ABSTRACT

An Analysis of Alternative School Effectiveness on Student Achievement

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This study is a comparative analysis investigating student achievement, attendance rates, grade point average and credit earned by at-risk students attending an alternative high school of choice, at-risk students attending a traditional high school and at-risk students attending a Disciplinary Alternative Education Placement Campus within the same school district. Three separate groups totaling 180 students were involved in this study. Each of the three groups consisted of 60 at-risk students from one of the three campuses. All of the students participating in the study were students labeled "at-risk" of not graduating from high school and had a minimum of three or more at-risk indicators attached to each student. None of the students used in the study were in a special education program.

The three different groups of at-risk students were compared in five separate categories: raw scores on the state mandated Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) on the individual Mathematics and Reading tests, attendance, credit accrual, scale scores on the TAKS Mathematics and Reading tests, and grade point averages (GPAs). In applying a test of significance a simple or one-way analysis of variance

(ANOVA) was applied to the data sets of each campus used in the study. Statistical significance was found to be present in 7 of 13 data sets within the five categories studied.

The school district involved in the study was a large 5-A district located in central Texas with an enrollment of over 8,900 students at the completion of this study. According to the research, student TAKS scores vary from year to year and tended to increase in the second year regardless of the campus students attended. Students who attended a tradition high school campus had higher attendance rates than students who attended alternative campuses. Students with three or more at-risk indicators accrued credits at a slower rate and were not likely to graduate in four years. Students with three or more at-risk indicators were successful at passing the TAKS Reading Test. Students with three or more at-risk indicators were unsuccessful in passing the TAKS Mathematics test. Students with three or more at-risk indicators and who attended an alternative high school of choice tended to have a higher GPA when compared to students attending the other campuses.

An Analysis of Alternative School Effectiveness on Student Achievement

by

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A Dissertation

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

In the 1960s and 1970s, the meaning associated with *alternative schools* was a school that was thought to be positive and progressive (McGee, 2001). According to McGee (2001), alternative schools encouraged their students to be creative partners in their educational pursuit and they focused on the whole child. Alternative schools pursued an idealistic goal to educate each student by identifying their individual needs and matching them with an educational plan. The student would maximize their knowledge and skill level by working directly with their teachers and through rich educational experiences (McGee, 2001).

Times have changed as alternative schools are now identified as educating students who have a variety of problems and lack basic human needs. The students are viewed as social outcasts, discipline problems and other negative-labels that are created as society continues to evolve (McGee, 2001). McGee (2001) says it best when he states, "Unfortunately, members of the general public – and many educators, as well – often define the students in alternative schools by the difficulties they face rather than by their ability to overcome these difficulties" (para. 1).

Alternative schools of choice were created as a means to serve students who are at risk of dropping out of the traditional high school setting by providing them with an alternative route in obtaining a high school diploma. Students who attended alternative schools felt that their needs were not being met in the traditional school setting to the point that they were willing to forego the rewards of obtaining a high school diploma and

thus be labeled a dropout (Coyl, Jones, & Dick 2004). Fortunately, alternative schools have been able to address the needs of these students by providing them with a choice in their education and a second chance to be successful in completing their high school diploma on their own terms by providing a self-paced environment. The creation of alternative schools has continued to escalate and has created enough of an impact on the drop-out rate in American schools to allow alternative schools to become a relevant stakeholder in America's educational system (Watts, 2000).

An alternative school of choice is simply one of many options that parents and students have in the world of alternative education. Alternative education is traditionally viewed as any method of schooling a student receives outside of the traditional publicly funded school. While the types of alternative education formats and names have changed throughout the history of America and the number of students attending alternative education programs has fluctuated, the fact is alternative education programs continue to grow in number and thrive today. Home Schools, Private Schools, Parochial Schools, Schools of Choice, Charter Schools, and Virtual High Schools are all examples of alternative schools that fit under the umbrella of alternative education (Edwards & Wilson, 2001). In short, drop-out prevention alternative programs are not the only type of alternative education programs offered to students as there are many sources of alternative education programs for all demographics of students.

In analyzing research on alternative schools and the contributions they have made in the lives of students, one might assume that alternative schools would be at the forefront of educational reform. According to several researchers there is a reoccurring theme that exists (Edwards & Wilson, 2001; Gregory, 2001; McGee, 2001). The theme

is that while alternative schools experience success with a high, at-risk student population, they will continue to be viewed as second tier schools unless they continue to promote their successes to the point that they will attract students from all demographics. Only then will alternative schools have a chance to be accepted as educational equals and partners with traditional schools in educating all students.

Background of the Problem

The problem is that one quarter of the students in the United States do not graduate from high school (Kaufman, Alt, & Chapman, 2004). Students are choosing to enter the adult workforce without the benefits of a high school diploma. In Texas, the negative statistics that result from a student not receiving a high school diploma are alarming to any concerned citizen and are especially disturbing as an educator. According to statistics provided by Texas Communities in Schools (2006), Texas high school dropouts:

- Are six times more likely to become incarcerated.
- Account for 2/3 of all inmates in the Texas prison system.
- Lose approximately $366,000 in lifetime earning potential.
- Typically earn half the income of high school graduates.
- Are three times more likely to live in poverty than high school graduates.
- Are 75% more likely to be unemployed. (p. 1)

The traditional school proponents are reluctant to admit that they are failing to meet the needs of certain students who cannot function or simply refuse to function in a traditional school setting. Often times these students are thought to be ordered to attend the alternative school by their traditional high school yet in reality many students have actually chosen to attend an alternative school because they feel that they fit in and can

succeed. In the words of one author, "the sending school is not the problem; the student is the problem" (Gregory, 2001, para. 5).

In the article, *Dropout Nation*, in TIME magazine, author Nathan Thornburgh (2006) suggests that there are many flaws in the educational system that makes it too easy for students to dropout. Reasons from boredom, administrative pressure to be pushed out, and lack of direction were given as to why students chose to dropout. By design, some schools districts have incorporated options for students in the form of alternative schools where students have the choice to work at their own pace. Many alternative schools offer flexible scheduling option for their students. This option allows students to attend school while they work, raise their children, or take care of their parents. For some students, the alternative school simply offers them another choice than having to attend the traditional high school campus.

Alternative schools provide school district administrators with an attractive solution to serving at-risk students. School administrators also have the opportunity to increase their district rating as alternative campuses fall under a less stringent accountability system at both the state and federal levels of accountability. However, it is critical to determine the effectiveness of alternative schools in working with at-risk students because alternative schools cost more per student. As alternative schools continue to strive to meet the needs of all students, take a progressive stance, and promote their successes, the future looks promising for alternative education in America's educational system. Alternative schools are a necessary element in our ever changing society in combating dropouts rates, and in empowering the youth of our nation with the ever needed high school diploma.

Researcher's Work Setting, Role, and Experience

The researcher is a public school administrator in a large school district (XYZ Independent School District) serving 8,911 students in Central Texas. The XYZ Independent School District is classified as 5A referring to the largest classification of school districts in the State of Texas. The researcher has served as a teacher, coach, assistant principal, principal, and central office administrator in four school districts in the State of Texas. The researcher served as the principal of ASOC High School in the XYZ Independent School District and has a passion for student learning. ASOC High School is the alternative high school of choice in the XYZ Independent School District and serves at-risk students who have left the traditional high school environment and made a choice to continue their education in a structured, self-paced setting. Ninety-three percent of the students who attend the alternative school of choice are students labeled "at-risk" of not completing high school and earning a high school diploma. ASOC High School has served approximately 450 students in grades 9-12 from 2005-2007. In 2006, ASOC High School graduated 36 students and graduated 44 students in the spring of 2007. ASOC High School estimates to graduate 38 students in the spring of 2008. Before becoming the principal of ASOC High School, the researcher served as the principal of a class 2A (small classification) high school in a neighboring school district in Central Texas for one year as a first year principal. The researcher also served as an assistant principal for three years at a junior high school campus in XYZ Independent School District. The junior high school campus served a combined 1,200 seventh and eighth graders per year with approximately 600 students per grade. Before becoming a campus administrator, the researcher was a fifth grade teacher for three years in a large

neighboring district and taught math and science. The researcher's career in education began in the smallest classification district in the State of Texas serving in a K-8 district for two years as a junior high teacher math and science teacher and also as a boy's football and basketball coach.

Having served as a principal in a Texas alternative high school of choice is what led the researcher to study alternative schools; especially the effectiveness of alternative schools in combating the dropout rates. This particular study was limited to results that were found within the XYZ Independent School District. ASOC High School is the only alternative school of choice in the XYZ Independent School District. The study used historical data from the 2006-2007 school year and the 2007-2008 school years. The researcher analyzed and interpreted data gathered from the district Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS). In addition to the PEIMS information on the at-risk students from ASOC High School, the researcher compared and analyzed information on at-risk students from the both the traditional high school and disciplinary alternative education placement campuses in XYZ Independent School District. In doing so, the research gathered the PEIMS data from the traditional campus and the disciplinary alternative education placement campus to determine the success that each campus has in serving at-risk students and keeping them on track to graduate. In that context, the research is a quantitative, correlational study as quantitative descriptive data were gathered, studied, and interpreted. The insight gleaned from the study was used by district administrators to determine the effectiveness of ASOC High School in combating dropout rates and to determine future expansion or changes in the alignment of the program within the XYZ Independent School District.

Statement of the Problem

The problem is that students are dropping out of high school. Recent statistics from the U.S. Department of Education indicate that of all students who entered high school in 2004, over 540,000 students dropped out of high school before the fall of 2005. At-risk students are of particular concern as they are more likely to not receive a high school diploma than non-at-risk students. The article reported that male students are more likely to dropout and than female students. Differences in race/ethnicity also exist with the dropout rate for African-American, Hispanic, and Native American students being higher than White students. North Dakota had the lowest percentage of dropouts at 1.9%, while Alaska had the highest percentage of dropouts with 8.2%. In another statistic provided by the report, the three most populated states, California, New York, and Texas led the nation in the number of students dropping out in grades 9-12 with over 43,000 students choosing to dropout in each of these three states (Sable & Gaviola, 2007).

Alternative schools definitely have a role to play in reducing the number of dropouts and are making a difference in American education as they are helping students succeed and graduate where traditional schools have not been able to meet their needs. Edwards and Wilson (2001), Gregory (2001), and McGee (2001) reveal that while alternative schools have made an impact in education, they still have several obstacles to overcome in order to rid themselves of negative criticism from much of the public and from the education community as well. Financing the education of students is of great concern to all school administrators who act as the stewards of the tax-payer. Therefore, it is critical to examine, analyze, and measure student achievement in alternative schools

to insure that they are truly effective in decreasing the dropout rate while providing a quality educational environment for students who choose to enter an alternative high school.

Definition of Terms

1. *AEA* – Alternative Education Accountability.
2. *ASOC* – Alternative School of Choice.
3. *COMPLETION RATE* – Students who successfully complete the credit requirements to receive a Texas High School Diploma.
4. *DAEP* – District Alternative Education Placement.
5. *DMP* – Anonymous district alternative education placement campus used in study; DMP District Alternative Education Placement campus.
6. *GPA* – Grade Point Average.
7. *ISD* – Independent School District.
8. *NCLB* – No Child Left Behind. The federal education mandate passed and signed into legislation on January 8, 2002 by President George W. Bush requiring standardized testing in each state.
9. *TAKS* – Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills.
10. *TEA* – Texas Education Agency.
11. *TEKS* – Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills. Also known as the State of Texas required curriculum standards.
12. *TRD* – Anonymous traditional high school used in the study; TRD High School.

13. *XYZ* – Anonymous Independent School District used in the study; XYZ Independent School District.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research project was to compare the TAKS scores, TAKS Scale Scores, attendance rates, grade point average, and credits earned by at-risk students attending an alternative high school of choice compared to the at-risk students attending the traditional high school and Disciplinary Alternative Education Placement Campuses within the same school district.

Research Questions

The following research questions were addressed in the study:

1. How do the TAKS scores of at-risk students at an alternative campus compare to the TAKS scores of at-risk students at a traditional high school and TAKS scores of at-risk students at a discipline campus?
2. How does attendance for at-risk students at an alternative campus compare to the attendance of at-risk students at a traditional high school and attendance of at-risk students at a discipline campus?
3. How do the number of credits accrued by at-risk students at an alternative campus compare to the number of credits accrued by at-risk students at a traditional high school and number of credits accrued by at-risk students at a discipline campus?

4. How do the TAKS Scale Scores of at-risk students at an alternative campus compare to the TAKS Scale Scores of at-risk students at a traditional high school and TAKS Scale Scores of at-risk students at a discipline campus?
5. How does the GPA of at-risk student enrolled at an alternative campus compare to the GPA of at-risk students at a traditional high school and GPA of at-risk students at a discipline campus?

The null format of the research questions addressed in the study would be the following:

1. There is no difference in the TAKS scores of at-risk students at an alternative campus compared to the TAKS scores of at-risk students at a traditional high school and TAKS scores of at-risk students at a discipline campus?
2. There is no difference in the attendance for at-risk students at an alternative campus compared to the attendance of at-risk students at a traditional high school and attendance of at-risk students at a discipline campus?
3. There is no difference in the number of credits accrued by at-risk students at an alternative campus compared to the number of credits accrued by at-risk students at a traditional high school and number of credits accrued by at-risk students at a discipline campus?
4. There is no difference in the TAKS Scale Scores of at-risk students at an alternative campus compared to the TAKS Scale Scores of at-risk students at a traditional high school and TAKS Scale Scores of at-risk students at a discipline campus?

5. There is no difference in the GPA of at-risk students enrolled at an alternative campus compared to the GPA of at-risk students at a traditional high school and GPA of at-risk students at a discipline campus?

Research Design

The research design for this study was a correlational quantitative data design that utilized quantitative methods of data collection and analysis of data. Using three individual campuses, a multi-case study format was used to strengthen the research and to compare student achievement of at-risk students at each campus. For the purpose of the study, student achievement was focused on student attendance, TAKS scores, credit attainment, grade point average, and TAKS Scale Score data. Historical data was pulled from archived PEIMS data for each of the students selected in the study. The data were organized into three groups from the three campuses and the data statistically compared using an ANOVA test.

Archived student data were gathered from the XYZ Independent School District. PEIMS records were used to show student achievement of the at-risk students in the areas of attendance, TAKS scores, and TAKS Scale Score data. Student credit attainment, grade point average, and the student at-risk indicators were researched and gathered at the campus level through the counseling department using the students' official transcripts. Additional archived data used in the study included campus demographics, number of students served, and types of programs offered at each of the three campuses. The completion rates for the three campuses were obtained using the AEIS reports provided by the Texas Education Agency (2007, 2008).

Data Collection

The method of data collection used in the study involved the use of archived data using the TAKS test scores, TAKS scale scores, attendance, credit accrual, at-risk indicators, and grade-point averages of the individual participants. All of the data used in the study was quantitative data collected from an archived data base.

Timeline of Project

The timeline of this project was based on the use of multiple year data from the 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 school years. The researcher began the data collection in the fall of 2008. The researcher gained access to the XYZ Independent School District during the fall of 2008 and obtained permission from the Superintendent of Schools for the XYZ Independent School District. The researcher used archived data from the 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 school years. In the fall of 2008 through the fall of 2009, the researcher gathered the at-risk information, formed the three groups represented in the study, and performed the data analysis on the archived information. The research was completed in 2010.

Limitations and Assumptions

The limitations of this study were the following:

1. The study was limited to one large school district in Texas.
2. The study was limited to one traditional high school, one district alternative educational education placement campus, and one alternative high school of choice.
3. The study was limited to only non-special education students.

4. The study was limited to those students with three or more at-risk indicators.
5. The study was limited by the data collected. The data collected may not have been the best way to evaluate student achievement among the three campuses participating in the study.
6. The study was limited by researcher bias. The researcher is an administrator in the District of the three high schools participating in the study; however, the researcher believed that he was able to interpret the data objectively.

The assumptions of the study were the following:

1. It was assumed that the 2006-2007 and the 2007-2008 data accurately represents the characteristics of students from a typical school in Texas.
2. It was assumed that all at-risk information is accurate and up-to-date.
3. It was assumed that the campus counseling departments actively identified at-risk student data.
4. It was assumed that TAKS scores would indicated student achievement.
5. It was assumed that all PEIMS data were accurately and honestly reported to the Texas Education Agency.
6. It was assumed that each of the schools serve a different function within the school district and thus have different schedules, programs, and curriculum formats to effectively serve their at-risk students populations. Therefore, each school may be well served and function effectively because of the curriculum and programs utilized at the campus level.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of the Literature

Preface

Imagine trying to build a home on a bad foundation. It is common knowledge that the house is not going to last and the cost of repairing the mistakes would be enormous over the lifetime of the home. Most home buyers would never think of purchasing a home with a bad foundation. Yet, using this analogy, the importance of education can be thought of as the foundation of building a successful life. The problem that generated interest in this study was that students are willing to forfeit receiving a high school diploma and willing to enter the adult world without the benefits of a high school diploma. It does not make sense. The traditional school proponents are reluctant to admit that they are failing to meet the needs of certain students who cannot function or simply refuse to function in a traditional school setting. By design, some schools districts have incorporated options for students in the form of alternative schools where students have the choice to work at their own pace. Many times alternative schools offer flexible scheduling allowing students to attend school while working a job, raising their children, or taking care of parents. Sometimes the strongest attraction of the alternative school is that it is not the traditional high school.

