional school. They were not successful in the previous setting; therefore, changes should be made and be realized by the student. Rote memory and lecture classes may hold little value for students in alternative schools. Children who need kinesthetic style learning experiences may enjoy active lessons. At-risk children do not have the support and guidance at home to assist with this style of more kinesthetic learning. The children from more affluent families learn from experiences, gaining knowledge, developing language, connecting to world experiences, and
igniting the mind. Examples of this type of learning are vacations, arts, and other out of town travel.

**Site Selection**

The community, the physical buildings, and the location or setting of the facilities are a major component to student success. Alternative schools should be community-based, reflecting the needs of the community. A school community may include the neighborhood, district boundary, and area businesses. The school vision must be shared by all members of the faculty and all community members. Teachers should have high expectations, employ positive discipline, and establish a rapport with the students and community (Butler & Druian, 1987). It is important to realize that alternative schools will not have the ideal approach. Rather, these schools will be individualized to the community needs, in particular, vocational technical trades. But a significant number of the listed quality indicators may be an important indicator of the effectiveness of the school.

**Addressing Individual Needs**

Meeting the needs of the individual student population is another characteristic agreed upon by several researchers. Meeting the needs of students, especially special needs children, is of great concern and is an important factor in schools meeting annual yearly progress. The Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice stated similar concerns during the late 1990s (Adera & Hughes, 2006). Schools remained focused on student behavior and not on the academic rigor needed for the student to be successful in the classroom (Adera & Hughes, 2006). “The Centennial School at Lehigh University in Pennsylvania is a model alternative setting wherein educators incorporate problem solving and social skills instruction as integral aspects of the curriculum designed to teach students school survival skills and life skills” (p. 28). Unlike
traditional schools, alternative schools may have different schedules, time of day, school calendar, and varied curriculum to meet the needs of the individual students. This makes it more difficult to evaluate and to compare schools across districts and regions for success. Alternative programs having a distinctive mission, a school vision, and a strong community and family atmosphere proved successful. All of these research-based practices: significant home/parent communication engagement, frequent monitoring, supportive environment, student self-involvement, a focus on academic achievement, program size, program design, choice to attend, curriculum focus, site selection and addressing individual needs, lend themselves to the alternative school setting (Butler & Druian, 1987; Cash & Reimer, 2003; Raywid, M. 1994). However, simply including some or even all research-based practices does not negate the challenges inherent in alternative schools in local school districts or throughout the United States.

Potential Barriers for Alternative Schools

Despite the successes, many challenges exist for alternative schools. A commonly held definition of what constitutes an alternative school does not exist. This is problematic. While many alternative schools are known for their innovative and creative programs such as youth personal development, physical and psychological safety, supportive relationships, positive norms, youth empowerment of decisions, skill building, and integration of family, school, and community, other definitions of alternative schools include alternative education as a perspective, not a procedure or program. Lack of a common understanding presents a potential barrier. As no clear definition exists, programming issues and accountability are also problematic. While some school leaders believe educating alternative school students should include self-esteem building, planning for post-program life, teaching social, coping, and living skills, involving the family, and developing a positive peer culture (Denti & Guerin, 1999). Other school leaders believe the
alternative school students programming adds to the variance in alternative schools. For example, Duke and Griesdorn studied thirty-two alternative high schools in Virginia in 1998 and found that “10% or more of the schools supplemented subjects with career awareness and employment, conflict resolution and peer mediation skills, anger management skills, life skills, and group counseling” (p. 77). While practical, validated prevention, and intervention strategies that target development risk factors showed the greatest impact (Van Acker, 2007), not all alternative schools contain such a program focus.

Piecemeal approaches to interventions have not proven to be as successful yet rather carefully planned, comprehensive, and school wide effort approaches to student interventions have consistently proven their effectiveness (Van Acker, 2007). “Interventions that have been empirically documented to display positive outcomes includes psychotherapy, applied behavior analysis, cognitive-behavioral methods, social development interventions, youth involvement and opportunity initiatives, social case work intervention” (p. 8).

While the belief that everyone can learn is still common in alternative schools, teachers, administrators, and community members may question this belief especially when discipline referrals soar, and standardized test scores fall in alternative settings. Many alternative schools are not meeting academic expectations. However, “in alternative schools it is assumed that not all students are able to learn in all school environments or without the school having the capability and ability to adapt to some of these students’ needs” (Mottaz, 2002, p. vii).

As Lange and Sletton (2002) conclude, little documentation is available on whether the best practices for alternative schools are being implemented with fidelity in most alternative schools. This puts constraints on determining how effective these practices are in the alternative setting. It is important to note in relationship to the belief all students can learn, many of the
practices in alternative schools are those considered essential to effective regular K-12 programs and schools.

Problems were also noted in research studies of alternative schools. Munoz (2002) reported although staff members were generally caring, they did not have adequate training and support to provide students with a quality education. These programs often lack the adequate facilities, materials, and budgets necessary for success. Munoz (2002) also found that programs targeting a specific population of at-risk youths produced larger effects than those with open admissions. However, researchers have also suggested that alternative education has not been properly evaluated and therefore it is very difficult to measure the effectiveness (Cash & Reimer, 2003). The “one size fits all” attempts have proven to be not as successful as programs targeting specific educational and behavioral areas.

The goals and outcomes of the alternative school are important accountability factors. State mandates must be followed by all alternative schools including the performance on standardized tests and alternative school students’ daily attendance. These two areas continue to be the weakest for alternative schools.

Two major unintended consequences from effective schools research are establishing accountability based on state-developed tests and using punishment as a motivator to improve schools. “The belief that all children can learn has spawned a movement of testing as the basis for student promotion, student graduation, evaluation of school personnel, and state and federal funding” (Bainbridge & Thomas, 2001, p. 3). Punishment as a motivator may be a more popular belief today than in the past. Threatening administrators and decreasing funds for schools whose student test scores decline creates a difficult problem. The schools that need more funding and aid are being labeled and classified as failing. Many of these schools are minority and high poverty
schools. As a result, a certain question has been raised; what can we do differently so these at-risk students can succeed and the schools they attend can become effective?

Besides accountability, parental understanding and parental involvement policies are barriers to student achievement for students of poverty (Butler & Druian, 1987). Society places most of the blame for teenage failure on their parents, with secondary blame placed with youths themselves. “Parents involved in instruction, in support of classroom and extracurricular activities, and in school governance are related to positive student learning outcomes and attitudes” (Cotton, 1991, p. 7). Programs that provide learning experiences for parents and for children must be coordinated among the teaching staff and administrators. “Parent education programs and frequent parent communication can be an effective method to improve student achievement” (Aron & Zweig, 2003, p. 36). Coordinating intervention resources to meet the student’s health or nutrition needs, and providing resources to assist with personal or family drug or alcohol problems, family abuse or neglect are other ways to improve at-risk students overall achievement level (Cotton, 1991). Developing such encouraging partnerships supports learning at school, at home, and in the community. Sound relationships between the parents, the students, and the school are important for students to feel successful and appreciated. The family seems to be the most effective and economical system of fostering and sustaining the child’s development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Bronfenbrenner (1979) describes the environment in which a child exists is composed of five systems: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem.

“Despite the history of alternative education programs, little data are available describing the governance, physical facilities, student populations, educational programming, and supports being provided to students at risk for educational failure” (Foley & Pang, 2006, p. 11). Financial
support for students at risk of educational failure is mainly governed by federal Title I guidelines. “At its inception in 1965, Title I policymakers were optimistic thinking that infusing federal funds into poor schools would help break the cycle of poverty” (Roza, 2005, p. 3). Safeguards for schools enrolling high numbers of poor students, minority students, and low-performing students are monitored so equity in spending between wealthy and poverty schools can be sustained within each state and district. Many of the alternative schools service students who are poor, of color, and with exceptionalities. Proper funding for these programs is of paramount concern. The “No Child Left Behind Act” mandates districts to have particular budgets to address teacher salaries, general fund, and Title 1 allocations. These funds are the main financial resource for alternative schools.

**Leadership Standards and Alternative Schools**

Effective urban elementary school research in the late 1970s examined successful outliers—those high-achieving schools that primarily serve low-socioeconomic populations. Effective schools research identified strong and directive instructional leadership as the role of the principal. “Instructional leaders focus all efforts on the improvement of classroom practices through the creation of safe, orderly, and positive school environments, a clear and focused mission, high performance expectations, student time on task, and positive home-school relations” (Drysdale, Jacobson, & Ylimaki, 2007, p. 365). Leaders of alternative schools should also manage the curriculum effectively and staff the school with teachers who align with the mission and direction of the school’s purpose.

Based on interviews with principals, the Pacific Research Institute reported that principals attribute the success of their schools to specific policies, integration of state academic standards in the classroom, frequent assessment, professional development that focuses on subject matter, and
strong discipline (Kafer, 2002). “The Pacific Research Institute reported in a 2002 study that schools using research proven methods and curricula succeed even when confronted with the challenges of poverty and deprivation” (p. 1).

Leaders must develop and communicate shared goals, a sense of common purpose, and high performance expectations. Goals must be achievable and should begin with focus on the physical environment, high expectations, and orderly schools. Talbert and McLaughlin (1993) speak of school culture and collaboration as ingredients to build an effective school with strong leadership and engaging lessons. Developing school communities especially in elementary schools is an important characteristic in strong leadership and learning. Marshall, Patterson, Rogers, and Steele (1996, p. 272) mention that care and ethics are essential for leadership and learning to take place in schools. Providing practitioners with support based on high quality ethical research is also important for good leaders to promote learning. Learning and leadership should be a shared enterprise as well as an individual enterprise. Collaboration modes of working build and strengthen teams.

As Kropiewnicki and Shapiro (2001) suggested, the ability to build relationships and the five attributes of collaboration, caring, courage, intuition, and vision must be incorporated for leadership success. Included in building these critical relationships are the leader’s ability to handle situations in relation to power and authority. This research and many other studies have lead to the development of standards for school leaders.

The Performance Standards and Indicators for Education Leaders: ISLLC-based Models (2008) were released in 2008 after years of collaboration between state education agencies and national educators. These standards for school leaders are considered a basis or framework of what administrators should know and do in their daily job performance. “These standards are a
national perspective for leadership expectations and take into consideration the differences among state and local agencies” (p. 6). The six standards include vision and goals, teaching and learning, managing organizational systems and safety, collaborating with key stakeholders, ethics and integrity, and the educational system.

The school administrator position has developed over the years into far more than a manager of efficiency for a work environment for teachers. Today, the administrator’s position includes increasing student learning, counseling, safety, meeting accountability on standardized assessments, financial management, creating and carrying out a vision, building community relationships, and ethics (ISLLC, 2008). With the development of these standards, plans for improving educational leadership policies and practices throughout the United States became a realization. Setting expectations for administrators will allow states to better evaluate the leaders in a measureable way. Emphasis will be placed on improving instruction and student achievement for all students (ISLLC, 2008). The ISLLC standard 1, mission/vision and goals, and standard 4, collaboration with key stakeholders will be studied to identify the communication of these standards in alternative schools.

ISLLC standards describe vision and goals as a way an “educational leader ensures the achievement of all students by guiding the development and implementation of a shared vision of learning and setting high expectations for every student” (p. 20). Educators and administrators establish high, measureable expectations by sharing and communicating the vision and goals for the school for all students and educators. The process of creating and sustaining the vision and goals is inclusive. Building a common understanding and genuine commitment among all stakeholders is essential to successfully implement this standard (ISLLC, 2008). “Continuous improvement toward the vision and goal and continuous improvement toward achieving the vision
and goals requires effective use of research and best practices in strategic planning, change processes, allocating resources, prioritizing activities, and systematically monitoring progress” (p. 20).

Deal and Peterson (2009), who have researched school leadership and culture, define a clear mission as “a mission focused on student learning fostering high expectations for all students, focusing on the work of the staff, and generating motivation to learn (Deal & Peterson, 2009, p. 9). “A successful school is one with cohesion, passion, commitment, and extensive interaction among teachers” (p. 10). Students, parents, staff, and elders should all be included in the school population. “Parents are snugly woven into the texture of the school and they are respected, supported, and made to feel welcome at any time” (p. 26). Effective schools have messages and symbols representing the vision and goals easily visible in the hallway, classrooms, gymnasium, and web site.

Trust is another value the school community and the school personnel must develop to build a strong school culture. This credibility or trust must include the staff, students, and community. “A school’s purpose and mission serve as bedrock of its culture” (Deal & Peterson, 2009, p. 58). “Mission and purpose trigger intangible forces that inspire teachers to teach, school leaders to lead, children to learn, and parents and the community to have confidence and faith in their school” (p. 61). The mission and purpose shape and reflect what the school hopes to accomplish and to portray to the public. “One of the most important aspects of this is that the people share beliefs of what the school wishes to realize” (p. 61). “Simply stated, mission statements are noble attempts to get to the core of what a school seeks to bring about in its students” (p. 62). “Missions run deep and allow people a medium that will help people connect viscerally and emotionally with the school’s reason for existence, its higher calling” (p. 62).
Purpose and mission do many things for schools; they define the actions which ought to take place; they motivate the staff and the students by signaling what is important and what will be rewarded; “they steer the allocation and distribution of resources according to what is considered important or valuable” (p. 65).

