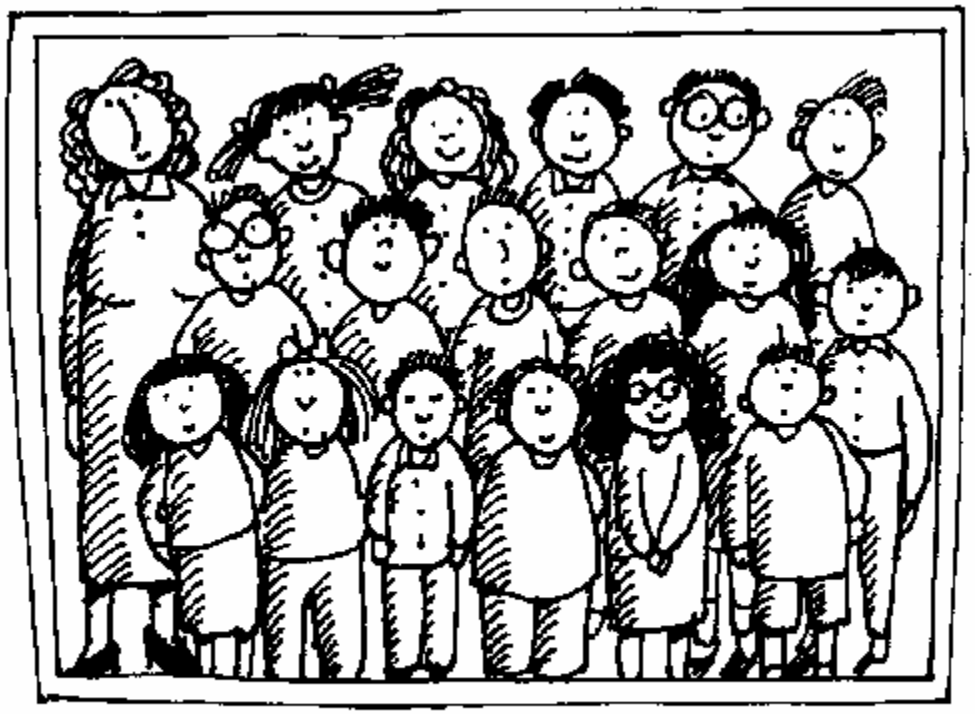
Tennessee's Alternative Schools



John G. Morgan
Comptroller of the Treasury
Office of Education Accountability
April 2005

STATE OF TENNESSEE

John G. Morgan
Comptroller

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April 4, 2005

The Honorable John S. Wilder
Speaker of the Senate
The Honorable Jimmy Naifeh
Speaker of the House of Representatives
Members of the Senate and House Education Committees
and
Members of the Select Oversight Committee on Education
State Capitol
Nashville, Tennessee 37243

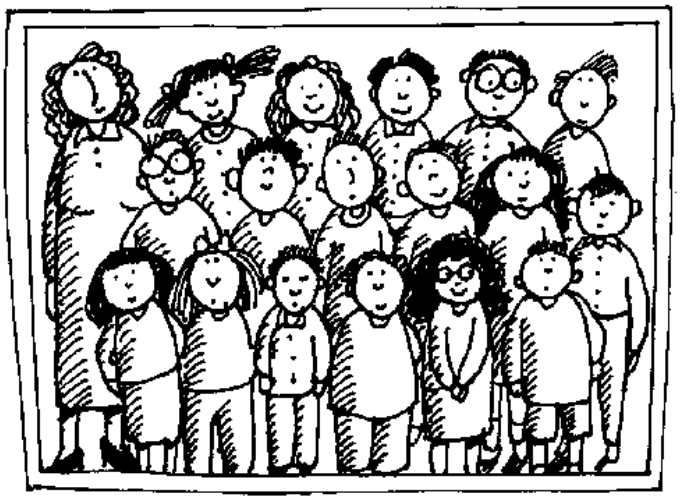
Ladies and Gentlemen:

Transmitted herewith is a study of Tennessee's alternative schools as directed by Senate Joint Resolution 746 of 2004. The report addresses the quality of curriculum in alternative schools, the policies and procedures relative to discipline, and the drop out rate for alternative school students. The report contains findings and recommendations that we hope will prove useful for policy makers in strengthening the state's educational system.

Sincerely,

John G. Morgan
Comptroller of the Treasury

Tennessee's Alternative Schools



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John G. Morgan
Comptroller of the Treasury
Office of Education Accountability

April 2005

The Office of Education Accountability was created in the Office of the Comptroller of the Treasury by *Tennessee Code Annotated* 4-3-308 to monitor the performance of school boards, superintendents, school districts, schools, and school personnel in accordance with the performance standards set out in the Education Improvement Act or by regulations of the State Board of Education. The office is to conduct such studies, analyses, or audits as it may determine necessary to evaluate education performance and progress, or as may be assigned to it by the Governor or General Assembly.

Comptroller of the Treasury, Office of Education Accountability. Authorization Number 307329, 600 copies, April 2005. This public document was promulgated at a cost of $2.15 per copy.

Executive Summary

Alternative schools are often the last chance for the state's neediest students, but many do not provide adequate staffing, curriculum, and support services. Alternative schools generally receive less guidance, are subject to less rigorous oversight, and have access to fewer resources than mainstream school programs. They provide educational opportunities for students suspended or expelled from regular schools, and in some instances for students who request alternative placement. Several recent events involving the state's alternative schools have prompted debate about what constitutes adequate and just services for this student population.

In response the General Assembly passed Senate Joint Resolution No. 746 of 2004 directing the Office of Education Accountability (OEA) to study

- the quality of curriculum used by alternative schools,
- the policies and procedures relative to discipline and punishment, and
- the dropout rate for alternative school students.

A review of the state's alternative school programs highlights the characteristics of the alternative school student population, instructional and disciplinary approaches, as well as governance structures. (See "A Snapshot of Tennessee's Alternative Schools," pages 12-21.)

The report concludes:

The quality of alternative school programs varies significantly across the state. Disparities are evident in funding, staff, curriculum, and support services. Several factors create significant variation.

- State mandates provide little enforceable guidance for quality program components;
- Local education agencies determine the resource allocation and priority of the alternative program within the school system;
- Alternative schools lack systems of accountability to ensure program quality;
- Half of alternative school directors identified inadequate funding as a concern; and
- Many alternative school programs lack needed counseling, psychological, and support services. (See pages 21-25.)

Many alternative school programs do not thoroughly assess the academic needs of incoming students. In fact, less than 50 percent of alternative school directors indicated that academic skills are "always" assessed upon entry to the program. More often, they rely on accessible records from the regular school, such as grades or grade level. (See page 25.)

Although the student-teacher ratio in the majority of alternative school programs meets state standards, not all alternative school teachers are certified for their responsibilities in the alternative school program. Over 75 percent of alternative schools have enough teachers to meet the 12-to-1 student-teacher ratio standards set by

the State Board of Education. It should be noted, however, that the high mobility of students in and out of alternative school programs could affect student-teacher ratios significantly. Individual teachers are frequently responsible for the instruction of multiple grade levels and many subjects. Many are not qualified to teach all the children and all the subjects assigned to them. In addition, alternative school teachers need better training on how to work with at-risk students. (See pages 25-26.)

Although most alternative school programs attempt to model the core curriculum of the regular school system, limitations exist. The inability to provide comparable instruction for more advanced coursework, such as honors and advanced placement, is apparent. The provision of courses other than core subject instruction is also challenging for alternative schools. Most problematic is the provision of science labs, foreign language, vocational and elective course work. These limitations stem mostly from shortages of teachers, space, money, and technology. (See page 26.)

The criteria used for remanding students to alternative schools are broad and vary by school system. The mandate to serve suspended and expelled students is a minimum – systems can send students to alternative school for reasons other than suspension and expulsion. Although policies and procedures to maintain due process rights are well-articulated prior to students' remand to alternative school programs, complaint processes or grievance procedures for students within the state's alternative schools are less clear. (See pages 26-29).

Behavior management standards are not uniformly followed statewide. Although some alternative school directors identified clear expectations, daily discussion between staff and students, and communication with parents as factors aiding behavior management, these practices are not uniformly followed. The lack of clear expectations and open communication among staff, students, and parents hinders the quality of behavior management in many programs. The relative isolation of alternative school programs makes this a significant issue. (See pages 29-30.)

The transition process for students leaving alternative school is underdeveloped or is not followed in most programs, and does not include long-term follow-up. Many alternative schools directors indicated the need to aid students' transition and follow-up, including:

- A transition staff coordinator
- Better data collection of student outcomes
- On-going communication with regular schools, and
- Partnerships/collaboration with more community agencies. (See page 30.)

Neither the department nor school systems systematically measure performance outcomes – dropout, graduation, attendance – of alternative school students. Although reduction of poor educational outcomes is a frequently cited goal, methods to systematically measure performance outcomes are not common. Without these, accountability for performance relies heavily upon inconsistent, anecdotal evidence.

Consequently, predictions of students' performance are mixed and the effectiveness of alternative school programs is unclear. (See pages 31-32.)

Legislative recommendations (See pages 32-33.)

The Education Oversight Committee or the Senate and House Education Committees may wish to hear presentations from alternative school representatives and encourage legislators to make on-site visits to alternative school programs.

The General Assembly may wish to revise *Tennessee Code Annotated 49-1-520, Tennessee model dropout prevention program*, to address more explicitly the dropout tendencies of the alternative school student population.

The General Assembly may wish to require school systems to track the operation and performance of their alternative school programs.

The General Assembly should consider appropriating funds again for alternative school pilot programs.

Administrative recommendations (See pages 33-36.)

The State Department of Education should pursue further collaboration with alternative school programs. Several strategies should address the need for (1) accessible information regarding the scope of alternative schools and (2) research-based and innovative practices for alternative school improvements.

The State Department of Education should review the quality of curriculum used in all alternative school programs. Both the content and the rigor of curriculum should be adequate to permit students to keep pace with their peers. Remediation should be widely available.