Alternative schools have been able to address the needs of many students by helping them to be successful and motivating them to complete their high school diploma. The impact this has made on the dropout rate in American schools is significant

enough to allow alternative schools to become a relevant stakeholder in America's educational system.

Introduction

It has been said that the opposite of one truth begats another truth (Postman, 1995). Alternative education is traditionally viewed as any method of schooling a student receives outside of the traditional publicly funded school. Because of the chameleon-like qualities of alternative education, it has withstood the test of time from the beginning of American educational history. While the types of alternative schools have fluctuated in numbers throughout the history of America, they continue to grow in number and thrive today. Home Schools, Private Schools, Parochial Schools, Schools of Choice, Charter Schools, and Virtual High Schools are all examples that fit under the umbrella of alternative education. In order to gain a better understanding of the role of alternative education, it is critical to examine America's history in regards to public education (Edwards & Wilson, 2001).

The Problem

One quarter of the students in the United States do not graduate from high school (Kaufman et al., 2004). Students choose to enter the adult workforce without the benefits of a high school diploma. In Texas, the statistics that result from a student not receiving a high school diploma are alarming to any concerned citizen and are especially disturbing to an educator. According to statistics provided by Texas Communities in Schools (2006), Texas high school dropouts:

- Are six times more likely to become incarcerated.
- Account for 2/3 of all inmates in the Texas prison system.

- Lose approximately $366,000 in lifetime earning potential.
- Typically earn half the income of high school graduates.
- Are three times more likely to live in poverty than high school graduates.
- Are 75% more likely to be unemployed. (p. 1)

The traditional school proponents are reluctant to admit that they are failing to meet the needs of certain students who cannot function or simply refuse to function in a traditional school setting. Often times these students are thought to be ordered to attend the alternative school by their traditional high school. Yet, some students choose to attend an alternative school because they feel that they fit in and can succeed in this different environment. In the words of one author, "the sending school is not the problem; the student is the problem" (Gregory, 2001, para. 6).

A History of Alternative Schools in the United States

In the early 1600s the purpose of education in the United States was to glorify God and to produce the next generation to continue in the ways of a Christian lifestyle. The leader or teacher was usually the father of the household, the structure of the school was the family, the curriculum was the Holy Bible, and the method of instruction was rote memorization and direct interpretation of the scriptures. The aim was to create children who were moral and would carry on the theology and life of a Christian (McClellan, 1999). Therefore, it can be said that home-schooling was the first example of alternative education that existed in America only in that public schools in America had not been established. This is a critical aspect of alternative education as public education in America would soon be paid for by taxpayers and would provide parents with a choice in where their children would receive an education. However, home-

schooling would remain as a key option for parents even with the creation of the public school system (McClellan, 1999).

The Puritans in the early colonies left a strong record of the successes in education and created a strong network of stable communities that helped settle the United States. While the Puritans began with the father of the household being the spiritual teacher, the growth of the United States caused a change in the dynamic of how children were educated. The structure and method of educating children was passed from the father of the household to the mother. Eventually, this duty was passed from the mother of the household to that of the public school where the Holy Bible remained the main source of curriculum and was complemented with texts such as *The New England Primer* (McClellan, 1999). The Puritans are credited with founding the first public school on April 23, 1635, in Boston, Massachusetts under the guidance of the Reverend John Cotton in the home of Philemon Pormort. The name of the school was the Boston Latin School, and thus began the growth of public school in America (Boston Latin School, 2007).

Americans were not opposed to sending their children to public schools; however, the growth of America's public schools was enjoyed mostly by white families who could afford to send their children to school. There were also regional differences that inhibited the growth of public schools. The regional differences between the New England colonies, Virginia, and the South varied as further south along the East Coast the living conditions became increasingly harsh and the population grew sparse as geographical distances between families and communities increased. Therefore, most children in these regions experienced alternative education through the curriculum taught at home,

attended Sunday school, or unfortunately did not receive any type of formal education. The purpose of public education at that time was seen as a way to spread "American Democracy" and in the belief that children should be educated for the reasons of patriotism, economic utility, and revolution for the creation of a new nation (McClellan, 1999).

After the American Revolution it became apparent to some Americans that if public schools were being paid for by the taxpayer, then the taxpayer should have some say in the quality of teachers who were hired by the public school system. Thus, the first push for a school voucher system was introduced by Adam Smith in 1778, who argued, that the state should provide parents with the financial means to hire teachers to educate their children because parents are the best equipped to understand the needs of their children (Public Broadcasting Service, 2001). The notion of a voucher system was also backed by Thomas Paine in 1798 who advocated that state governments should provide poor families with money in which to provide a basic education for their children (Public Broadcasting Service, 2001).

As America continued to grow as an independent nation and experienced an influx of immigrants from Europe, the public schools were not equipped to educate all American children. Alternative schools grew under the banner of bilingual education. Alternative schools that catered to immigrants in their native language flourished in mostly rural areas in order to meet the educational needs of new immigrants. The idea of bilingual education is not a new concept to America. The immigrant schools were not financed with taxpayer money and were run by the immigrants themselves who loved their children, wanted to preserve their national heritage, and understood the importance

of education in a new nation. The German immigrants who were mostly of the Catholic and Lutheran faiths were one group who are credited with creating a strong system of bilingual schools in America. The first state to pass a bilingual educational law was Ohio. In 1839 students were allowed to take classes in German and English. The classes were only allowed upon the request of the parent (Public Broadcasting Service, 2001). The state of Louisiana followed the lead of Ohio 18 years later by passing a law in 1847 that allowed schools to instruct students in both French and English as Louisiana had a high number of French speaking families (Public Broadcasting Service, 2001).

It was also at this time that parochial schools began to make a push as an alternative to the public school system as American Catholics began to experience a large amount of anti-Catholic bias in the public school system and felt that their children were discriminated against due to their religious beliefs. The Catholic Church and its followers were advocates of education but were leery of public schools because they felt that public schools had become too secular. Catholic parents had a desire for their children to be exposed to the basic curriculum offered by the public schools that included reading, writing, and arithmetic but also wanted to include the Catholic catechism. Leaders in the Catholic Church, such as Bishop John Carroll in 1789 and Archbishop Hughes in 1842, argued for parochial schools in lieu of public schools to teach Catholic students (Fraser, 1999).

Horace Mann, who is known as the "Father of American Public Education," believed that having students read from the Bible would be good enough and would be accepted by Christians of all denominational faiths (Milson, Bohan, Glanzer, & Null, 2004. p. 149). This however, was not the case. In 1840, the Bishop John Hughes of New

York requested that the state pay for Catholic schools in order for Catholic children to be educated in schools that did not discriminate against Catholic beliefs. The request was denied by the State of New York and Hughes called for parents of Catholic students to stop attending public schools and to send their children to Catholic schools (Fraser, 1999).

Catholic parents answered Bishop Hughes proclamation and started sending their children to the private Catholic schools without funding from the state (Fraser, 1999). Two years later, in 1842, the State of New York passed the Maclay Bill, which outlawed any type of religious instruction in public schools and denied public funding to parochial schools. The Maclay Bill was quickly adopted by other states as both a means by which public schools were operated and the denied state funding to denominational schools (Public Broadcasting Service, 2001).

The parochial school movement against public schools is considered as one of the first organized alternative school movements in the United States. Before the Parochial school movement, the only other educational choice offered to parents beside the public school was to home school (Fraser, 1999; Public Broadcasting Service, 2001).

In the period 1835-1930, America continued to grow in population with the influx of immigrants coming to the United States. It was during this period that parents were offered the choices of public schools, parochial schools, private immigrant schools, or home schooling. Public schools flourished during this period as it was estimated that over 15 million students were in attendance in public schools throughout America by 1900. It was also during this period that alternative education, specifically parochial

schools, came under fire in the courts as public education flexed its political muscle (Public Broadcasting Service, 2001).

As mentioned earlier, the MaClay Bill of 1842, which outlawed any type of religious instruction in public schools and denied public funding to parochial schools, was one of the first legislative moves that that aided public schools to have dominance over private education at the state level (Fraser, 1999). At the federal level, President Grant utilized his presidential power to strengthen the public school system over parochial schools in his Seventh Annual Message to the Senate and House of Representatives on December 7, 1875 (Peters & Woolley, 2007). He stated that it was "the duty of each of the several States to establish and forever maintain free public schools adequate to the education of all the children in the rudimentary branches within their respective limits, irrespective of sex, color, birthplace, or religions" (para. 7). He went on to say that taxpayer money should not be used to fund "directly or indirectly, of any religious sect or denomination" (para. 7). In summary, President Grant was against using federal money to finance parochial schools.

In 1876, the Blaine Amendment was introduced to the House of Representatives and Senate as a law to outlaw funding for parochial schools. The Blaine Amendment passed in the House of Representatives but did not pass in the Senate. However, the Blaine Amendment set the stage for individual States to forbid taxpayer money to be used to finance parochial schools (Fraser, 1999). In doing so, public schools were acknowledged as the dominant educational system for educating American students. However, alternative schools in the form of parochial and private schools continued to exist without the use of taxpayer money and were financed by the parents themselves

because of their religious convictions. It was also during this time period that the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution passed through Congress on June 13, 1866, and ratified on July 9, 1868 (U.S. Constitution Online, 2007).

The Fourteenth Amendment was intended to provide former slaves with full United States citizenship and rights as American citizens. The Fourteenth Amendment was also used by private and parochial schools to bolster parental rights in educational choices for their children (U.S. Constitution Online, 2007). One of the hallmark cases utilizing the Fourteenth Amendment was the *U.S. Supreme Court Pierce v. Society of Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary* case in 1925. In this case an Oregon parochial school, called the Society of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary, and private school called the Hill Military Academy, challenged the compulsory attendance law in the State of Oregon. In 1923, the State of Oregon had passed a mandatory Compulsory Attendance Act for children between the ages of 8 and 16 to attend public school or face a misdemeanor charge. The State of Oregon did not recognize the private or parochial school as a means of a valid education, and parents who sent their children to these schools were violating the law. In doing so, the two schools sued Governor Pierce of Oregon in the United States Supreme Court and won (FindLaw for Legal Professionals, 2007b). This was a landmark case for alternative education as it validated parental control over their children's education. The case also acknowledged that organized schooling outside of the public schools was a recognized and valid means for obtaining an education.

The Fourteenth Amendment also aided alternative education with the outcome of the *U.S. Supreme Court Cochran v. Louisiana State Board of Education* in 1930. In this

United States Supreme Court case the State of Louisiana passed a law allowing the state to purchase textbooks for all students regardless of where they attended school. The State of Louisiana was sued because language in the Blaine Amendment did not allow state money to be used to benefit parochial schools and this practice violated the Fourteenth Amendment by "depriving taxpayers of their property without due process" (FindLaw for Legal Professionals, 2007a, para. 4). In short, the Supreme Court backed the State of Louisiana as they felt that the benefit was for the child and the State of Louisiana by having an educated citizen; not the schools themselves. It can also be said that alternative education benefited from this case as private and parochial schools gain validation as an authentic means and system of educating students (FindLaw for Legal Professionals, 2007a).

Types of Alternative Schools

Historically, the only competition for traditional public schools has come from private and parochial schools. However, private and parochial schools are costly and limit the admission of students to children from families of the upper-middle class and wealthy with the exception of students on scholarship. Therefore, public schools have operated as a monopoly. Like most monopolies, levels of bureaucracy have been created and slow the public schools ability to make changes in curriculum and program that impact student learning and achievement. In 1992, competition with traditional public schools increased with the opening of the first charter school in Minnesota (Metcalf, Theobald, & Gonzalez, 2003). For the first time parents had a choice in the type of taxpayer funded public school that they wanted their child to attend outside of a traditional public school.

In analyzing charter schools and the impact they have made in public education it is clear that traditional public schools are beginning to realize that they face competition for taxpayer money and students for the first time. Researchers of charter schools introduce a common theme that competition in public education is desired and evident with the rapid growth of charter schools. Competition for public education now exists because charter schools have proven to be successful in educating students and parents desire to send their children to the school they feel best meets their child's educational needs. Because of these two factors, charter schools are competing with traditional public schools for students, tax dollars, and the trust of state and local taxpayers.

The charter school movement began in 1991 in the state of Minnesota with the backing of school reform advocates, the Minnesota legislature, and the progressive senator Paul Wellstone (Nathan, 2005). According to Nathan (2005), the first charter school opened in Minnesota in 1992 and was so successful that the charter school movement continued to be adopted in other states. The legislation passed in Minnesota allowed, "more than one publicly accountable organization the power to authorize or sponsor new kinds of public schools. That could include the State Board of Education, local school boards, cities, universities, foundations, major non-profit organizations, etc." (Nathan, 2005, para. 6), to open a public school financed with taxpayer money. The successes of charter schools has been so evident that charter schools have been promoted by leaders in the United States such as the former President Bill Clinton and civil rights advocate Rosa Parks as a new reform in America's public school system (Nathan, 2005).

The idea behind charter schools is that if public schools are freed from many of the restrictions and regulations of traditional schools that student achievement can be

enhanced at a more efficient cost to the taxpayer (Kennedy, 2002). This belief is held by many others. The authors, Metcalf, Theobald, and Gonzalez (2003), point out that there are now over 684,000 students attending 2,695 charter schools across the United States and this number is expected to continue to grow.

Who would want to start a charter and why? According to Nathan (2005), progressive teachers, parents, and individual educators who desire to try new ideas free from the restrictions and politics of traditional public school administration and school boards. These teachers feel more ownership over the decisions of how the school is run and the curriculum that is taught in the school. The success stories come from the charter schools that have improved student achievement with students that have been traditionally underserved such as minorities, limited English proficiency speaking, special needs, and low socio-economic status groups (Nathan, 2005). Examples of these successes are Lawrence Hernandez, a Harvard instructor who founded the Cesar Chavez Academy in Pueblo, Colorado that served a limited-English-speaking student population. The Cesar Chavez Academy is now one of the highest achieving schools in Colorado. Another is the Codman Academy that has transformed an inner-city school to levels of achievement with outlying suburban schools (Nathan, 2005). One of the benefits that charter schools enjoy over traditional public schools is the speed at which new ideas and curriculum can be carried out. Another benefit is the parental support that charter schools experience because parents have been given the opportunity to choose the public school that their child attends (Nathan, 2005).

One of the most controversial topics on charter schools is the influx of for-profit companies entering into the public school arena under the guidelines of a charter school.

Walk (2003) defends the position of the for-profit management companies because they utilize free market concepts of competition for the purpose of improving student achievement. The thought is that if a charter school can do a better job of serving students in a community than the traditional public school then parents will choose the better school for their child to attend.

According to Walk (2003), for-profit management companies aid charter schools in their initial start up costs, administrative duties, and support of curriculum, and access to materials at a cost cheaper that schools can purchase them for. For-profits management companies are interested in handling administrative business functions while allowing the teachers to be the experts in the classroom and educating students.

Walk (2003) also expressed that for-profit management companies have a great interest in student achievement because, if the students are not successful in the classroom and on state accountability measures parents will not send their child to the charter school. If charter schools are not successful they will loose their charter in three to five years and the for-profit management company will not stay in business.

There is no doubt that the charter school movement is making an impact on American education. However, this does not come without opposition, obstacles, and controversy. Backlash from teacher unions and school district superintendents is continuous; they see charter schools as a threat to the status-quo and the economic impact. In a similar study the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) felt that charter schools were a "diversion…from reformers' and policymakers' efforts to improve education" (Kennedy, 2002, para. 26). The article goes on to express the AFT's frustration of having teachers being free to be employed with the use of a union contract.

Walk (2003) focuses on the anger that school administrators express because charter schools are taking students out of their schools and thus the money paid-per-pupil. School administrators feel that for-profit management companies do not care about or respect the value of a student's education, but only look at charter schools as a means to turn a profit. School administrators feel that education should be left to professional school people who truly care about education and not capitalists.

The authors, Metcalf, Theobald, and Gonzalez (2003), have found that opponents express a financial concern but on moral grounds as well. They go on to say that charter schools have an unfair advantage over traditional public schools because they are not held to the same regulations and are free from restrictions. Opponents also say that some charter schools cherry pick the high level students, attract highly involved parents, and inhibit lower achieving students from attending their school while traditional public schools have to accept all students (Metcalf, Theobald, & Gonzalez, 2003).