“One of the most consistent findings in school effectiveness research is that the involvement of parents makes a significant difference for students and staff” (Deal & Peterson, 2009, p. 181). Education leaders should ensure the success of all students by collaborating with families and key stakeholders who represent diverse community interests and needs and mobilizing community resources that improve teaching and learning. While collaborating with families and community members, leaders “extend educational relationships to families and community members to add programs, services, and staff outreach and provide what every student needs to succeed in school and life” (ISLLC, 2008, p. 31). Schools can offer programs that provide family services and support such as mental health resources, increase parents' skills and leadership capabilities, connect families with others in the school and in the community for improved parent networking, and help teachers with daily school work, in hopes to help all children succeed in school and in later life. “The educators’ assumptions that parents don’t become involved because they are either apathetic about their children’s education, too lazy to get involved, or both must be dismissed” (Deal & Peterson, p. 182). Deal and Peterson (2009) also feel “stakeholders, parents, teachers, and students should share expectations, meaningful interactions, rituals of involvement, and celebrations of accomplishments together” (p. 183)

According to Deal and Peterson (2009), “educators and community relationships thrive in a jointly controlled, emotionally satisfying, spiritually uplifting educational community” (p. 183). Many schools put in place efforts to involve parents. Parent handbooks, back-to-school nights,
lunches, principal chats, assemblies, newsletters, school advisory committees, fundraisers, parent centers are just a few. But too often these initiatives are just surface invitations. “These commitments are devoid of shared meaning and the more organic, communal values that truly bring people together for a shared purpose” (p. 184). According to Deal and Peterson (2009), “successful cultures try to find ways to increase communication by convening, conveying, collaborating, conspiring, co-creating, and celebrating” (p. 186). In all of these ways, schools can link the community, sharing the benefits and appreciations. Activities such as these build ties with parents and community members.

These ties include trusting the school and the school trusting the community. Every parent wants to trust the school and to be trusted. “Parents want to trust that the school will do what is in the best interest of their child and they want to feel they are trusted no matter what socioeconomic, racial, or ethnic place they come from” (Deal & Peterson, 2009, p. 189). Trust is easy to damage and hard to establish, but it remains one of the most important elements of parent and community ties. Coordination of communication between school, parent, and community leads us to a theory known as ecological theory.

**Ecological Theory in Practice**

Hobbs (1966) believed that the interactions within the ecosystem that the child functioned, including the school, family, and community impacted the child’s behavior. Effective programs must be developed with the assistance of the student, family, school, and community. Ideally, the total student ecological environment should be taken into consideration when setting goals for the student. The National Institute of Mental Health funded Project Re-Education (Project Re-Ed) as an 8 year pilot project created to launch a new paradigm in the treatment of children with severe emotional disturbance in alternative settings while involving the child’s ecosystem.
Project Re-Ed, developed by Hobbs and colleagues (1982), is a principles-based approach that promotes responsibility, increases competence, and builds on the strengths of each child. Two important concepts emerged from the Re-ED model, transition and reintegration of the emotionally behavior disordered student. The ecological perspective provided a novel way to describe, to assess, and to intervene with children and youths with emotional disturbances. For Hobbs, “emotional disturbance did not reside solely within the individual student, but rather was a result of malfunctions in a much broader ecosystem that included a social system unique to the child” (Cantrell, Cantrell, & Valore, 2006, p. 50). The first step of ecological intervention is collecting information from all areas that impact a student. This is done by assessing each area’s strengths and needs of the emotionally disordered child. “Hobbs and colleagues (1966) also thought it was necessary to identify all significant members of a student’s ecosystem and then strive to include them as partners who can both help identify needed resources and participate in the intervention process on behalf of the student” (Zigler, 1985, p. 178-179).

As stated previously, the success of many alternative schools can be traced back to the 1960s. The first Re-education schools started in 1961. These schools were part of the 8 year grant from the National Institute of Mental Health (Hobbs, 1982). The first schools were set up in Tennessee and North Carolina. Cumberland House was organized and formed in Nashville, Tennessee; and the Wright School was created in Durham, North Carolina. These two programs are still in existence today, almost 50 years later. Today, there are 23 Re-education schools throughout the United States. The Re-education program has endured many political budgetary cuts and has survived numerous other crises. The program is built around ecological principles. It is not a cure for at-risk children, but it is definitely a program that works with the child’s total ecological makeup. “This refers to the dynamic interactions of forces in a natural system, which is
precisely the focus of re-educational efforts” (Hobbs, 1982, p. xiii). This strong belief is carried out by all personnel in all phases of the child’s ecosystem, family, school, and community.

“Project Re-education was developed by Hobbs and colleagues and is a principles-based approach that promotes responsibility, increases competence, and builds on the strengths of each child” (Cantrell et al., p. 49). The main focus of Re-education schools is transition and reintegration to the home based school.

Re-Education schools were originally set up for students with emotional disturbances. These children also fought academic difficulties, and these two issues made it difficult for them to learn in any academic setting. Re-education professionals “reject the conventional wisdom that emotional disturbance causes academic failure and that the child must be cured in order to resume learning; the staff maintains instead that the achievement of adequacy in academic skills is an essential step in the process of overcoming emotional problems” (Hobbs, p. xiv). Since the first schools utilized the ecological model 50 years ago, this strategy continues to be effective in schools using the Re-ED model.

In helping emotionally disturbed children, Re-education programs team with many other professional groups. The general health system is important as many children are diagnosed and treated by general health professionals. The public school system serves most of the mildly and moderately disturbed children. On November 29, 1975, President Ford along with Congress passed “Public Law 94-142” that was intended to improve opportunities in education for handicapped children and adults through the provision of a free appropriate public education (FAPE). This law granted that handicapped children and adults ages 3-21 be educated in the "least restrictive environment" to the maximum extent appropriate. These general health services are sometimes limited as the number of students needing services in the public school systems has
been steadily increasing. Social service agencies have custody of many mentally-ill youths. These children face huge hurdles in overcoming their mental shortcomings. Families who are providing guardianship to these students often do not have the necessary skills to help.

Another hurdle the at-risk, mentally ill child may face is the juvenile correctional system. The juvenile correctional system also has many children in its custody. These children are often dangerous, frightened, hostile, and defiant to others. The correctional system is an expensive way to treat these young children, as the costs to incarcerate a child in a Louisiana juvenile facility is $157.00 per day (Juvenile Justice Reform, 2010). Logistics make it difficult for professional services to be administered to all youth who qualify. Professional teams with area agencies assist to provide the needed series for these students. Also financially, servicing these students can become expensive since 20% of the incarcerated youth in Louisiana have been identified as seriously mentally ill or mentally retarded (Juvenile Justice Reform, 2010). Professional groups face quite a financial burden while providing long term treatment to the students. Much of this funding is not provided to school districts and the districts must find alternative means to provide the quality education the students may need.

During the 1980s,

“Cumberland House School was occupied by 40 children, who were cared for by 31 fulltime staff, four part time consultant staff, and four clerical staff implementing the program. The total direct costs were $661,260, indirect costs made up another $132,252. During this fiscal year the total student days equaled 7,992. The per deim cost was about $99.00. The total cost of returning a child to a home and community was approximately $17,500” (Hobbs, p. 43).

In Durham, North Carolina, the Wright School operated a residential and educational program at its main facility. In May 1981, the cost per day was $102.00. “Because the Wright School maintained a rigorous policy of enrolling children for the shortest time possible in its
residential program, the cost of returning a child to home and community averaged approximately $8,160” (Hobbs, p. 43).

Alternative education programs such as these are capable of meeting the needs of youth who display antisocial behavior. These programs must continue to provide a comprehensive servicing plan focused on the individual’s needs and provide an effective treatment environment for the individual. Removing students from ineffective and coercive schools, homes, and communities will continue to be an option as long as a safe setting can be provided and a plan addressing their problem behavior is promoted and implemented with fidelity.

The Positive Education Program in Cleveland, Ohio, helps students grow emotionally, behaviorally, and socially by providing intensive interventions. Realizing not all alternative school students are mentally ill, the Positive Education Program is a model program grounded on the re-education of emotionally disturbed children. The Re-education philosophy is used extensively in this program. It has been continuously refined since its inception. The program blends quality education and mental health services. It develops partnerships with families, schools, and communities (Adera & Hughes, p. 28). The Georgia Psycho-educational network is another model program. “This program provides community based services that focus on the emotional, social, and behavioral growth of students” (p. 29). It also uses the Re-education model and has been successful in helping students transition back to their home-based school or the traditional school they once attended.

**Summary**

The transition of these students from the alternative school back to the traditional school is important for the students’ overall success. A transitioning process that includes the child’s ecosystem is a unique feature of the Re-education model.
Alternative schools have emerged as one way to serve many of these youths who have not succeeded in the traditional public school setting. Alternative programs differ greatly in their academic standards, structure, basic goals and objectives, parent and community involvement, disciplinary consequences, and intervention policies. Literature on alternative schools is growing. Many researchers have done studies on best teaching practices, facility design, teacher attitudes, and student populations. There is a substantial base of literature regarding instructional theories for alternative schools but not about the role of the administrator and the implementation of the Performance Standards and Indicators for Educational Leaders (ISLLC). However, little research has been done on the individual leaders of alternative schools. Further research information is needed in this area, in particular, how are alternative school leaders addressing the child’s ecosystem in terms of school on and family and community stakeholder interaction? Specific national performance standards are sought to identify the perceived vision of the school, the actions taken by the leader to address that perceived vision, and the impact of addressing families and stakeholders of the child’s community. Leadership of these programs, particularly the principal’s role and preparation in meeting standards one and four of the Performance Standards and Indicators for Education Leaders (ISLLC) will be examined using a descriptive qualitative research design. It is important to examine how principals lead alternative schools and how the principals of alternative school are meeting the standards for performance developed by the Council of Chief State School Officers.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter includes a detailed description of the research methodology that was utilized in the study. The chapter is organized into several sections that provide a framework within which to describe the research plan.

Method

This research study is a multiple case study, consisting of two alternative school principals purposefully chosen. My interest in alternative leadership stems from my personal background and past experience as an alternative school principal and my current position as Supervisor of Child Welfare and Attendance, which includes supervising and monitoring alternative programs. My experience in both positions has primarily been assisting at-risk children to attain a high school diploma or equivalent. Data collected from the principals were from a personal interview, a day-long site observation, analysis of the student handbook, and examining a published document from two Louisiana Public Alternative schools. A researcher’s notebook was also referenced. By selecting multiple cases, different perspectives of meeting the ISLLC standards 1 and 4 was shown. “Building theory from case studies attempts to reconcile evidence across cases, types of data, and different investigators, and between cases and literature increase the likelihood of creative reframing into a new theoretical vision” (Eisenhardt, 1989, p. 546). The approach I used once the data was gathered was grounded theory. Grounded theory allowed for a more concentrated comparison of the themes read, seen, and heard by the researcher. This comparison led to grounded theories of administrative practices, alternative school leadership standards, the role of the alternative school leader in meeting these standards, and resulted in more consistent implementation for standards by alternative school leaders. “A strength is that the resultant theory
is likely to be empirically valid and the likelihood of valid theory is high because the theory-building process is so intimately tied with evidence that it is very likely that the resultant theory will be consistent with empirical observation” (Eisenhardt, 1989, p. 547). By completing this research study, it is my hope to assist district and state leaders in developing a more comprehensive alternative school leadership program. This program addresses the state and national performance standards, which can assist in the evaluation of alternative schools as well as the evaluation of their school leaders.

**Study Design**

A multiple case study seemed appropriate as the objective and questions of my research pertains to school leaders’ standards, knowledge, and how they exist in the context of a school leadership situation. Qualitative research involves collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data by observing what people do and say within specific and unique contexts. Qualitative researchers strive to find rich descriptions of the subjects involved in the research. These descriptions emerged during interviewing, observing, and analyzing documents. The data collected from this study fit well in the context of a case study. A clear understanding of the use of the standards, mission/vision and school community relations are helpful for alternative school principals and district leaders to improve the educational system. There is a paucity of literature regarding how alternative school leaders meet state and national standards. The findings can provide preliminary information on the success of alternative schools. Future studies may wish to explore consistency among other school leaders. A multiple case study of this topic can lead to a focused discussion among alternative school leaders and district leaders regarding the leadership standards and the importance of evaluating administrative performance and add to the small, existing body of research.
Data Sources

Four data sources were used. Sources consist of a formal interview, a day-long site observation, and subsequent field notes, a document analysis consisting of an artifact worksheet protocol, and as a fourth source, I kept a researcher’s notebook of personal observations. Each source was collected from each school site.

Population

The State Department of Education for Louisiana reported that there are a total of 1,372 public schools in Louisiana with a racial demographic make up of students from these schools consisting of 51% white, 44% black, 3.2% Hispanic, 1.5% Asian, and .86% American Indian (www.louisianaschools.net/lde/uploads/15133.pdf). The gender makeup of the schools is 51% male and 49% female. The socioeconomic measure of the at-risk students attending Louisiana public schools is 65%.

A total of 132 public alternative schools were reported as operating and servicing students in Louisiana public schools during the 2008-2009 school term. The demographics of the children attending Louisiana public alternative schools are 60% African American, 38% white, and 2% Hispanic. According to the Louisiana Department of Education 2006-07, the number of students receiving in-school expulsion was 4,703 (http/ww.doe.state.la.us). During the same period the number of students receiving out-of-school expulsion was 2,729. Students receiving an in-school expulsion are not placed out of school for a period of time more than nine days. Students receiving an out-of-school expulsion are out of school for an extended period of time. Many may attend an alternative school. The total number of students dropping out of public schools during this term was 15,914 students (http://www.louisianaschools.net/lde/uploads/14037.pdf.)
Sample

From the Louisiana alternative school population, two schools were chosen to be participants because of time and logistical constraints. The population was categorized into three subgroups, urban, suburban, and rural. From these subgroups an urban and suburban district were purposely chosen. The make-up of the student body from each school consisted of both upper elementary and high school students. The two schools were from different geographic areas in south Louisiana, a region south of the New Orleans metropolitan area and a region south of the Baton Rouge metropolitan area (see figure 1, map of parishes). One sample was from one of the largest urban public school districts in Louisiana, and the other was from a small suburban public school district. The student population at both schools were made up of students who had been expelled for disciplinary reasons from the traditional school setting. These students were assigned to attend the alternative schools for a set amount of days. The two districts were characterized as urban (area south of Baton Rouge) and suburban (area south of New Orleans). The smaller suburban district had a total of 8 public schools; whereas, the larger urban district had 85 public schools.

