

ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

Alternative Education Overview: Community Day Schools

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~ Introduction, Session 4~ Handout

Creating Effective Alternatives for Disruptive Students *SOLEIL GREGG*

One in eight students fails to complete high school (McMillen 1997). Minorities, the poor, and the disabled fare even worse. Over 50 percent of students in a quarter of the nation's poor, urban high schools fail to graduate (Braddock and McPartland 1993). Suspension, expulsion, retention, chronic failure, and alienation all contribute to those unacceptable dropout and incompleteness rates. Yet rather than look at how to improve school systems that are failing sizable numbers of students, many states have created alternative schools for "problem" individuals thought to degrade general education quality.

Alternative schools were first created to provide academic options for students not successful in regular education programs (Raywid 1994b, 1994d; Kershaw and Blank 1993). However, zero-tolerance policies, safe-schools legislation, and the commitment to provide orderly learning environments have prompted states and districts to adapt the model for disciplinary purposes. But alternative programs that lack the focus and purpose of the first alternative schools may not duplicate their success at improving student outcomes-either academic or behavioral.

A Focus on Schools versus Individuals

The first alternative schools shaped education to better meet the needs of some students through individualized instruction, personal attention, and a modified or innovative curriculum (Raywid 1994a, 1994b, 1994d; Smith, Gregory and Pugh 1981; Morley 1991; *Report to the Commission* 1990; Gregory and Smith 1981). Many new alternative schools, however, try to shape students to better fit the system. Although both approaches share the ultimate goal of improving student outcomes, a fix-the-student focus raises the following educational, financial, and legal issues that schools should consider when creating alternative programs:

- A focus on fixing "problem" students may obscure or ignore school-based problems. Large classes or schools make it easier for marginal students to fall through the cracks

and for their academic, behavioral, and social needs to be overlooked. Children who repeatedly fail academically and socially are more apt to give up or become alienated and antisocial. When Baltimore's troubled Patterson High School subdivided its student body into five small academies featuring personalization and career-focused curricula, student behavior, attendance, and achievement improved dramatically (McPartland, Jordan, Legters, and Balfanz 1997).

- Teachers may not have received training in behavior management and instructional strategies to help students with different learning needs. As schools move to include students with disabilities in regular education classrooms, they may not be giving adequate attention to teacher preparation. The 1997 Amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) reaffirm the importance of adequate teacher training to meet the learning needs of special education students, even allowing supports that a teacher may need to deliver the curriculum to be included in a child's individualized education plan (IEP) (IDEA at 1412(a)(14)). IDEA also requires that schools conduct functional behavioral analyses and develop proactive behavior interventions for exceptional students whose behavior interferes with learning (IDEA at 1415(k)(1)(B)).
- A school's leadership and organization may not define and support high standards for behavior and achievement. Research shows that improved school organization-management, governance, culture, and climate-can reduce overall student disruption as effectively as individual treatment programs (Gottfredson 1984, 1986). In contrast, a study of New York City's dropout prevention program led researchers to conclude that "programs based on the deficiency model (fix the student) [do] not solve the problems they are trying to correct" (Gerics and Westheimer as cited in Kershaw and Blank 1993). Researchers at Johns Hopkins (McPartland et al. 1997) concede that "some students are so hostile to authority that they need an alternative setting for their education.... [However,] at some point a nonselective school must stop rejecting difficult cases and start finding ways to adapt ... to the diverse needs of its students" (17). Labeling and separating students may further marginalize them and solidify antisocial peer groups, compounding the problems one is trying to "fix."
- Programs that target individuals may divert resources from everyone else. The small teacher-pupil ratios and additional services of alternative schools can cost more per pupil than regular schools but, as Iowa found, may pay off in the long run (Black 1997). Its investment in an alternative education program yielded long-term savings to the state in averted welfare, unemployment, and incarceration expenses (Morley 1991). However, because the numbers and percentages of students at-risk are rising, a systemwide focus could be more cost effective than one that targets individuals. Recent changes in how Title I and special education funds can be spent support schools that wish to take a schoolwide approach (IDEA at 1413(a)(2)(13)).
- A focus on problem students may threaten system equity by segregating poor, disabled, and minority students in alternative programs. Preliminary studies in two states caution that alternative schools may become "dumping grounds" for undesirable or unwanted students (North Carolina Education 1997; Armstrong and Barber n.d.). Minority and special education students are more likely to be suspended and expelled (North Carolina Education 1997; Cooley 1996), so they may be disproportionately placed in alternative schools as well (Report to the Joint 1996).