One of the greatest obstacles faced by charter schools is the quality of the physical plant. Charter schools many times operate out of buildings that were not intended to be used as a school. Commercial buildings, old churches, and abandoned schools are all locations that charter schools have renovated to operate as schools. One of the greatest sore spots that charter school proponents feel is not fair when compared to traditional public schools is the disbursement of capital outlay funds. The article points out that as the charter school movement continues to grow and through the use of litigation charter schools are beginning to receive funds allocated for facilities (Kennedy, 2002).

The charter school movement is making an impact on American education because traditional public schools are once again facing another form of educational

competition. Competition can be seen as a positive because it forces the traditional public schools to reflect on themselves and to research the successful methods and strategies that charter schools have used for high student achievement. Proponents of charter schools would say this can be attributed competition. Opponents of charter schools would say that this takes place in quality schools regardless of competition because it is mandated by the accountability movement and because quality schools are always looking for ways to improve their school (Metcalf, Theobald, & Gonzalez, 2003).

Characteristics of Alternative Schools

Many opponents and proponents of alternative education say there are characteristics of alternative schools that are used to attract students to attend an alternative high school over a traditional high school. According to the authors, Tary Tobin and Jeffrey Sprague (1999), for alternative high schools to be successful, they must have a strong commitment from the school district administration, community, and in the organization of the school. Alternative Schools of Choice or Accelerated High School Campuses are one avenue that both parents and students are choosing to obtain their high school diploma among other choices such as private schools, charter schools, or parochial schools. In 1993, 80% of the population attended designated public schools and by 1999 that percentage had changed to 76% (Bielick & Chapman, 2003). However, what are the characteristics of alternative schools that attract students to attend them over a traditional high school? In this case, what are the characteristics of alternative schools of choice where students choose to attend?

The researcher, Ernie Anastos (2003), expresses that one of the successful characteristics is having a smaller student population, a smaller student-to-teacher ratio,

and developing a culture that students feel supported in. The researcher Mary Anna Dunn (1997) adds that while alternative campuses, like their traditional counterparts, are structured to promote academic achievement, alternative schools also promote student needs such as self-esteem, positive feelings towards school, and personal growth in making positive behavioral choices.

The researcher Tim Gregory (2001) concurs with Ernie Anastos on the importance of the school culture as one of the keys characteristics of what attracts students to an alternative campus. According to Gregory, the culture of the alternative school or "Ethos" of the school is fundamental to the success and attractiveness of an alternative campus. "Ethos – the fundamental values of a collection of people" is usually very strong in alternative schools and creates a strong learning climate and high expectations that is passed from older students who have attended the school to the new students (Gregory, 2001, para. 6). The culture and identity of the school is powerful and begins with teachers who understand that students are very resilient and receptive to a positive learning environment. When this happens students are given opportunities to feel success in their school work (Gregory, 2001).

Another characteristic of alternative schools that attract students is when the alternative school makes a point of understanding the difficulties that their students are faced with and focus their energy on creating an atmosphere that is warm and inviting. While this may seem touchy-feely, the schools are highly structured and promote strong self discipline, stress attendance, and a high level of student achievement (Edwards & Wilson, 2001).

According to Mark Edwards, the superintendent of the Henrico County Public Schools in Richmond, Virginia and Vick Wilson, the assistant superintendent for instruction in the Henrico County Public Schools, an advantage that alternative schools have over traditional schools in achieving student success is in the area of scheduling classes. One apparent advantage is that alternative schools do not have to schedule the extracurricular classes that traditional schools offer as their curriculum usually focuses on the core-curriculum classes (Edwards & Wilson, 2001).

Individualization is another key characteristic of alternative schools that also attracts students to their doors. According to Jay McGee (2001), alternative schools must pursue an idealistic goal to educate each student by identifying their individual needs and matching them with an educational plan. In turn, the student has an opportunity to maximize their knowledge and skill level by working directly with their teachers and through rich educational experiences. Like the researchers Ernie Anastos (2003) and Tim Gregory (2001), McGee also promotes that the characteristic of the school environment is critical and that the school must be warm and inviting for students (McGee, 2001).

The authors, Mary Quinn, Robert Rutherford, and David Osher (1999), agree with Jay McGee (2001), on the importance of individualization as a key characteristic of alternative schools. According to the authors, successful alternative schools should develop an Individual Education Plan (IEP) with each student that includes educational goals and objectives. This should be done utilizing assessments that indicate the academic strengths and weaknesses of the students (Quinn, Rutherford, & Osher, 1999; McGee, 2001).

In summary, the characteristics of alternative schools that attract students to attend an alternative high school over a traditional high school are a smaller student population, a smaller student-to-teacher ratio, an environment where students feel supported, flexible scheduling, the individualization for each student, and giving the student a feeling of control in their education. These characteristics allow students who do not fit the traditional high school mold to be successful in obtaining their high school diploma in an alternative school.

As indicated by the history of alternative education in America, parents now have the choice of sending their children to private school, parochial school, charter schools, home-schooling, or schools of choice versus a traditional public school. Given the fact that parents have several choices in where to send their children many researchers feel that the students themselves display characteristics that make them more likely to choose and attend an alternative high school over a traditional high school. Alternative schools offer students several advantages in comparison to traditional schools in that they offer flexible scheduling, smaller student population, lower student-to-teacher ratio, and a more individualized education plan. However, alternative schools usually do not offer the extracurricular activities, dances, pep rallies, and fine arts programs that traditional high schools offer. Alternative schools are usually housed in hand-me-down buildings and the educational facilities, such as physical education gyms and science labs, are limited (McGee, 2001). Why would a student bypass the "icing" of the traditional school climate and attend an alternative school?

Characteristics of At-risk Students

Diana Coyl, Randall Jones, and Andrew Dick (2004) found in their statistical analysis that most students who attend alternative high schools did not feel that they belonged to any peer group while attending a traditional high school. They also did not have a good experience in the traditional high school setting to the point that they were willing to forgo a high school diploma and thus be labeled a dropout.

What are the characteristics of students compared to other students that were more likely to choose and attend an alternative high school over a traditional high school? According to Regina Foley and Lan-Sze Pang (2006), the researchers reported that there were common characteristics of students that choose to attend alternative schools. The most common characteristics of these students were truancy, past academic failure, teen pregnancy, at risk of dropping out, and behavioral problems in the traditional setting that resulted in suspensions, expulsions, or the student deciding to drop-out of school.

Aligning to the research of Coyl, Jones, and Dick (2004) in regards to the feeling of not fitting into the traditional school setting, the researcher Marco Munoz (2002) addresses a theory called the "alienation theory" that states, "that some students fail to connect with the goals of the schools, develop a detachment from the schooling process and eventually leave high school" (Munoz, 2002, para. 4). The characteristics of the students are that they feel detached from the mainstream students in a traditional setting to the point that they do not feel that they fit in with other students and feel inadequate in their ability to succeed in school.

Many characteristics of alternative students are characteristics that the student has little control over. According to the researcher Rebecca Watts (2000), many times

students come to school without the basic needs of adequate food, shelter, and clothing. Yet, school officials do not always acknowledge the importance of these needs and still focus on simply the academics. The author also reviews characteristics that affect the self-esteem of students. These students are usually disconnected from *regular* students and do not have many friends. The at-risk student usually does not have a strong social network that provides healthy choices and thus the basic social needs are not met as well. Therefore, the students do not feel a sense of purpose, trust, or belief that they are acceptable to others or have a strong sense of worth (Watts, 2000).

An interesting characteristic found among alternative students in urban areas is language and cultural barriers. One of the growing demands in public education is the need to educate Hispanic students. Alternative schools many times have a disproportionate population of Hispanic students compared to the traditional high schools because of language barriers (Munoz, 2005).

According to the researcher Juan Sanchez Munoz (2005), language, cultural, and socio-economic barriers have kept Hispanics students from performing adequately in our nation's schools. According to the author, our public schools system has allowed this population to slip through the cracks educationally because of high mobility, need for labor, and a lack of concern for this population. The author promotes that alternative schools have traditionally been a way for public schools to educate Hispanics.

According to the researcher Janine Zweig (2003) alternative school students have an increased number of at-risk behaviors in comparison to their traditional school counterparts. Like Janine Zweig (2003), the researcher Rebecca Watts points out that two of the greatest predictors of students dropping out of high school are socioeconomic

status of students and being retained (Watts, 2000). Poor students are much more likely to drop out of high school for economic reasons. According to the author, "the number of students leaving school increases proportionally with the number of students classified as poor" (Watts, 2000, para. 6). In reference to students being retained, the author reports that a student that is retained is four times more likely to drop out of high school than students who are not retained (Watts, 2000).

In the article, *Dropout Nation*, in TIME magazine, author Nathan Thornburgh (2006) promotes that there are many flaws in the educational system that have made it too easy for students to dropout. Reasons range from boredom, administrative pressure to be pushed out, and lack of direction. Sadly, Shelbyville High School, located in Shelbyville, Indiana, like many high schools in the nation, have reported the dropout rates as being much lower than they really are (Thornburgh, 2006).

In summary, the characteristics of students compared to other students that make them more likely to choose and attend an alternative high school over a traditional high school are socio-economic, alienation, boredom, discipline issues, suspensions, pregnancy, lack of educational success, have already dropped out, and language, social, and cultural barriers. The following reasons are a good indication that there is a definite need for alternative schools to meet the challenge of educating our nation's youth.

Alternative School Indicators

In analyzing the various types of alternative schools an important question comes to mind. What are the indicators that demonstrate that students who attend an alternative high school gain a positive outlook on education and their future? According to the author Tim Gregory (2001), the traditional school proponents have a hard time admitting

that they fail to meet the needs of certain students who cannot or refuse to function in a traditional school setting. Many times these students are thought to be ordered to attend the alternative school by their traditional high school. However, many students choose to attend an alternative school because they feel that they fit in and can succeed. In the words of the author, many traditional schools have the mentality that "the sending school is not the problem; the student is the problem" (p. 2).

In a study performed in an alternative school by Heidi Buhlman, Carole Basite, and Florence Olson (2005), the researchers promote the use of advising in order to build trust and relationships with students. An advisor or teacher utilizes democratic principles of cooperation, mutual respect, and ensures that each student has a voice in decision making. In the case of the Jefferson County Open School, the students are assigned an advisor and stay with that advisor for a period of 2-4 years. The students at Jefferson County Open School report a high level of satisfaction in the areas of trust and communication with their advisor leading to a rewarding educational experience and increased level of self-esteem for themselves and towards their education. Students learn to take responsibility for their learning and for the well being of their classmates and the school as a whole (Buhlman, Basite, & Olson, 2005).

In a study by Diana Coyl, Randall Jones, and Andrew Dick (2004), students who attended alternative high schools reported that they were very happy in their decision to attend an alternative high school. The study showed that peer status was not as big of an issue in an alternative high school in comparison to a traditional high school. The study also found that the quality of peer relationships improved in the alternative high school setting. The researchers found statistical evidence that students felt good about the

choice they made about selecting the alternative high school and felt that peer status was not a big issue in the alternative high school setting. The students felt that peer relations at the alternative high school were much more positive and that both the students and staff at the alternative high school were more accepting of students regardless of their looks, backgrounds, or current living situations (Coyl, Jones, & Dick, 2004).

Kim Kafer (2005) was not surprised that more students were choosing to attend alternative high schools and provided several statistics that showed that school choice was not only growing, but was in demand by both parents and students in America. The author credited the increase in participation because parents are increasingly unhappy with their child's local public school for reasons of school safety, lack of academic challenge, or poor school rating.

In a study performed on North Carolina Alternative Schools, researchers found that students served in alternative schools had trouble in a traditional school and did not perform well on traditional achievement tests and school course work (Brewer, Feifs, & Kaase, 2001). What the researchers found was that the alternative campuses performed at the "Expected Growth goal at almost twice the rate" (Brewer et al., 2001, para. 1) when compared to the traditional campuses. While this may be expected as the alternative schools are held to a different standard, the authors suggested that alternative schools can be held to an accountability measure and that the formulation of an accountability measure is possible.

One of the key elements that alternative schools must have is a supportive staff that encourages students to succeed and that celebrate the accomplishments of the students. The schools make a point of understanding the difficulties that their students

are faced with and focus their energy on creating an atmosphere that is warm and inviting (Edwards & Wilson, 2001).

In summary, students are satisfied with their decision to attend an alternative high school. The reasons given are that students are given choices, they feel supported, respected, have flexible scheduling, do not feel isolated, and do not have as much peer pressure in regards to their physical looks or socio-economic status. Therefore, they are better able to perform academically in school and thus build self-esteem.

It is well known that obtaining a high school diploma is a first step in providing opportunities for our nation's youth and allows them the choice of entering the workforce, joining the military, or pursuing post-secondary education. According to Ernie Anastos (2003), alternative schools successes are built on having a smaller student population, smaller student-to-teacher ratio, and developing a culture that students feel supported to stay in school and obtain their high school diploma. However, according to the researcher, alternative schools need to continually address the need for developing a strong curriculum that addresses the educational needs of students to be successful on state exams and to have the skills to be successful in the workforce (Anastos, 2003).

In a study performed by Diana Coyl, Randall Jones, and Andrew Dick (2004), the researchers reported that alternative schools have been able to address the needs of non-traditional students by allowing them to be successful and motivating them to complete their high school diploma. The students report that they felt supported by the alternative school staff and more positive about both their education and their future (Coyl, Jones, & Dick, 2004).

Jay McGee (2001), who is the director of the Hamilton Alternative School in South Bend Community School Corporation in South Bend, Indiana, felt so strongly about the positive changes that occurred in the lives of his students that he allowed student reporters from traditional campuses in his area to visit the campus and write a story about the campus and the students who attended Hamilton Alternative School. The student reporters were very impressed with the learning occurring on the campus and wrote a positive story about the campus (McGee, 2001).

In a study by Sandra Kerka (2003), the author promoted that an effective alternative high school program has the ability to help at-risk youth feel respected, supported, and gain self-confidence in their ability to succeed in school. The result is that students are more likely to overcome barriers and thus, adapt the skills necessary to be successful in school, to receive a high school diploma, and to obtain employment in the workforce. The author promotes utilizing a holistic approach when working with at-risk youth to recapture the students' interest in school and to realize the importance of receiving an education in order to be successful both as a student and as a citizen (Kerka, 2003).

The author also gives examples of two programs that have been successful in recapturing at-risk youth (Kerka, 2003). "YouthBuild USA" and "Bridge over Troubled Waters Program" are two programs that demonstrate that students who have become disconnected have many skills that have enabled the students to survive without much support (para. 1). However, when provided with support and a belief that they can achieve the students live up to these expectations and overcome previous barriers that

restricted their abilities to be successful in both school and in the workplace (Kerka, 2003).

While many students report being happy about their decision to attend an alternative school and feel their future will be positively impacted, the reverse comes into play in the article, *Dropout Nation*, in TIME magazine. Nathan Thornburgh (2006) provides the reader with the image of students who did not complete their high school diploma and regret not completing high school. For these students, their current state is dismal and they have to work at medial, low-paying jobs for decisions they made in the past (Thornburgh, 2006). Tary Tobin and Jeffery Sprague (1999) agree that dropping out is not a good decision. These researchers promote that students would definitely consider continuing their education over dropping out if they were identified early and allowed to attend an alternative campus if given the choice.

While most of the research has shown that students who attend an alternative high school gain a positive outlook on education and their future, not all agree. Juan Sanchez Munoz (2005) raises concerns that alternative schools have traditionally been a way for public schools to educate Hispanics. While this is a critical method to reach and educate Hispanic youth, the author also feels that the quality of the education received may be inadequate in properly preparing Hispanic students with the skills and tools required to succeed in the workforce or in continuing education beyond high school (Munoz, 2005).

Another criticism is image. Alternative schools face public scrutiny in how well rounded graduates are and the belief that the curriculum of alternative schools is watered-down compared to the curriculum offered by traditional schools. This is an image that

each alternative school must overcome in their respective communities (Edwards & Wilson, 2001).

In summary, students who attend an alternative high school do gain a positive outlook on education and their future. This is indicated by the research. However, it is apparent that more research is needed in the area of alternative schools as there are more than 10,900 alternative schools in operation in the United States as of the academic year 2000-2001 and over 612,000 students being served in such campuses (Foley & Pang, 2006).

In analyzing the history of alternative schools in America it is easy to see that students have at their disposal several choices and routes to obtain a high school diploma. The choices of education that are offered to students in modern America students that have been analyzed up to this point are the traditional public school, home schooling, charter schools, parochial schools, private schools, and alternative schools of choice. However, the choices offered to parents and students continue to grow with the expanded use of technology. Virtual high schools via the Internet are also beginning to make an impact as a means of students to obtain a high school diploma without leaving their home (Chaika, 1999).