The principal of School A south of New Orleans is Principal A. School A had been in existence since 2006. It was reopened as an alternative school after Hurricane Katrina. It had a student population of 169 students. Ninety-eight students are from grades four to eight. The other 71 students were in high school (http://www.louisianaschools.net/lde/uploads/2072.pdf). The school had 21 faculty members, and it was located south of New Orleans, Louisiana.

The principal at School B in near south Baton Rouge is Principal B. It consisted of a student population of 226 students made up of kindergarten to 12th graders. Of the 226 students, 141 were in grades first to eighth (http://www.louisianaschools.net/lde/uploads/2072.pdf). Eighty-
five students were in high school. School A had 47 faculty members to service the student population. All of the students have been expelled from the traditional school setting. The gender makeup of the students is 74% male and 26% female. Ninety-six percent were African American students, 6 percent were white, and 1 percent was Asian.

Along with the personal interview of each principal, a day-long observation had taken place. Written documents were collected and analyzed to determine if practices discussed during the interview and observed during the specified time were similar to the information being disseminated to the public. A researcher’s log notebook was kept so the observer can write comments and personal notes about the discussion heard, insights, hunches, or questions which may arise during the observation period. Gillham (2000) described the log book as “more than a set of notes, it is a fundamental part of the database and needs to be treated with respect” (p. 23). All documents were collected and analyzed away from the school site. In addition Patton’s multiple analyst method (2002) was employed. Interview transcripts was shared with the principal A and principal B to ensure accuracy.

**Instrumentation**

Louisiana’s principal standards are aligned with the national standards for educational administrators, the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards for School Leaders (http://www.louisianaschools.net/lde/pd/848.html). Louisiana adopted seven standards that focus on the dimensions of educational leadership. Also adopted are National Performance Standards and Indicators for Educational Leaders, which in collaboration with state education agencies, were made available in 2008. This research project included open-ended questions relating to the Louisiana standards as well as the National standards. The interview instrument was divided in seven sections. The first section is considered background information about the
school and principal. All other sections represented the research questions being investigated in the research study. These sections of the interview consisted of 20 questions.

These standards, both national and state, are the basis for evaluating a principal. ISLLC Standards one and four were the focus of this research study. Standard one pertains to the vision and goals of the school and the development of this standard. Standard four pertains to the community and stakeholders and their involvement in the school. Interview questions were developed from these standards.

The National Middle School Association (2005) also developed sample interview questions for teachers, principals, assistant principals, and dean of students. Questions from this document were included in the demographic or information section of the interview protocol. The research conducted was not to interview the alternative school leader for an employable position or to evaluate the principal in his or her current position but to gather information about the principal in order to triangulate with other data sources.

A written document analysis worksheet, web site analysis worksheet, and artifact analysis worksheet were all be used to compare the documents collected from each of the two alternative school sites. These worksheets were designed and developed by the Education Staff, National Archives and Records Administration in Washington, DC (see appendix C & D). By using a worksheet, all documents were analyzed using the same method. This process ensured unbiased subjective observation and professionalism due to the designed instruments. These instruments were specifically developed for newspaper articles, letters, memorandums, press releases, reports, and advertisements, which allowed the researcher latitude in the selection of documents. Each school had various types of publications, and this latitude allowed for a simpler analysis to be performed.
Data Collection Procedures

Permission to perform this study was requested in July 2009 and granted from the Institutional Review Board at Louisiana State University through July 2012. The application was hand delivered by the researcher along with copies of the consent form, interview questions, and document analysis worksheets. An application for exemption was completed and approved by the board in July 2009 (see appendix A).

After the Institutional Review Board (IRB) granted permission for the project to proceed, the individual principals were contacted by phone. The initial conversation in December 2009 was a brief introduction of the researcher, the research project, and consent needed to participate. The consent forms were mailed to the school sites, and a tentative date for a face-to-face meeting was set. The interview was conducted during January 2010.

I drove to the participant’s school on the date of the interview. Observation dates were chosen based on an agreed upon date and time between the participant and me. Yin (1993) states “the observer will likely not have any control over whether the relevant events will reliably occur or not, and if they do, whether you will happen to be at the right place at the right time to observe them” (p. 35). During this meeting, a laptop computer and digital recorder were used to demonstrate how each recording device will work and the devices’ purpose. An explanation of the transcribing software was also given, and a brief example of both the recording software and the transcribing software were shown to the participants. An explanation of what I will be interested in reporting and how common themes would be gathered was explained to the participant. The participants were informed about the guarantee of confidentiality and anonymity. Pseudonyms were used rather than the participant’s name. No school names, principal names,
student names, or staff names would be used. Before leaving the site, I collected the signed consent form indicating the participants understanding of the research project.

The participants also were given explanations of how the questions were developed and how the worksheets were chosen. The participants were also told that the documents and artifacts would be collected after interviews and observations are complete. Participants were aware that these would then be gathered by school staff and handed to me; in addition, once the documents were skimmed to make sure I understood, questions would be asked.

The participants were also given an explanation of the proposed date of completion of the final product. Copies of the final product will be delivered to the principals after the successful completion of the Education Leadership doctorate program.

Data Analysis

Atlas.ti for Windows was the software used to analyze the data. Keeping in mind the grounded theory approach, the data were organized and sorted according to codes from the ISLLC standards. Atlas.ti was chosen because of its ability to manage, to extract, to compare, to reassemble, to sort, and to code descriptive data. Using the “wizard” I used open coding, code by list, and in-vivo coding procedures as well as written memos and comments. I searched for emerging themes in the data and create categories and subcategories of this data and reduce themes to a point of saturation. A re-occurring theme should appear in 3 of 4 data samples. I utilized the constant comparative approach in which the researcher “attempts to saturate the categories to look for instances that represent the category and to continue looking until the information obtained does not further provide insight into the category” (Creswell, 2007, p. 160). The data analysis phase of grounded theory research tries to create concepts, categories, subcategories, properties, and themes. Once a consistent theme appears in the data, a grounded
theory may be formed: a theory that does not come from outside the data but rather arises from analyzing the data.

**Data Triangulation**

Triangulation involves comparing all the data sources for credibility purposes. Four sources of data from each site were collected and analyzed: formal interview, day-long observation, school handbook and published school documents, and researcher’s notebook.

“Theory triangulation is the use of multiple theories and perspectives to help interpret and explain the data” (Christensen & Johnson, 2008, p. 278). I solely collected and analyzed all data, giving me a sound perspective of the alternative school leaders and application of the mission and community relations at these two school sites. By using four sources of data collection, formal interview, observation, handbook and document analysis, and my reflection notebook method triangulation will be attempted.

Triangulation of data leads to trustworthiness, a component that leads to greater acceptance of the results. Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that trustworthiness is synonymous to believability. Qualitative research is not generalizeable. Qualitative research credibility was addressed by using three basic questions. 1) what techniques and methods were used to ensure integrity, and accuracy of the finding; 2) what do I bring to the study in terms of experience and qualifications, and 3) what assumptions undergird the study? Besides triangulation, multiple analyst or member checking on my conclusions ensures credibility (Patton, 2002). The constant comparative method permitted triangulation of data, continuous comparisons, cross-analysis, and revisions.
CHAPTER 4

DATA COLLECTION AND RESULTS

This chapter presents data collected and analyzed from this case study. This study sought to determine how alternative school leaders addressed the child’s ecosystem, i.e. the child’s family, community, and school. As previously stated Hobbs (1966) believed the interactions within the child’s ecosystem impacted the child’s behavior. Effective programs must be developed with the assistance of the student, family, school, and community in order to adequately impact the child’s ecosystem and behavior. This study focused specifically on the principal and the school as part of the student’s ecosystem and how the vision, family, and community stakeholders interacted. In order to provide guidance and support to school districts, understanding alternative school leaders is important.

General Characteristics of School A

School A is a small school of 169 students with a faculty of 21 teachers, one principal, and one assistant principal. The school is located in a rural area south of New Orleans. Seventy-nine percent of the total students in the parish school population qualify for free and reduced lunch. The parish school system in which School A is located was decimated after Hurricane Katrina. The school building was built after this natural disaster, specifically for alternative programs. The exterior is a brick two story with a small circle drive for busses and a large faculty and guest parking lot to the left of the main entrance.

The building’s main entrance opens up to a small hallway with the front office located in the first door to the right. The school is then divided into two hallways on each floor, each representing an alternative program. The bottom right hallway is for overage 4th and 8th grade students. The bottom left hallway is for overage students who have been expelled from their home.
based school. The top floors house the high school students and students who are not working on a high school diploma. The top right floor is for overage students who have been chosen by parish administrators to attend based on age and standardized test scores. The top left floor is for high school students who are in the options or pre-GED program.

The cafeteria is located on the bottom floor in the back of the building. The cafeteria has a dividing curtain to assist in separating elementary students from high school students. A stage area is to the left of the cafeteria, used for small programs and assemblies. The school library is located in the front of the top floor of the school. The school also has a stairway and elevator in the middle of the two hallways. A small gymnasium is located alongside the school connected by a covered walkway in the middle of the building; the size is equivalent to a three-fourths regulation basketball court.

The campus is located a few blocks away from a major East-West highway, which connects New Orleans with coastal areas of Louisiana. The community is still rebuilding since all residents’ domiciles were destroyed by levee breaches; many of the homes were still not occupied and were in the process of being razed. The school lies in a rebuilding neighborhood.

**General Characteristics of School B**

School B is a large school of 376 students with a faculty and staff of 75 teachers and support personnel. The school has one principal, one assistant-principal, and itinerant pupil appraisal personnel assigned to the site. One itinerant pupil appraisal person is a social worker, and the other is an educational diagnostician. The social worker consults with students about behavioral matters and about appropriate social skills both inside and outside of school. The educational diagnostician evaluates students to determine if they qualify for special services. The school is in a suburban area near south Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Nearly 90% percent of the
students qualify for free and reduced lunches. The school building was built 40 years ago and served as a middle school for 20 years. The exterior is a brick one story building with a two story gymnasium connected. Both buildings are bleak and appear uninviting from the street view. A large faculty and guest parking lot are located next to the gym and serves as a bus zone as well.

The building’s main entrance opened up to a large tiled commons area with the office located to the left of the entrance. A short hallway leads visitors to the administrative offices and the bookkeeper/secretary office. The entrance door has a bell to ring before anyone enters the school. The school is square-shaped with opposite side hallways each having two single hallways. The left front hallway is made up of an elementary hallway located close to the office with a special education hallway located farther from the office. A registration office and a dean’s office are to the right of the hallway. The back side of the square housed the cafeteria. The cafeteria is divided into two tabled areas, boys and girls. One entrance door and one exit door are across from the serving line. Opposite the elementary classes are the high school classrooms. Each hallway has approximately four classrooms and a bathroom. Across from this area is an orientation room which also served as a college room; the school counselor is located in this large area. The gymnasium appeared to be rundown as evidenced by the peeling paint, rusty gutters, and unvarnished gym floor. The gym floor is surrounded by four classrooms on the bottom floor and four classrooms on the top floor. The library is located in one of the classrooms to the far left of the gym entrance. This makeshift library was tucked away and hidden from the public. Although the school gymnasium had no elevator, it was wheelchair accessible. The school’s neighborhood seemed to be a lower income neighborhood based on the appearance of the houses and neighborhood surrounding the school campus. The school site was previously the site of a landfill and is currently situated high above the surrounding areas.
Data Sources

Four data sources collected from each school site contributed to this research study. Each of the school’s two alternative school principals participated in the study, which included a formal interview with the principal. In addition, I conducted a day-long observation at each school yielding field notes. I also performed an analysis of each school’s official student handbook which was disseminated to parents and students. A personal notebook was maintained with researcher notes.

Formal Principal Interview

A formal principal interview was completed at each site. The interview questions (see appendix B) were developed from the ISLLC standards, National Middle School Association, and Performance Standards and Indicators for Education Leaders. A total of 20 questions were presented to each principal. A laptop computer and a digital recorder were used to gather responses. Each interview was approximately 50 minutes in length, and both were conducted without interruption. The transcripts from each interview were typed verbatim, saved as a Microsoft document, and loaded in the Atlas.ti software. The same 20 questions were asked to both principals, in exact order. No probing was needed, as each principal understood the content in the questions and quickly responded with extended answers. In an effort to establish rapport, I did share like experiences with each principal.

Field Notes

A day-long observation was conducted at each school site. School A’s initial observation was scheduled during January 2010 following the principal interview. This partial observation occurred as the principal provided a tour throughout the school facility. The principal described the facility as we walked the entire school site. I then walked unaccompanied around the site
without any distraction or hindrance. In March 2010, I returned to complete my day-long observation because the hallway and bulletin board information were undocumented and more data needed to be collected. During the initial observation, I did not record the information pertaining to the appearance of the bulletin boards or decorations in the hallway. I was also able to speak to staff members to clarify any information I observed throughout the day.

