Thank you for your request to our REL Reference Desk regarding specific predictors of on-time school completion for students who are assigned to alternative schools compared to their same aged cohorts who remain at regular school sites. Ask A REL is a collaborative reference desk service provided by the ten regional educational laboratories (REL) that, by design, functions much in the same way as a technical reference library. It provides references, referrals, and brief responses in the form of citations on research based education questions.

The information below represents the most rigorous research available. Researchers consider the type of methodology and give priority to research reports that employ well described and thorough methods. The resources were also selected based on the date of the publication with a preference for research from the last ten years. Additional criteria for inclusion include the source and funder of the resource.

**Question:** Are there specific predictors that suggest students who are assigned to alternative schools are less likely to graduate on time, if at all, with same aged cohorts who remain at regular school sites?

**Search Process**

**Key words and search strings used in the search:** graduation rates of students in alternative schools versus mainstream education; variables that predict graduation for alternative school students; predictors of graduation for students in alternative schools; alternative schools AND graduation rates; characteristics of students in alternative schools; alternative education

**Search databases and websites:**
- Google Scholar (http://scholar.google.com)
- ERIC (http://www.eric.ed.gov)
- JSTOR (http://www.jstor.org/action/showAdvancedSearch)
- Institute of Education Sciences (IES) Resources: http://ies.ed.gov

**Sample Citations Retrieved:** (NOTE: Abstracts and executive summaries are copied directly from the reports when possible to ensure accuracy):

Abstract/Summary: The central message of this report is that while some students drop out because of significant academic challenges, most dropouts are students who could have, and believe they could have, succeeded in school. This survey of young people who left high school without graduating suggests that, despite career aspirations that require education beyond high school and a majority having grades of a C or better, circumstances in students’ lives and an inadequate response to those circumstances from the schools led to dropping out. While reasons vary, the general categories remain the same, whether in inner city Los Angeles or suburban Nebraska.


Abstract/Summary: This First Look report presents data from a recent district Fast Response Survey System (FRSS) survey about alternative schools and programs available to students during the 2007-08 school year. Alternative schools and programs are specifically designed to address the educational needs of students at risk of school failure in a setting apart from that of the regular public school. They can be administered by the district or an entity other than the district. The study includes information on the availability and number of alternative schools and programs, the number of students enrolled in alternative schools and program, and district policy on returning students to a regular school.


Abstract/Summary: This guide is intended to be useful to educators in high schools and middle schools, to superintendents and school boards, and to state policymakers in planning and executing dropout prevention strategies. The target audience includes school administrators as well as district-level administrators. This guide seeks to help them develop practice and policy alternatives for implementation. The guide includes specific recommendations and indicates the quality of the evidence that supports these recommendations.

**Abstract/Summary:** Alternative education programs are often viewed as individualized opportunities designed to meet the educational needs for youth identified as at-risk for school failure. Increasingly, these programs have been identified as programs for disruptive youth who have been referred from traditional schools. The purpose of this study was to examine the characteristics of the administrative structures and physical facilities of alternative education programs and to describe the student population and educational services being offered to youth attending such programs. The findings suggest programs appear to be largely site-based programs, often operating in physical facilities with limited access to academic supports. The student population appears to be mostly high school students with a large portion of students identified as disabled. The general education curriculum is reported as a predominant course of study among alternative schools, supplemented with vocational education. Students appear to be provided with a number of school and community support activities. Implications for research and practice are discussed.


**Abstract/Summary:** There is increasing evidence that a mismatch exists between the structure of the schools and the cultural, social, and linguistic background of some segments of the school-aged population. This mismatch is often exemplified in the academic and behavioral expectations and performance of some students. In this article, the authors discuss the reciprocal nature and effect that learning and behavioral problems have on students. Next, the authors highlight selected programs that have impacted the course of intervention programs for children and youth. Characteristics that distinguish current alternative programs for students and variables that appear essential to qualify programming are presented. Last, the authors encourage more communication and interaction between researchers and practitioners concerning critical issues related to alternative schooling.