Beginning in 1994 the State of Utah began operating the Electronic High School as a means for students in Utah to obtain a high school diploma via the Internet. Originally the Electronic High School was restricted to students from Utah who had a designated special need to stay home such as an illness, physical or mental disability, or behavior manifestations that would limit their success at completing their high school diploma in a traditional public school setting. However, from its inception the Electronic

High School was also seen as an avenue for students from Utah to obtain high school credit for the purpose of accelerating their education or for the purpose of credit recovery. The successes of this program allowed the Utah Electronic High School to also serve students outside of the state to obtain high school credit for the same purposes of acceleration or credit recovery. In seeing these successes, the Utah Electronic High School has continued to grow each year in the number of courses offered and is fully accredited though the Northwest Association of Accredited Schools. However, students outside of the State of Utah cannot receive a high school diploma through the Electronic High School (Electronic High School, 2007).

The Utah Electronic High School served as one of the major test-beds for other states and because of its professionalism, student-centered approach, and success several other states soon followed in developing their own virtual high schools. In 1997, the State of Florida opened the Florida Virtual School mirroring many of the registration requirements and diploma requirements of the Utah Electronic High School. In doing so, the Florida Virtual School became an independent institution in 2000 whose funding is based on student performance and serves students in grades 6-12. The impact of the Florida Virtual School can be seen as 31,000 students took advantage of over 68,000 courses in the 2005-2006 school year. As in Utah, most of the students utilized the virtual program for the purpose of credit recovery and acceleration (Florida Virtual School, 2007).

The Florida Virtual School is accredited through the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools and recognized as a legitimate means of obtaining credit by other states. Like the Utah Electronic High School, the Florida Virtual School does not award

high school diplomas to out-of-state students but only as a mean of obtaining high school credit as a correspondence course. The latter, is critical to the validity of virtual high schools as they could easily be seen as a diploma mill by critics of correspondence courses and virtual education programs (Florida Virtual School, 2007).

The growth of virtual high schools is not limited to only the States of Utah and Florida. Colorado, Nebraska, Michigan, Massachusetts, California, Illinois, Maryland, Hawaii, Georgia and several other states have either established virtual high schools or are in the process of initiating virtual high schools in their respective states. Across the nation the creation of virtual high schools is impacting in effect hundreds of thousands of students in how they look at obtaining their high school diploma. Virtual high schools are welcomed by parents who choose to home-school their children and are looking for courses that are both rigorous and accredited in order to be accepted by institution of higher learning beyond high school. However, virtual high schools are mostly utilized by students for the means of credit recovery and acceleration (Chaika, 1999).

The first purpose of this chapter was to show that alternative education has always existed in the United States out of necessity because the public school system has not been able to meet the needs of all learners throughout the history of America. The second purpose was to show that alternative education is about parental and student choice. In doing so, this chapter identified the types of choices offered to parents, the impact of alternative education, reasons why student choose to attend alternative schools, and why there will continue to be demand for choices as our country continues to change.

The public school system in America has been highly successful at educating generations of students. However, the traditional public school is not a system created to

meet the needs of all learners. Parents and students have demanded that there be choices outside of the traditional public schools system. Alternative choices in education were created throughout the history of America in the form of Home Schools, Private Schools, Parochial Schools, Schools of Choice, Charter Schools, and Virtual High Schools. Alternative schools are making a positive impact in the lives of thousands of students who are at risk of dropping out of the traditional high school setting by providing them with an alternative route to obtain a high school diploma. The impact this has made on the dropout rate in American schools is significant enough to allow alternative schools to become a relevant stakeholder in America's educational system. The reason for the above statements is simple. Parents now have choices or alternatives to the traditional public schools system that simply have not been offered in the past. Successful education is about having choices!

CHAPTER THREE

Methods and Procedures

Introduction/Purpose Statement

The purpose of this research study was to compare TAKS scores, TAKS Scale Scores, attendance rates, grade point average, and credit earned by at-risk students attending an alternative high school of choice, at-risk students attending a traditional high school, and at-risk students attending a Disciplinary Alternative Education Placement Campus within the same school district.

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the methodology used in this study. Descriptions provided in the chapter include an explanation of the procedures used to collect and analyze the data and is divided into seven sections: (a) the research questions, (b) the district, (c) the campuses, (d) the participants, (e) the sample, (f) the procedures for collection of data, and (g) the procedures for analysis of data.

To complete the study, archived data from the 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 school years were used. Participants consisted of at-risk students enrolled at ASOC High School, TRD High School, and the DMP Discipline Alternative Education Placement campuses. The study utilized a single method quantitative approach to data collection and analysis. The three student groups were compared using student data provided by the XYZ Independent School District's Research, Testing, and PEIMS Department to obtain student TAKS scores, TAKS Scale Scores, and student attendance. The Counseling Departments located on two of the three campuses were the source of archived data related to student grade point averages and credit attainment for the 2006-2007 and 2007-

2008 school years, in addition to the at-risk indicators of the students utilized in the study.

The Research Questions

The following research questions were addressed in the study:

1. How do the TAKS scores of at-risk students at an alternative campus compare to the TAKS scores of at-risk students at a traditional high school and TAKS scores of at-risk students at a discipline campus?
2. How does attendance for at-risk students at an alternative campus compare to the attendance of at-risk students at a traditional high school and attendance of at-risk students at a discipline campus?
3. How do the number of credits accrued by at-risk students at an alternative campus compare to the number of credits accrued by at-risk students at a traditional high school and number of credits accrued by at-risk students at a discipline campus?
4. How do the TAKS Scale Scores of at-risk students at an alternative campus compare to the TAKS Scale Scores of at-risk students at a traditional high school and TAKS Scale Scores of at-risk students at a discipline campus?
5. How does the GPA of at-risk student enrolled at an alternative campus compare to the GPA of at-risk students at a traditional high school and GPA of at-risk students at a discipline campus?

The null format of the research questions addressed in the study would be the following:

1. There is no difference in the TAKS scores of at-risk students at an alternative campus compared to the TAKS scores of at-risk students at a traditional high school and TAKS scores of at-risk students at a discipline campus?
2. There is no difference in the attendance for at-risk students at an alternative campus compared to the attendance of at-risk students at a traditional high school and attendance of at-risk students at a discipline campus?
3. There is no difference in the number of credits accrued by at-risk students at an alternative campus compared to the number of credits accrued by at-risk students at a traditional high school and number of credits accrued by at-risk students at a discipline campus?
4. There is no difference in the TAKS Scale Scores of at-risk students at an alternative campus compared to the TAKS Scale Scores of at-risk students at a traditional high school and TAKS Scale Scores of at-risk students at a discipline campus?
5. There is no difference in the GPA of at-risk student enrolled at an alternative campus compared to the GPA of at-risk students at a traditional high school and GPA of at-risk students at a discipline campus?

The District

XYZ Independent School District is located in the heart of Central Texas along the Interstate 35 corridor. XYZ Independent School District had a student enrollment of 8,300 students for the 2007-2008 school year. The district boundaries encompass a geographic region of 202 square miles that includes two lakeside communities within the

district. XYZ Independent School District is somewhat unique in that the school district's boundaries extend into a neighboring mid-sized city which has its own school district. XYZ Independent School District can be described as a suburban school district as it sits between two larger communities. Due to the proximity of I-35 and being located in Central Texas, the major industry includes distribution operations, the railroad industry, and warehouse facilities. Other local industry includes metal and plastics manufacturing and the warehousing and construction of office and school furnishings. The local economy benefits from the extensive medical facilities in the area. Three major hospitals are located near the district and focus on medical research, educational training, and patient care. Fort Hood, the largest military installation in the free world, is within 12 miles of the XYZ Independent School District and serves as one of the major employers in this region of Central Texas adding billions of dollars to the local economy. The XYZ community also benefits by having a four-year university within the community and two community colleges in the neighboring communities allowing for additional educational opportunities for high school graduates. Recreation for the community includes outdoor venues provided by two large lakes and several parks surrounding the lakes. Other outdoor activities include walking and biking trails located in two large and well equipped parks in the community. The community also has three golf courses within a seven mile radius. In addition to outdoor activities there are restaurants, movie theaters, a cultural activities center, and events sponsored by the local university and the community itself through the convention center where concerts, rodeos, and other events are held. The majority of students who attend XYZ Independent School District have parents who work in the neighboring cities yet, reside in the XYZ

Independent School District. Tables 1 and 2 provide a quantitative description of the ethnic distribution and enrollment of student programs offered in the XYZ Independent School District.

Table 1

Ethnic Distribution of XYZ Independent School District

Ethnicity	# Students	Percentage
White	5,104	61.6%
Hispanic	2,402	29.0%
African American	587	7.1%
Asian/Pacific Islander	102	1.2%
Native American	97	1.2%

Note: Source - 2008 AEIS Report

Table 2

Student Programs & Enrollment of XYZ Independent School District

Program/Indicator	#Students	Percentage
Economically Disadvantaged	3,593	43.3%
At-Risk	3,419	41.2%
Limited English Proficient	618	7.5%
Disciplinary Placements	138	1.6%
Bilingual/ESL Enrollment	582	7.0%
Gifted & Talented Enrollment	545	6.6%
Special Education Enrollment	1,006	12.1%
Career & Technology Education Enrollment	1,468	17.7%

Note: Source - 2008 AEIS Report

The information was taken from the 2007-2008 AEIS reports found on the Texas Education Agency website. The AEIS report is generated from data collected by the XYZ Independent School District's PEIMS department and submitted to the Texas Education Agency (2008).

XYZ Independent School District currently has 13 campuses composed of eight elementary schools, two middle schools, two high schools, and one disciplinary alternative education placement (DAEP) campus. The two high schools used in the study are TRD High School that serves as the traditional high school campus and ASOC High School that serves as the alternative high school of choice campus. XYZ Independent School District also has a Disciplinary Alternative Education Placement campus that serves all of the secondary campuses by educating students who have been sent for disciplinary reasons. XYZ Independent School District has experienced a 20% increase in growth over the last five years with future growth expected to continue at approximately 4% per year.

The Campuses

The population for this study consisted of 180 at-risk students in grades 9-12 who were enrolled at one of three campuses in the XYZ Independent School District during the 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 school years. The age of the students participating in the study ranged from 15-20 years old. It is important to note that the DMP Disciplinary Alternative Education Placement Campus had students enrolled from all secondary campuses in the XYZ Independent School District including the middle school campuses who have students as young as 12 years old. However, for the purpose of this study only at-risk students in grades 9-12 with three or more at-risk indicators were used.

The three campuses used in the study serve three separate functions in meeting the needs of students in the XYZ Independent School District. However, they each have the same goal to make students successful in their academic achievement by the means of credit accrual, grade point average, student attendance, and passing the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test. The paragraphs below provide the reader with a more in-depth knowledge of the different campuses and the students that they serve in the XYZ Independent School District. A detailed description of each campus follows.

TRD High School

TRD High School is the traditional four year public high school in the XYZ Independent School District and serves over 2,300 students in grades 9-12 who are both at-risk and non-at-risk. TRD High School has a faculty of 159 teachers, six principals, six counselors, and a Career and Technology Education Director. One of counselors serves as a full-time "at-risk" counselor. TRD High School is classified as a 5A high school which is the largest classification category in the State of Texas. As is expected of a large campus, TRD High School offers general courses, advanced placement courses, dual-credit courses, and a large assortment of vocational courses and extra-curricular activities that students can choose from in order to obtain one of the three high school diplomas offered in the State of Texas. The three diplomas offered in the State of Texas are the (1) minimum graduation diploma, (2) the recommended diploma plan, and (3) the distinguished diploma plan. According to the 2007-2008 Academic Excellence Indicator System report data, 39.8% of students attending TRD High School were labeled "at-risk".

DMP District Alternative Education Placement Campus

The DMP District Alternative Education Placement campus is the school district's disciplinary campus and serves students in grades 6-12 by a faculty of 6 teachers, 2 paraprofessionals, 1 director, and a full-time at-risk counselor. The DMP District Alternative Education Placement campus has an average daily attendance that fluctuates between 30-70 students and serves approximately 150 students over the course of the school year. The students who are placed at the campus are attached to the sending campus for the purpose of district, state and federal accountability in the areas of attendance, grades, credit accrual, and mandatory testing. Placement at the campus typically begins with an 85 day assignment, but can be shortened or lengthened based on the behavior of the individual student. What is different about the DMP District Alternative Education Placement campus is that 100% of the students who attend a disciplinary placement campus are labeled "at-risk". Another defining characteristic of the DMP District Alternative Education Placement campus is that it serves students in grades 6-8 and students in grades 9-12 as the DMP campus receives students from the district's two middle schools, TRD High School, and ASOC High School. Students placed at the discipline alternative education placement center can range in age from 12-21 years. However, the majority of students are under the age of 18. The DMP District Alternative Education Placement campus serves a vital function in the district as Chapter 37 of the Texas Education Code calls for mandatory removal and placement to a disciplinary alternative education placement setting for students who commit Title V "crimes against humanity" listed in the Texas Penal Code or for violations for illegal

weapons, drugs, or alcohol on school grounds. In most cases, students are sent for reasons of continued misbehavior from their sending campus.

ASOC High School

ASOC High School is the district's alternative high school of choice and served 179 students in grades 9-12 who voluntarily chose to attend the campus. ASOC High School serves students who are both at-risk and non-at-risk students. ASOC High School has a faculty of 10 teachers, one principal, and one counselor. Upon enrollment to the campus, students understand that they are not allowed to participate in extra-curricular activities offered in the district. One unique characteristics of ASOC High School is that special education resource classes are not offered at the school. Students who receive resource special education classes are not allowed to attend ASOC High School. Like TRD High School, students at ASOC High School have the ability to earn each of the three high school diplomas offered in the State of Texas. What makes ASOC High School different from TRD High School is its mission, self-paced curriculum and the accountability system that it is classified under as outlined by the Texas Education Agency. ASOC High School falls under the Alternative Education Accountability (AEA) system for Texas public schools. In order to operate and continue to function as an Alternative Education Campus (AEC) under the Texas Education Agency, it is required that ASOC High School maintain a 75% or more students population that is comprised of at-risk students. Below is a statement taken directly from Chapter 8 of the Texas Education Agency's 2007 Accountability Manual in regards to Alternative Education Campuses maintaining a 75% minimum at-risk student population:

> Beginning in 2006, an at-risk registration criterion was implemented under AEA procedures. Each registered AEC must have a minimum percentage of at-risk

> students enrolled on the AEC verified through current-year PEIMS fall enrollment data in order to remain registered and be evaluated under AEA procedures. The at-risk criterion began at 65% in 2006 and will increase by five percentage points annually until it reaches 75% in 2008, where it is expected to remain.
>
> • 2007 – 70% or higher at-risk student enrollment at the registered AEC
>
> • 2008 – 75% or higher at-risk student enrollment at the registered AEC
>
> An at-risk registration criterion accomplishes two goals. It restricts use of AEA procedures to AECs that serve large populations of at-risk students and enhances at-risk data quality. (p. 77)

According to the 2007-2008 Academic Excellence Indicator System report data, 87.6% of students attending ASOC High School were labeled "at-risk." In the same chapter from the Texas Education Agency's May 2007 Accountability Manual, Alternative Education Campuses (AECs) like ASOC High School, "must serve students at risk of dropping out of school" as defined in Texas Education Code (TEC) §29.081(d) and provide "accelerated instructional services to these students" (p. 75). The mission of serving "at-risk" students and getting them to graduate is clearly the primary function of ASOC High School.

Tables 3-7 provide the reader with demographic information about TRD High School, the DMP Disciplinary Alternative Educational Placement Campus, and ASOC High School. The data source of the tables was the 2007-2008 Texas Education Agency Academic Excellence Indicator System (2007, 2008).