The observation of School B was completed directly after the principal interview in February 2010. Unaccompanied, I freely walked around viewing the facility watching students exchange their first two class periods. I was able to observe student movement and principal interaction while communicating with other adult staff members in the hallway. One hour after observing, the principal gave me a guided tour of the school and explained the rules and daily procedures for all students and staff.

Each day-long observation’s field notes were written on a tablet. The notes were later typed and saved as a Microsoft Word document. After all field notes were transcribed and saved the documents were loaded into the Atlas.ti program.

**Student Handbooks**

As part of data collection, I collected a student handbook from each school for analysis purposes. This occurred as I was ending each visit. Both schools provided printed booklets to distribute to each student and family as they enrolled in the school. The handbooks, printed by a professional printer, appeared somewhat attractive to the eye. For the purposes of this study, selected pages were analyzed. I purposely chose pages with headings informing the student and parent of policies and procedures as they related to ISLLC standards 1 and 4. The selected pages of each booklet were scanned into a document, saved on a computer, and analyzed using Atlas.ti software.
Reflective Notebook

After each interview and observation was complete, I recorded reflective notes in a notebook allowing me to contemplate upon my personal experiences and perspectives in response to each facility, principal, students, and faculty. Reflective notes were also typed and saved as a Microsoft document so Atlas.ti software could be utilized.

Data Analysis

Looking through my own lens of experience, the data was micro-analyzed. “Microanalysis involves very careful, often minute examination and interpretation of data” (Corbin & Strauss, 1998, p. 58). The data was analyzed using Atlas.ti by first assigning codes to important phrases, paragraphs, and sentences, literally line-by-line coding. I developed these codes based on my knowledge and experience in education and administration as “Experience and knowledge are what sensitizes a researcher to significant problems and issues in the data and allows a researcher to see alternative explanation and to recognize properties and dimensions of emergent concepts” (p. 59). Bryant & Charmaz (2010) described this type of coding as creating “topic oriented categories” (p. 209). Examples of such categories were physical facility, behavior, and teaching background.

Once the open coding or topic coding was complete, I used the ISLLC (2008) standards, written and divided into two sections, knowledge and functions, to develop new codes based on the standards 1 and 4, those being a primary focus of the study. Vocabulary terminology, from the functions, was used in this second coding phase. As this new phase was completed, the previous codes were examined for possible relationships, compared, merged, and condensed to concepts. According to Corbin & Strauss (1998), the first step in theory building is conceptualizing or labeling a phenomenon, “The purpose behind naming phenomenon is to enable researchers to
group similar events, happenings, and objects under a common heading or classification” (p. 103). Table 1 and table 2 highlight the concepts used for this study. These concepts were further analyzed using a constant comparative analysis. A constant comparative analysis helped ensure the analysis process included all concepts and that these concepts are placed in the same category based on the researchers images (Corbin & Strauss, 1998). Categories are typically created by the researcher.

In this study final categories were derived from ISLLC standards 1 and 4. As a researcher, I sought patterns in the data from the concepts to form final categories. Concepts were further collapsed to the point of saturation when no further categories could be collapsed. “This constant comparing of incidents continues until the process yields the interchangeability of indicators, meaning that no new properties or dimensions are emerging from continued coding and comparison” (Bryant & Charmaz, 2010, p. 265). These categories became the themes which emerged from the data, forming the basis of the development of grounded theory. According to Corbin & Strauss, “A theory is validated by comparing it to raw data or by presenting it to respondents for their reactions” (1998, p. 161). “Grounded theory is a general methodology for developing theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analyzed” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 158). Figure 1 represents the data analysis process I used for this study. The four raw data sources collected were interviews, handbooks, observations, and reflective notes. These raw data sources were analyzed and combined to become concepts. The concepts were then analyzed and combined to become categories. Finally, the categories were analyzed and combined to become themes. Each step further analyzed and decreased the total number of codes discovered in the study.
Raw data sources

![Diagram of data analysis process]

Figure 1 Data Analysis Process

**Raw Data**

The raw data was analyzed numerous ways: as a whole with all codes, according to similar codes, individually by source and school, and finally by themes. The data was examined to see which codes occurred with the greatest frequency. Table 1 presents the 33 concepts and the initial codes within each concept. Table 2 presents the concepts and the number of initial codes in each concept. The concepts presented in table 2 have initial codes with a frequency of ten or more. The top ten rankings of concepts were charted and compared. A chart was created for each of the concepts, the frequency per school, and data source (see table 3). Another analysis was completed
by computing the most frequent concept in each source for each school. I noted during the analysis that one principal, School A, elaborated more during the interview, thus had more interview quotations coded. However, this should not affect School B data since analyzing the data for highest frequency of concepts per school gives equality to both schools and all four sources.

Some outliers were noted and deleted from the data collected. Those concepts with a frequency of less than 10 were determined to be less significant and were not included in future tables or analysis.

Table 1 Defining Concepts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Initial codes - Words or phrases included in the definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discipline policies</td>
<td>Zero tolerance, check-in check-out, bullying, suspensions, expulsions, metal detectors, point sheets, rules and regulations, separating students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent communication</td>
<td>Parent conferences, orientation meeting, parent questionnaires, parent phone calls, PTO, positive phone notification, parent workshops, open house, parent volunteers, parent center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative experiences</td>
<td>Observed punishments, dress code violations, arrests, suspended students, noise level, sleeping in class, voice tone toward students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual children</td>
<td>Non-judgmental, accepting others, own story, accepting change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PBS</td>
<td>Reward system, posters in hallway, expectations, prizes and awards, grant for PBS funds, Rocket bucks, store</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety issues</td>
<td>Metal detector, door ringer, hall monitors, resource officers, drug court, AED box, DARE program, sock check, backpack procedure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectations</td>
<td>Banners posted, graduation rate, future jobs, chance of redemption, full potential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community relations</td>
<td>Business partners, technical schools, food drives, donations, judicial partners, parish pictures of the past</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum-social skills</td>
<td>Boys Town, character education, banners posted, diversity training words of wisdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School improvement</td>
<td>Approved plan, student attendance, academic focus, A/R, credit recovery, LEAP 21, GLE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(Table 1 continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structure for students</th>
<th>Tardy bell, cafeteria setup, hallway movement, morning arrival, transition point card</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student actions</td>
<td>Announcements, shout outs, noise level, punished in hallway, sleeping in class, cameras in hallway, verbal prompts had to be given</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School personnel</td>
<td>Pupil appraisal on site, number of faculty, administrative staff, hall monitors, drill sergeants, itinerant staff, resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goals for students</td>
<td>Transition cards, interview with students, rockets or bucks earned, high school diploma, GED, pictures in hallway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum regular</td>
<td>Lesson plans, chalk board postings, objectives for improvement, GLE’s used, test scores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punishment issues</td>
<td>Students along wall, arrests, escorting out of class, suspension, rate of expulsions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding people</td>
<td>Each student different, own individual problems, compromising, empowering students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student recognition</td>
<td>Announcements, pictures posted, work posted, free dress, PBS bucks, happy birthday cards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative programs</td>
<td>Option 3, Pre-GED, transition classes, special education programs, expulsion programs, discipline center, STAR kids, elementary, middle and high school students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data analysis</td>
<td>Discipline data, test score data, school improvement, graduation rate, tracking sheets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working Staff</td>
<td>Duty teachers, hallway monitors, teacher ratio, assistant principal, office personnel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence of leader</td>
<td>Certification areas, experience, making things happen, help facilitate change, working with at-risk students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student growth</td>
<td>Test scores, top 10 list posted, student of the month, transitioning of students, self-esteem, school performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District issues</td>
<td>Number of students, number of programs, personnel assigned, payment of personnel, clubs and other programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical plant</td>
<td>Exterior and interior of the building, location of the campus, condition of the facility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal characteristics</td>
<td>Understanding, caring, perceptions of program, empathetic, leadership qualities, special people</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(Table 1 continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School mission</th>
<th>Mission statement posted, mission statement written, discussion of the statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alternative school leaders</td>
<td>Understanding, caring, different person, flexibility, nurturing, emotional needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation process</td>
<td>Parent meetings, assigned room, parent communication, rules and procedures outlined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire to be a leader</td>
<td>Administrative experience, awards and accolades, personal thoughts and goals of the principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School demographics</td>
<td>Percent of gender and race, free or reduced lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional needs of child</td>
<td>Students hospitalized, challenging issues, meeting the needs of children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum alternative</td>
<td>Pre-GED, Option 3, STAR, GED testing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 lists all concept titles with 10 or more codes in rank order. This table redistributed the data using only information with the interview and information from the other three sources. After initially reviewing the concepts, I determined that the interview data was a significantly larger body of information compared to the handbook, observations, and researcher’s data notebook. Also, as a previous alternative school principal with over 20 years of experience teaching or leading at-risk students, I experienced similar feelings to those demonstrated by interviewees; my perceptions were closely aligned to the principals in this study. As I noted an imbalance in sheer quantity of interview data, I considered the interview to be the major source of information as compared to the other sources; therefore, the data collected was analyzed with and without the interview quotations. Thus, listing the data with and without the interview allowed for a deeper understanding of the relationships between the data and allowed the information to be clearly represented in the final analysis. The sources were then separated into columns labeled without interview and only interview as the table indicates.
Table 2 Concept Ranking

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept Title</th>
<th>Number of initial codes</th>
<th>Without interview</th>
<th>Only interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discipline policies</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent communication</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative experiences</td>
<td>41</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual children</td>
<td>33</td>
<td></td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PBS</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety issues</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectations</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community relations</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum-social skills</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School improvement</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure for students</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student actions</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School personnel</td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goals for students</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum regular</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punishment issues</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding people</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student recognition</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative programs</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data analysis</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working staff</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence of leader</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student growth</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District issues</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical plant</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal characteristics</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School mission</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative school leaders</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation process</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire to be a leader</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School demographics</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional needs of children</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum alternative</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data revealed discipline policies as the most frequently occurring concept. The same result occurred when the data was distributed, without the interview data, as well as with using only the interview data. The concepts of parent communication, positive behavior support, safety
issues, expectations, social skills curriculum, and school improvement were also common in frequency within all three data arrangements. These concepts exemplify a strong application in an alternative school, according to the two school leaders in the study and the observations and documents analyzed.

The highest frequency concept was discipline policies. The concept had the most frequent initial codes with 94. This information was nearly the same with the interview information included or with the interview data separated. With the disbursements of the concept in each of the four sources, discipline policies were considered a means of strength of the two alternative schools studied.

The concept parent communication was a distant second in the rankings. It had a frequency of 52 instances, 34 from the interview only and 18 from the day-long observation field notes, student handbook, and reflective notebook sources. As with the top ranked title, discipline policies, parent communication had a strong application in the alternative schools in the study.

As an alternative setting implies, students were unsuccessful in a traditional setting. It was not surprising that discipline policies emerged as significant. It appeared to consume the principals’ attention and time. It is also not surprising that parent communication emerged as significant. For many students enrolled in alternative settings, the alternative environment is the “last ditch” effort. Thus, many parents’ level of concern is amplified once their child entered the school.

During the day-long observation, I observed negative perceptions and recorded these in my reflective notebook. These negative experiences totaled 41 instances in the total data calculation. This positioned negative perception data third in the ranking of total concepts. Again, a negative experience can be defined as voice tone toward students, dress violation, student arrest, class
attentiveness, in-school suspension placements, and noise levels in the hallway. It also should be noted that no negative perceptions were mentioned during the formal interview process by the two alternative school principals.

The concept, care, and well-being of individual children was coded 33 times with School A having a frequency total of 27, all obtained from the interview data. This concept title was ranked the fourth most frequent in total data collected; however, it was not prevalent in all three data sources. This suggested that each principal’s perception of a caring environment at his/her school may be different than what is suggested by data obtained from observations and documents for each school.

Positive Behavior Support (PBS) a research-based, state approved program that reinforces positive behavior by using academic interventions and incentives, occurred in all three data sources. The total number of occurrences was 33. Twenty-two instances were recorded during the interview, and 11 were recorded excluding the interview data. Based on the results of this data analysis, PBS is an important feature in an alternative school based on frequency of occurrence across all data sources.

The concept, safety concerns and safety issues, were also present in all three data sources. The majority, 18 of these codes, were located in the data without the interview information included. Twelve of the instances were recorded from the interview only. Being that all three data sources also included safety concerns, safety issues were factors in these two alternative schools based on the perception of the two principals in the study.

Overall expectations of faculty, staff, parents, and students in the two alternative school settings examined emerged as a key subject for the two principals. Expectations had a frequency of 29. The interview data comprised 19 instances compared to 10 in the other two data sources.
This suggested that expectations may weigh heavy in the development of an alternative school, according to these two principals.

The community relations concept was coded 22 times during the interview; whereas, it had a frequency of only two of the remaining data sources. Community relation topics were not noted during the day-long observation field notes, in the student handbook, or recorded in the reflective notebook. This is significant because the community relation concept was stressed by the principal during the interview but was not present in the other data sources investigated in this study.

Another focal point of the principals was the curriculum, in particular, the curriculum involving social skills training for students. This concept had a frequency of 25 codes. The total from the interview was 15 and without the interview just 10. Specifics of the social skills being introduced to students were not mentioned. Only the indication of teaching social skills was detected. Curriculum was noted in all three data sources. Although it was a critical component in an alternative school, the frequency of other concepts showed more value, concluding a higher, more accurate focus.