The State Department of Education should develop appropriate guidelines for discipline and behavior modification strategies used in alternative schools. The department should require local education agencies to set standards for disciplinary practices in alternative school programs and report that information back to the department.

The State Department of Education should target alternative school staff for professional development regarding the needs of at-risk students. The department could develop professional training programs for alternative school staff, perhaps in coordination with the regular schools. Shared training promotes well-aligned, professional efforts for instructing at-risk students.

The State Board of Education should revise administrative rules and regulations to require greater systems of accountability for student outcomes in alternative school programs. Alternative school programs should be required to submit comprehensive "End-of-year Progress Reports" to the department of education and local education agencies.

The State Board of Education should convene a task force to address specific issues in alternative school programs. A task force could examine issues identified by OEA that warrant further consideration and analysis, yet were beyond the scope of this report.

The State Board of Education should consider revising its administrative rules and regulations regarding complaint processes for alternative schools. A complaint process or grievance procedure for alternative schools seems particularly important considering the number of alternative school remands, the scope of remand criteria, the at-risk nature of the student population, the proportion of special education students, and the relative isolation of some alternative school programs.

The BEP Review Committee should analyze the alternative schools component, and may wish to recommend adjustments to the ratio to increase funding for the state's alternative schools.

See pages 52-53 for responses from the State Board of Education and the State Department of Education.

Local education agency recommendations (See pages 36-37.)

Local education agencies should improve integration between regular schools and alternative schools. Methods might include school board representation for alternative schools, advisory councils, as well as shared professional development and in-service days for regular school and alternative school teachers.

Local education agencies should improve transition and long-term services for alternative school students returning to the regular school setting.

Local education agencies should consider alternative administrative options to provide alternative school education. School systems might consider the benefits of partnering with other systems or independent providers in order to pool resources and provide more efficient programs.

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List of Exhibits

Introduction

Alternative schools are often the last chance for the state's neediest students, but many do not provide adequate staffing, curriculum, and support services. Alternative schools generally receive less guidance, are subject to less rigorous oversight, and have access to fewer resources than mainstream school programs. They provide educational opportunities for students suspended or expelled from regular schools, and in some instances for students who request alternative placement.

Recently, a school principal acknowledged the urgency of effectively dealing with students prone to disciplinary problems. In a 2004 *Tennessean* article, this school leader emphasized that "removing bad apples, quite often, is not going to change the problem. At some point, you have to say, 'we're going to change behavior'…and it's not about putting kids out."[1] Alternative schools were not conceived merely as holding stations for students removed from the regular system but as programs to effectively remediate students for return to the regular school program.

In a recent incident in middle Tennessee a parent questioned the psychological and physical methods of behavior management in an alternative school program. A lawsuit in Knox County has questioned that school system's ability to provide an adequate education for alternative school students. These events have prompted debate about what constitutes adequate and just services for this student population. In response the General Assembly passed Senate Joint Resolution No. 746 of 2004[2] directing the Office of Education Accountability (OEA) to study

- the quality of curriculum used by alternative schools,
- the policies and procedures relative to discipline and punishment, and
- the dropout rate for alternative school students.

This report provides an overview of Tennessee's alternative school programs and highlights well-grounded practices. The Office of Education Accountability identified 144 alternative school programs throughout the state.[3]

Methodology

Information, conclusions, and recommendations in the report are based on:

- a 2004 survey of Tennessee school superintendents and alternative school directors;[4]
- a review of state law and Tennessee State Attorney General opinions pertaining to alternative schools;
- a review of Tennessee State Board of Education rules, regulations, and standards for alternative schools;
- information from and interviews with appropriate stakeholders,[5] including:
    - Department of Education
    - State Board of Education

[1] Diane Long, "New Principal Wins over Worried, Angry Parents," *The Tennessean*, Oct. 15, 2004.
[2] See Appendix A – Senate Joint Resolution No. 746 of 2004.
[3] See Appendix B – List of OEA identified alternative school programs.
[4] See Appendix C – Survey respondents.
[5] See Appendix D – List of interviewees.

    - Department of Children's Services
    - Members of the General Assembly
    - School superintendents and district staff
    - Alternative school directors and staff
    - Legal counsel for plaintiffs in Knox County alternative school case
    - Legal counsel for local school boards
- a review of academic literature and research reports on alternative schools and other relevant issues, including at-risk youth and discipline policies;
- site visits to a sample of alternative schools in 16 school systems across the state;[6]
- a review of related reports published by the Office of Education Accountability;
- a review of other states' alternative school programs; and
- an interview with Jefferson County Public Schools staff in Louisville, Kentucky.

Previous Reports

OEA has analyzed alternative schools in past reports, originally studying the topic in a 1995 report - *Tennessee's Alternative Schools: Serving Disruptive Students*. The following OEA reports also provide additional information on alternative schools. All reports are available online at http://comptroller.state.tn.us/orea/reports/index.htm.

- *The Education Improvement Act: a progress report* - April 2004
- *Teaching to Empty Desks: The Effects of Truancy in Tennessee Schools* - January 2004
- *Zero Tolerance in Tennessee Schools: an update* - August 2003
- *Funding Public Schools: Is the BEP Adequate?* - July 2003
- *A Look at Tennessee's Family Resource Centers* - April 2002
- *Getting Tough on Kids: A Look at Zero Tolerance* - February 1998
- *Tennessee's Alternative Schools: Serving Disruptive Students* - September 1995

Background

The alternative school movement began in the 1960s as an attempt to provide alienated and disengaged students with more individual instruction. One of the prototypes for Tennessee's alternative schools originated in Dickson County in the late 1970s. With the cooperation of other judges and local and state educators, former Juvenile Judge William D. Field, Sr. identified the need for an alternative means of education and discipline for disruptive students who had been expelled or suspended.[7]

On the state level, concerns in the early 1980s about disruptive behavior, at-risk students, and the dropout rate led legislators, educators, and community leaders to consider the need for alternative learning environments.[8] In 1984, the General Assembly passed legislation authorizing, but not requiring, the establishment of alternative schools for

[6] See Appendix E – List of site visits.
[7] Interview with Wayne Sanders, Director of Juvenile Court Services, Dickson County, November 4, 2004; Rick Hollis, "Field Strived to put Dickson County First," *The Dickson Herald,* October 21, 2003; Confirmed by Joel Walton, Consultant, Department of Education, March 14, 2005.
[8] *Tennessee's Alternative Schools: Serving Disruptive Students,* Office of Education Accountability, September 1995.

students who were disciplinary problems.[9] Approximately 50 alternative schools were established the next year. Although the ideological purpose of alternative schools was not exclusively disciplinary, the Tennessee General Assembly authorized the creation of alternative schools for the placement of students suspended or expelled from regular schools. In 1986, the General Assembly amended the original statute to require local education agencies to make alternative schools available.[10]

The Education Improvement Act (EIA) of 1992 established the minimum number of alternative schools for 7th-12th graders at one per LEA. In language similar to the 1984 law, the EIA authorized, but did not require, the establishment of alternative schools for grades 1-6. The EIA also prohibited high school students from graduating based solely on attendance in alternative schools.[11]

Statutes, Rules, & Standards

The purpose for alternative schools is addressed in

- *Tennessee Code Annotated* 49-6-3402,
- the administrative rules and regulations[12] of the State Board of Education, and
- the *Alternative School Program Standards*[13] of the State Board of Education.

According to these documents, Tennessee's alternative schools are to focus on removing disruptive students from regular schools for remediation and eventual return to the regular school. (See Exhibit 1 – Timeline of state-level alternative school policies, 1984-2004.)

T.C.A. 49-6-3402: Alternative schools for suspended or expelled students

The intent of this statute is to provide students remanded to alternative schools with a chance to continue academic progress and to prepare to return to and succeed in a regular school environment. The statute outlines the types of students to be served, the curriculum, and the discipline procedures to be followed in alternative schools. Reiterated throughout the statute is the goal of returning students to the regular school program: students are not to "graduate based solely on attendance in alternative schools," and the curricular focus is to remediate students to return and stay in the regular school system.

The statute requires the state board of education to: "provide a curriculum for alternative schools to ensure students receive specialized attention needed to effectively reform students to prevent them from being repeat offenders." Additionally, instruction "shall proceed as nearly as practicable in accordance with the instructional programs at the student's home school." Any course work completed or credits earned by students while in the alternative program should be awarded as credit by the regular school. The intent

[9] Public Acts, 1984, Chapter No. 5.
[10] Public Acts, 1986, Chapter No. 939 (subject to appropriation).
[11] Public Acts, 1992, Chapter No. 535.
[12] State Board of Education, Administrative Rules and Regulations, 0520-1-2-.09 Alternative Schools, 2000.
[13] State Board of Education, *Alternative School Program Standards*, 2000.

of the alternative curriculum is twofold: to continue the educational experience of the regular school program and to remediate the student.

State law permits significant local discretion regarding the discipline policy of alternative schools. Students in alternative programs are subject to the same discipline policy endorsed by local school boards in the regular schools. However, the law sets two qualifications on the operation of the discipline policy:

- First, the state does not recommend that a student's separation from the regular school program be of significant duration.
- Second, schools must document the reasons for students' remands to alternative school.

This is of particular importance to the disciplinary management of special education students, since all laws relating to the treatment of special education students apply in alternative schools. In addition to the Individual Education Plans for these students, alternative schools should "provide safeguards to assure that no child with disabilities … is arbitrarily placed in such a school." This qualification aligns with the federal requirement of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) that schools determine whether behavior is a manifestation of a child's disability.

State Board of Education Rules & Regulations: 0520-1-2-.09

The State Board of Education outlines administrative criteria for the operation of alternative schools in its rules and regulations. These rules and regulations complement state law and provide detail regarding the purpose, curriculum, and discipline policy of alternative schools in the state.

The board defines an alternative school as "a short term intervention program designed to develop academic and behavioral skills for students who have been suspended or expelled from the regular school program." This definition emphasizes the inclusion of both academic and behavioral components as a temporary intervention to prepare students for return to the regular school.