The Participants

All students participating in the study were labeled "at-risk" by the district and identified as having three or more of the "at-risk" indicators. The sample population consisted of 60 at-risk students from each campus who met the qualifications of being labeled at-risk with three or more at-risk indicators. Participants were in grades 9-12 and

were not enrolled in the district's special education program. As the focus of the study was on the student achievement of at-risk students, each of the participants used in the study were students with three or more at-risk indicators. A student was identified as being "at-risk" based on indicators listed on the 2008 XYZ Independent School District Grades 7-12 At-Risk Identification Form. The at-risk indicators are listed in Table 8:

Table 3

Campus Grade Level Information

Grade Level Information	Population			Percentage of Campus		
	TRD	DMP	ASOC	TRD	DMP	ASOC
Grade 9	703	26	15	30.2%	34.6%	12.4%
Grade 10	596	21	26	25.6%	28.0%	21.5%
Grade 11	517	18	27	22.2%	24.0%	22.3%
Grade 12	511	10	53	22.0%	13.3%	43.8%

Table 4

Campus Ethnic Distribution

Ethnic Distribution	Population			Percentage of Campus		
	TRD	DMP	ASOC	TRD	DMP	ASOC
African American	150	7	12	6.4%	9.3%	9.9%
Hispanic	618	19	34	26.6%	25.3%	28.1%
White	1,510	49	72	64.9%	65.3%	59.5%
Native American	23	0	2	1.0%	0.0%	1.7%
Asian/Pacific Islander	26	0	1	1.1%	0.0%	0.8%

Table 5

Campus Sub-Population Information

Sub-Population Category	Population			Percentage of Campus		
	TRD	DMP	ASOC	TRD	DMP	ASOC
Economically Disadvantaged	728	57	59	31.3%	76.0.%	48.8%
Limited English Proficient	73	5	0	3.1%	6.6%	0.0%
Students w/Disciplinary Placements 2007-08	73	75	2	3.1%	100%	1.0%
At-Risk	927	75	106	39.8%	100%	87.6%
Mobility 2007-08	380	56	123	16.0%	74.6	64.4%
# of Students per Teacher	15.6	10.7	12.4	N/A	N/A	N/A

Table 6

Campus Graduate Information

Graduate Category	Population			Percentage of Campus		
	TRD	DMP	ASOC	TRD	DMP	ASOC
Total Graduates (Class of 2008)	513	N/A	41	100%	N/A	100%
Graduates by Ethnicity (Including Sp. Ed)						
African American	27	N/A	2	5.3%	N/A	4.9%
Hispanic	116	N/A	12	22.6%	N/A	29.3%
White	364	N/A	25	71.0%	N/A	61.0%
Native American	2	N/A	1	0.4%	N/A	2.4%
Asian/Pacific Islander	4	N/A	1	0.8%	N/A	2.4%

Table 7

Campus Graduation Diploma Type

By Graduation Type (Including Sp. Ed.)	Population			Percentage of Campus		
	TRD	DMP	ASOC	TRD	DMP	ASOC
Minimum High School Diploma	120	N/A	21	23.4%	N/A	51.2%
Recommended Diploma	393	N/A	20	76.6%	N/A	48.8%
Special Education Graduates	90	N/A	1	17.5%	N/A	2.4%

Table 8

XYZ Independent School District At-Risk Student Indicators

At-risk Indicators	Criteria
Grade Average	Did not maintain an average of 70 on a scale of 100 in two or more subjects in the foundation curriculum during a semester in the preceding school year. Did not maintain a 70 on a scale of 100 in two or more subjects in the foundation curriculum during a semester in the current school year. Is not maintaining a 70 on a scale of 100 in two or more subjects in the foundation curriculum during the current semester.

(continued)

At-risk Indicators	Criteria
TAKS	Scored below proficient on the TAKS Reading (9th).
	Scored below proficient on TAKS Math.
	Did not score at or above 110% TAKS Math after having failed.
	Scored below proficient on TAKS ELA.
	Did not score at or above 110% TAKS ELA after having failed.
	Scored below proficient on the TAKS Social Studies.
	Scored below proficient on the TAKS Science.
	Did not score at or above 110% on TAKS Science after having failed.
Discipline	Has been placed in an alternative education program in accordance with Sect. 37.006 during the preceding or current school year.
	Has been expelled in accordance with Sect. 37.007 during the preceding or current school year.
	Is currently on parole, probation, deferred prosecution, or other conditional release.
Grade Advancement/	Was not advanced from one grade level to the next for one or more school years.
Dropout	Has been previously reported through PEIMS to have dropped out of school.

(continued)

At-risk Indicators	Criteria
Student Circumstance	Is pregnant or is a parent.
	Is a student of Limited English Proficiency (LEP) as defined by Sect. 29.052.
	Is in custody or care of Dept. of Protective and Regulatory Services or has, during the current school year, been referred.
	Is homeless as defined by the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act of 2001, Section 725.
	Resided in the previous school year or in the current school year in a residential treatment facility in the district – detention facility, substance abuse treatment facility, emergency shelter, psychiatric hospital, halfway house or foster group home.

The Sample

The focus of the study was to compare student achievement data of students with three or more at-risk indicators who attend the three campuses identified above. This section of the chapter identifies the selection process used to gather the three groups used in the study. The researcher found the sample collection process to be particularly difficult because each at-risk indicator had to be recorded separately onto an Excel spreadsheet. This is due to at-risk information being recorded into the district's PEIMS database as independent categories. At the time of the study there was not a compiled list that identified all at-risk indicators associated with each at-risk student. The first step taken by the researcher was to identify and separate all non-special education students

who were labeled at-risk from the at-risk student pool. This information was available to the researcher in the PEIMS database and the findings in the initial sample showed 715 students meeting this qualification.

The second step in selecting the sample was to identify at-risk students with three or more at-risk indicators and record them according to their campus of enrollment in order to have three sample groups. The findings in the second step identified 158 students at TRD High School, 66 students at ASOC High School, and 62 students at the DMP campus.

The third step in selecting the sample was to select 60 students for each of the three campus groups used in the study. The reason for choosing 60 students per group was to help ensure an increase in the reliability of the statistical data. The findings in the second step showed 158 students at TRD High School, 66 students at ASOC High School and 62 students at the DMP campus with three or more at-risk indicators. This result indicated that the sample groups of 60 students per campus were almost complete for the ASOC High School campus and the DMP campus. In viewing the spreadsheets, it was apparent to the researcher that most of the students had well over 3 at-risk indicators. Therefore, the researcher made the decision to see how many students would be in each group with four or more indicators for the purpose of randomly selecting the group. The findings showed that TRD High School had 57 students with four or more indicators, the DMP having 56 students and ASOC High School having 55 students with four or more at-risk indicators. It was very apparent to the researcher that the three groups of 60 students could almost be complete based on at-risk indicators alone. However, in order to have 60 students per campus group, the researcher needed three students from TRD

High School, four students from the DMP campus, and five students from ASOC High School. The selection of the remaining students was completed by drawing the names of students with three at-risk indicators out of a plastic bowl. In referring to the information above, the DMP had six students to choose from with three at-risk indicators, ASOC High School 11 students with three at-risk indicators to choose from, and TRD High School had 101 students with three at-risk indicators to choose from. The researcher performed three separate drawings by cutting the names of the students out of their respective campus list, folding their names, and placing their names in a plastic bowl. In asking his wife to draw the names from the plastic bowl, the researcher was able to form the one group of 60 students for each campus used in the study. The 60 students from each campus had at least three or more at-risk indicators and were not in special education as originally planned for the study.

The Procedures for Collection of Data

The procedures of data collection required the researcher to access archived data from the 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 school years on the identified at-risk students in the XYZ Independent School District. The first step in the data collection process was to receive permission to gain access from the district's superintendent. Permission was granted to the research and documented on request form submitted by the researcher and signed by the superintendent. A request was also submitted to the Baylor University IRB. Archived student data included in the study were student TAKS scores, TAKS Scale Scores, attendance information, grade point average, and the number of credits earned by the students used in the study. The quantitative data collected in the study came from two primary sources. The first source of quantitative data collected in the

study included archived data about each of the three campuses involved in the study. The archived data on the individual campuses included elements of school demographics, number of students served, type of programs offered, and completion rates utilizing the AEIS reports produced by the Texas Education Agency (2007, 2008).

The second source of quantitative data collected in the study was the archived student data accessed from the XYZ Independent School District's Research, Testing and PEIMS Department. Student TAKS scores, TAKS Scale Score, and attendance information from the 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 TAKS school years were accessed from the PEIMS Department. The researcher also printed a transcript of each student identified in the campus groups in order to gather individual student grade point averages and the number of credits attained by each student used in the study. All of the students that participated in the study remained anonymous and the student information was stored securely in the office of the researcher inside a locked file cabinet. All of the students participating in the study were students labeled "at-risk" of not graduating from high school and had a minimum of three or more at-risk indicators attached to each student.

Procedures for Analysis of Data

Quantitative Analysis of Data

The research design was a quantitative approach comparing the student achievement of high school students with three or more at-risk indicators enrolled in three separate campuses within the same school district. The three campuses included a traditional high school, an alternative high school of choice, and a disciplinary alternative educational placement campus. Each of the campuses used in the study formed a sample

group. The three groups, totaling 180 students, were identified and compiled using the at-risk identifiers found on the XYZ Independent School District's 2008 At-Risk Identification Form. The individual groups were comprised of 60 students from each of the three campuses. None of the students used in the study were enrolled in special education classes.

The procedures used for the data analysis were performed on the archived quantitative data from the 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 school years. The quantitative data collected were placed into an Excel spreadsheet and separated into five categories. The five categories of student achievement data used in the study were the following:

1. TAKS scores
2. TAKS Scale Scores
3. Attendance
4. Grade Point Average
5. Number of Credits Accrued

An ANOVA simple test for statistical significance was applied to compare each of the five categories of student achievement in regards to their respective campus group. The five categories of student achievement data produced 13 separate data sets. Therefore, an ANOVA tests was applied to the 13 data sets in order to accurately compare student achievement among the three sample groups. The 13 separate ANOVA tests that were applied to the data sets are shown below:

1. 2007 Reading TAKS Pass/Fail
2. 2008 Reading TAKS Pass/Fail
3. 2007 Math TAKS Pass/Fail

4. 2008 Math TAKS Pass/Fail
5. 2007 Attendance
6. 2008 Attendance
7. 2007 Credit Attainment
8. 2008 Credit Attainment
9. 2007 Reading TAKS Scale Scores
10. 2008 Reading TAKS Scale Scores
11. 2007 Math TAKS Scale Scores
12. 2008 Math TAKS Scale Scores
13. GPA

The data sets were sent to a third party for the purpose of manipulating the data and producing the statistical comparisons. The identity of the students was kept confidential from the third party applying the ANOVA test by providing each of the students with an identification number. The findings of the ANOVA test are shown in Chapter Four of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

Report of Data Analysis

The purpose of this research study was to compare TAKS scores, TAKS Scale Scores, attendance rates, grade point average and credit earned by at-risk students attending an alternative high school of choice, at-risk students attending a traditional high school, and at-risk students attending a Disciplinary Alternative Education Placement Campus within the same school district. Archived quantitative data from the 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 school years were used to analyze the effectiveness of student achievement, attendance, and credit accrual between three distinct campuses within the same district. The following research questions regarding student achievement were answered using archived quantitative data from each school:

1. How do the TAKS scores of at-risk students at an alternative campus compare to the TAKS scores of at-risk students at a traditional high school and TAKS scores of at-risk students at a discipline campus?
2. How does attendance for at-risk students at an alternative campus compare to the attendance of at-risk students at a traditional high school and attendance of at-risk students at a discipline campus?
3. How do the number of credits accrued by at-risk students at an alternative campus compare to the number of credits accrued by at-risk students at a traditional high school and number of credits accrued by at-risk students at a discipline campus?

4. How do the TAKS Scale Scores of at-risk students at an alternative campus compare to the TAKS Scale Scores of at-risk students at a traditional high school and TAKS Scale Scores of at-risk students at a discipline campus?
5. How does the GPA of at-risk students enrolled at an alternative campus compare to the GPA of at-risk students at a traditional high school and GPA of at-risk students at a discipline campus?

Each of the research questions are discussed separately.

Research Question 1

How do the TAKS scores of at-risk students at an alternative campus compare to the TAKS scores of at-risk students at a traditional high school and TAKS scores of at-risk students at a discipline campus?

The data for this question is raw score data or simply pass/fail data. In this question the researcher was comparing how students from each campus performed in relation to the other two campuses and determining if there was a statistical difference between the campuses. The data used to answer this question originated from the 2007 and 2008 TAKS reading test results and from the 2007 and 2008 TAKS math test results. To fully answer the question, the data was analyzed by applying a test of significance to TAKS reading and TAKS math results from 2007 and 2008. The test of significance applied to each data set was a simple or one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) beginning with the 2007 and 2008 TAKS reading data. The same test was then applied to the 2007 and 2008 TAKS math data.

In applying a test of significance to the 2007 TAKS reading results, a simple or one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was applied to the data sets of each of campus

used in the study. In the case of the TAKS reading results, the null hypothesis stated that there was no difference in the averages of the mean of the 2007 TAKS reading data. To fail to reject the null hypothesis would mean that there was not sufficient evidence to say there was a difference in the mean score. When comparing the 2007 TAKS reading data the P-value of 0.032113 was less than the Alpha value (0.05). Therefore, there was a statistical difference between the mean of the sample 2007 TAKS reading data (Tables 9 and 10). There was sufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis, and we could conclude that there was a statistical difference between the 2007 TAKS reading data of the three campuses. In this case, the TAKS reading scores passing rate at the ASOC high school campus and the DMP Disciplinary Alternative Education Placement campus were approximately 20 percent higher than at TRD high school for at-risk students who had three or more at-risk indicators.

Table 9

Test of Significant Difference for Reading TAKS 2007 Pass/Fail – ANOVA-Single Factor

Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance
TRD	57	31	0.54386	0.252506
DMP	40	30	0.75	0.192308
ASOC	42	32	0.761905	0.18583

A simple or one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was applied to the 2008 TAKS reading results from the three campuses used in the study. In this case, the null hypothesis stated there was no difference in the averages of the mean of the 2008 TAKS

reading results. To fail to reject the null hypothesis would mean there was not sufficient evidence to say there was a difference in the mean score.

Table 10

Test of Significant Difference for Reading TAKS 2007 Pass – ANOVA

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	1.51758	2	0.75879	3.56916	0.032113	3.0627
Within Groups	29.2594	136	0.215143			
Total	30.77698	138				

Note: Alpha Level .05

When comparing the 2008 TAKS reading results the P-value of 0.924264 was greater than the Alpha value (0.05). Therefore, in viewing Table 11 and Table 12 there was no statistical difference between the mean of the sample 2008 TAKS reading results. In doing so, the data showed that the researcher would fail to reject the null hypothesis, and could conclude that there was not a statistical difference between the 2008 TAKS reading results of the three campuses.

Table 11

Test of Significant Difference for Reading TAKS 2008 Pass/Fail – ANOVA-Single Factor

Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance
TRD	43	32	0.744186	0.194906
DMP	26	20	0.769231	0.184615
ASOC	25	18	0.72	0.21

Table 12

Test of Significant Difference for Reading TAKS 2008 Pass/Fail – ANOVA

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	0.030909	2	0.015455	0.078826	0.924264	3.096553
Within Groups	17.84143	91	0.19606			
Total	17.87234	93				

Note: Alpha Level .05

In applying a test of significance to the 2007 TAKS math results data, a simple or one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was applied to the 2007 TAKS math results for the three campuses used in the study. In this case, the null hypothesis would state that there was no difference in the averages of the mean of the 2007 TAKS math results. To fail to reject the null hypothesis would mean there was not sufficient evidence to say there was a difference in the mean score. When comparing the 2007 TAKS math results, the P-value of 0.000147 was less than the Alpha value (0.05). Therefore, in viewing Tables 13 and 14 there was a statistical difference between the mean of the sample 2007 TAKS math results. There was sufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis. There was a statistical difference between the 2007 TAKS math results of the three campuses. In this case, the 2007 TAKS math results at DMP Alternative Educational Placement Campus were higher than the 2007 TAKS math results of ASOC high school and the TRD High School. However, the data also showed that the 2007 TAKS math results were higher at ASOC high than at the TRD high school in the XYZ Independent School District.

Table 13

Test of Significant Difference for Math TAKS 2007Pass/Fail – ANOVA-Single Factor

Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance
TRD	59	3	0.050847	0.049094
DMP	42	16	0.380952	0.24158
ASOC	48	11	0.229167	0.180408

Table 14

Test of Significant Difference for Math TAKS 2007 Pass/Fail – ANOVA

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	2.728345	2	1.364173	9.380886	0.000147	3.05805
Within Groups	21.23139	146	0.14542			
Total	23.95973	148				

Note: Alpha Level .05

Lastly, in applying a test of significance to the 2008 TAKS math results data, a simple or one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was applied to the 2008 TAKS math results from each of the three campuses used in the study. In this case, the null hypothesis was that there is no difference in the averages of the mean of the 2008 TAKS math scores. To fail to reject the null hypothesis would mean that there was a difference in the mean score. When comparing the 2008 TAKS math results the P-value of 0.503795 was greater than the Alpha value (0.05). Therefore, in viewing Tables 15 and 16 there was no statistical difference between the mean of the sample 2008 TAKS math

results. The researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis, and concluded that there was not a statistical difference between the 2008 TAKS math results of the three campuses.

Table 15

Test of Significant Difference for Math TAKS 2008 Pass/Fail – ANOVA-Single Factor

Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance
TRD	43	17	0.395349	0.24474
DMP	26	12	0.461538	0.258462
ASOC	35	11	0.314286	0.221849

Table 16

Test of Significant Difference for Math TAKS 2008 Pass/Fail – ANOVA

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	0.331919	2	0.16596	0.690261	0.503795	3.086371
Within Groups	24.28347	101	0.24043			
Total	24.61538	103				

Note: Alpha Level .05

Research Question 2

How does attendance for at-risk students at an alternative campus compare to the attendance of at-risk students at a traditional high school and attendance of at-risk students at a discipline campus?

It was important for the reader to understand that daily student attendance is how school districts receive funding. In addition, it is widely accepted by educators that

attendance in school has a positive correlation to success in school. In analyzing the 2007 attendance data, a box and whisker plot (Figure 1) shows the data was symmetrical allowing the ANOVA to be applied. However, Figure 1 also allows the reader to see that there are four statistical outliers in the TRD high school data and two statistical outliers in the DMP alternative disciplinary placement campus data.