Student performance was another paramount concern of the principals. The school improvement title includes such vocabulary as academic achievement, graduation rates, dropout statistics, and state standardized test results. A frequency of 25 codes was calculated. Eleven of these were from the interview only, and 14 were from the sources excluding the interview. Although this was last of the 10 highest concept titles, significance may be of worth to the alternative schools, since alternative school students must meet state graduation requirements. All public school students must pass high stakes tests to be promoted to the next grade level. In Louisiana these tests consists of LEAP and GEE.
Table 3 lists the codes from each data source, from each school. Seeing the top codes from each data source enabled me to look for reoccurring codes within each source, the principal interview, the day-long observation field notes, the student handbook, and the reflective notebook. If the same codes are located in the top portion of the each source, I determined that to be an important code and a possible theme developing. If the data sources had different uppermost data, then the data suggested no commonalities or themes.

The data in Table 3 was summarized in two sections. The first section was a summary of frequencies from the four sources used in the study from School A. The second was a summary of frequencies from the four sources from School B. To create a visual of the most frequent concepts, the three most frequent codes from each source from School A and School B are italicized. Each column on in Table 3 represents a raw data source and the initial code title applied to the collected data.

Table 3- Frequency of Initial Codes per School Data Source

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code Title</th>
<th>School A</th>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>Handbook</th>
<th>Observation</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disciplines</td>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent communication</td>
<td></td>
<td>26</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative experiences</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual children</td>
<td></td>
<td>25</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PBS</td>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety issues</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectations</td>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community relations</td>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum—social skills</td>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School improvement</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure for students</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student actions</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School personnel</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goals for students</td>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum regular</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punishment issues</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding people</td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student recognition</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(Table 3 continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>Handbook</th>
<th>Observation</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alternative programs</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data analysis</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working staff</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence of leader</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student growth</td>
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SCHOOL B

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**Summary of Table 3**

**Principal Interview**

The principal interview conducted at each school site produced similar results. This indicates the importance of these two principals regarding discipline policies being in place and parent communication occurring. Despite different locales and student populations, discipline policies were the number one concern.

**School A**

Analysis of School A yielded a frequency of 30 codes in which the use of discipline policies was a key focus. Parent communication was second with a total frequency of 26, followed by individual children with 25. As the numbers indicate, these three codes were very close in total number. The range was five from the highest code’s frequency total to the lowest code’s frequency total. Thus, school A’s principal perceived discipline policies as a paramount concern.

**School B**

School B also had discipline policies as its most frequent concept with 23 codes. This was followed by structure for students with 9 and parent communication 8. These two concepts represented a very close range, but the data showed the emphasis was on discipline policies.
**Principal Interview Synthesis**

The principal interviews produced similar results. School A’s principal had similar concerns as School B’s principal; both principals agreed discipline was a major challenge. Parent communication was perceived as a minor concern for both principals.

**Student Handbook**

Each school published a student handbook that is given to each student and their family upon enrollment at the alternative school. This book is designed to guide all policies and regulations concerning the alternative school. These handbooks are printed annually and approved by the parish school board. The student handbook analysis indicated only discipline policies as a common concept between the two participating schools. This highlights discipline as the focus of alternative placement and confirmed the data from the principal interview. Not all students had discipline problems at their home based school; however, the alternative school was a more appropriate setting for these students. Many students benefit from attending an alternative school instead of a traditional school because of the ability to attend an alternative school with overage peers and the ability to follow a non-diploma certificate path, which may include a vocational skills certificate. Also, students from both schools were allowed to attend pre-GED courses to assist with the alternative curriculum.

**School A**

Various alternative programs were reported at School A. These programs were given priority when the principal developed the student handbook and was coded seven times on the selected pages reviewed. Expectations for the student, parent, and staff appeared five times in the handbook. Individual children’s needs and discipline policies were the third concept and gathered a total frequency of four.
School B

School B had a very wide disparity from its top concept to its third concept. The top concept was discipline policies with 16 occurrences. This was followed by alternative curriculums three occurrences and goals for students with three. Negative experience was the second concept with four instances. The range between first frequency and third frequency is 13.

Handbook Synthesis

Each school’s handbook varied. With the selection of programs offered at School A, the principal wanted all students and parents to understand the numerous ways each student can achieve within his or her current educational placement. Unlike School A, School B’s principal perceived that discipline policies should be stressed to all students and parents within the student handbook. The student handbook data was most different between the two school principals.

Day-long Observation

The day-long observation at each school was scripted as I paced back and forth within the school building and examined and recorded student and adult actions. The observation resulted in discipline policies being observed with the highest degree of frequency at both school sites, indicating these practices occurred at each school. This observational data confirmed the issue of discipline policies as the same issue surfaced in interview data as a paramount and overwhelming focus.

School A

The observation conducted yielded data pertaining to discipline policies occurring 15 times. Negative experiences were scripted in my field notes 13 times during the period of time visited. Student actions were also viewed and recorded a frequency of 11 times, which was third in frequency for School A.
School B

Mirroring School A, School B also had discipline policies as the highest frequency concept. The need for structure for students was second with 9 codes and safety issues were recorded as third with 8 initial codes.

Day-long Observation Synthesis

From the day-long observation both school principals perceived discipline policies as a point of awareness. The differences occurred in other concepts. During the observation at School A, I recorded a number of negative experiences; whereas, at School B, the structure for students, along with safety issues, was documented as a notable concern. The data collected from the day-long observation continues to refer to ways of controlling student behavior as a significant area of concern for both alternative school principals.

Reflective Notebook

As previously noted, the reflective notebook contained my personal feelings, concerns, and perceptions throughout the research process. This information was annotated and analyzed as a fourth data source, adding depth to findings. My perception of negative experiences occurring at each school observed was overwhelmingly common when the data was computed and placed in the table for visual comparison. These negative experiences brought vivid images to mind while the reflective notebook was being created.

School A

My reflective notebook contained 11 coded negative experiences. These experiences, such as loud student adult communication and student arrest, had the most frequent initial codes for School A. Next in the notebook was working staff with five codes. The third concept was shared
by discipline policies, punishment issues, school improvement, and school personnel, all having a frequency of four.

**School B**

The reflective notebook also had negative experience for School B as the number one concept with seven initial codes. Examples of these experiences included the drill sergeant sternly reminding the students about walking properly in the hallway and the four hall monitors racing to remove a student from class when radioed from the front office personnel. Another example occurred during morning arrival; the student seemed to forget his behavior check sheet from the previous day and was immediately taken to the boot camp center without allowing the child to express himself. Five concepts were ranked second with a frequency total of four. Tied with four codes each were physical plant facilities, structure for students, influences of the leader, student actions, and working staff members. Four concepts received three initial codes. The concepts with three codes were student growth, discipline policies, school improvement, and school personnel.

**Reflective Notebook Synthesis**

Even though the experiences were different in intensity between the two schools, negative experiences were still cited as having the highest frequency. Besides negative experiences, the data did not reveal any other concept to be of great significance. Other concepts were scripted in the reflective notebook for both schools, but the negative experience data was the only concept that was warranted as significant.

**Category Development**

Table 4 presents analysis of the ranking of each concept to form categories. The outcome will develop a framework for locating commonalities in the results. The data was reviewed and
categories were established by gathering the concept titles with the most initial codes for each school and developing a ranking in each source for these gathered concepts. The concepts must be ranked in both School A and School B in order to be considered for a category. These categories are indicated by the asterisk next to the concept title. The categories - discipline policies; parent communication; negative experiences; and school personnel, working staff, and school improvement - from all four sources, were ranked first, second, or third and common to both schools; therefore, these concepts will be discussed as categories.

Table 4 Categories

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79
(Table 4 continued)

Physical plant 3
Curriculum alternative 3
*Common in both schools

**Discipline Policies**

The total coding results and findings from the research data indicated discipline policies as the most discussed concept in alternative schools in this study. This concept was established as a primary issue; therefore, it is an important category. The day-long observation field notes and also the principal interview each had discipline policies as the most frequent concept. School B had discipline policies as the most frequent concept for two data sources, the principal interview and the day-long observation field notes.

**Parent Communication**

Parent communication, like discipline policies, was a top concept for both schools. The student handbook listed parent communication as the top ranking concept. No other data source produced results that listed parent communication having a top frequency ranking, even though, parent communication did have strong support with 52 overall codes occurring throughout the four sources. The strength of the number of codes for parent communication indicated parent communication was significant enough to be considered a category.

**Negative Experiences**

Negatives perceptions occurred in half of the eight data sets including School B’s student handbook, School A’s day-long observation field notes, and in the reflective notebook for both schools. In fact, negative experiences were first or second in each data set in which it was recorded. Besides discipline policies, negative experience was the highest ranked concept,
receiving two top rankings and two second rankings; therefore, negative experiences was considered a category.

**School Personnel, Working Staff, and School Improvement**

Working staff, school improvement, and school personnel were ranked in the top three data findings in the reflective notebook for both schools. These concepts were not ranked in the top three from any other source, unlike the other concepts previously discussed. None of the three concepts received a top rank; however, the concepts school personnel, working staff, and school improvement are important and were considered a category.

**Synthesis of Categories**

Based on the data from all sources, the six most important concepts were: discipline policies, parent communication, negative experiences, school personnel, working staff, and school improvement. Structure for students was a category in three of the four data sources collected for School B. The principal interview, the day-long observation field notes, and the reflective notebook each listed structure for students in the top responses. Structure for students was not in any of the highest three frequency concepts for School A, which indicated an important or noteworthy difference between the two schools. A major focal point for School B, structure for students, was stressed by the principal during the interview, witnessed during the observation, and scripted in the reflective notebook implicating the perception was meaningful to the principal. However, other data categories such as goals for students, student actions, school safety, student growth, leader influence, curriculum alternatives, physical plant, individual student needs, and expectations were present and important categories but not emphasized as others. All categories were merged further to form themes to assist in simplifying the research data.
Developing Themes

In order to manage data, codes were correlated to concepts, and concepts were correlated to categories then merged and relabeled. This process continued to the point of saturation until 7 final themes emerged based on common characteristics of all categories, concepts, and initial codes analyzed. The themes are listed in Table 5 along with the number of initial codes pertaining to the themes. Like Table 3 and Table 4, Table 5 also identifies the data by source. The themes are defined for a clearer conceptual understanding of how each theme was merged.

Definitions of Themes

1. School structure/discipline - This theme included the categories discipline policies, punishment issues, safety issues, and structure for students.

2. Student behaviors - The theme student behavior contained codes from negative experiences and student actions.

3. School community/parent relations - The category parent communication was included in the school community/parent relations theme.

4. Leadership Characteristics - This theme included the alternative school leaders’ influences and the needs of individual children.

5. Curriculum and instruction - The curriculum and instruction theme included all concepts of curriculum, alternative curriculums, school improvement, and student growth.

6. Uncontrolled variables - This theme included issues discussed or observed over which the principals had no authority or control. The categories school personnel, working staff, physical plant, and the various programs offered on the alternative school site composed this theme. Many of these are district or state mandated policies.
7. Mission and vision- The steps the leader performs in developing the mission and vision of the alternative school and how this is accomplished defined this theme. The categories for this theme were student expectations and goals for students.

Table 5- Themes

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*Data source Table A

Synthesis of Themes

**School Structure/Discipline**

I determined the concepts discipline policies, punishment issues, safety issues, and structure for students would be included in this theme. As I collected the data from each source, discipline emerged as a major concern of the principals. Evidence to support this included the explanation of why the students were being placed at the alternative school and how the students must earn points to be transitioned back to the home based school. The point system was monitored by what Principal A called a transition card. To earn these points each student had to comply with the procedures of point sheet. When students followed the format of the behavior
plan, rewards were earned from the positive behavior support program in place to promote positive consequences after each student met the school wide expectations. These expectations were posted strategically around the school facility. At times students did not meet the expectations and were assigned a punishment or negative consequence. Both School A and School B had a specific room for noncompliant students. School B employed drill sergeants who monitored the students while they were performing boot camp activities. These were physical activities that occurred daily, each hour, throughout the school day. Student recognition was stated during both principal interviews as an often-used incentive to reward the students who met either academic or behavior performance standards.

Table 5 indicated the high frequency of using school structure/discipline related words or phrases. This theme more than doubled the second most frequent theme. As indicated by Table 5, the principal interview and the day-long observation field notes yielded the most evidence of the four data sources.

**Leadership Characteristics**

According to the literature, leaders of alternative schools must have definite qualities. The theme leadership characteristics included the categories, influences of the leader on the school and community, and meeting the needs of individual children. This theme also documented feelings of the interviewed school leader, the emotional needs of the children attending the alternative school, the influences a leader has on the school family, the principal’s characteristics, their desires to be a school leader, characteristics a leader needs to possess to be an effective and efficient principal, and the ability to understand people. As with the prior theme, Principal A dominated the data with 30 references to this theme during the interview. Her phrases such as “we need to be flexible, compromising, and accept change,” and “we need to understand what our kids
go through” are examples of how this theme developed. Other examples include statements from Principal A including, “being accepting of people and not judgmental,” and “we need to work with kids one-on-one, that is a key, in the traditional school, you don’t always have those resources”.

The emotional tie to the students was often stressed. The ability to understand each student and to assist each student to reach his/her full potential was an important point each principal emphasized within the alternatives setting.