Abstract/Summary: Purpose– The expansion of alternative education, globally, has coincided with a shift towards greater accountability for ensuring educational access and opportunity, high academic standards and increased graduation rates. While studies suggest the pervasive influence of accountability may be redefining how school leaders provide meaningful learning experiences and facilitating high achievement, little is known about school leaders of alternative schools administering accountability polices. If there are inconsistencies between meaningful learning experiences for at-risk students and performance-based standards outcomes, this may suggest issues around equity and alternative schools that should be evaluated. Using a theoretical frame of policy implementation, specifically the authoritative design of policy and social constructs of compliance, this study aims to examine how alternative school leaders implement accountability policies.
Design/methodology/approach– This cross-case study employs a qualitative thematic strategy of data analysis in conjunction with Fairclough's three-dimensional framework of discourse analysis to examine how seven school leaders at five alternative schools in California and Texas interpret and administer accountability policy.
Findings– The theme of reconciliation: tension between compliance and innovation was revealed from the data. The discourses surrounding the nature of students at risk and policy compliance converged, creating a notion that alternative school leaders were losing their autonomy as knowing what is best for their students amidst increasing accountability standards.
Research limitations/implications – While many of the administrators are positioned by their districts to act as an at-risk student expert when designing or sustaining academic and social programs at their respective alternative schools, they are in the process of losing some of their autonomy because of the pressures derived from accountability standards. However, school leaders continue to take responsive and reflexive actions to create distance between their settings and accountability policy in order to protect their students and schools from external pressures.
Originality/value– The study presents original findings in the area of accountability policy implementation in alternative school settings. This work suggests that the social constructs of compliance and student risk factors converge with the authoritative nature of accountability policy. In turn, tension was created for alternative school leaders as they consider what is best for at-risk students.

Abstract/Summary: The University of Minnesota’s Alternative School Research Project, a directed research study funded by the US. Department of Education’s Office of Special Education Programs, is in the process of conducting research on alternative schools across the country. Special emphasis is given to studying the extent to which and how students with disabilities are being served. Information in this article is a synthesis of data gathered during the 1st year of this study and is drawn from interviews with state directors of special education, material on alternative education compiled from each state, and other relevant research and literature on alternative education. Critical issues and challenges for alternative educators and administrators are identified and discussed. Issues focus on governance and policies guiding the operation of alternative schools, the purpose of alternative schools, student needs and implications for service, staffing and instruction, maintaining high expectations and high standards, and measuring outcomes and effectiveness. The article contains a list of questions that can be used to help educators identify and address key issues in their alternative settings in order to promote successful school experiences for students with and without disabilities.


Abstract/Summary: Districts and states that have begun to get traction in improving their graduation rates are pursuing a reform agenda that includes both the redesign of failing high schools and the development of multiple alternative pathways that help young people get back on track to graduation and to postsecondary education. Unlike traditional alternative education, new back-on-track models assume that challenge, not remediation, will make the most difference, especially for youth who are over age for grade and far behind in accumulating the credits they need. The goal is for students to make up for lost time by accelerating their learning so that they can complete high school and move successfully to postsecondary education and careers. Although these small schools do not in themselves constitute a replacement or transformation strategy for large low-performing high schools, they are a necessary part of a comprehensive approach to turning such schools around. (Contains 17 notes and 2 tables.)

Abstract/Summary: The authors attempted to identify key contributing factors to school dropout among 3 categories of at-risk students: those with low grade point averages, those who had been suspended, and those from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Logistic regression analysis of the data, which were derived from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth–1997 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2002) indicated that student dropout rates were affected differently by students’ membership in the 3 at-risk categories.


Abstract/Summary: The display of antisocial behavior by children and youths in America is recognized as one of the most pressing concerns facing educators today. To meet the educational needs of these students while maintaining safe school environments, school districts across the nation have increasingly looked toward alternative educational programs. Approximately 2%, or roughly 280,000 youths, attend alternative schools in the United States (J. A. Grunbaum et al., 1999). For the most part, these students are at high risk for school failure or display significantly challenging behavior so that school officials have sought to have them educated in classrooms or facilities away from other students. As a result, students with significant behavioral concerns or educational disabilities are clustered together into alternative educational programs. The author explores alternative education programs serving students who display antisocial behavior and discusses research on the impact of alternative school placement on the display of antisocial, violent, and aggressive behavior within these settings. The author also focuses on the social context of the alternative school that might exacerbate the development of antisocial behavior and highlights empirically validated prevention and intervention efforts. (Contains 1 table.)

Referrals:

Organizations:
- National Center on Secondary Education and Transition  http://www.ncset.org/
- National Alternative Education Association  http://the-naea.org/NAEA/
Federally Funded Resources:


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