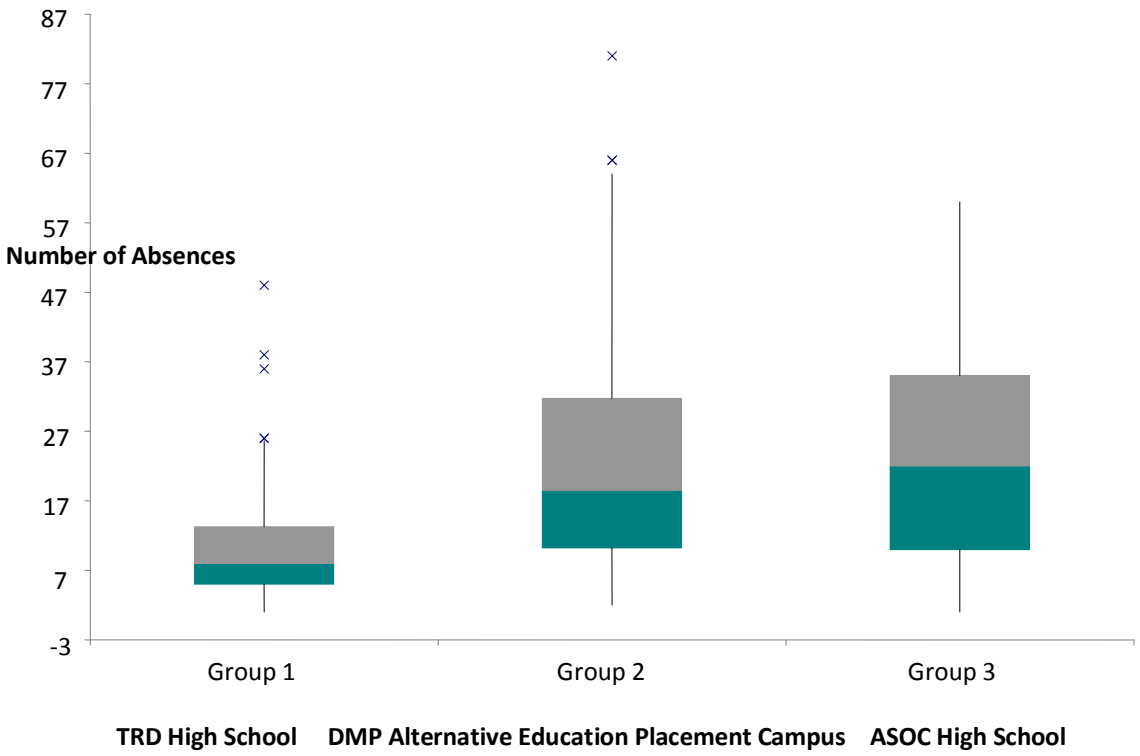

Figure 1. Box and whisker plot of the 2006 – 2007 attendance

In applying a test of significance to the 2007 attendance data, a simple or one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was applied to each of the three campuses used in the study. In this case, the null hypothesis stated that there was no difference in the averages of the mean in the 2007 attendance data. To fail to reject the null hypothesis would mean that there was not sufficient evidence to say there was a difference in the mean score.

When comparing the 2007 attendance, the P-value of 5.51E-06 indicates that scientific notation was used because the value was very small and was much less than the Alpha value (0.05). Therefore, in viewing Table 17 and Table 18 there was a significant statistical difference between the mean of the sample 2007 attendance data. Therefore, sufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis, and the researcher concluded that there was a statistical difference between the 2007 attendance data of the three campuses.

In this case, the 2007 attendance data at ASOC High School showed more days missed than the 2007 attendance data of TRD High School and the DMP Alternative Educational Placement Campus in the XYZ Independent School District. The 2007 attendance data of the DMP Alternative Educational Placement Campus also had a significant increase in the number of days missed when compared to TRD high school. This finding reflects negatively on ASOC high school and the DMP Alternative Educational Placement Campus because attendance has been determined to be important for student achievement. School funding would also increase with improved student attendance in the XYZ Independent School District.

Table 17

Test of Significant Difference for Attendance 2007 – ANOVA-Single Factor

Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance
TRD	60	666	11.1	88.46441
DMP	58	1373	23.67241	341.768
ASOC	57	1290	22.63158	239.4868

Table 18

Test of Significant Difference for Attendance 2007 – ANOVA

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	5762.47	2	2881.235	13.00325	5.51E-06	3.04852
Within Groups	38111.44	172	221.5781			
Total	43873.91	174				

Note: Alpha Level .05

A box and whisker plot (Figure 2) was initially used to analyze the 2008 attendance data. At first glance, it seemed that there was a decrease in the number of days missed by all three campuses. This would be good news to any campus because it showed that the students used in the study attended school more days of school in the second year of the study. Showing a similar trend as in Figure 1 above, Figure 2 below showed the data was symmetrical which allowed the ANOVA test to be applied. However, Figure 2 also showed that there were statistical outliers at each campus. The box and whisker plot showed that there were four statistical outliers at TRD High School, two outliers at the DMP campus and five outliers at ASOC High School.

The results of the 2007 attendance data and the 2008 attendance data showed that the outcomes were very similar in that the attendance at ASOC high school was less than the attendance at TRD high school and the DMP campus. In applying a test of significance to the 2008 attendance data, a simple or one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was applied to the three campuses used in the study. In this case, the null hypothesis stated there is no difference in the averages of the mean of the 2008

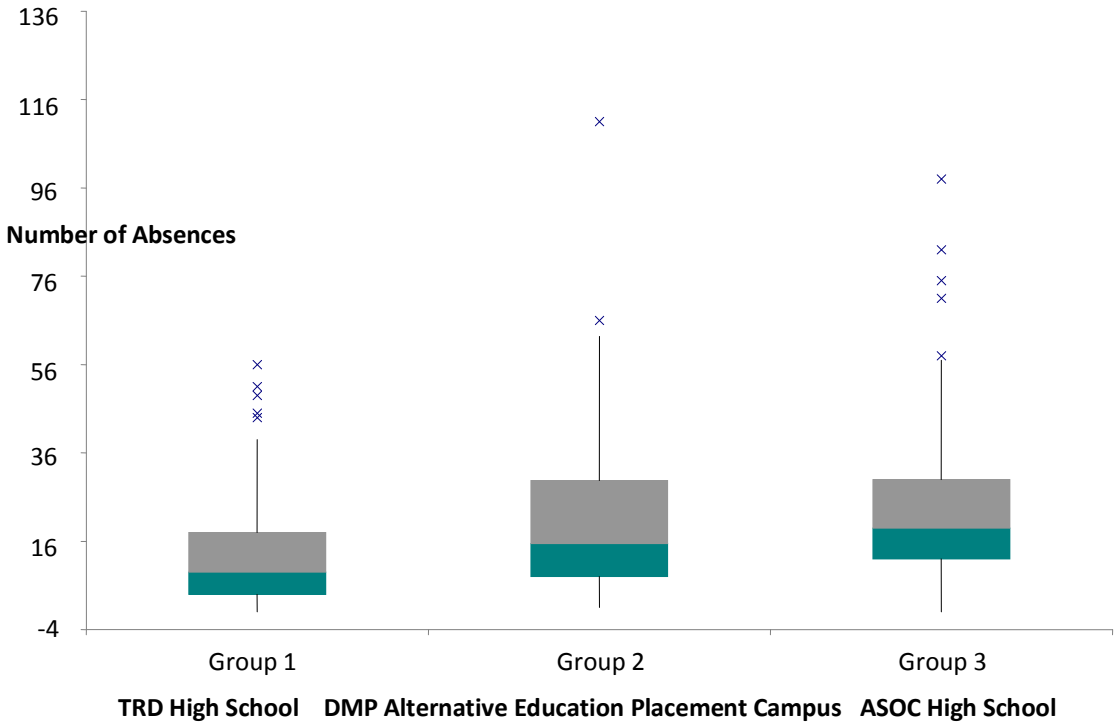

Figure 2. Box and whisker plot for 2007 – 2008 attendance

attendance data. To fail to reject the null hypothesis would mean that there was not sufficient evidence to say there was a difference in the mean score. When comparing the 2008 attendance the P-value of 0.003858 was less than the Alpha value (0.05). Therefore, in viewing Table 19 and Table 20 there was a statistical difference between the mean of the sample 2008 attendance data. This indicated that there was sufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis, and the researcher concluded that there was a statistical difference between the 2008 attendance data of the three campuses. Following the same trend as in the 2007 attendance data, the 2008 attendance data at ASOC High School showed to have many more days missed than that of the TRD High School and the DMP Alternative Educational Placement Campus.

Table 19

Test of Significant Difference for Attendance 2008 – ANOVA-Single Factor

Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance
TRD	59	785	13.30508	177.7674
DMP	42	942	22.42857	461.6167
ASOC	59	1444	24.47458	452.0123

Table 20

Test of Significant Difference for Attendance 2008 – ANOVA

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	4068.238	2	2034.119	5.758999	0.003858	3.053628
Within Groups	55453.51	157	353.207			
Total	59521.74	159				

Note: Alpha Level .05

Showing the same result as in the 2007 attendance data, the DMP Alternative Educational Placement Campus also had more days missed than the TRD high school. The good news was that in year two the attendance appeared to improve at each of the campuses in XYZ Independent School District.

Research Question 3

How do the number of credits accrued by at-risk students at an alternative campus compare to the number of credits accrued by at-risk students at a traditional high school and number of credits accrued by at-risk students at a discipline campus?

It was important to remember that in the State of Texas a student must have completed a minimum of 22 credits in order to graduate from high school. Students in Texas normally graduate after four years of attendance or after the completion of eight semesters of high school. In looking at the 2007 credit accrual data, Figure 3 contains a box and whisker plot indicating that the data is symmetrical and allowed the ANOVA test to be applied.

In applying a test of significance to the 2007 credit attainment data, a simple or one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was applied to the 2007 credit attainment data from each campus used in the study. In this case, the null hypothesis stated there was no difference in the averages of the mean of the 2007 credit attainment data. To fail to reject the null hypothesis would mean there was not sufficient evidence to say there was a difference in the mean score. When comparing the 2007 credit attainment the P-value of 0.113794 was greater than the Alpha value (0.05).

Therefore, in viewing Table 21 and Table 22 there was no statistical difference between the mean of the sample 2007 credit attainment data. The data showed that the researcher would fail to reject the null hypothesis, and the researcher concluded that there was not a statistical difference between the 2007 credit accrual for students attending any of the three campuses. The data showed that most students completed approximately four credits a year at each of the three campuses used in the study.

The data indicated that students in XYZ Independent School District who had three or more at-risk indicators and were labeled at-risk of dropping out of high school accrued fewer credits than the standard seven credits per year. In XYZ Independent School District, a student who successfully passes each course of study will complete seven

credits for each year of high school. The result of receiving credits at a slower pace will require a student to stay in high school longer in order to graduate. However, if a student chooses to attend ASOC high school, the student would have the opportunity to work at their own pace and attain more than seven credits per year. Therefore, a student could catch up on their credits and graduate on time.

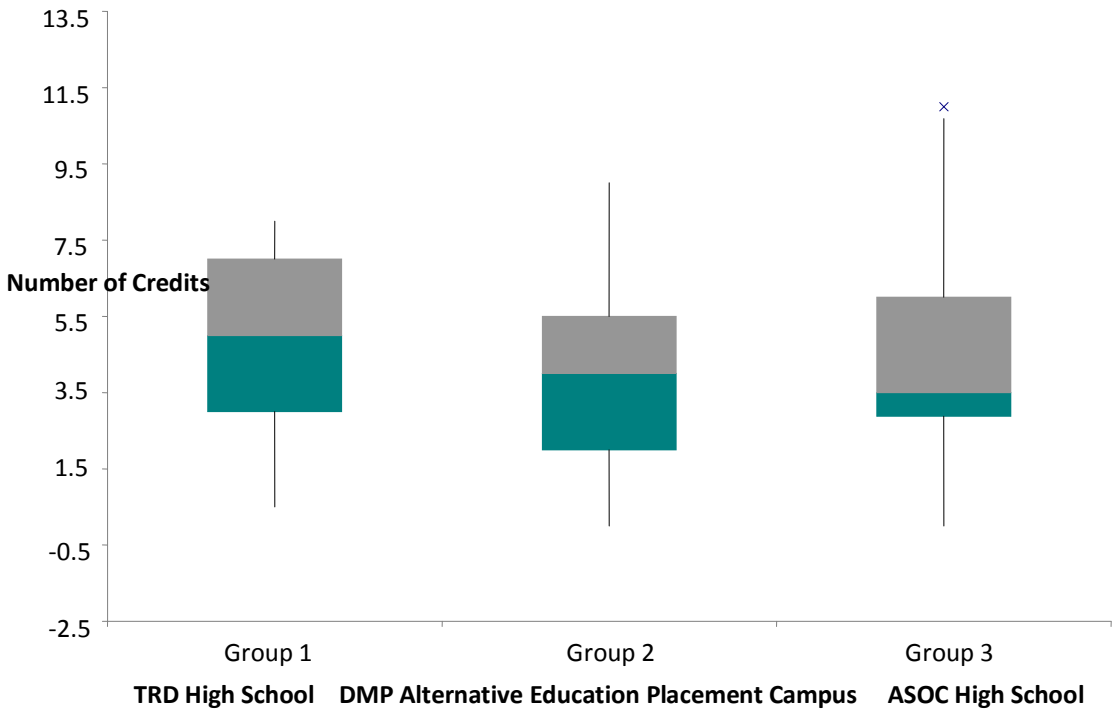

Figure 3. Box and whisker plot of 2006 – 2007 credit attainment

In looking at the 2008 credit accrual data, Figure 4 contains a box and whisker plot indicating that the data was symmetrical and allowed the ANOVA test to be applied. However, when looking at Figure 4, it was easy to see that the TRD high school had a slight edge over the other two campuses with an increase of one credit. However, this was not a large enough value to make it a significant increase over the other two

campuses in the study. It is also important to note that there was one statistical outlier shown at the DMP Alternative Education Placement Campus.

Table 21

Test of Significant Difference for Credit Attainment in 2007 – ANOVA-Single Factor

Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance
TRD	57	270	4.736842	4.331297
DMP	51	197.5	3.872549	4.968431
ASOC	56	235	4.196429	4.860714

Table 22

Test of Significant Difference for Credit Attainment 2007 – ANOVA

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	20.75206	2	10.37603	2.202969	0.113794	3.052172
Within Groups	758.3135	161	4.710022			
Total	779.0655	163				

Note: Alpha Level .05

The 2008 credit attainment data was analyzed with the application of a simple or one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) test and compared the results of the three campuses used in the study. The null hypothesis stated there would be no difference in the averages of the mean of the 2008 credit attainment data. To fail to reject the null hypothesis would mean that there was not sufficient evidence to say there was a

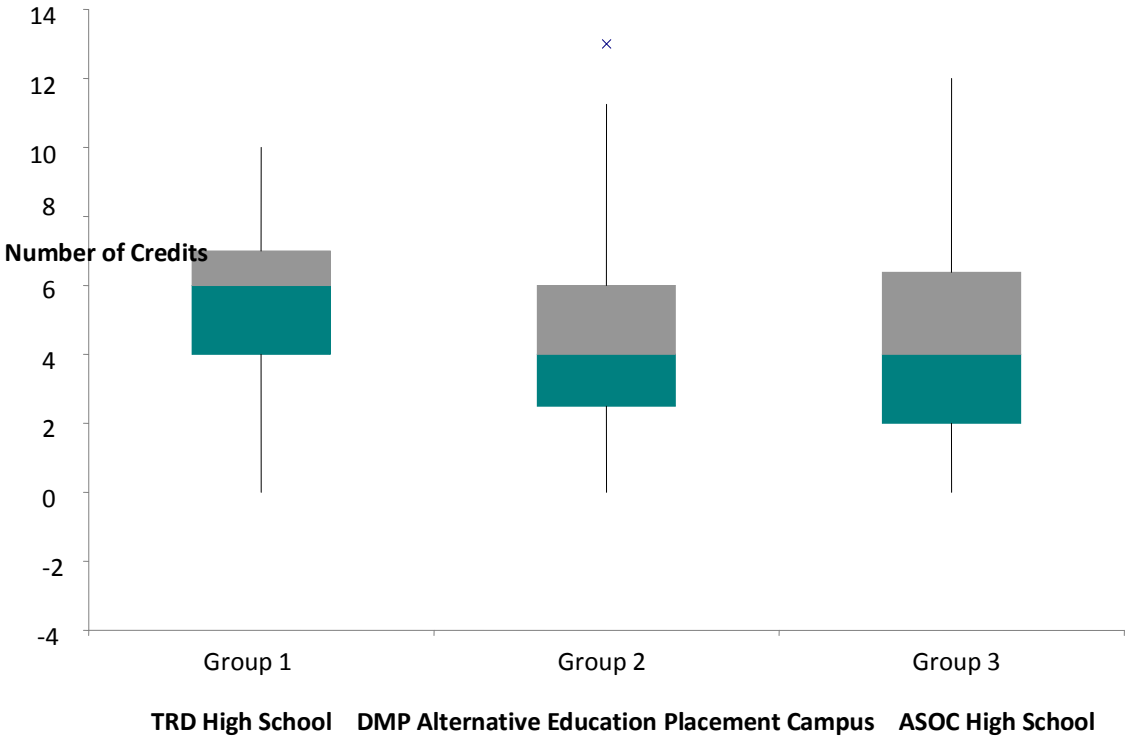

Figure 4. Box and whiskers plot of 2007 – 2008 credit attainment

difference in the mean score. When comparing the 2008 credit attainment the P-value of 0.20921 was greater than the Alpha value (0.05). Therefore, in viewing Table 23 and Table 24 there was no statistical difference between the mean of the sample 2008 credit attainment data. The data showed that the researcher would fail to reject the null hypothesis, and concluded that there was not a statistical difference between the 2008 credit accrual for students attending any of the three campuses. The data showed that most students completed approximately four credits a year. When compared to the 2007 credit attainment results, the 2008 credit attainment results showed a slight increase in the amount of credits achieved from four credits to approximately four and a half credits.