**Curriculum and Instruction**

The theme curriculum and instruction included school improvement, student growth, and alternative curriculum. Concepts included in this category include social skills, character training, alternative curriculums, and state approved curriculums. This theme also included references from hallway displays and bulletin boards, school improvement, data analysis, and student growth. While instruction was a concern of the principals, social skills instruction was accentuated throughout the data. The interview of Principal A revealed an overwhelming frequency of instances referring to social skills. Both principals acknowledged that students lacked social skills. The following illustrates principal perception regarding student social skill acquisition.

“We try to teach them to understand tolerance and respect issues” said Principal A. A need was perceived by the school community for such social skills within the alternative setting, suggesting such skills should be a part of the school’s objective. School B had banners prominently displayed throughout the hallways referencing character education pillars, respect, responsibility, trustworthiness, caring, fairness, and citizenship. These character-based vocabulary words hung in each hallway with both large printed banners and paper sized posters. The Why Try curriculum was implemented at School A. Data further revealed the significance of this program, as the faculty and staff attended a workshop presented by the publisher at the school site.
Student growth on state standardized tests was posted in the hallway of School B. This data was a reminder to the students of the academic expectations the administration supported. Along with this testing data were attendance data and suspension data. Soon after orientation, School A reviewed with each student academic goals and expectations. Principal A shared her views as she stated, “this was a really good message to kids of their own personal growth.” This growth would eventually assist the students in meeting the requirements to return to their home based school.

**Uncontrolled Variables**

This theme had a frequency of 52 concepts and included four categories. This was the third most frequent theme in Table 5. This included district or state issues discussed or observed of which the principal had no authority or control. The data was consistent in seven of eight informational sources. School personnel, working staff, student demographics, special education laws, the physical plant, and the various programs offered by the school site are some examples of uncontrolled variables. Many of these were district or state-mandated policies. Each school had a significant number of programs on the campus during the school day. Option 3, transitional 4th and 8th grade, Pre-GED, lower elementary and high school expulsion students, and discipline centers were all incorporated into the alternative school and observable on the alternative school’s campus. The principal enforced uniform policies to assist in determining which students were in each program. For example, yellow shirts were worn by junior high students on School A’s campus. Maroon shirts were worn by high school students on School B’s campus. These colors were different for elementary, middle, and high school students. Stability in the staff was emphasized by both principals as an important component in the success of the school.
Student demographics were quite different between the schools. School A was a mostly Caucasian student population, and School B was a mostly African-American campus population, emulating district demographics. The same was true of the faculty makeup.

Another uncontrolled variable discussed by the principal of School B was district support. The principal felt district support was important to mention during the interview as an issue prohibiting the school’s success. “We are at a point of just getting support from the district,” replied Principal B. Meanwhile, Principal A states, “funding is sliding away, we don’t really get a budget so I solicit donations.” Both of these statements appeared demoralizing to the principal as shared during the interview. Appearances notably shifted as their faces appeared elongated and sullen as they answered this interview question.

School Parent/Community Relations

The theme school parent/community relations included the category parent communication. The concepts distribution of information, orientation, and community and business relationships comprised this category. Fifty percent of the total frequency of this theme came from the School A’s principal interview. School A’s field notes and reflective notes along with School B’s field notes had a zero frequency. The principals of both schools believed that this theme was vital to the overall success of the school as evidenced by the following statements from the principals. “We call every single day for absences,” said Principal A. At one point during the enrollment of each child at School B, “we have a meeting with the student, parent, administrator, and dean.” Other parent/community relations involved attending open house, volunteering parents, and written communication via student planners. This theme was quite easy for the principals to discuss; however, little data was found in the other sources to confirm principals’ perceptions.
Community support was also important. “Home Depot donates Christmas trees, Canes provides meals” used as incentives for many of the students and the families of alternative schools. According to the principals, the community’s perception of the school was very negative. When asked what is the public’s perception of the school? Principal A indicated, “This is a school for bad kids.” Principal B stated, “The perception is a holding cell but once they come in, they see that we actually function like a regular school.” These poor perceptions of each school by the school community were embarrassing for both principals to verbalize during the interview. However, both realized it is a perception that they must overcome in order to be successful.

**Student Actions/Behaviors**

The theme student actions/behaviors contained negative experiences and student actions. This theme’s concepts came primarily from the observation field notes and the reflective notebook. An example of a student action recorded in the field notes from School A was the appearance of required uniforms. Some students tucked the uniform shirt into the pants, while others had sagging pants. At School B students were moving on the right side of the hallway during the exchange of classes. These actions were observed during both schools’ visits.

My perception of a negative behavior was also documented during the observation and noted in my reflective notebook. At School A, three students were being monitored in the suspension center as another student was being brought in by the assistant principal. At School A, a student was being arrested from the classroom. The drill sergeants at School B spoke sternly to the students as they moved from the cafeteria to class. The sergeants were barking out instructions to students, ordering them to the right side of the hallway, and authoritatively demanding them to continue moving until they reached their destination. Experiences such as these were perceived as
negative because students were suspended, arrested, and spoken to in a harsh manner while attending school.

**Mission and Vision**

The steps the leader performed in developing goals and expectations for the mission and vision of the alternative school and how this was accomplished were included in this theme. Also included in this theme were the concepts student and school goals and a posted mission and vision statement in and around the school building. The mission statements of the schools were posted near the entrance in the school building and also printed on the opening page in the student handbook of each school. The development of the statement was quite different at each school. School A reported that “We go over our mission statement and it really dictates every decision we make.” A total frequency of 49 was computed for the theme mission and vision. Principal A’s interview encompassed 28 of those codes. The principal at School B had six codes from the interview for the theme mission and vision. Other examples of codes being recorded to this theme were, “We need to improve in and give them a goal personally,” and “Our mission is to provide every student another opportunity for academic and behavioral success.” From the comments referenced above, each principal found it vitally important to incorporate a clear and understandable vision for the school community and each student enrolled in the alternative school.

**Relationships of Themes**

The results from the four data sources, principal interview, student handbook, day-long observation, and reflective notes revealed seven themes emerging from coded data. The sources and direct quotations from the principal serve as evidence, illustrating the principal’s perception of an alternative school. This perception and its relationship to ISLLC standard 1 - mission and
vision of the school and ISLLC standard 4-school community/parent relations was the nucleus of this study. The relationship to these standards was analyzed using the themes listed on Table 5. The ISLLC standards were examined and analyzed by the functions of each standard. Each theme was correlated and placed in the appropriate function. Standard 1 has five functions and standard four has four functions. If no function was deemed suitable, the theme was cataloged to an appropriate ISLLC standard.

Table 6 ISLLC Standards and Functions

| Standard 1- Facilitating the development articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by all stakeholders | Standard 4- Collaborating with faculty and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources |
| Function A- collaboratively develop and implement a shared vision and mission | Function A- collect and analyze data and information pertinent to the educational environment |
| Function B- Collect and use data to identify goals, assess organizational effectiveness, and promote organizational learning | Function B- Promote understanding, appreciation, and use of the communities diverse cultural, social, and intellectual resources |
| Function C- Create and implement plans to achieve goals | Function C- Build and sustain positive relationships with families and caregivers |
| Function D- Promote continuous and sustainable improvement | Function D- Build and sustain productive relationships with community partners |
| Function E- Monitor and evaluate progress and revise plans |

ISLLC Standard 1

Theme School Mission/Vision

Concept sharing mission/vision- The principal’s perception of his/her school in the community is vastly different from what he/she envisioned. Both principals agreed during their
interviews that this is a major point in the success of the school. The school community still felt, according to Principal A, “that this is the school for bad kids and I say it is not. It is a school for kids that made bad choices and all of these kids have some good in them and of course we find it out.” The principal was not accepting of the community’s perception and vowed to change it.

The community of School B felt that “this is a prison school; they try to fight not being here as much as possible.” Not only does the community feel this way about the school, but the school system shows little support, according to the principal. She stated, “Really, we are just at the point of trying to get support from the district.” These perceptions existed in the minds of each principal, and the principal at each site attempted to combat this feeling with a clear implementation of the mission and vision for the alternative school. Developing and sharing the school’s vision and mission is an important step in getting support from all stakeholders. ISLLC standard one relates this exact belief.

**Theme School Structure and Discipline**

Concept discipline policies – The diversity of students and subsequent diverse range of needs was stressed by both principals during the interview and each indicated this was not being consistently carried out by the staff. A few instances taken from the interviews were very impressionable to me, such as, “Caring for kids and being there for kids and trying to seek out the individual help they need because they are all different, each child’s needs are different and we work together here to do that.” Another example is, “We let kids know that everyone is treated equally and that we will not put up with anything other than that.” Realizing the differences in children can lead to more successes for both the alternative school and the students who attend. Understanding diversity and its effect on the student population emerged as important by the principals interviewed; however, the actions of the staff did not parallel these thoughts. Student
punishment was rendered without regard to the student’s feelings. Although such a negative incident occurred during the observation, the principal seemed to follow the school’s basic principle of implementing plans to achieve goals, of sustained improvement (ISLLC standard 1, function C and D), even if the goals were not agreed upon by all educators. The negative actions lead me to realize that the principal was not aware or not in control of the actions of other staff members towards students. Perhaps more communication between staff members or walk around observations should occur for the principal to witness actual behaviors occurring on campus.

Concept structure for students - With a lack of support from the community and district, the principals’ priority, according to the data, was to design a highly-structured, discipline-based school. This was evident as school structure received the highest frequency. When this total was analyzed further, school structure codes were divided equally between the interview and the other three data sources. This confirmed a strong relationship to the principal’s focus of leading an alternative school. As with all of the data sources collected, structure or discipline occurred as the most frequent in all data tables. A direct quotation taken from the principal interview explains School A’s structure and the overall importance on structure, “It is not that the traditional school has failed. They don’t succeed there because of the various needs they have. The traditional school is not equipped to handle it. The dynamics for kids are not good. We have small class sizes, super structured environment, more academic interventions being addressed, and if they are in special education, they can get more services.” Both principals were concerned with creating an organized structured environment for learning. Their beliefs of a strict discipline-oriented school facility were based on the student’s prior academic and behavioral records, either expelled from the home-based school or belonging to a non-traditional school setting. These modifications
to the traditional setting allows for alternative placements which meets ISLLC standard 1, function E, monitoring and evaluating progress and revise plans.

**Theme Curriculum and Instruction**

Concept school improvement - An example which related to this standard was taken from the data notebook of School B. “Each class has an objective, bell ringer, teaching, guided practice, and closure written on the board.” A best practice for all schools is to set expectations for learning and sequencing the lesson to accomplish these objectives. Since school structure/discipline was rated so high in all of the data analysis, curriculum and instruction would be expected to have a weaker impact on the alternative schools in the study. However, curriculum and instruction was very much aligned to promoting organized learning and this precluded the culture of collaborative learning.

Concept student growth – School A principal explained how students felt in particular situations; for example “we put the kids’ names in a lottery, of course they were pre-selected; the names were pulled out to win a Christmas tree.” She continued, “They thought they won which was phenomenal and every kid here is in need in some way. When they think they won something, they become a winner; it’s not because something was given to them because of charity or need.” School B principal said, “They (students) love their work being posted. So when they got mastery or an advanced score on a paper, it goes up on the board, and it’s like wow, look what I did!” These quotes described the behavior of students when their self-esteem was lifted, and they felt good about themselves. Both principals’ perceptions were confirmed during the observations when student work was posted on hallway bulletin boards and monthly student-of-the-month winners names were placed on a plaque for view. Both principals also follow the suggestions of researchers, Mooz (1979) and Clements and Kannapel (2005) who advocated
creating a school culture where high expectations for student achievement and promoting a positive reward system for academic work are important to the child’s ecosystem. Promoting continuous and sustainable improvement while creating plans to achieve goals are both measured in ISLLC standard one.

**ISLLC Standard 4**

**Theme Leadership Characteristics**

Concept alternative programs/curriculums – Both principals had notions of what characteristics an alternative school leader should possess. Principals’ perception of the characteristics of a leader was second of the seven concepts. Eighty-one percent of the instances were taken directly from the principal interviews. The remaining twenty percent were from the other data sources. A quotation which described the perception of the characteristics an alternative school leader should possess is clearly conveyed by the principal of School A when she expressed, “Well, I think learning and programs are one in the same. The difference is really about having more tolerance and understanding of what our kids go through. Having an emotional tie to truly understand what they go through.” She continued, “It takes a little different person to be an alternative school principal; we need to meet the needs of kids. The training is the same but you need a little different attitude, we have to have this.” This was a summation of the principal’s feelings and perceptions of the needed characteristics of an alternative school leader. The principal felt strongly about the different characteristics an alternative school principal must possess and indicated a difference between the alternative setting and traditional setting regarding tolerance and understanding. This also indicted her perception that a different attitude was warranted. Alternative school principals should be more empathetic because many of these students need such an administrator. While all educators need to develop caring attitudes, the
demands of an alternative setting exacerbate the degree of caring and concern needed as the
students’ needs are so great. At one point during the interview, Principal A broke down
emotionally and cried when speaking of the needs of each of these students. Simply overcome,
this emotional outburst was genuine as she truly showed compassion for each student enrolled at
her school. Her emotion illustrated her perceptions of the intense emotional commitment needed
and that such commitment was overwhelming. Both principals stressed how their decisions are
based on meeting the students’ needs. Thus, understanding the diverse needs of the learners and
the community in general can be aligned to ISLLC standard 4.