Alternative school teachers are subject to the same teacher licensure requirements as those in regular schools. The rules also call for the availability and accessibility of support services, such as counselors or psychological services, as needed by the students.

The board adheres to the discipline policy outlined by state legislation. Statute directs the board to "require documentation of the reasons for a student attending such school."[14] Accordingly, state board rules require that alternative schools must provide end of year reports on each student to the regular school. Additionally, the rules and regulations require that the State Department of Education establish procedures to report reasons for students' remands to alternative schools.

Alternative School Program Standards

In 2000, the State Board of Education created a task force to develop the *Alternative School Program Standards* in response to state law calling for the creation of a

[14] *T.C.A. 49-6-3402(f)(1).*

curriculum framework for alternative school programs. [15] As with other state law and rules, these standards clarify the purpose, students to be served, curriculum, and discipline policy for the operation of alternative schools. Unlike the general statute and the administrative rules of the state board, however, these standards proffer a comprehensive description of the remedial intent of alternative schools.

The task force recommended nine standards to guide the operation of quality alternative schools:

- Establish collaborative partnerships;
- Integrate life skills development;
- Set up an effective system of positive student management;
- Utilize innovative teaching strategies;
- Develop a curriculum responsive to the needs of the student population;
- Provide appropriate assessment and support services;
- Provide for an environment that is conducive to learning;
- Ensure effective, qualified staff; and
- Establish an effective transition process for students entering and exiting the program.

The board's standards acknowledge the special needs related to the alternative school student population.

> The student who is in need of an alternative school environment will be provided with curricula, counseling, and resources to enable the student to master life skills that are critical to social, emotional, and academic growth and success.[16]

The board standards create an expectation that alternative schools will balance the curriculum of regular schools with a student-centered responsiveness to the needs of the alternative school population. Beyond core subjects, the curriculum should incorporate social skills, GED + 2 courses as needed, and career awareness. The *Alternative School Program Standards* recognize that successful implementation of this curriculum requires a well-trained, motivated staff, who are qualified to conduct on-going assessments to gauge the academic and behavioral needs of the students.

The standards for alternative schools approach discipline more from a remedial perspective than from a punitive one. Student management should focus upon positive reinforcement aided by behavioral treatment, counseling, and character education. Good behavioral management should have explicit, well-defined expectations as well as consistency and fairness of discipline. The standards recognize alternative schools as one critical element in a systemic response to student behavior: "alternative education must be one component of a comprehensive discipline policy and procedures action plan."

[15] Public Acts, 1998, Chapter No. 871.
[16] State Board of Education, *Alternative School Program Standards*, 2000.

"Risk to Resiliency: A Model for Alternative Schools"

In 1996, the General Assembly passed legislation requiring the Department of Education to establish pilot alternative school programs for K-12 school students in three Tennessee school systems for a period of three years.[17] The department based the grant program on four premises: 1) improved classroom management skills for dealing with misbehaving students; 2) incorporation of technology; 3) conflict resolution and management for students; and 4) engagement of families and the community at large. The department intended the pilot sites to serve as examples for other school systems, envisioning the program as "a launch pad for systemic change."[18]

The model, *Risk to Resiliency: A Model for Alternative Schools*, required each pilot program to include the following:

- **Accelerated Learning Center** – combines computer technology with school and classroom management philosophies, intended to assist at-risk students academically before they experience serious discipline problems.
- **Alternative Classroom** – an alternative learning environment on the site of the regular school for secondary students with moderate discipline problems.
- **Alternative School** – an off-site school for students with serious discipline problems.
- **Judges school** – developed cooperatively by the school system and the juvenile court, a last chance approach for student behavioral remediation following serious discipline problems. This component was optional, contingent upon available funds and community needs.

These components illustrate the program's emphasis on providing multiple learning environments for students with behavioral problems. Rather than a "one-size-fits-all" approach regardless of degree and kind of behavioral disruption, the grant model encompassed a variety of approaches from preventive (Accelerated Learning Center) to a final opportunity for remediation (Judges school).

The department required recipients to implement a variety of strategies to meet at-risk students' needs, including counseling, school and system-wide management strategies (i.e., peer mediation and/or conflict resolution), classroom management, community engagement, cooperative learning, staff development and technical assistance in dealing with at-risk students and students exhibiting disruptive behavior, and family involvement.

In February 1997, the department awarded the grants to Lenoir City, Decatur County, and Franklin County Schools. The department operated a strategic planning and technical assistance committee to provide recipients with training in classroom management and other techniques. To evaluate the success of the programs, the department required

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[17] *T.C.A.* 49-6-3403 (a) (1). Note: The 1996 legislation limited the pilot alternative programs to one in each grand division of the state and only in school systems of less than 7,000 students. The state allocated $25,000 to each of the three programs, with an additional $75,000 from the State Department of Education's Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Program. The department awarded the grants through a competitive process.

[18] Tennessee Department of Education, "Risk to Resiliency: A Model for Alternative Schools." PowerPoint slides, no date.

grantees to provide information on the number of students served, students returned to the regular school program, attendance and dropout rate figures, and comments on the total experience of the program.

In 1999, recipients filed their final reports on the use of the grant funds in their district.

- Decatur County Schools reported an increase in grades for students placed in the Accelerated Learning Center, although the overwhelming majority of those students' grades returned to their original level after exiting the program.
- Franklin County Schools documented through pre- and post-assessment surveys an improvement in self-esteem, non-rebelliousness and social attitude for students at the junior high level, while only self-esteem and school attitude demonstrated improvement at the elementary level.
- Franklin County Schools also noted that at-risk students require continued focus on changes in the classroom: "The 'problem' students have learning styles, emotional and social needs, which are not met in the regular classroom. Even though these needs can be met in an Alternative setting, when the child returns to the setting where he has had many years of failure, he reverts back to the old patterns of coping. The concept that we can 'fix' the child in a few weeks and return him (to) the typical classroom needs to be eliminated."
- Lenoir City Schools reported teachers' attitudes toward students were more positive and respectful, a decrease in the dropout rate, and an increase in the attendance rate for 7-12th graders, while the rate for K-6 held relatively constant.[19]

In reviewing recipients' final reports, the department found that:

- Required time for suspension caused fewer referrals;
- Increased access to technology increased responsibility for learning among at-risk students; and
- At-risk students were able to participate in cooperative and service learning projects.[20]

The department also concluded in the final report that the minimum mandatory time required of alternative school placements promoted a commitment by teachers and administrators to deal with students in the regular classroom before making alternative placement referrals.[21] In the transmittal letter accompanying the final report to the General Assembly, the department noted that, "we consider the Risk to Resiliency Project to have been generally successful. Implementation of all the requirements and desired

[19] Letter to Andy Womack, Chairman, Senate Education Committee, from Vernon Coffey, Commissioner of Education, February 2, 2000.
[20] Tennessee Department of Education, "Risk to Resiliency: A Model for Alternative Schools." PowerPoint slides, no date.
[21] Note: The program required a minimum period of attendance for students referred to either the Alternative Classroom (minimum of three weeks) or School (minimum of 12 weeks).

elements, especially the 'accelerated learning center' was difficult, given the factors described in the individual project reports."[22]

Exhibit 1 – Timeline of state-level alternative school policies, 1984-2004

1984	**GENERAL ASSEMBLY**	Legislation passes authorizing establishment of alternative schools for students who are disciplinary problems
1986	**GENERAL ASSEMBLY**	Statute amended to require alternative schools for students in grades 7-12
1992	**GENERAL ASSEMBLY**	Statute amended to require at least one alternative school per LEA for grades 7-12 Authorization given for the creation of alternative schools for grades 1-6 High school students prohibited from graduating based solely on alternative school attendance
1996	**GENERAL ASSEMBLY**	Legislation passed requiring Department of Education to establish pilot alternative school programs – one in each grand division
1997	**STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**	Responding to 1996 legislation, Department awards grants to three school systems for alternative school pilot programs
1998	**GENERAL ASSEMBLY**	Legislation passed requiring State Board of Education to provide a curriculum for alternative schools focused on reforming students and preventing repeat offenses

[22] Letter to Andy Womack, Chairman, Senate Education Committee, from Vernon Coffey, Commissioner of Education, February 2, 2000.

2000	**STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION**	Responding to 1998 legislation, Board releases *Alternative School Program Standards*
2004	**GENERAL ASSEMBLY**	Senate Joint Resolution 746 passed requiring Office of Education Accountability of the Comptroller's Office to conduct study of alternative schools across the state

Purpose of Alternative Schools

The purpose of alternative schools is framed by the debate over school discipline policy in general, which places two philosophies at odds: "get tough" versus "student support." "Get tough" proponents advocate the removal of disruptive students from the school environment, while "student support" proponents call for a more remedial response. Both, however, share the intention to improve the learning environment in schools. One side believes that the removal of disruptive students is not only optimal, but necessary, to maintain the quality of the learning environment. Eliminating problematic students removes distraction and deters further misbehavior. Student support proponents cite educational research against the efficacy of outright exclusion: "since longstanding evidence [exists] that the strongest predictor of academic achievement is opportunity to learn, it should also come as no surprise that removing a child for disciplinary reasons in no way improves school achievement."[23]

Alternative school programs intend to bridge the conflict between the "get tough" and "student support" philosophies. In general, alternative school programs serve students not optimally served by traditional schools and they deviate from regular school organization, programming, and culture. Three basic types of alternative schools exist:

- Type I: Institutions of choice that any student may attend until high school graduation. These schools are innovative and have both non-traditional organizational and administrative structures.
- Type II: Placement institutions enrolling disruptive students for a temporary period. These schools provide an alternative to expulsion and focus on behavior modification to reduce or eliminate problems that caused discipline concerns in traditional schools. (This report's scope is limited to Type II alternative schools.)
- Type III: Referral institutions enrolling students with academic, social, or emotional difficulties. These schools focus on rehabilitating students so that they can succeed in traditional school.[24]

[23] R. Skiba, A. Simmons, L. Staudinger, M. Rausch, G. Dow, & R. Feggins, "Consistent Removal: Contributions of School Discipline to the School-to-Prison Pipeline," School-to-Prison Pipeline Research Conference, The Civil Rights Project, Harvard University, 2003, p. 28, accessed Oct. 15, 2004.
[24] Mary Ann Raywid, "Alternative Schools: the State of the Art," *Educational Leadership*, Vol. 52. Iss. 1, pp. 26-31.