IDEA requires states to monitor both the percentages of minority students placed in special education programs (IDEA at 1418(c)) and the rates at which special education students are suspended and expelled (IDEA at 1412(a)(22)). IDEA permits schools to place exceptional students in alternative settings as long as they continue to have access to the general curriculum, receive the special education services set forth in their IEPs, and are provided services to address problem behavior (IDEA at 1415(k)(4)(c) and 1415(k)(3)). Alternative programs that lack high academic standards, clear and fairly administered entrance and exit criteria, and the right to due process may violate students' educational and civil rights.

Competing Purposes-To Educate, Discipline, or Health

The first alternative schools aimed to educate, while the purpose of many new alternative settings is correctional whether disciplinary or therapeutic. Raywid's research (1990, 1994a, 1994b) has defined school characteristics associated with these three types of alternative schools:

Type I schools offer full-time, multiyear, education options for students of all kinds, including those needing more individualization, those seeking an innovative or challenging curriculum, or dropouts wishing to earn their diplomas. Type I schools provide a full instructional program so that students can earn the credits they need to graduate, and students choose to attend. Other characteristics include divergence from standard school organization and practices (deregulation, flexibility, autonomy, and teacher and student empowerment); an especially caring, professional staff; small size and small classes; and a personalized, whole-student approach that builds a sense of affiliation and features individual instruction, self-paced work, and career counseling (Raywid 1994c, 1994d; Smith and Pugh 1981; Morley 1991; *Report to the Commission* 1990; Lehman 1994; Gregory n.d.). School s-within-schools, magnet schools, charter schools, experiential schools, careerfocused and job-based schools, dropout recovery programs, after-hours schools, and schools in atypical settings such as shopping malls and museums are examples of Raywid's Type I schools (Raywid 1990, 1994d; *A Report to the Commission* 1990; Lehman 1994; Hill 1996; Miller 1994).

Discipline distinguishes Type 2 programs, which aim to segregate, contain, and reform disruptive students. Students typically do not choose to attend, but are placed in the program for specific time periods. Because placement is shortterm, either the curriculum is limited to a few basic courses, or students work on assignments supplied by their "home" schools. Familiar models include last-chance schools and in-school suspension (Raywid 1990, 1994a, 1994d).

Type 3 programs provide short-term but therapeutic settings for students with social and emotional problems that create academic or behavioral barriers to learning. Type 3 programs typically offer counseling, access to social services, and academic remediation. Although the programs serve targeted populations, students can choose not to participate (Raywid 1990, 1994a, 1994d).

The distinction between the three types is not rigid, and some schools show characteristics of more than one type: for example, Type I and Type 2 schools increasingly offer counseling, a Type 3 characteristic (Raywid 1994d; Gregory 1997). However, the purpose of an alternative school, as defined by law or policy, remains critical to program implementation, evaluation, effectiveness, and even equity (Raywid 1994d; Gregory 1997).

The language used in laws and policies may therefore create the following dilemmas for schools:

- *Mixed signals about purpose may confuse implementation efforts.* Is the alternative program supposed to improve outcomes for students with different education needs or to separate disruptive students from mainstream classrooms? Schools must have a clear understanding of what they're expected to accomplish because organizational and implementation strategies differ widely according to their purposes (Raywid 1994a; Duke 1989). Table I presents such implementation issues in relation to school type or purpose.
- *Mixed signals about purpose may thwart evaluation and accountability efforts.* Does the alternative program do what it's intended to do? Schools must understand the intent or purpose of legislation to measure its effect on outcomes (Raywid 1994a). If the purpose is to serve students whose needs are not met in traditional settings, then schools will want to track and compare data such as gradepoint averages and graduation rates. If the purpose is to improve school discipline, then they will want to track and compare rates of disciplinary referrals, suspensions, and expulsions. A meta-analysis of research on alternative schools found the largest positive effects in schools designed to meet specific student needs (Cox, Davidson, and Bynum 1995). As the director of an alternative school in Rhode Island explains, "If an alternative school is set up to help teen parents get their GED and learn job skills, it isn't likely to work miracles for teens with criminal histories and drug addiction" (Black 1997, 42). Some state laws mix purposes or do not address purpose at all, simply allowing districts to create alternative schools for students who are suspended, expelled, or at-risk of dropping out (Education Commission 1997). Such lack of direction, while maximizing local control, may result in uneven implementation across districts, undermine system equity and quality, and make evaluation, oversight, and regulation difficult (North Carolina Education 1997; Armstrong and Barber n.d.; *Report to the Joint* 1996).
- *A punitive purpose may cause schools to adopt ineffective models for improving learning or behavior* What types of schools work best to improve learning and behavior? Research shows that education-oriented Type I schools and not punishment-have positive effects on both behavior and achievement for students at-risk. Their individualized approach helps students succeed academically; their small size and family atmosphere keep students connected and in school; and their voluntary enrollment policies boost student motivation and goal setting (Kershaw and Blank 1993; Raywid 1990, 1994c, 1994d; Smith, Gregory and Pugh 198 1; Oklahoma Technical n.d.).

Research shows that disciplinary programs reap no positive long-term gains-and may even increase negative outcomes (Raywid 1994a; Cox, Davidson, and Bynum 1995; Oklahoma Technical n.d.; Cummins 1995; Aleem and Moles 1993). Florida's statewide analysis of in-school suspension showed that the practice did not improve student behavior (Raywid 1994a, 1994d). Officials in Oklahoma studied data on the state's alternative students-credits earned, classes failed, grade-point averages, absences, standardized test scores, and disciplinary referrals-and found that "students in alternative education programs improved substantially, while students in disciplinary programs [inschool suspension] declined" (Oklahoma Technical n.d., 1).

Type 3 schools may temporarily improve student behavior and achievement, but results tend to fade when students return to home schools (Raywid 1990, 1994d). Providing follow-up and transition services to students re-entering home schools may enhance long-term outcomes for this type of program (Glass 1994).

III Effects of Punitive Approaches

How do the students and standards of alternative schools compare with those of other schools in the system? Gregory (1997) warns that a punitive purpose may put educators in the awkward-if not unconscionable-position of creating schools undesirable enough to deter bad behavior. Wehlage (1983) notes that he has frequently heard that "special programs for the marginal student should not be 'too good' because these students might get the wrong message ... they must pay for their mistakes and poor attitude toward school" (2 1).

A study of one state's alternative schools found a similar attitude applied to staffing. Many of its districts' alternative programs lacked appropriately certified teachers, and some districts "sentenced" teachers to alternative placements. One superintendent was reported to say, "I'm not going to waste my certified teachers on those kids" (North Carolina Education 1997, 3).

Punitive attitudes carry the risk of creating a two-tiered system of education: good schools and good teachers for good kids, and bad schools and bad teachers for bad kids. Not only does this attitude violate constitutional guarantees of equal protection, it doesn't work. Time and again, experience shows that excellence inspires excellence, as demonstrated by Spanish Harlem's Central Park East Secondary School in New York City (Raywid 1994c), while rejection and punishment further alienate students at-risk-from both school and society (Staff 1997).

A Question of Results: What Works?

Research on secondary schools has identified three dimensions of school climate that contribute to disciplined, productive learning environments: "strong emphasis on the academic mission of the school; firm, fair, and consistently enforced discipline standards; and an ethic of caring that guides staff-student relationships" (Aleem and Moles 1993). This combination transcends individual student differences to produce desired academic and behavioral outcomes. Similarly, Wehlage (1983) and Raywid (1994d) have identified three interrelated factors that distinguish successful alternative schools: (1) *a sense of community*, (2) *engaging instruction*, and (3) *the organizational structure to support them*.

Key criteria for building *a sense of community* is choice (Black 1997; North Carolina Education 1997) and smallness (Morley 1991; Willis 1996). Choice-or voluntary participation-by both students and teachers promotes affiliation, bonding, and membership (Raywid 1994d; Morley 1991). Attendance by choice can have "almost magic" results (Barr cited in Staff 1997). Small size helps schools become caring communities by allowing teachers and students to get to know each other. Like a family, the school community supports the healthy development of the whole child, doing whatever must be done to ensure academic, social, and emotional growth (Morley 1991; Duke 1989).