Table 23

Test of Significant Difference for Credit Attainment in 2008 – ANOVA-Single Factor

Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance
TRD	48	251.06	5.230417	5.039898
DMP	37	155.5	4.202703	6.728604
ASOC	50	229.5	4.59	9.996837

Table 24

Test of Significant Difference for Credit Attainment 2008 – ANOVA

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	23.24165	2	11.62083	1.583105	0.20921	3.064761
Within Groups	968.9499	132	7.34053			
Total	992.1916	134				

Note: Alpha Level .05

Research Question 4

How do the TAKS Scale Scores of at-risk students at an alternative campus compare to the TAKS Scale Scores of at-risk students at a traditional high school and TAKS Scale Scores of at-risk students at a discipline campus?

In order to answer the research question, it is important for the reader to understand the importance of scale score data. Scale score data is different from raw score data in that the raw score is simply the number of questions that a student answered correctly on the test. Unlike the raw score data, the scale score data can be used across

different sets of test questions. Therefore, the scale score is a conversion of the raw score into a scale that is common to all test forms for a particular assessment. In this case, the assessments used were the 2007 and 2008 TAKS reading assessments and the 2007 and 2008 TAKS mathematics assessments taken by the students at each of the campuses used in the study. To answer research question four each of the assessments were analyzed separately with the results shown below.

In looking at the 2007 TAKS reading scale scores, Figure 5 contained a box and whisker plot showing that the data was symmetrical and allowed the ANOVA test to be applied. It was important to note that there were four statistical outliers TRD High School and two statistical outliers at the DMP campus. In each case the statistical outliers showed that the scale scores fell below the passing scale score standard of 2100.

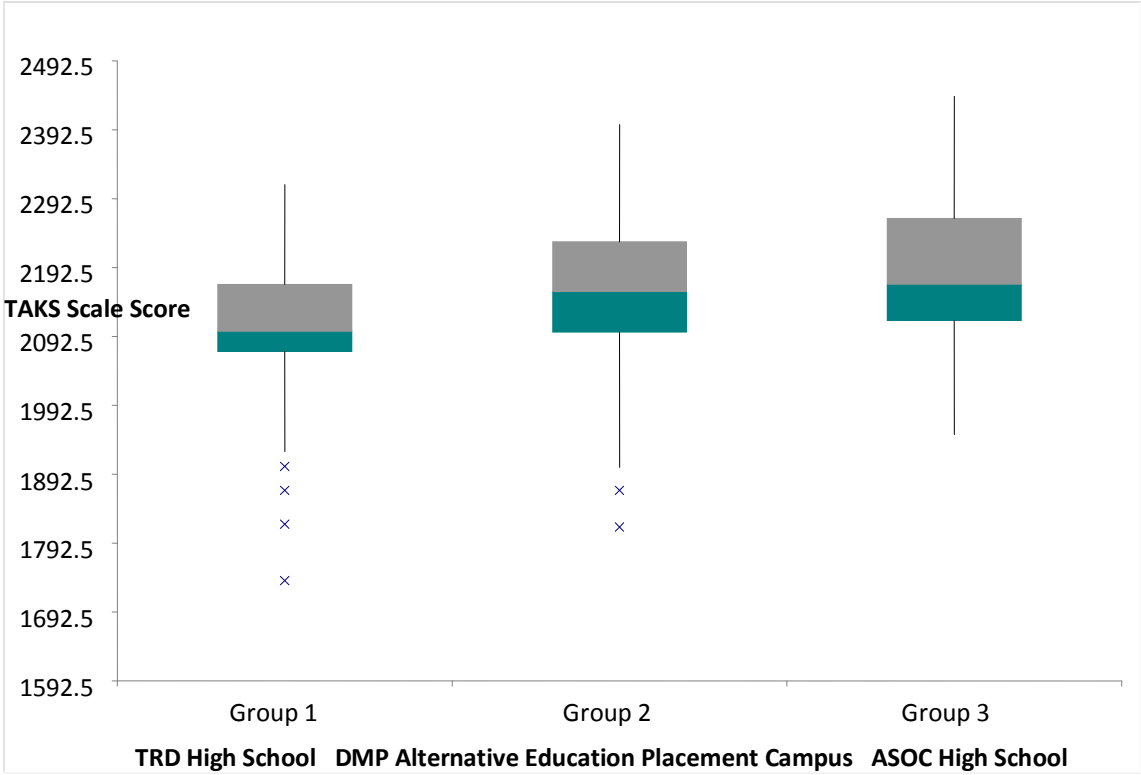

Figure 5. Box and whiskers plot of 2006 – 2007 TAKS reading scale scores

In applying a test of significance to the 2007 TAKS reading assessment data, a simple or one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) test was applied to the 2007 TAKS reading assessment data from the three campuses used in the study. The null hypothesis stated that there was no difference in the averages of the mean of the 2007 TAKS reading scores. To fail to reject the null hypothesis would mean there was not sufficient evidence to say there was a difference in the mean score. When comparing the 2007 TAKS reading scores the P-value of 0.008224 was less than the Alpha value (0.05). Therefore, in viewing Table 25 and Table 26 there was a statistical difference between the mean of the sample 2007 TAKS reading scale scores. This provided the researcher with sufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis, and the researcher concluded that there was a statistical difference between the 2007 TAKS reading scale scores of the campuses used in the study. In this case, the 2007 TAKS scale scores at ASOC High School were greater than the 2007 TAKS reading scale scores of TRD High School and the DMP Alternative Educational Placement Campus in the XYZ Independent School District.

Table 25

Test of Significant Difference for Reading TAKS 2007 – ANOVA-Single Factor

Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance
TRD	57	120059	2106.298	12529.32
DMP	41	88178	2150.683	15331.57
ASOC	40	87100	2177.5	9998.615

Table 26

Test of Significant Difference for Reading TAKS 2007 – ANOVA

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	125668.1	2	62834.05	4.975565	0.008224	3.063204
Within Groups	1704851	135	12628.52			
Total	1830519	137				

Note: Alpha Level .05

In viewing the 2008 TAKS reading scores, Figure 6 contains a box and whisker plot that showed the data was symmetrical and allowed the ANOVA test to be applied. It was important to note that at TRD High School there were two statistical outliers. In this case there was one outlier at each end of the spectrum. One outlier indicated a very high scale score while the other was extremely low on the spectrum and indicated a low scale score. The DMP Alternative Education Placement Campus also showed one statistical outlier at the low end of the scale score spectrum.

In applying a test of significance to the 2008 TAKS reading assessment data, a simple or one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) test was applied to the 2008 TAKS reading assessment data from each of the campuses used in the study. The null hypothesis stated there was no difference in the averages of the mean of the 2008 TAKS reading scores. To fail to reject the null hypothesis would mean there was not sufficient evidence to say there was a difference in the mean score. The 2008 TAKS reading scores showed the P-value of 0.585847 was greater than the Alpha value (0.05). Therefore, in viewing Table 27 and Table 28 there was no statistical difference between the mean of the sample 2008

TAKS reading scale scores. In doing so, the data showed that the researcher would fail to reject the null hypothesis, and concluded that there was not a statistical difference between the 2008 TAKS reading scale scores of the three campuses used in the study.

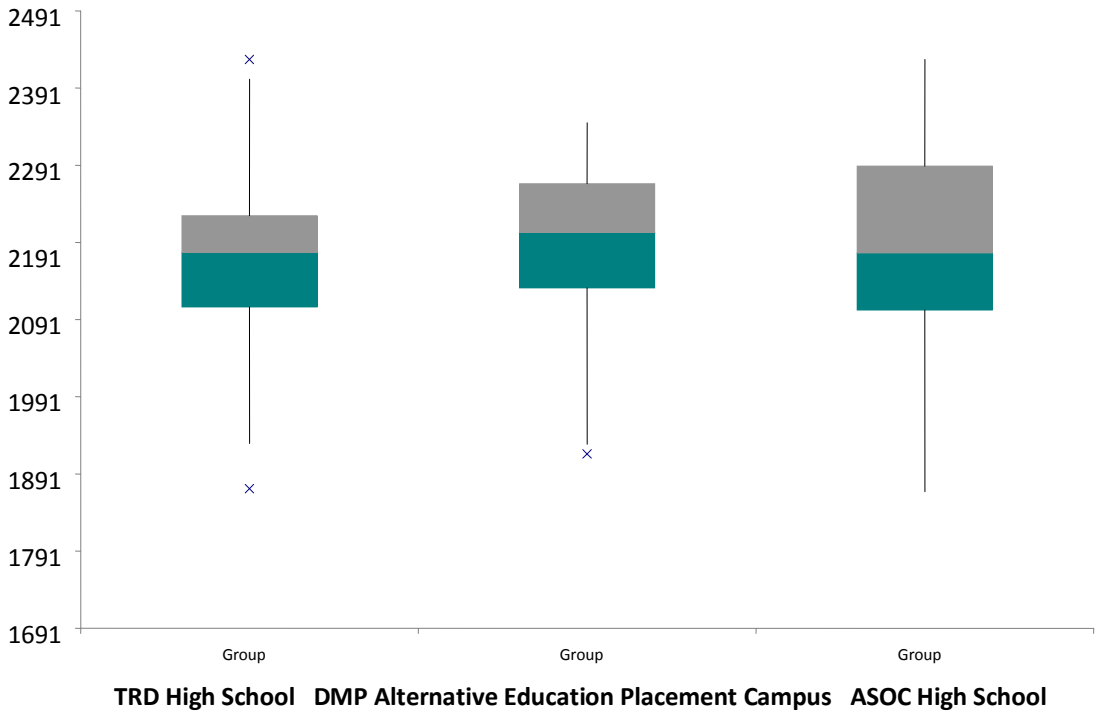

Figure 6. Box and whiskers plot of 2007 – 2008 TAKS reading scale scores

Table 27

Test of Significant Difference for Reading TAKS 2008 – ANOVA-Single Factor

Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance
TRD	48	93308	2169.953	10877.28
DMP	25	54789	2191.56	9814.173
ASOC	24	52713	2196.375	18225.9

Table 28

Test of Significant Difference for Reading TAKS 2008 – ANOVA

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	13436.96	2	6718.48	0.537922	0.585847	3.09887
Within Groups	1111582	89	12489.68			
Total	1125019	91				

Note: Alpha Level .05

In viewing the 2007 TAKS math scale scores, Figure 7 contains a box and whisker plot indicating that the data was symmetrical and allowed the ANOVA test to be applied. One characteristic that should be noted was that the actual scale scores of the 2007 TAKS math scale scores for all of the campuses was below the score of 2100. The scale score of 2100 is the minimum score required to successfully pass the TAKS math test. Therefore, the groups of students from three of the campuses used in the study scored below the passing standard. It was also important to note that each of the campuses used in the study contained statistical outliers. At TRD high school there were two scale scores that fell below the passing standard and at the DMP Alternative Education Placement campus there was one score below the passing standard. On the flip side at ASOC high school there was one statistical outlier well above the passing standard of 2100.

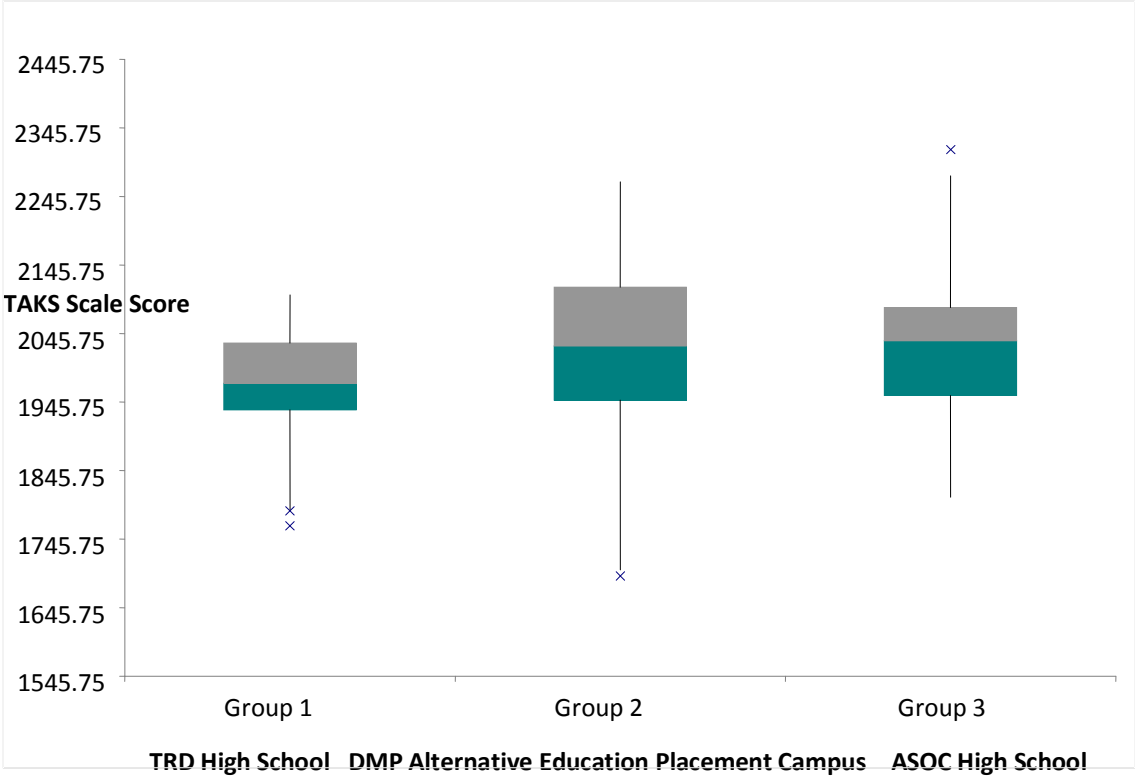

Figure 7. Box and whiskers plot of 2006 – 2007 TAKS math scale scores

In applying a test of significance to the 2007 TAKS math assessment data, a simple or one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) test was applied to the 2007 TAKS math assessment data from each of the campuses used in the study. The null hypothesis stated there was no difference in the averages of the mean of the 2007 TAKS math scores. To fail to reject the null hypothesis would mean there was not sufficient evidence to say there was a difference in the mean score. When comparing the 2007 TAKS math scores, the P-value of 0.003968 was less than the Alpha value (0.05). Therefore, in viewing Table 29 and Table 30 there was a statistical difference between the mean of the sample 2007 TAKS math scale scores. This provided the researcher with sufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there was a statistical difference between the 2007 TAKS math scale scores between the three campuses. In this case, the

2007 TAKS math scale scores at the DMP Alternative Education Placement Campus were greater than the 2007 TAKS math scale scores of TRD High School and ASOC High School. ASOC High School showed a higher average score than the TRD high school campus.

Table 29

Test of Significant Difference for Math TAKS 2007 – ANOVA-Single Factor

Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance
TRD	59	116475	1974.153	6418.476
DMP	42	85586	2037.762	17496.23
ASOC	48	97327	2027.646	10091.64

In viewing the 2008 TAKS math scale scores, Figure 8 contains a box and whisker plot indicating that the data was symmetrical and allowed the ANOVA test to be applied. Mirroring the same characteristics of the 2007 TAKS math scale score data, the 2008 TAKS math scale scores for the three groups of student used in the study fell below the minimum score of 2100 required to successfully pass the TAKS math test.

Therefore, it showed once again that in the area of TAKS math each of the campuses used in the study had an overall score that was below the passing standard. It was important to note that at ASOC High School showed a statistical outlier at each end of the scale score spectrum with one extremely high scale score and one extremely low scale score.