Implementation of these models, however, is complex. Research suggests that implementation often suffers from a lack of oversight and accountability.

Effects of Exclusion

By providing suspended and expelled students with continued education outside of the regular school program, alternative schools could negate the consequences of completely removing students from a learning environment. Research on suspension and expulsion reveals evidence that removal policies without alternative education options may serve to reinforce poor behavior. A 2000 report by R. Skiba, a professor of education psychology at the Indiana Education Policy Center, stated that "for at-risk students, the most consistently documented outcome of suspension and expulsion appears to be further suspension and expulsion, and perhaps school dropout."[25] The individual and societal costs associated with high dropout rates can be significant. High school dropouts contribute less to economic productivity. They earn substantially less then their high school graduate counterparts, and are more likely to be dependent upon government assistance and welfare programs. A 2004 Statistical Analysis Report by the National Center for Education Statistics concurs that dropouts are more likely to be unemployed, to participate in criminal activity, and to be dependent upon government assistance.[26]

In 2003, the Civil Rights Project of Harvard University sponsored a conference to discuss issues surrounding disciplinary removal policies. The conference, entitled *The School-to-Prison Pipeline,* heard presentations of the results of several studies involving out-of-school suspension (OSS). The studies revealed:

- Out-of-school suspension correlates with further disciplinary problems.
- Higher rates of OSS correlate with lower rates of achievement in reading, writing, and math.
- Higher rates of OSS correlate with high school dropout rates.
- States with higher rates of OSS also have higher overall rates of juvenile incarceration.
- Racial disparity is observable in both school discipline and in the subsequent negative experiences correlated with it.[27]

One of the conference studies, *Consistent Removal,*[28] uses national data from the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights and the U.S. Department of Justice. The study found that states' rates of suspension correlate with academic under-

[25] R. Skiba, "Zero Tolerance, Zero Evidence: an Analysis of School Disciplinary Practice," Indiana University, Indiana Education Policy Center, 2000, p. 15, accessed Oct. 20, 2004.
[26] Phillip Kaufman, Martha Naomi Alt, & Christopher D. Chapman, "Dropout Rates in the United States: 2001," National Center for Education Statistics, Statistical Analysis Report, November 2004, p. 1, accessed Oct. 26, 2004.
[27] The Advancement Project and the Civil Rights Project, "Opportunities Suspended: the Devastating Consequences of Zero Tolerance and School Discipline," School-to-Prison Pipeline Research Conference, The Civil Rights Project, Harvard University, 2003, accessed Oct. 15, 2004.
[28] R. Skiba, A. Simmons, L. Staudinger, M. Rausch, G. Dow, & R. Feggins, "Consistent Removal: Contributions of School Discipline to the School-to-Prison Pipeline," School-to-Prison Pipeline Research Conference, The Civil Rights Project, Harvard University, 2003, p. 28, accessed Oct. 15, 2004.

achievement and incarceration rates of youth. For reading, writing, and math, higher rates of suspension significantly correspond with lower scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress. Higher rates of suspension also correlate with higher rates of juvenile incarceration.

Another report, *Defining and Redirecting a School-to-Prison Pipeline,* reveals a correspondence between rates of racial disparity in suspension and juvenile incarceration. States in which African-Americans are at significantly greater risk than whites for suspension are also more likely to have similar disparity in juvenile incarceration rates. The report also highlights how minorities are disproportionately represented among those most severely sanctioned in schools:

> As the number of overall suspensions has increased over time, so have the racial disparities. Between 1972 and 2000, the percentage of white students suspended annually for more than one day rose from 3.1% to 6.1%. During the same period, the percentage for black students has risen from 6.0% to 13.2%.[29]

This disparity is similarly evident among the special education population, in which suspension affects blacks at a rate three times that of whites.

Responding to these findings, a report presented to the Civil Rights Project in 2003 indicates the urgency for further study of the role of alternative schools in the education of these needy students:

> Alternative schools clearly have a role to play in ensuring that these students are not deprived of educational opportunities. To date, little research has been conducted regarding alternative school programs. More information is needed to more accurately assess the quality of education being provided to students in these schools.[30]

In Tennessee, students removed from the regular school environment need access to continued educational opportunities. Unfortunately, not all of these students receive such services. According to the State Department of Education, not all students expelled for zero-tolerance violations continued receiving educational services during the 2003-04 school year. In fact, nine percent were expelled without placement, one percent dropped out, while the disposition was unknown for three percent of violators.[31]

Considering the great, and often unmet needs of this student population, alternative schools have a critical role to play in this state. Little is currently known about the scope and quality of Tennessee's alternative school programs. Some programs work, some do

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[29] J. Wald and D. Losen, "Defining and Redirecting a School-to-Prison Pipeline," School-to-Prison Pipeline Research Conference, The Civil Rights Project, Harvard University, 2003, pp. 2-3, accessed Oct. 15, 2004.
[30] The Advancement Project and the Civil Rights Project, "Opportunities Suspended: the Devastating Consequences of Zero Tolerance and School Discipline," School-to-Prison Pipeline Research Conference, The Civil Rights Project, Harvard University, 2003, accessed Oct. 15, 2004.
[31] Tennessee Department of Education, 2003-04, Zero tolerance data.

not. The one common denominator they share, however, is a responsibility to "effectively reform students to prevent them from being repeat offenders" (*T.C.A.* 49-6-3402(f-2)).

A Snapshot of Alternative Schools in Tennessee

Students

In Tennessee, the number of discipline referrals is high compared to other states and disproportionately involves certain subgroups of students. The 2003 *Zero Tolerance* report by the Office of Education Accountability notes that zero-tolerance offenses increased at a faster rate than student enrollment from school years 1999-2000 to 2001-02. This report also shows an overrepresentation of zero-tolerance offenders for the following subgroups: African-American students, special education students, and males.[32] A 2003 report from the Civil Rights Project supplements these concerns; it found Tennessee to have the sixth highest suspension rate in the nation, 9.1 percent. Additionally, the state is ranked eighth for the greatest racial disparity in suspension rates – black students are 3.3 times as likely as whites to be suspended out of school.[33]

A report by the State Department of Education on discipline referral rates confirms these findings. The discipline rates of black and male students exceeded the overall rates of students statewide during the 2002-03 and the 2003-04 school years. For example, in 2002-03 the statewide rate of suspension incidents was 8.7 percent, 19 percent for blacks and 11.4 percent for males. In 2003-04, the statewide rate for incidents of suspension was 9.2 percent; however, the rate for blacks and males was 20.5 percent and 11.9 percent, respectively.

Exhibit 2 – Discipline Referral Rates, Statewide

	2002-03			2003-04		
	Overall	Blacks	Males	Overall	Blacks	Males
Remand	1.70%	1.70%	2.50%	1.10%	1.40%	1.50%
Suspension	8.70%	19.0%	11.40%	9.20%	20.50%	11.90%
Expulsion	0.20%	0.40%	0.30%	0.20%	0.40%	0.30%

Source: Tennessee Department of Education, 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 Discipline Referral Rates

Based on a random sample of OEA survey respondents certain student subgroups disproportionately populate alternative school programs. OEA surveys asked superintendents to report on the percentage of their systems' alternative school populations represented by certain student subgroups for the 2003-04 school year. African-American, economically disadvantaged, and special education students comprise a higher percentage of the alternative school population than they comprise in the school system as a whole based on sampled survey responses. In addition, most sampled LEAs reported either few or no Hispanic students in their alternative school programs.

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[32] Comptroller of the Treasury, Office of Education Accountability, *Zero Tolerance in Tennessee: an Update*, August 2003.

[33] R. Skiba, A. Simmons, L. Staudinger, M. Rausch, G. Dow, & R. Feggins, "Consistent Removal: Contributions of School Discipline to the School-to-Prison Pipeline," School-to-Prison Pipeline Research Conference, The Civil Rights Project, Harvard University, 2003, pp. 42-43, accessed Oct. 15, 2004.

(Note: OEA has identified disproportionality in the expulsions of African-American and special education students in two previous reports on zero tolerance. Thus, the demographic disproportionality apparent in alternative school programs in part reflects the disciplinary policies of the local education agency and the disciplinary practices and interventions of the regular school.)[34]

Exhibit 3 – Comparison of System and Alternative School Program (ASP) Demographics

LEA	Race						Low Socioeconomic Status (SES)		Special Education	
	White		*Black*		*Hispanic*					
	System %	ASP %	System %	ASP %	System %	ASP %	System %	ASP %	System %	ASP %
Bledsoe Co.	96.3	95	1	5	2.3	0	68	70	29.4	35
Blount Co.	96.4	97	1.6	3	1.2	0	40.2	57	16.1	32
Carter Co.	98.3	92	.5	7	1	1	69.5	90	17	31
Chester Co.	82	64	15.5	36	2	0	45.6	74	9.6	9
Claiborne Co.	98.5	96	.7	2	.5	2	73.4	95	18.2	60
Dickson Co.	91.2	85	6.4	13	1.7	0	41.6	60	18.4	40
Franklin Co.	90.4	50	6.6	30	2.4	10	41.4	95	18	40
Giles Co.	83	80	15.6	18	.7	1	47.4	-	14.6	10
Hancock Co.	99.5	100	.3	0	0	0	83.2	80	19.8	60
Houston Co.	94.2	77	3.6	23	1.4	0	47.6	73	15.2	18
Humphreys Co.	95.4	99	3.7	.05	.6	.05	47.3	90	17.2	75
Lewis Co.	94.9	93	2.3	7	2.2	0	55.7	90	15.9	80
Maury Co.	75.1	53	20.1	47	4.2	2	45.3	55	17.5	29
Monroe Co.	95.3	98	1.8	0	2.1	2	58.9	65	15.9	20
Morgan Co.	99.3	100	.1	0	.4	0	58.8	90	17.7	15
Polk Co.	99.1	100	.3	0	.6	0	63.8	50	12	25
Sumner Co.	87.1	40	9.3	59	2.3	1	28	50	17	20
Union Co.	99.3	100	.1	0	.3	0	64.4	68	19.9	44
Weakley Co.	88.6	91	9.3	8	1.3	0	45.9	42	15.5	23
White Co.	96.3	95	2.5	5	0.8	0	53.1	90	16.9	30
Athens City	76.6	67	15.9	33	4.6	0	51.4	89	17.8	33
Elizabethton City	93.9	63	3.9	31	.9	0	42.7	6	15	50
Johnson City	83.4	72	11.4	24	3.2	2	41.7	53	18.1	20

[34] See Office of Education Accountability, *Zero Tolerance in Tennessee Schools: an update,* Comptroller of the Treasury, August 2003, and *Getting Tough on Kids: A Look at Zero Tolerance*, Comptroller of the Treasury, February 1998.