TABLE 1
Implementation Issues by School Type

Purpose	Type 1 Educational (fix the educational environment)	Type 2 Disciplinary (fix the child)	Type 3 Therapeutic (fix the child)
Organization, administration, and governance	Small student body (< 250) 25:1 student-teacher ratio Deregulation, flexibility Autonomous Teacher/student empowerment Shared decision making Part-time administrator or teacher-director for small school	Small classes for close supervi- sion Separation from host school optional (may be one room in host school) Traditional governance, top- down control	Very small classes for personal attention (4-5, limit of 10-12) Flexibility to meet individual needs Separation from host school optional (may be one room in host school) Collaboration with service providers
Climate	Challenging, caring, nurturing, supportive Collaboration Student-centered Personal relationships, bonding to faculty and students Focus on whole child High expectations for student achievement, behavior Student behavior guided by norms	Controlling Highly structured, regulated Student compliance Student behavior controlled by rules Focus on behavior Punitive	Caring, nurturing, supportive Student behavior mediated by counseling Student-centered, service-ori- ented Personal relationships, bonding important Focus on attitude and behavior
Facilities	Separate facility Alternate time in existing facili- ty (evenings, weekends) Alternative, nontraditional loca- tions (e.g., shopping malls, store fronts, museums)	Separate wing or room in host school Alternate time in existing facili- ty (evenings, weekends)	Room in host school Alternate time in existing facili- ty (evenings, weekends)
Transportation	Need depends on model (e.g., nothing extra needed for school-within-school) Regular bus schedule may be provided to separate facility or after-hours program May be required by IEP for spe- cial education students	Need depends on model (e.g., nothing extra needed for ISS, room in host school) Transportation requirements may be waived in legislation May be required by IEP for special education students Parental responsibility	Need depends on model (e.g., nothing extra needed for room in host school) May be required by IEP for special education students
Staffing	Teacher chooses, not assigned Hiring, seniority waivers may be needed May be contracted on part-time or as-needed basis to meet graduation, IEP requirements Teacher assumes multiple roles (teacher, mentor, counselor) Repertoire of teaching skills, strategies Caring, humane Accountable for student success Collegiality, teamwork Professional community	Teacher choice optional Hiring, seniority practices may be waived Repertoire of teaching skills, strategies to teach multiage, multilevel students	Teacher chooses, not assigned Hiring, seniority waivers required Good relationship, affective skills needed Caring, humane

Table continues

TABLE 1
Continued

Purpose	Type 1 Educational (fix the educational environment)	Type 2 Disciplinary (fix the child)	Type 3 Therapeutic (fix the child)
Curriculum and instruction	<p>Full instructional program</p> <p>Integrated curriculum, interdisciplinary projects</p> <p>Individualized (for learning styles, needs, current achievement levels)</p> <p>Clear program goals</p> <p>Experiential, hands-on learning</p> <p>Vocational, career, community service components</p> <p>Challenging, engaging, relevant</p> <p>Structured or early, frequent success</p> <p>Continuous progress model</p> <p>Student responsibility for learning</p> <p>Multidisciplinary: academic, behavioral, social contexts</p>	<p>Academics not the focus</p> <p>Provides only basics, no electives</p> <p>Skill and drill</p> <p>Lessons may be provided by home school</p> <p>Behavior modification</p> <p>Remediation</p>	<p>Academics not the focus</p> <p>Provides basics</p> <p>Remediation and rehabilitation</p> <p>Lessons may be provided by home school</p> <p>Modified curriculum to meet individual needs</p> <p>Individual approach</p> <p>Counseling</p>
Entrance, exit criteria	<p>Students attend by choice</p> <p>Long-term; students may graduate from program</p>	<p>Student assigned or given limited choice (e.g., alternative school or jail)</p> <p>Short-term (one day, rest of semester, rest of year); student returns to host school when time/behavior requirements are met</p> <p>By contract with parent, child</p> <p>Transition services critical</p> <p>Collaboration with home school, support system for returning students important</p>	<p>Students referred to program, targeted students attend by choice</p> <p>Short-term (determined by student need, program goals)</p> <p>Transition services critical</p> <p>Collaboration with home school, support system for returning students important</p>
Graduation credits	<p>Full curriculum; meets state graduation requirements</p> <p>Waivers may be needed for innovative approaches (e.g., graduation expectation in lieu of Carnegie units)</p>	<p>Graduation through host school</p> <p>Waivers may be needed due to limited curriculum (e.g., graduation expectations in lieu of specific courses and Carnegie units)</p> <p>Alternatives to diploma (e.g., GED)</p>	<p>Graduation through host school</p> <p>Waivers may be needed to meet individual needs (e.g., graduation expectations in lieu of Carnegie units)</p>
Special education	<p>Services must be provided according to IEP</p> <p>Inclusion facilitated by flexible curriculum, individualized instruction</p>	<p>Services must be provided according to IEP</p> <p>Assignment to setting may be contested or prohibited if behavior caused by disability</p> <p>Screening for special education may be indicated</p>	<p>Services must be provided according to IEP</p> <p>Inclusion facilitated by individualized instruction, curriculum</p> <p>Screening for special education may be indicated</p>