Theme Uncontrolled Variables

Concept various programs – Curriculum and instruction was third of the seven themes. Both with only the interview and without the interview, curriculum and instruction frequencies totaled 59 and 50 respectively. At times the principals expressed frustration with the academic performances of the students. During interviews, both principals spoke about the different types of alternative programs on their campus and the students’ performance in those programs. Data indicated instructional leadership at these schools was not of significant importance. This is evident during the interview process when School A principal stated, “These students have never been successful in academics but yet we still shove academics down their throats.” The principal clearly explains that students do not gain through academics because of a lack of success; therefore, she believed other paths of learning must be successfully accomplished before academics are incorporated. Hence, the focus is on discipline policies and student structure rather than academics and student achievement. Each leader’s decision may be based on his/her personal characteristics. Decision making as such is a viable theory and educators utilize this theory to make important school decisions. Making sound decisions, which promote high standards of
learning, are included in ISLLC standard 1, the mission and vision of learning. Also, having diverse programs allows the school to meet the needs of diverse students and community.

**Theme School Parent/Community Relations**

Concept parent communications - Community/parent relations were significantly mentioned during the interview but did not have the same importance in other data sources. The successes and struggles a principal faces when dealing with community and parent relations in regard to alternative settings are epitomized by both principals in the following quotations taken from the principal interviews. School B principal stated, “We have some parent workshops, parent meetings, no PTO or PTA because we feel this is a revolving door so it is not home for them.” This quotation illustrates the mobility of the alternative setting and hence, the difficulty with establishing and maintaining parental/familial relationships. Principal A stated, “We tried to start a parent teacher organization which most schools around here don’t have, but it was not well attended.” The principal continued with, “We have intake with every child and parent. We build a relationship from the first time we meet. We always have a parent connection with us before we even take their child and that is huge.” While parental involvement is a struggle for many settings, the transiency of the alternative setting exacerbates this challenge. Meeting ISLLC standard 4, function C, remain difficult for the alternative school principals. This concurs with the literature research done by Cotton (1991) which suggests the support of the parents and the whole ecosystem surrounding the child has great benefits to enhancing the student’s success at school.

**Unique Leadership Aspects of Alternative School Principals**

**Theme Student Actions/behaviors**

Concept Negative experiences - The themes previously discussed are the major findings; however, the student actions/behaviors, which included negative experiences and diverse student
populations, and recorded during the gathering of the qualitative data, are very important outcomes of this study. Numerous negative experiences were observed. These negative experiences were scripted and tallied during the day-long observation and reflective notebook sources. A few examples included “students were sitting in the chair position with their backs along the hallway wall.” This was a form of disciplining students who were sent to the office for correction. Another negative example was noted when “a student was being arrested from the classroom for refusing to allow the teacher to search her shoes.” The recording of these events left questions and reservations as to whether the information from the interview was factual and actually happened during the school day or is there a discrepancy between the vision of the school leader and the actions of the school leader. The kind, empathetic, and caring words of the principal and the reprimanding events occurring at the school site were far different. In one instance the principal said, “I worry about them every night” and yet an arrest occurred while I was present. I soon realized and remembered from my previous experience as a principal that the observation was just a snapshot of a day and not a consecutive day observation and that these types of incidents may commonly occur at alternative schools where the student population was comprised of expelled students. Therefore, a dichotomous situation exists with a juxtaposition of nurture and concern with the hard, cold reality of having to arrest a student. The principal has a true concern and genuinely cares about each of the enrolled students, but challenging situations arise at the alternative school that makes it difficult to achieve the goals of conforming and meeting the ISLLC standards.

Summary

This research project attempted to find answers to six research questions. The data
collected and triangulated enabled me to suggest possible answers to questions previously posed based on the eight data sets and provided research-based evidence to perform such a task.

**Education**

How does the alternative school leader understand the mission of alternative education?

As the data indicated, this is an important feature in leadership of the alternative school; however, other issues are much more prevalent to the alternative school leaders studied and appeared to consume their attention, energy, and time. Based on the number of negative experiences noted during the observation, a clear mission may not be fully explained to all of the school stakeholders as Principal A stated, “Well the first thing is we meet with a committee every year to review our mission and vision statements. We go over our mission statement and it really dictates every decision we make.” Based on many of the negative actions observed, the ISLLC standard mission/vision and the schools discipline methods are not correlated. Therefore, the alternative school leader’s understanding of the school’s mission and vision is unclear and not being followed based on the data collected. Concluding the mission and vision were not major concerns for the principals.

**Learning**

How are alternative school leaders developing and implementing a shared vision of learning?

Alternative school leaders developed and implemented a shared vision to the faculty and public via the student handbook. It is not present in the top concerns of School A or School B. However, the ISLLC standards differ from the concerns of both schools, as it advocates the utmost importance of vision and mission. Data gathered from the study did reveal that the vision is developed and routed to the school stakeholders but may not be performed as expected on the school campus. The results from the study indicated the principals did not collaboratively develop
and implement a shared vision and mission. This shows standard 1 is addressed but not fully realized. The principals are promoting continuous improvement and implementing student learning plans; however, these plans mostly are discipline policies enforcing more structure for students.

**Interests**

How does the alternative school leader collaborate with families and key stakeholders who represent diverse interests?

The data indicated the alternative school leaders in the study do collaborate with parents and stakeholders through an orientation program, the student handbook, and a limited number of business partnerships. Many parent conferences are held throughout the time the students are assigned to the particular school. However, the varying degree and length of time spent at an alternative setting intensifies the struggles with collaboration between the school and family. The migratory and shifting nature of alternative school populations adds a sense of instability. Frequent communication is not sustained and is only emphasized in structure for students. It is aimed at discussing and explaining the school’s rules and procedures addressing function E of standard 1. To fulfill standard 1, monitoring must occur in areas other than discipline and structure; therefore, the full standard is not being met.

**Schools**

How does the alternative school leader organize community resources to help children attending alternative schools?

Both school leaders indicated that business sponsors were important to the success of the school either from a financial aspect or a name recognition aspect. Neither principal pushed businesses to collaborate with the school, but both seemed to think this was important to show the
existence of the school in the community. Families are hesitant to accept leadership in the school since the length of stay may be brief. Both principals also wanted more business partnerships at their alternative school. These actions address ISLLC standard 4 but to a very limited extent.

**Decisions**

How does the child’s ecosystem influence leadership decisions?

The ecosystem for each child consists of the child’s family, school, and community. The principals recognized that parent involvement in the child’s education was minimal. School B does not have a PTO, nor does School A’s principal feel the parents understand the needs of the child. Many parents do not know how to assist their child with his or her mental and emotional needs. Parents seem to depend on the school to provide services for the child to enjoy a measure of success in school. Both school administrators welcomed new students and insisted that this is not a bad place to go to school, but it is a place to rejuvenate good decision making and to move back into the mainstream of education. Again, the transitory nature of alternative settings increases leadership demands. It was important for the students to transition back in the community as responsible citizens. The child’s ecosystem is attended to, but the follow-up and wrap around services may not be strong enough for lasting and sustained student success. Therefore, the child’s ecosystem is not met nor is ISLLC standard 4, function C. Because of the lack of parental involvement, the school has to take on more responsibility to best assist the child.

**Leaders**

What are the perceived challenges for leaders in alternative education?

Both principals had a different yet equally challenging situation. School A emphasized the emotional needs of the child and how schools were meeting these needs as a substantial challenge. This leader displayed great emotion when speaking about the child’s needs at home, at school, and
in the community. This was evident when she stated, “I think the hardest challenge is the emotional challenge. They are so emotional challenged, and when they leave to go to the hospital, I worry about them all night. I worry about them all the time.” She adds, after a seemingly pensive pause, “I would love to just have a facility to take care of them totally and the parents can just come to visit.” Promoting understanding, appreciation, and use of the community’s diverse, cultural, social, and intellectual resources is important for the school principal and equally important for the parent (standard 4, function B).

School B stressed the number of special education students being placed in alternative settings was a major challenge for her and the staff. Principal B was concerned that traditional schools in the parish were not doing their part in trying to educate the child and that her school was becoming a dumping ground for other schools’ problems or deficiencies. This was reflected in the following statement, “Right now our biggest challenge is the special education (ESS) population. They come to us, and they cannot be expelled like the regular student. Once they realize this, they act out more. Our hands are tied.” Standard 1, functions B and E are addressed by these challenges.

As I reflected, these challenging situations for each principal are similar to the challenges I faced as an administrator. Wrap around services and special education services are and may continue to be challenges for all school leaders. However, it appeared the alternative setting exasperated the demands of meeting student needs. Truly, addressing the student’s ecosystem, including cooperation with traditional sending schools, can assist in alleviating some of these apprehensive feelings. The questions, resultant data tables, summaries, and the answers to the initial research questions presented in this chapter lead to the summary, conclusion, implications, and recommendations of the researcher, presented in chapter 5.
CHAPTER 5
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents a discussion of conclusions and implications for alternative school leaders as well as future directions in alternative schools. The body of knowledge derived from this research project may aid district and state educators in designing effective alternative schools for students who have not been successful in traditional school settings. It will enable professionals to examine their own beliefs and perceptions as they relate to national and state standards while meeting the needs of each individual child and thus, addressing needs within the school setting as a part of the child’s ecosystem. The results from this study are noteworthy to educators but also can be explored further in order to focus on a particular objective related to alternative schools or national standards. As schools are an integral part of a community; viewing the school within the child’s ecosystem is paramount.

Summary

This study sought to determine how alternative school principals addressed the child’s ecosystem, i.e. family, community, and school. The interaction within the student’s ecosystem impacts the student’s behavior. Specifically, this qualitative research study was designed to contribute to the knowledge base of how ISLLC standard one, mission/vision, and standard four, parent/community relations, were being met by two Louisiana alternative school principals. Four data sources were used in the study: the principal interview, the day-long observation, the student handbook, and the data notebook. The data gathered from this study was then analyzed to determine the principals’ perceptions, their area of focus, and how perceptions related to the research questions. Each source’s data was then coded using computer software to determine
similar concepts, categories, and common themes. I compared themes to ISLLC standards 1 and 4. A grounded theory approach was used to reach the results and conclusions in this study.

Conclusions

One of the seven themes that emerged from this research provides a spotlight on the principals’ and school interaction with the child’s ecosystem – school structures/discipline. The school structure/discipline was a consistent result from the data and consisted of student discipline referral system, student movement throughout the day, orientation process, and other administrative driven procedures designed to focus strictly on behavior policies.

In this study, discipline permeated school operation. Personnel at both schools continued to perform negative actions that reflected no change in student behavior. Too much punishment and discipline, while not enough positive, corrective teaching, was observed in the school setting. This result was similar to Adera and Hughes (2006); alternative schools remain focused on student behavior and not the academic rigor needed for the student to be successful in the classroom.

Another theme, School Parent/Community Relations, occurred but not nearly to the extent and depth needed to both assist students in these alternative settings and to change public and community perceptions. Community and business involvement was highly sought out and dearly wanted; however, the ability to recruit this involvement was at a low level. Other concerns such as discipline derailed any extraordinary efforts by the principal to obtain more community and business involvement. Slight resistance often resulted in a decrease in parental involvement attempts. The principals become content with having no PTO or PTA and satisfied with parental acknowledgement during the orientation process.

A third theme was the mission and vision statement for the schools. The mission and vision statement for the schools were posted prominently for everyone to see and were written in
the handbooks for everyone to receive; however, neither staff was observed implementing or emphasizing these statements in everyday practices in a positive manner. Certainly, students were given a second opportunity to succeed by attending the alternative school as suggested by both school’s mission statements; however, according to the research performed, the academic and emotional needs of the children were less of a priority than the behavioral needs.

These principals fell short with meeting the two ISLLC standards most associated with the child’s ecosystem and thus struggled with supporting the child’s ecosystem. The findings from this study did not indicate a great connection between the actions of individuals in the school and to the standards. Specifically, ISLLC standard two, mission and vision, were discussed but did not guide the school. As the themes suggest, principals also struggled with implementing ISLLC Standard four-Community involvement. As a possible explanation, the ISLLC standards are hard to meet due to constraints of the alternative principal. Transient student populations, constant mobility, both reasons for the students attending the school, as well as the lack of support from the districts, parents, and communities were findings that clearly indicated the limiting capacity of both of the principals from accomplishing ISLLC standard 1 and 4. These constraints were also prevalent during my tenure as an alternative school principal. Students were assigned to the alternative school via a hearing officer. The student assignments varied greatly in length from 45 days to 2 years. The assignment length was directly dependent upon the student’s participation in the discipline infraction. The student and parent felt no loyalty to the alternative school since it was only a temporary holding place. Observations conducted at both schools provided similar evidence.

Another constraint was that the parents of the students being assigned to the alternative school were relatively uninvolved in their child’s education. This spurred many of the behavioral
issues of the child. During orientation it is stressed to the parent to become involved in their child’s education; however, many of these parents did not have positive school experiences and did not know how to handle such situations. Therefore, choosing not to become involved was an easier decision for them.

**Implications**

This research may have implications for American schools, Louisiana schools, and district schools. The principals’ perceptions of meeting standards 1 and standard 4 are far different than their actions. It appeared, based on data, that the principals believed that verbally speaking and providing documentation of the mission and vision to the parents were adequate means to convey the mission and vision of the school to the school community. The principals’ perceptions of having a full orientation program, parent conferences as needed, and soliciting business partners did not appear to be changing the parents’ and school communities’ perception of the alternative program. As data indicated, many members of the respective communities still felt the schools were bad, prison-like, and did not prefer their children initially to attend the school. Upon observing the school, the actions inside the school building did not lend to a positive climate within the school. The lack of a positive climate within the school will only promote further negative perceptions to be spread in the community. Based on the research data of this study, the principals at both schools pursued strict discipline policies, as well as a rigid school structure. The principals were also extremely imbedded in the discipline and school structure aspect of learning but very loosely focused on the academics, curriculum, and student achievement. This is evident by the 25% national dropout rate of at-risk children and the 45% dropout rate for Louisiana children (see: http://www.doe.state.la.us/lde/pair/1805.html). With an increased number of at-risk students attending alternative schools in Louisiana, it is paramount that graduation is achieved
by each student. The principals’ priority may need to be adjusted and more focused on student performance and student graduation. Simply put, the alternative setting needs to truly offer alternative means to school success.