Maryville City	91.9	70	3.3	30	1.7	0	23.1	80	13.7	80
Tullahoma City	88.2	81	8.5	19	1.7	0	35.9	69	19.6	87

Source: OEA survey data, Tennessee Department of Education, Report Card 2004, http://www.k-12.state.tn.us/rptcrd04/.

Tennessee's alternative school programs serve a broad range of grade levels. Tennessee law requires school systems to establish alternative schools for students in grades 7 through 12, and allows them to serve grades 1 through 6.[35] Exhibit 4a shows that slightly over one-quarter of schools, 29 percent, serve students exclusively in the 7th through 12th grades. However, nearly 60 percent of alternative schools report the inclusion of students in grades 6th grade or below. Of these schools, 44 percent actually serve students in the 5th grade or below. (See Exhibit 4b.) Less than 10 percent of alternative schools serve students exclusively in grades 9 through 12.

Exhibit 4a – Grades Served in Alternative Schools

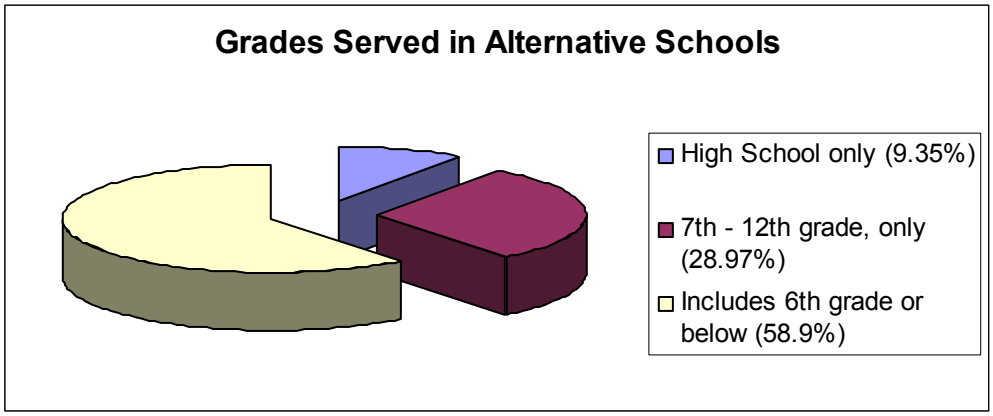
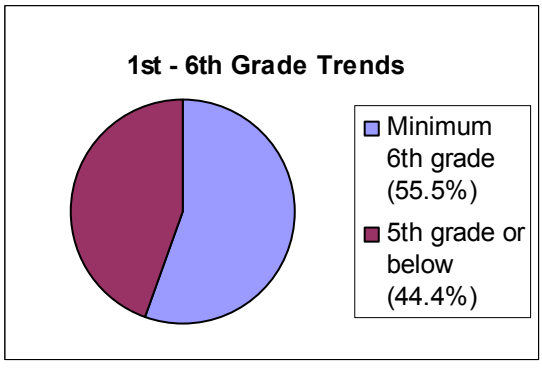


Exhibit 4b – 6th Grade and Below Only, Students Served



[35] *T.C.A.* 49-6-3402(a).

These state findings are comparable to the national scope of alternative schools. A 2002 National Center for Education Statistics report found that although nearly all alternative schools include grades 9 through 12, a significant number – over two-thirds – also serve students in grades 6 through 8. Approximately one-fifth include students in the elementary grades. Like Tennessee, the national data reveals a noticeable difference between the few programs serving 5th-graders or below and the many serving 6th-graders or above.[36]

Most alternative school students are in grades 7 through 12; 9th graders represent the greatest percentage of alternative school remands. Education experts identify the 9th grade as a melting pot of disciplinary concerns, including truancy, social disengagement, misbehavior, suspension and expulsion. These disciplinary problems often precipitate further misbehavior, poor attendance, and school dropout.[37] Eighty-seven percent of alternative school remand incidents came from grades 7 through 12 during the 2003-04 school year. Almost one-third of those remands were 9th-graders.

Exhibit 5
Grades 7th-12th: Alternative School Remands by Grade (2003-2004)

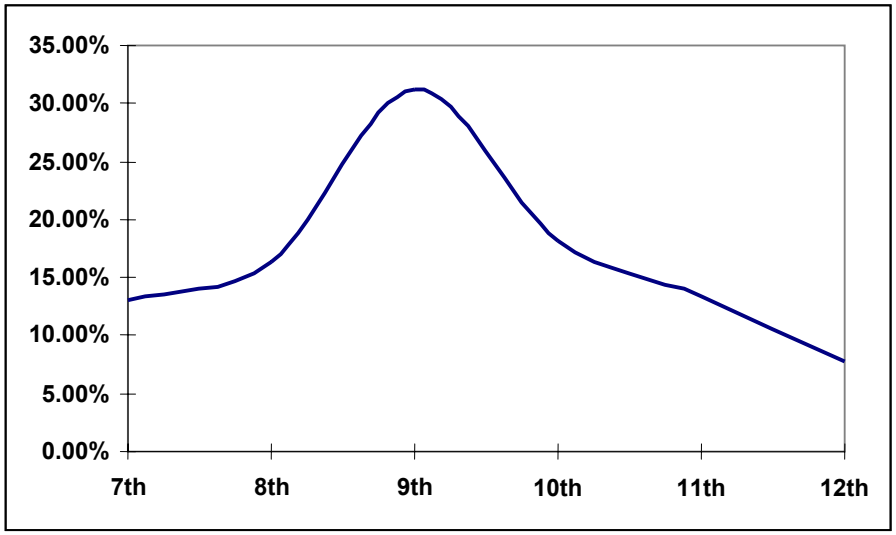
	7th	8th	9th	10th	11th	12th	7-12th
% of all K-12 remands	11.46%	14.26%	27.34%	15.95%	11.67%	6.76%	87.44%
% of 7-12 remands	13.1%	16.31%	31.27%	18.24%	13.34%	7.73%	100%
# of remands	1579	1966	3769	2199	1608	932	12053
						TOTAL	**13784**

Note: Remand rates calculated using data from the Tennessee Department of Education, Remands by Grade, 2003-04 school year.[38]

[36] B. Kleiner, R. Porch, E. Farris, & B. Greene, "Public Alternative Schools and Programs for Students at Risk of Education Failure: 2000-01," National Center for Education Statistics, Statistical Analysis Report, 2002.
[37] N. Letgers and K. Kerr, "Easing the Transition to High School: An Investigation of Reform Practices to Promote Ninth Grade Success," Dropouts in America Conference, The Civil Rights Project, Harvard University, January 2001.
[38] Remand rates calculated using statewide remand totals of each grade provided by Tennessee State Department of Education. Grade totals divided by the overall total to compute each rate.

For grades 7 through 12, the remand rate increases from the 7th to the 9th grade, then decreases during the latter high school grades.

Exhibit 6 – Remand Rates for Grades 7-12 (2003-04)



Note: Remand rates calculated using data from the Tennessee Department of Education, Remands by Grade, 2003-04 school year.

The 2003 *Zero Tolerance* report by the Office of Education Accountability, as well as the 2004 zero-tolerance data of Tennessee's Department of Education, found that 9th-graders are disproportionately represented among students violating zero-tolerance policies. During the 2003-04 school year, 9th-graders accounted for 27 percent of zero tolerance violations.

The duration of alternative school placement varies significantly. State mandates and standards recommend vague parameters for lengths of stay, allowing for local discretion. The rules and regulations define alternative school as a "short term intervention program." The *Alternative School Program Standards* indicate that programs should serve students suspended for more than 10 school days, as well as those in violation of zero-tolerance policy, which can result in a calendar year expulsion.

On average, remanded students serve 64 school days in alternative school. Nearly one-quarter of alternative school directors indicate that students could serve fewer than 10 school days in the program. Additionally, roughly six percent of respondents indicate that students could serve more than one school year (180 days).

Instructional Approach

Several structural features in some alternative schools promote student-centered instruction – including low student-teacher ratios and the use of computer software for self-paced student learning.

- Three-quarters of alternative school programs meet the state recommended student-teacher ratio of 12-to-1. The average student-teacher ratio in Tennessee's alternative school programs is 9.7 students for every one instructor. (See page 25.) It should be noted, however, that the high mobility of students in and out of alternative school programs could affect student-teacher ratios significantly. More long-term data would be needed for an accurate analysis of this statistic.
- Some alternative school programs utilize computer software, such as *Plato* or *A+*, for self-paced learning. These programs allow students to work one-on-one with a computer on individualized assignments. The extent to which these programs supplant teacher instruction in some of the alternative schools, however, is problematic.