Table continues

TABLE 1
Continued

Purpose	Type 1 Educational (fix the educational environment)	Type 2 Disciplinary (fix the child)	Type 3 Therapeutic (fix the child)
Finance, costs	Per-pupil allotments may suffice (especially if lower administrative, facilities costs and normal pupil-teacher ratio) May qualify for magnet or charter school funds or delinquency/dropout prevention funds Extra appropriations from legislature, state, local district Foundation, business support	May be higher due to low pupil-teacher ratio Extra appropriations from legislature, state, local district Support from law enforcement agencies	May be higher due to low pupil-teacher ratio Extra appropriations from legislature, state, local district Support from social service agencies Foundation, agency support for targeted student groups (e.g., dropout prevention)
Program evaluation, effectiveness	Monitor state outcome/performance indicators Type 1 schools associated with positive results (increased course credits, GPA, achievement test scores, attendance, graduation rates; decreased behavior referrals)	Monitor state outcome/performance indicators Type 2 schools associated with negative results (decreased math, reading achievement; increased absence, discipline referrals; no correlation to reduction in suspension, expulsion, dropout rates)	Monitor state outcome/performance indicators Type 3 schools associated with mixed results, positive results fade with return to home school (results may improve with better transition services, more follow-up care)

Source: "Schools for Disruptive Students: A Questionable Alternative?" *Policy Briefs* (1998). Charleston, WV: Appalachia Educational Laboratory.

Engaging instruction is student-centered, interesting, and challenging. It is experiential, noncompetitive, relevant, and individualized, promoting mastery learning, continuous progress, creativity, and success (Kershaw and Blank 1993; Willis 1996). Engaging instruction requires teachers with the depth and breadth of skill and knowledge to meet individual learning needs across grade levels—and the passion to do it.

The *organizational structure* that supports alternative learning communities involves students, educators, and parents working together to make decisions about living and learning at school. It is supported by collaboration among groups, collegiality among staff, a social order based on norms rather than rules, and the flexibility and autonomy to respond to changing and diverse needs.

Summary

Local efforts to design and implement a system of alternative education must be guided by the parameters of each state's law or policy. However, the considerable body of research on alternative schools can help local school policymakers improve the chances that their schools, and their students, will succeed.

A systems focus and educational purpose offer the best hope for reaching education goals for all children—regardless of race, ability, or socioeconomic status. As Aleem and Moles (1993) remind us, "Schools may do more to reduce student violence by creating nurturing environments than by placing primary emphasis on trying to control student behavior" (50). In contrast, deficit models that attempt to "fix the child," scare tactics, authoritarian approaches, and punishment do not produce the outcomes that policymakers, educators, and the public want (Willis 1996). Only time, and a hard look at practices and results, can answer the big questions about the new breed of alternative schools.

In embracing the concept of alternative schools for "problem" students, are we retreating from the promise of equal educational opportunity for all? Rather than finding ways to improve the culture and climate of our regular schools, are we giving up too easily? (North Carolina Education 1997,2

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