If principals meet the two ISLLC standards related to the child’s ecosystem, standard one and four, as well as the correlates for effective schools, student outcomes, such as those mentioned previously, are more likely to improve. It is important for the principal to continually and in varied ways, stress the mission and vision of the school to the school community, not just the parents of students who are attending. A proactive approach publicizing the alternative school’s offerings and resources may have a greater impact on the overall negative perception of the school by the community. Principals may need better training on how to develop a shared vision and how to implement that vision with structures that match the vision. True community partnerships need to be established and nurtured.

Meeting the student’s needs revolves around changing the student’s ecosystem. Standard 4, parent/community relations, have a strong influence on the ecosystem, in particular, family and community. Standard 1, mission and vision of the school, has a great impact on the student’s needs at school. If both of these can be fulfilled, a change in student behavior may occur at a more rapid and thorough pace. This research concluded that the school part of the ecosystem must be positively affected before a more permanent change in the student can occur. In some instances, because the students are so transient, individual, alternative methods must be employed. Traditional methods do not transfer to the alternative setting. Additional training in establishing community relations, implementing mission and goals thoroughly, and working with faculties and staffs are needed and warranted within the alternative setting. In addition, district support is
necessary for principals to properly address the student’s ecosystem. These changes will then proceed to affect American schools, Louisiana schools, and District schools.

American Schools

The development of standards is important to the education system. An evaluation of school leaders meeting these standards must be developed and utilized so principals have a better understanding of their actions as opposed to their perceptions. A self-evaluation checklist of all ISLLC standards and the corresponding functions, completed by the alternative school principal, may assist in the evaluation process.

Louisiana Schools

The application for alternative schools must be monitored by the Department of Education on a more stringent level. ISLLC standards should be included on the application for each alternative school. These standards are sound best practices; however, professional development and an evaluation instrument should be designed to assist the alternative school principal in meeting these standards. Perhaps a written action plan with tentative dates for introduction and completion will support the principal in becoming a more effective alternative school leader.

District Level Schools

Louisiana school districts have been mandated by the Department of Education to offer an alternative education to students whose educational needs are not being met in the traditional education setting. Each district has been given a set of administrative standards, similar to the ISLLC standards in which they are expected to follow. However, few districts have developed a plan of action on how the alternative school principal will meet those standards. Consistent monitoring of the principal is important so proper adjustments in action can occur. Monitoring should occur at both district and state levels. Often collaboration can aid in making better
decisions. Consistent collaborative efforts on meeting ISLLC standards can help the principal change thinking and practices as they relate to vision, mission, and community involvement. Most principals seem to be leaders for the right reasons; however, principals need assistance in creating a more positive learning environment for students.

**Recommendations**

First and foremost, this study found that there is a general lack of extant research on perceptions of alternative school principals. Despite the fact alternative sites are growing, little research is being conducted on these sites. This indicates the need for more research to explore alternative school principals and the need for educational leaders in those positions. While several research studies were conducted to examine definitions of an alternative school, methodology of curriculum and instruction, and detection of at-risk students, more studies that examine practice and belief systems and adherence to national standards of administrative practice that could provide models of successful alternative schools are needed.

This case study focused on two principals and their perceptions related to meeting ISLLC standards 1 and 4. Principals included in this study were able to describe their experiences and express their feelings about alternative schools. The insights gained from this study came as a result of the participants’ willingness to participate and to be candid and sincere about their experiences and current position. These insights offer hope that alternative school leaders can provide a structured school environment that still supports the student’s ecosystem and meets the needs of students. Further studies might examine alternative schools’ curriculum and instructional practices. Additional studies would be beneficial to heighten instructional leadership behaviors of alternative principals, counteracting the emphasis on school structure and discipline found in this study. Further studies might examine the following concerns in an in-depth manner:
What does an effective classroom look like? How do these instructional practices meet particular standards? What is the perception of an alternative school principal at a high performing alternative school? Studies focusing on these issues would be beneficial for both school level and district level leaders. Such studies would potentially inform state level leaders as well.

In addition to several possible studies that would adhere to qualitative design and methods, there is also a need for quantitative studies. Researchers could investigate alternative school student performance scores and compare those to traditional school performance scores. Alternative school students scoring high on standardized tests can be investigated further to determine possible reasons for such a positive influence on student performance. Other possible quantitative studies may include analyzing the size of alternative schools, student to teacher ratios, and student recidivism rates. Many possibilities exist in this area for continued research on alternative placements.

This research was a multiple case study and pertained to school leaders’ standards, knowledge, and how they existed in the context of two alternative schools. The findings will contribute to the body of research concerning the implementation of national professional standards and a principal’s perception of effective alternative school leadership. Purposeful sampling allowed the selection of the principals and schools based on demographics and logistics. Coding words, phrases, and paragraphs organized data from several sources. A balance between objectivity and sensitivity when gathering and interpreting data was maintained, thus trustworthiness was achieved. The conclusion of this study confirmed previous research, gave new insights on perceptions of alternative school principals, and highlighted new findings related to the alternative school setting and to the perceptions of alternative school leaders.
REFERENCES


National Middle School Association (2005). *Sample Interview Questions and Approaches-Teacher and Administrator Positions at the Middle Level.* May 24, 2005.


Figure 2- Map of Louisiana Parishes
APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVAL

Application for Exemption from Institutional Oversight

Unsure qualified as meeting the specific criteria for exemption from Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight, all LSU research projects using living humans as subjects, or samples or data obtained from humans, directly or indirectly, with or without their consent, must be approved or exempted in accordance with the LSU IRB. This form helps the PI determine if the project may be exempted, and in so it is requested an exemption.

- Applicant. Please fill out the application in its entirety and include the completed application as well as parts A-E listed below, when submitting to the IRB. Once the application is completed, please submit two copies of the completed application to the IRB Office or to a member of the Human Subjects Screening Committee. Members of this committee can be found at http://www.lsu.edu/lrb/screening/members.shtml

- A Complete Application Includes All of the Following:
  (A) Two copies of the completed form and two copies of Parts B thru E.
  (B) A brief project description (adequate to evaluate risks to subjects and to explain your responses to Parts 1 & 2).
  (C) Copies of all instruments to be used.
  (D) If this proposal is a grant proposal, include a copy of the proposal and all recruitment materials.
  (E) Certificate of Completion of Human Subjects Protection Training for all personnel involved in the project, including students who are involved in testing or handling data, unless already on file with the IRB.

- Training link: (http://www.nlm.nih.gov/training/users/login.php)

1) Principal Investigator: Perry DiCarlo
   Rank: dissertation study

   Dept. Education Theory  Ph: 504-628-2617  E-mail: dicipero@lsu.edu

2) Co Investigator(s): please include department, rank, phone and e-mail for each

   * If student, please identify and name supervising professor

   Dr. Sarah Raines - supervising professor

3) Project: Examining leadership in alternative schools: Why do principals lead alternative schools and how are principals prepared for this leadership position?

4) LSU Proposal? Yes or No

   If Yes, LSU Proposal Number

   Also, if YES, either C This application completely matches the scope of work in the grant
   OR
   C More IRB Applications will be filed later

6) Subject pool (e.g. Psychology Students/ Louisiana public school principals)
   Circle any "vulnerable populations:" to be used: children <18, the mentally impaired, pregnant women, the aged, etc. Projects with incarcerated persons cannot be exempted.

6) PI Signature: ___________________________  ** Date: 2/16/02 (no per signature)

   **If not accurate or complete, if the project scope or design is later changed, I will resubmit for review. I will obtain written approval from the Authorized Representative of 20 non-LSU institutions in which the study is conducted. I also understand that it is my responsibility to maintain copies of all consent forms at LSU for three years after completion of the study. If I leave LSU before then, that the consent forms should be preserved in the Departmental Office.

   Screening Committee Action: Exempted  Not Exempted  Category/Paragraph:

   Reviewer: Mathews  Signature:  Date: 2/16/09
APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

Background and introduction

1. Tell me about yourself.
   a. high school
   b. college
   c. work experience
   d. honors
   e. professional organizations

2. What are your certificate endorsements?

3. Explain your experience as it relates to alternative schools?

4. Why do you want to be in this leadership position?

5. What characteristics do you have that will help you to work with colleagues or students who are different from you? (NMSA)

6. What experiences have you had, both in teaching and as an administrator that have helped you to become an alternative school leader? (NMSA)

7. What makes you well-suited to be an alternative school leader? (Combs)

8. What do you perceive as a top priority in this position? (Combs)

9. Give me a little background on the history of the school?

Research question #1 mission

1a. Explain your school population? (PSIEL)

2a. How do you promote acceptance, tolerance, and diversity in your school? (ISLLC)

3a. How do alternative school students learn? (PSIEL)

4a. Why do you feel the traditional school was not successful?

Research question #2 shared vision

5b. What steps do you take to address the school’s vision? (ISLLC)

6b. How do you establish high expectations? (ISLLC)
7b. How do you involve all stakeholders in the mission of the school? (ISLLC)

**Research question #3 collaborate with families**

8c. How do you build relationships with families and the community? (ISLLC)

9c. What are some ways you involve parents in your school? (ISLLC)

10c. How do you provide key social structures to provide critical resources for children? (PSIEL)

11c. How do you analyze data? (ISLLC)

**Research question #4 organize resources**

12d. What are the social rituals of interaction and support? (PSIEL)

13d. How and when are classroom successes shared and recognized? (ISLLC)

14d. What do people say and think when asked what the school stands for?

15d. How are newcomers welcomed?

**Research question #5 ecosystem**

16e. What are you trying to do in your current position?

17e. What resources do you have to meet that goal? (PSIEL)

18e. What transition programs do you have in place to assist the students?

**Research question #6 challenges**

19f. What are the challenges you face as a leader of an alternative school? (ISLLC)

20f. Which challenge is hardest to overcome?
APPENDIX C

INSTRUMENT

Written Document Analysis Worksheet

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td><strong>TYPE OF DOCUMENT</strong> (Check one):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>___ Newspaper</td>
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<td>___ Letter</td>
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<td>___ Patent</td>
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<td>___ Congressional record</td>
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<td></td>
<td>___ Census report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>___ Other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 2. | **UNIQUE PHYSICAL QUALITIES OF THE DOCUMENT** (Check one or more): |
|    | ___ Interesting letterhead |
|    | ___ Handwritten |
|    | ___ Typed |
|    | ___ Seals |
|    | ___ Notations |
|    | ___ "RECEIVED" stamp |
|    | ___ Other |

| 3. | **DATE(S) OF DOCUMENT:** |
|     | ______________________________ |

| 4. | **AUTHOR (OR CREATOR) OF THE DOCUMENT:** |
|     | ______________________________________ |
|     | **POSITION (TITLE):** |
|     | ______________________________________ |

| 5. | **FOR WHAT AUDIENCE WAS THE DOCUMENT WRITTEN?** |
|     | ______________________________________ |
6. DOCUMENT INFORMATION (There are many possible ways to answer A-E.)

A. List three things the author said that you think are important:

___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

B. Why do you think this document was written?

___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

C. What evidence in the document helps you know why it was written? Quote from the document.

___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

D. List two things the document tells you about the school:

___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

E. Write a question to the author that is left unanswered by the document:

___________________________________________________________________________

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### APPENDIX D

## ARTIFACT ANALYSIS WORKSHEET

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>TYPE OF ARTIFACT</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Describe the makeup of the artifact: web release, booklet, handout, power point, other</td>
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<th>SPECIAL QUALITIES OF THE ARTIFACT</th>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Describe how it looks and feels: shape, color, texture, size, weight, movable parts, anything printed, stamped or written on it.</td>
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<th>USES OF THE ARTIFACT</th>
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<td>A. What might it have been used for? _________________</td>
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<td></td>
<td>B. Who might have used it? __________________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C. Where might it have been used? _________________________</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D. When might it have been used? _________________________</td>
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<th>WHAT DOES THE ARTIFACT TELL US</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>A. What does it tell us about technology of the time in which it was made and used?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B. What does it tell us about the school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C. Is this a useful item?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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VITA

A Doctor of Philosophy degree in the field of educational leadership and research will be conferred on Perry DiCarlo of Laplace, Louisiana on December 17, 2010. Perry is the son of the late Jiachino Joseph DiCarlo and Dolores DiCarlo Brignac. He is married to Donna Rollo DiCarlo for 22 years and has two children, Dominique Lynn and Christian Jiachino. Perry is the first in his family to earn a doctoral degree. He graduated from Promised Land Academy in Braithwaite, Louisiana, in 1983. He then attended Southeastern Louisiana University in Hammond, Louisiana where he graduated in 1987 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in management and finance. He later earned his Master of Special Education degree from Southeastern Louisiana University in 1997. A plus 30 graduate hours was awarded to Perry with a concentration in School Administration. He accomplished 20 years of service from St. John Parish Public Schools and was granted an opportunity of retirement from Louisiana public schools in July 2010. He currently is principal of Riverside Academy in Reserve, Louisiana.