When devising students' instructional plans, alternative schools gather both academic and behavioral information. Over 80 percent of alternative school directors indicate that they "always" receive adequate information regarding the reasons for students' referral. When asked to identify what kinds of referral information regular schools provide, alternative school directors responded as follows:

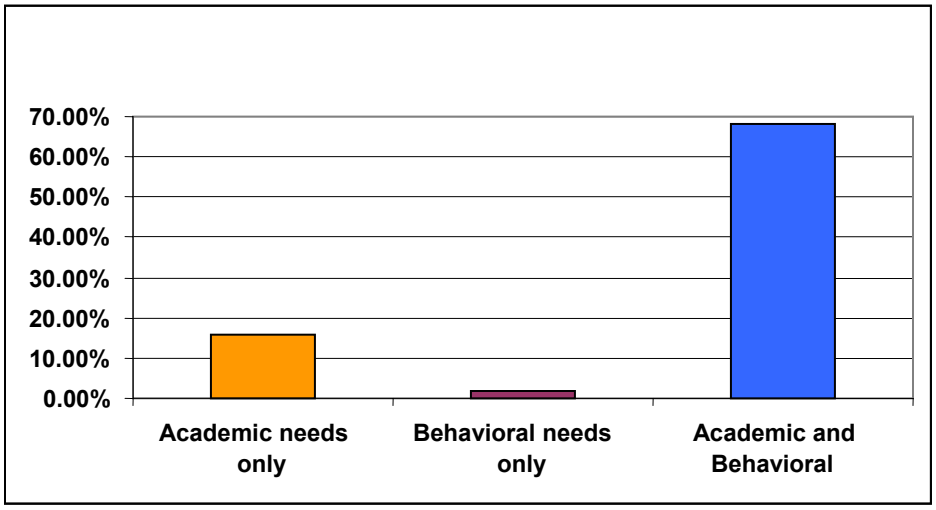
Exhibit 7 – Referral Information Received by Alternative Schools

No information	Referral reason	Academic information	Behavioral information	Both academic and behavioral
0.93%	89.72%	87.85%	91.59%	84.11%

Sixty-eight percent of alternative school directors say that they review both behavioral records *and* at least one proxy for academic performance history – such as grades or grade level of incoming students – when devising students' instructional plans. Although alternative school programs receive academic information from the regular school, many do not thoroughly assess the individual academic needs of incoming students. (See page 25.) A smaller percentage of programs *exclusively* use indicators of either academic or behavioral information to develop students' course of instruction.

Alternative school directors note that Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) provide the curriculum framework for special education students. IEPs also guide the development of academic and behavioral assessments for the population of special education students. Curriculum and grading policy reveal sensitivity to these students and uphold the requirements of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Honoring the IDEA policy is of particular importance considering the substantial percentage of special education students in alternative school programs.

Exhibit 8 – Information used to Devise Instructional Plans



Disciplinary Approach

The management of student behavior by alternative school programs varies from "get tough" to "student support." The *Alternative School Program Standards* emphasize that positive student management systems for the effective remediation of students should include clear, explicit, consistent rules as well as positive reinforcement. State mandates, however, do not require remedial approaches.

The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) considers alternative setting programs that are primarily punitive, non-rehabilitative, or authoritarian as program models that are largely ineffective in preventing future behavioral problems. The NASP instead cites programs and strategies that "include cooperative learning, social decision-making, peer modeling, close relations with at least one member of the school staff and the practice of positive social skills among peers" as approaches with proven effectiveness.[39] Two OEA survey respondents indicated they are seeking to make their alternative school programs less punitive, although they did not elaborate on the specific reasons behind this ideological shift.

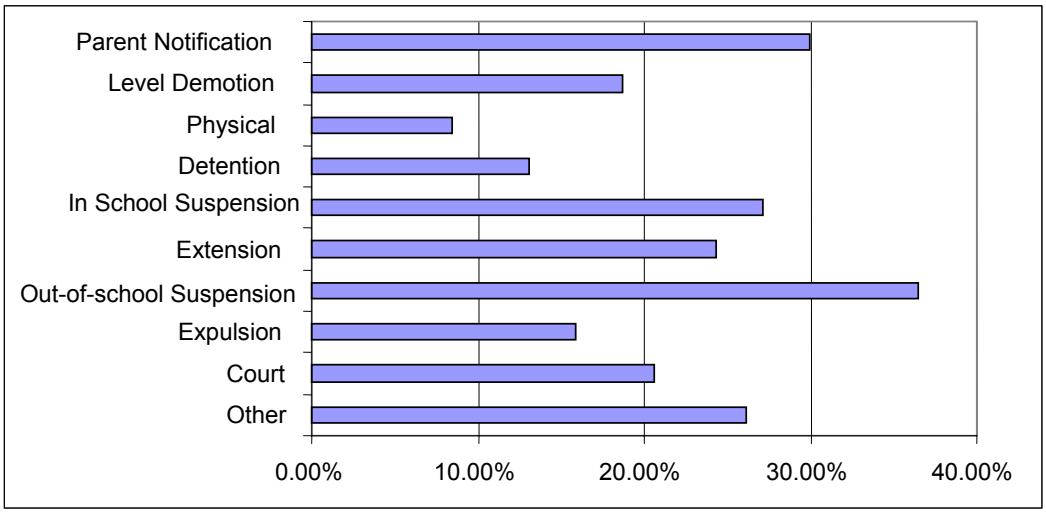
Alternative school directors repeatedly highlighted the importance of clear, consistent expectations for the management of students' behavior. Alternative school directors and superintendents highlighted the well-defined, reliable rules as not only factors aiding student management, but also as some of the primary strengths of the program.

[39] G. Bear, M. Magee Quinn, and S. Burkholder, "Interim Alternative Educational Settings: Balancing Zero Tolerance with the Right to an Appropriate Education," National Association of School Psychologists, December 2001.

The use of material incentives – mentioned by over half of alternative school directors – is the most popular strategy for rewarding positive behavior. Both level promotion[40] and early leave – each mentioned by approximately one-quarter of alternative school directors – are the other two most frequently implemented strategies for positive reinforcement. In addition, encouraging relationships between students, alternative school staff, and parents is critical for a positive system of behavior management.

Other alternative schools use sanctions that reflect practices of the regular school system. When asked to describe the sanctions used to manage student behavior, alternative school directors responded with methods shown in Exhibit 9. Percentages indicate the proportion of alternative school directors who reported using a specific disciplinary action. For example, approximately 30 percent report using parental notification as a disciplinary action.

Exhibit 9
Directors' Estimate of Disciplinary Actions Used



Source: Survey of Alternative School Directors, August – October, 2004.

- The use of physical sanctions is the least mentioned strategy; only 8.4 percent of alternative school directors mentioned using it as a disciplinary option for disruptive students. These sanctions most often involve corporal punishment (paddling), but also include measures such as running, pushups, and other physically demanding activities.
- The most frequently mentioned strategy is out-of-school suspension, at a rate of 36.5 percent.
- Almost one-fifth of alternative school directors mentioned the use of level demotion to manage student behavior. This strategy is the punitive component of the level system practiced in many alternative school programs.

[40] The 'level system' is a common mechanism used in alternative schools to manage student behavior. Dependent upon a student's compliance with program expectations, students advance or regress along the level hierarchy - higher levels provide for greater privileges.

- Some programs use strategies to transfer the disciplinary decision-making power to an authority outside the alternative school. Over 20 percent of respondents mentioned the referral of students to the court system. Additionally, of the 26 percent of respondents mentioning the use of "other" sanctions, the majority describe the referral of students to the disciplinary hearing authority of the school system.

Funding

The BEP currently funds alternative schools at $2.85 per system ADM for grades K-12 plus $23.97 per system ADM for grades 7-12. For the 2004-05 school year, the BEP generated $11,873,983 for alternative school programs. The state share of this amount was $8,905,487; the local share was $2,968,496. Funds generated through the "alternative schools" section of the BEP's classroom component reflect funds for classroom materials and equipment. Salaries for personnel at the alternative school are still generated through the instructional component of the BEP.

Senate Joint Resolution No. 685 of the103rd General Assembly urged the BEP review committee to make a thorough review and assessment of the alternative schools component of the BEP funding formula, acknowledging the importance of alternative schools for the success of Tennessee's children, economy, and welfare.

Governance

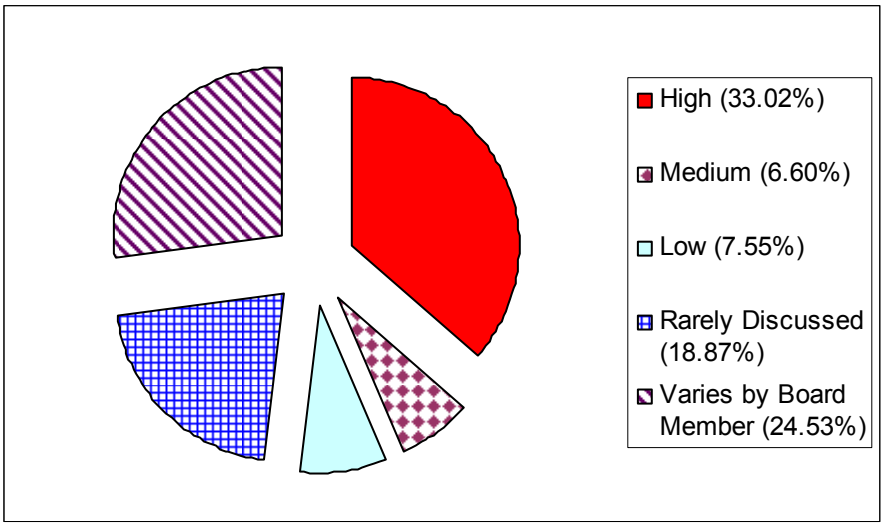
Most alternative school programs operate under the governance of their own local board of education. Alternative school programs most commonly are located within free-standing facilities or within a regular school. About 60 percent operate within their own, free-standing facilities, while about 25 percent operate as a school-within-school. Often single classrooms are set aside within school facilities to serve as alternative schools. The remaining programs are adjacent to a juvenile court, or located within the school system's central office.