Table 30

Test of Significant Difference for Math TAKS 2007 – ANOVA

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	123063.9	2	61531.97	5.744312	0.003968	3.05805
Within Groups	1563924	146	10711.81			
Total	1686988	148				

Note: Alpha Level .05

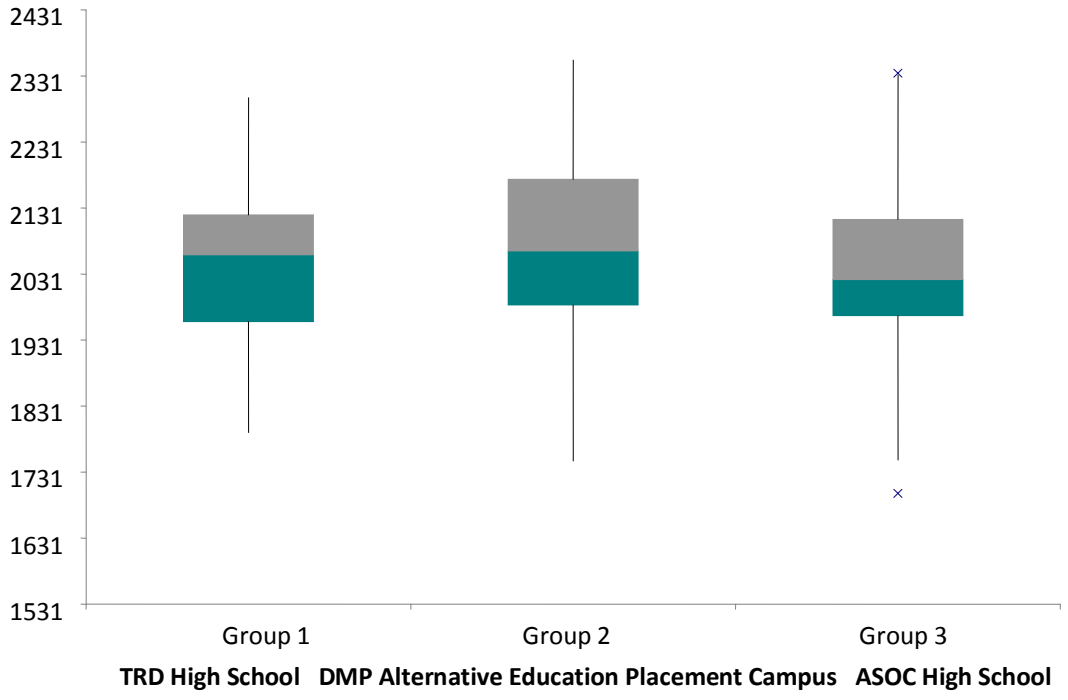

Figure 8. Box and whiskers plot for 2007 – 2008 TAKS math scale scores

In applying a test of significance to the 2008 TAKS math assessment data, a simple or one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) test was applied to the 2008 TAKS math assessment data of the campuses used in the study. The null hypothesis stated there

was no difference in the averages of the mean of the 2008 TAKS math scores. To fail to reject the null hypothesis would mean there was not sufficient evidence to show that there was a difference in the mean score. The 2008 TAKS math scores showed that the P-value of 0.359916 was greater than the Alpha value (0.05). Therefore, in viewing Table 31 and Table 32 there was no statistical difference between the mean of the sample 2008 TAKS math scale scores. Therefore, the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis, and concluded that there was not a statistical difference between the 2008 TAKS math scale scores between the three campuses.

Table 31

Test of Significant Difference for Math TAKS 2008 – ANOVA-Single Factor

Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance
TRD	44	89879	2042.705	14260.63
DMP	27	56062	2076.37	22297.01
ASOC	36	73133	2031.472	13084.77

Table 32

Test of Significant Difference for Math TAKS 2008 – ANOVA

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	32763.65	2	16381.82	1.031991	0.359916	3.083706
Within Groups	1650896	104	15874			
Total	1683660	106				

Note: Alpha Level .05

Research Question 5

How does the GPA of at-risk students enrolled at an alternative campus compare to the GPA of at-risk students at a traditional high school and GPA of at-risk students at a discipline campus?

The final research question in the study compared the grade-point averages of students who attended each of the three campuses. Figure 9 contains a box and whisker plot that indicated that the data was symmetrical and allowed the ANOVA test to be applied. It was important to note that at TRD high school there was one statistical outlier indicating a higher than normal grade-point-average.

In order to answer the question, How does the GPA of at-risk students enrolled at an alternative campus compare to the GPA of at-risk students at a traditional high school and GPA of at-risk students at a discipline campus?, it was necessary to apply a test of significance to the GPA data from each of the campuses used in the study. A simple or one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) test was applied to the GPA data. The null hypothesis stated there was no difference in the averages of the mean of the GPA scores.

To fail to reject the null hypothesis would mean there was not sufficient evidence to say that there was a difference in the mean score. The GPA data showed a P-value of 3.5E-12 indicating that scientific notation was used because the value was very small and was much less than the Alpha value (0.05). Therefore, in viewing Table 33 and Table 34 there was a statistical difference between the mean of the sample GPA's. Thus, there was sufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis, and the researcher concluded that there was a statistical difference between the GPA's of the three campuses. In this case, the GPA scores at ASOC High School were greater that the GPA's of TRD High School and

the DMP Alternative Educational Placement Campus in the XYZ Independent School District.

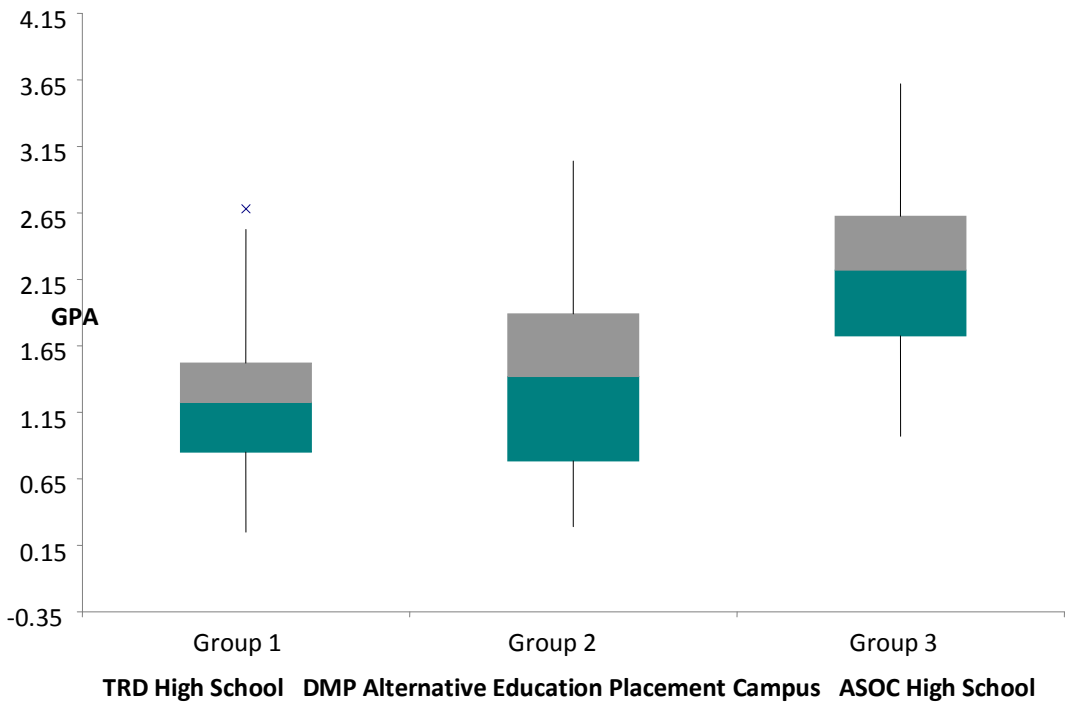

Figure 9. Box and whiskers plot for student grade-point-average

Table 33

Test of Significant Difference for Student GPA – ANOVA-Single Factor

Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance
TRD	60	75.986	1.266433	0.311171
DMP	55	80.42	1.462182	0.555054
ASOC	59	128.0954	2.171108	0.443138

Table 34

Test of Significant Difference for Student GPA – ANOVA

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	26.75044	2	13.37522	30.89338	3.52E-12	3.048833
Within Groups	74.03408	171	0.432948			
Total	100.7845	173				

Note: Alpha Level .05

Summary

In summary, the results of this study indicated there was a significant difference in attendance and grade-point averages for at-risk students with three or more at-risk indicators depending on which campus they attend. In the case of attendance, students who attended ASOC High School or the DMP Alternative Education Placement Campus missed more days than students who attended TRD High School. Missing more days of school can negatively affect the number of credits that a student can earn during the school year. In addressing student grade-point-averages, the ANOVA test showed that students who attended ASOC High School received a higher GPA than students who attended TRD High School or the DMP Alternative Education Placement Campus.

In analyzing the TAKS Pass/Fail raw scores there were mixed results in the 2006-2007 Reading and Math scores where there was a small significant difference when compared to the 2007-2008 Reading and Math scores which showed no significant difference. Overall, in viewing the TAKS Reading and Math scores there was not enough data to make a distinct determination. This mixed-bag scenario also applied to

the 2006-2007 TAKS Reading and Math scale score data where there was a slight significance in the data that led to the rejection of the null hypothesis. Like in the 2008 TAKS Reading and Math raw scores, the 2008 TAKS Reading and Math scale score data showed that there was no significant difference.

Finally, upon review of student credit attainment, the ANOVA test showed that there was not a statistical difference between the campuses. However, TRD High School students did obtain more credits. The increase shown only increased by one credit and was not enough to merit any change of significance.

Conclusions and recommendations for further study were determined and presented in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER FIVE

Summary of Major Conclusions

Research Questions 1-5

The purpose of this study was to compare the TAKS scores, TAKS Scale Scores, attendance rates, grade point average and credit earned by at-risk students attending an alternative high school of choice, at-risk students attending a traditional high school and at-risk students attending a Disciplinary Alternative Education Placement Campus within the same school district. Using archived quantitative data from the 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 school years a comparative analyzes was performed between the campuses to measure the effectiveness of student achievement, attendance and credit accrual between three distinct campuses within the same district. Final conclusions of this study include the following:

1. Student TAKS scores vary from year to year and tended to increase in the second year regardless of the campus students attended.

   Researcher assertion - This tendency was probably because students made a decision to take the test more seriously once they realized that they must pass the TAKS in order to graduate. Another possibility was that students tended to perform better at taking the TAKS tests as they progressed through high school and acquired more knowledge and skills.

2. Students who attended a tradition high school campus had higher attendance rates than students who attended alternative campuses.

Researcher assertion - The lower pattern of attendance displayed by students attending the alternative high school of choice might be due to the flexibility offered to students and the willingness of the campus to work with students on a case-by-case basis. Student may have felt that the flexibility extended to attendance. In the case of students attending the disciplinary alternative education placement campus, this pattern of attendance might be due to a developed pattern of poor choices made by the students. Placement into a disciplinary alternative education campus was the result for students who had a tendency of making poor choices that led to misbehavior.

3. Students who had three or more at-risk indicators as defined by this district accrued credits at a slower rate (four or five per year) and thus are not likely to graduate in four years.

   Researcher assertion - This pattern of credit accrual leads to slower advancement in student grade classification and demonstrated one of the at-risk characteristics.

4. Students with three or more at-risk indicators as defined by this district were successful at passing the TAKS Reading Test.

   Researcher assertion - This may be the result of successful reading interventions and practices used by the district to help students in reading comprehension and understanding.

5. Students with three or more at-risk indicators as defined by this district were unsuccessful in passing the TAKS Mathematics test.

Researcher assertion - These students will require additional interventions in math in order to be successful on the TAKS Mathematics test.

6. Students with three or more at-risk indicators as defined by this district and who attended an alternative high school of choice tended to have a higher GPA when compared to students attending the traditional high school or disciplinary alternative education placement campus.

   Researcher assertion - This result may be connected to the self-paced curriculum and individualized approach used by the alternative high school of choice.

Recommendations for Further Study

Results from the analysis of the data raised further questions which should be studied in order to fully understand the concept of student achievement for at-risk students with three or more at-risk indicators who attend an alternative high school of choice, a traditional campus, or a disciplinary alternative education placement campus. Future studies which should be conducted include the following:

1. A study should be done to determine why a student makes the decision to attend an alternative high school of choice.
2. A longitudinal study should be conducted to examine the attendance rates of at-risk students with three or more at-risk indicators before they reach high school.
3. A longitudinal study should be conducted to examine the TAKS scores of students in grades 3-8 of students with three or more at-risk indicators before they reach high school.

4. A study should be conducted to determine teacher perceptions of at-risk students at each of the three campuses used in this study.
5. In-depth interviews with follow-up questions should be given to students who attend an alternative high school of choice to see if they were pleased in their choice to attend an alternative high school of choice.
6. A longitudinal study of students with three or more at-risk indicators should be conducted after graduation to track their choices after graduation.
7. A similar study should be conducted in other like-districts to determine if the outcomes of this study are similar.
8. A study should be conducted to determine if methods of instruction practiced on each of the three campuses used in this study would have an effect on student achievement.

Implications from the Study

The purpose of this study was to compare the TAKS scores, TAKS Scale Scores, attendance rates, grade point average and credit earned by at-risk students attending an alternative high school of choice, at-risk students attending a traditional high school, and at-risk students attending a Disciplinary Alternative Education Placement Campus within the same school district. As a result, the study will enable the XYZ Independent School District to make future decisions about ASOC High School and its effectiveness in educating students. The study will help district leadership to determine whether to expand the program or to reduce the program. ASOC High School has operated in the XYZ Independent School District for 10 years without any type of evaluation in regards

to its effect on student achievement. This study now provides the district with data that the superintendent has requested.

From past to present, the XYZ Independent School District has searched for various programs that will enable students to stay committed and graduate from high school. Currently, the district has shown to be committed to the mission of ASOC High School and its role in serving at-risk students. The district has benefited from this commitment to ASOC High School because the campus falls under the alternative education accountability rating system and has helped to improve the rating of the district. However, with issues of funding that effect the majority of school districts in the State of Texas, school finances ultimately become the deciding factor when determining what programs will be allowed to stay or are cut. Therefore, it is imperative that ASOC High School shows that it is a program that provides positive results in educating and graduating students in order to stay operational. This study can help that cause by serving as a benchmark evaluation and showing that ASOC High School is not a futile approach. It is the researcher's belief that ASOC High School will continue to operate as long as it continues to meet the needs of the students that it serves and fulfills its mission of graduating at-risk students.

In the United States there continues to be a debate about the power of school choice and its role in making students successful. Parents and students are provided with many choices of how to receive a high school education. Home Schools, Private Schools, Parochial Schools, Schools of Choice, Charter Schools, and Virtual High Schools are all examples that fit under the umbrella of alternative education (Edwards & Wilson, 2001). In evaluating the research, it is apparent educators and politicians will

continue to battle about how best to serve students based on the resources available. As indicated by the research, the debates are nothing new as the types of alternative schools have fluctuated in numbers throughout the history of America. Regardless of these outcomes, alternative schools have continued to grow in number and thrive today. Research, finances and data will continue to direct the types of schools that will operate in the future. Perhaps this study will be a small contribution to future decisions.

Concluding Remarks

Across the United States and in Texas educators are searching for ways to keep students from dropping out of high school. Alternative schools of choice were created as a means to serve students who are at risk of dropping out of the traditional high school setting by providing them with an alternative route in obtaining a high school diploma. Students and parents today have more options available to them than any time in our history as a nation. While the types of alternative education formats and names have changed throughout the history of America, and the number of students attending alternative education programs has fluctuated, the fact is alternative education programs continue to grow in number and thrive. Home Schools, Private Schools, Parochial Schools, Schools of Choice, Charter Schools, and Virtual High Schools are all examples of alternative schools that fit under the umbrella of alternative education (Edwards & Wilson, 2001).

Fortunately for students today, alternative schools have enabled them to address their individual needs and challenges by providing them with a variety of choices in their education. The advent of choice in education allows for students to be given a second chance to successfully complete and obtain their high school diploma. What is more

intriguing for students is that in many cases they can complete their high school diploma on their own terms. The creation of alternative schools has continued to escalate and has created enough of an impact on the dropout rate in American schools to allow alternative schools to become a relevant stakeholder in America's educational system (Watts, 2000).

In analyzing the data in this study it was apparent that further study, analysis, and research is required on at-risk students. As educators, we are all responsible for this undertaking by improving our knowledge of curriculum, instruction, best practices, and learning. To begin, we can start by analyzing the data that is currently available to us and combine this data with current best practices in order to make students successful. In addition to the use of data and best practices, educators must communicate their successes with each other and continue to relentlessly seek researched-based instructional methods that are proven to increase student learning and achievement. It is our responsibility as educators to provide students with the skills they need to be successful in tomorrow's world. With continued research, passion, and resources, the mission of all students' completing high school can be accomplished.

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