State law and administrative rules allow school systems to operate alternative schools under several administrative options: alone, in partnership with other local boards of education, or through contracts with independent providers. Survey results identified the following trends in alternative school governance structures:

- Of all respondents, over three-quarters, approximately 76 percent, of alternative school programs operate under the administration of their local board.
- A much smaller percentage exist as partnerships – only 13 percent of alternative school programs are partnerships between two or more local education agencies; approximately eight percent contract with independent providers such as the Department of Children Services, juvenile courts and nonprofit organizations.

The attention local school boards give to alternative school programs varies significantly across the state. Exhibit 10 indicates the responses of school superintendents when asked to describe the importance of the alternative school program on the school board's agenda.

Exhibit 10 – Importance of Alternative School on Local Board's Agenda



Source: Survey of School Superintendents, August – October, 2004.

Over 40 percent of superintendents identified alternative school programs as either "rarely discussed" by the local board or as an issue lacking agreement among board members. Roughly one-third of superintendents classified the importance of alternative school programs as "high" on the board's agenda.

Related, several directors viewed their programs as well-integrated into the regular system – alternative schoolteachers attended professional development workshops with regular school teachers, principals of the alternative and regular schools shared professional relationships.

Analysis and Conclusions

Barriers to Quality

The quality of alternative school programs varies significantly across the state. Researchers noted disparities in funding, staff adequacy, curriculum, and support services. Several factors create significant variation:

- State mandates provide little enforceable guidance for quality program components.
- Local education agencies determine the resource allocation and priority of the alternative program within the school system.
- Alternative schools lack systems of accountability to ensure program quality.

Alternative schools serve a critical student population at risk of giving up on school; yet, oversight of practices is scarce in Tennessee. It is not clear that the set of criteria for successful alternative schools established by the National Center for Education Statistics are being met uniformly in Tennessee. These criteria, iterated in board standards, include well-trained and dedicated staff, effective curriculum, and collaborative support services

that are beneficial for at-risk students in these schools.[41] Exhibit 11 demonstrates the variability of alternative school programs. The two programs are located less than 50 miles from each other.

Exhibit 11 - A Tale of Two Alternatives

Purpose	
Hold remanded students in alternative classroom until the completion of the sentence to be served.	Remediate students, through academic and behavioral interventions, and prepare them for success in the regular school program.
Facility	
Locker room in high school's football field facility – one room with desk chairs.	Renovated building including multiple classrooms, administrative offices, eating facility, activities space, and counseling room.
Staff	
One lead teacher/administrator, one assistant, and one part-time teacher certified in special education.	Principal, vice principal, teachers, part-time teachers, teachers assistants, crisis intervention team, full-time counselor.
Curriculum	
Class work transferred to alternative classroom from regular school teachers. GED option available.	Core courses taught in alternative school, GED, vocational courses, and extensive service learning component.
Behavior Management/Discipline Policy	
Discipline violations handled by the juvenile court system.	Students' behavior is monitored through a level system of 'carrots and sticks.' Counselors and a crisis intervention team enhance the behavioral component.
Support Services	
No counseling or psychological services provided by the alternative classroom. No in-take process with parents.	Full-time counselor and crisis intervention team. Teachers make home visits with parents of incoming students.
Predicted Student Outcomes	
"Students are not likely to graduate." - Alternative program staff member	Students complete a meaningful high school experience and graduate.

[41] B. Kleiner, R. Porch, E. Farris, & B. Greene, "Public Alternative Schools and Programs for Students at Risk of Education Failure: 2000-01," National Center for Education Statistics, Statistical Analysis Report, 2002.

The state document providing the most comprehensive framework for successful alternative school programs – the State Board of Education's *Alternative School Program Standards* – is not enforceable. The *Alternative School Standards* proffer an extensive description of the comprehensive, remedial nature that should define an alternative school. This state document, however, sets forth recommendations, not requirements.

The standards aim to provide a continuance of the regular school program while responding to the specific needs of the individual students. Beyond core courses, they state that the curriculum should incorporate social skills, GED +2 courses as needed, and career awareness. The standards recognize that successful implementation of this curriculum requires a well-trained, motivated, qualified staff as well as ongoing assessments to gauge the academic and behavioral needs of the students.

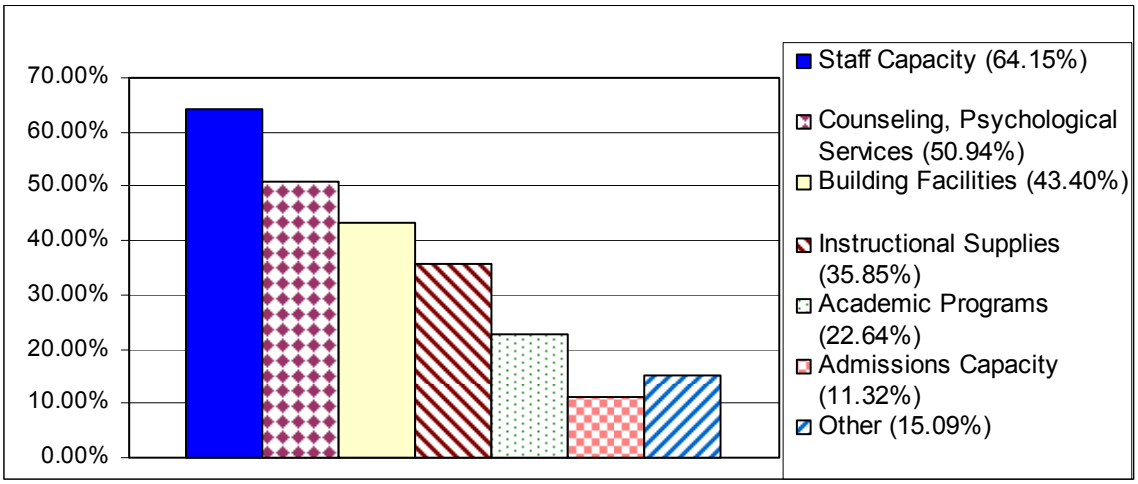
This model for alternative schools approaches discipline from a remedial, rather than punitive, perspective. Student management should focus upon positive reinforcement aided by behavioral treatment, counseling, and character education. Good behavioral management should have explicit, well-defined expectations as well as consistency and fairness of discipline. Discipline should be one element of a systemic response to student behavior – "alternative education must be one component of a comprehensive discipline policy and procedures action plan." Strategies, such as classroom management and graduated disciplinary procedures, should be underway in the regular school setting as well.

The mandates of statute and administrative rules and regulations are the only enforceable state guidelines for alternative school programs. Unlike the *Alternative School Program Standards*, these mandates provide few specifics regarding quality components for a successful alternative school. State law and rules maintain that curriculum should encourage the continuance of a student's regular school education – instruction should model the regular school "as nearly as practicable." Regarding behavioral components, the mandates require alternative school programs to be a "short term intervention" for the effective remediation of students, while adhering to the local school board's discipline policy.

With a comprehensive philosophy and an infrastructure capable of sustaining it, alternative school programs can address multiple goals. The recommendations of the *Alternative School Program Standards* provide such a framework.

Half of the alternative school directors identified inadequate funding as a concern. For the 2003-04 school year, 50 percent of survey respondents stated that funding was not adequate for their alternative school program. When asked to identify program components affected most by inadequate funding, the most frequent responses were – staff capacity (64 percent), counseling and psychological services (51 percent), and building facilities (43 percent).

Exhibit 12 – Inadequately Funded Program Components



Source: Survey of Alternative School Directors, August – October, 2004.

Resource limitations appear to hinder the provision of transportation for students to alternative school sites. Approximately 60 percent of superintendents indicate that their systems do not provide transportation to students in alternative school programs. Transportation is available, however, for students with special education needs.

Although most alternative schools have some kind of working relationship with regular schools, this collaboration does not ensure ongoing support and long-term services for students. Alternative school administrators recognize the value of working in concert with the regular schools, but the quality of these partnerships is inconsistent statewide. The *Alternative School Program Standards* stress the necessity of quality communication – "the alternative school program will establish collaborative partnerships in a system of shared responsibility for program support and service delivery." According to state board standards such partnerships should:

- provide supportive administration including but not limited to the superintendent, the program director, and juvenile court judges;
- provide support services to address the student's environment outside the school, including community agencies such as family resource centers and mental health centers;
- develop a liaison with the school from which the student has been reassigned;
- involve and inform parents about techniques and strategies to work effectively with their children, using school resources and home visits.

Alternative school directors identified collaboration with the regular schools as a critical issue for program effectiveness. According to respondents, this most commonly involves the exchange of students' school records, course information, and assignments, with cooperation and communication often ending when students complete their time in the alternative school program and return to regular school.

Many alternative schools lack needed counseling, psychological and support services. State board rules and regulations call for the availability and accessibility of support services, such as counselors or psychological services, as needed by the students.[42] Cooperative partnerships to provide support services are underdeveloped in many alternative school programs. Less than a third – 30 percent – provide such services "sometimes," while over 10 percent of programs "rarely" or "never" provide these support services. Both superintendents and alternative school directors identify the need for full-time and well-trained counselors, more parental involvement, and more involvement from community agencies.

Curriculum

Although some academic information is often transmitted from regular schools, many alternative school programs do not thoroughly assess the individual academic needs of incoming students. Less than 50 percent of alternative school directors indicated that academic skills are "always" assessed upon entry to the program. More often they rely on accessible records from the regular school, such as grades or grade-level. (See page 17.) As emphasized by the *Alternative School Program Standards*, an effective entrance process should include ongoing student assessment in addition to the development of individual education plans for all students. The lack of thorough assessment questions the ability of programs to meet the academic needs of their students.

In addition, teachers often lack the time necessary to prepare curriculum and instruction for students. Even when the curriculum is simply a transfer of regular school materials, untimely delivery of materials leaves teachers little time to prepare.

Although the student-teacher ratio in the majority of alternative school programs meets state standards, not all alternative school teachers are certified for their responsibilities in the alternative school program. Three-quarters of alternative schools in Tennessee meet the 12-to-1 student-teacher ratio standard set by the State Board of Education. The average student-teacher ratio in Tennessee's alternative school programs is 9.7-to-1.[43] The average daily membership of students in alternative school programs is subject to frequent change due to the transient nature of the student population. Alternative schools have a revolving door through which students frequently enter and exit. Consequently, the finding on student-teacher ratios should be considered judiciously.

The 2002 NCES report on alternative schools identified teacher quality and dedication as essential criteria for program effectiveness. These characteristics were reiterated by superintendents and school-level directors. Although some mentioned the dedication of teachers as a primary strength of the program, others affirmed that staff inadequacy is a dilemma – (1) more qualified teachers are needed in the content areas for which they teach and (2) better training should be provided for teachers to work with at-risk students. Additionally, staff members often serve multiple roles. It is not uncommon for one staff

[42] State Board of Education, Administrative Rules and Regulations, 0520-1-2-.09(2).
[43] Ninety-seven out of 107 respondents answered the student-teacher ratio survey question.

person to serve as administrator, instructor, as well as provider of other services. Although over 90 percent of alternative school directors indicated that all teachers in their schools are certified, individual teachers are frequently responsible for the instruction of multiple grade-levels and many subjects.

Most alternative school programs have high percentages of special education students. Approximately two-thirds of alternative school directors have at least one certified special education teacher dedicated *solely* to their alternative school program. The remaining third make arrangements for part-time access to special education teachers serving the school system at-large. Considering the high percentage of special education students in alternative school programs, the provision of qualified special education instructors is critical.

Most alternative school programs attempt to model the core curriculum of the regular school system. However, the inability to provide comparable instruction, especially for more advanced coursework, is a problem. Comparable instruction may be a particular problem for students who were high achievers in regular school. The provision of advanced placement and honors coursework is less available in alternative school programs.

- Nearly 90 percent of alternative school directors reveal curriculum approaches well-aligned with the regular school program. This finding corresponds with alternative school curricular approaches regionally and nationally – 90 percent in the Southeast and 91 percent nationwide.[44]
- When asked about grading policy, over 90 percent of alternative school directors indicate that regular school teachers continue grading assignments, or grading standards by alternative school teachers reflect those of the regular school.

Providing course offerings other than core subject instruction is challenging for alternative schools, mostly because of shortages of teachers, space, money, and technology. "Limited course offerings" was often cited as a factor hindering the academic progress of students in alternative schools. Most problematic was the provision of science labs, foreign language, vocational, and elective course work. As a result, alternative school students may have difficulty completing needed coursework.

Placement in Alternative School

The criteria used for remanding students to alternative schools are broad and vary by school system. Although state law requires that school systems establish alternative schools for suspended and expelled students, this mandate allows for latitude. Statute establishes zero-tolerance policies for suspension and expulsion that are applicable statewide. Local education agencies often expand the list of zero-tolerance violations. Policies for other types of violations are less uniform. The mandate to serve suspended and expelled students is a minimum – systems can send students to alternative school for reasons other than suspension and expulsion.

[44] B. Kleiner, R. Porch, E. Farris, & B. Greene, "Public Alternative Schools and Programs for Students at Risk of Education Failure: 2000-01," National Center for Education Statistics, Statistical Analysis Report, 2002.

According to State Board Standards, students can be remanded to alternative school for:

- Suspension,
- Expulsion,
- Zero-tolerance violation,
- Chronic misbehavior, and/or
- Inability to perform in a regular school environment.[45]

In 1995, in response to the federal Gun Free Schools Act of 1994, the General Assembly required a one-year expulsion for students who bring to school or are in unauthorized possession of a firearm.[46] In 1996 Public Chapter 888 required local boards of education to adopt policies and procedures to impose swift, certain, and severe disciplinary sanctions for the following behaviors: possession of drugs, drug paraphernalia, or a dangerous weapon, under the influence of drugs, assaulting or threatening to assault a teacher, student, or other person. Public Chapter 988 of 1996 required school systems to expel for one year students who:

- commit battery upon any teacher, principal, administrator or any other employee of a local education agency, or
- unlawfully possess any narcotic or stimulate drug.[47]

Public Chapter 634 of 2000 further clarified the zero tolerance concept: "Reasoned punishment [for zero tolerance offenses] may include a spectrum of disciplinary measures designed to correct student misbehavior and promote student respect and compliance with codes of conduct and board policies. A zero tolerance violation shall not necessarily result in a presumptive one (1) calendar year expulsion except for those types of student misconduct set forth in § 49-6-3401 (g)."[48] The law grants local education agencies considerable latitude in requiring minimum one-year expulsion for offenses other than those required by state law.[49]

Regular school policies help determine the makeup of alternative school populations. According to the Department of Education, zero-tolerance violations reported by school systems resulted from offenses committed beyond those mandated in law. Other violations for the 2003-04 school year include offenses such as assault, attendance violations, sexual battery or harassment, threats of violence, property damage, weapon replica, and accumulation of misbehavior.[50]

The Department of Education also provides a comprehensive list of remand rates, as reported by each school system. For 2003-04, alternative school remands resulted from

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[45] State Board of Education, *Alternative School Program Standards*, 2000.
[46] Public Acts, 1995, Chapter No. 268. Note: state law grants school directors discretion in modifying the expulsion on a case-by-case basis.
[47] Public Acts, 1996, Chapter No. 988.
[48] Public Acts, 2000, Chapter No. 634.
[49] *T.C.A.* 49-6-3401 (g): "Disciplinary policies and procedures for all other student offenses, including terms of suspensions and expulsions, shall be determined by local board of education policy."
[50] Tennessee Department of Education, 2003-04 Zero-tolerance data.

various offenses, including: alcohol, attendance violations, battery, property damage, drugs, fighting, firearms, immoral behavior, lack of immunization, violence, theft, weapons, and tobacco.[51]

When asked whom the school serves, less than 40 percent of alternative school directors responded that they serve *only* students specifically remanded to alternative school. In fact, one-quarter serve students referred to in-school suspension, and approximately four percent serve students who request placement in the program. Reported reasons to remand students to alternative school programs, other then explicit suspension and expulsion include:

- Remand decisions by the school system's Disciplinary Hearing Authority (DHA),[52] which most often remands students for violations involving alcohol, truancy, attendance, and other disruptive behavior.
- Placement decisions by the IEP team for special education students. IEP placement results from an acknowledgement that a special education student would be more optimally served in an alternative school environment.

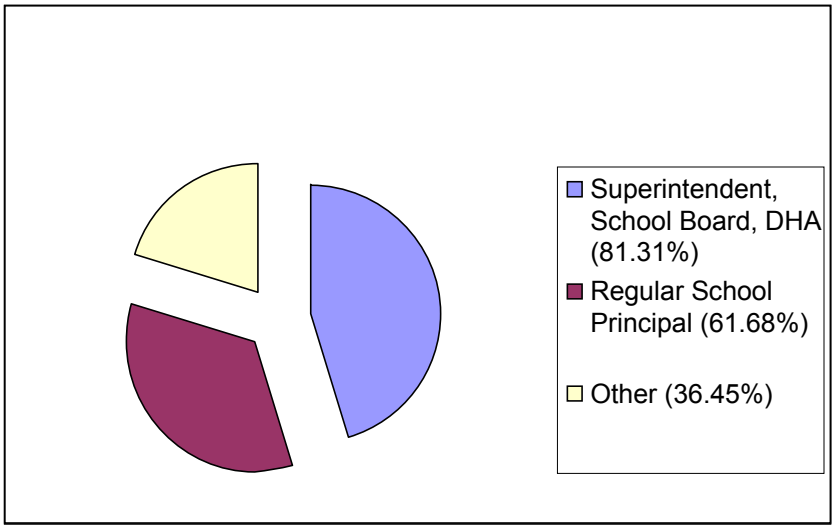
Although policies and procedures to maintain due process rights are well-articulated prior to students' remand to alternative school programs, complaint processes or grievance procedures for students within the state's alternative school programs are less clear. Critical components of due process procedures prior to remand include notification of disciplinary violation, review of previous intervention practices, disciplinary hearing, manifestation determination for special education students, and a right to appeal.

It is also common practice for a superintendent, local school board, DHA, or regular school principal to serve as the referral authority. Eighty-one percent of alternative school directors indicate that central office representatives, such as the superintendent, school board, or the DHA, have authority over remand decisions. Over 60 percent responded that regular school principals have such decision-making power. Rarely mentioned as referral authorities are personnel such as alternative school staff or juvenile judges. No respondents indicated that regular school teachers had remand authority. See Exhibit 13.

[51] Tennessee Department of Education, 2003-04 Remands by Cause.

[52] Discipline Hearing Authority (DHA) – according to *T.C.A.* 49-6-3401, the DHA is a body appointed by local boards of education to ensure the due process rights of suspended and expelled students. The DHA oversees appeals and enforces discipline referrals for suspension and expulsion of students.

Exhibit 13 – Referral Authorities for Alternative School Placement



Source: Survey of Alternative School Directors, August – October, 2004.

However, once students enter the alternative school programs, such processes are less evident. Parents or citizens who have concerns about curriculum or behavior modification methods used in alternative settings appear to have few avenues to pursue except litigation. Improved communication with parents, allowing monitoring by non-school personnel, and enhancing grievance procedures might help alleviate some of these issues. The at-risk nature of the student population, the use of unconventional behavior modification techniques in some facilities, the proportion of special education students, and the relative isolation of some alternative school programs all point to a need for improved guidelines.

Behavior management and discipline

Behavior management standards are not uniformly followed statewide. The *Alternative School Program Standards* recommend that alternative school programs "define clear, explicit student expectations and discipline plans," and "provide consistent, firm, and fair behavior management." Although some alternative school directors identified clear expectations, daily discussion between staff and students, and communication with parents as factors aiding behavior management, these practices are not uniformly followed. The lack of clear expectations and open communication between staff, students, and parents hinders the quality of behavior management in many programs. In fact, only 30 percent of directors mentioned parent notification as a response to discipline problems with students. (See Exhibit 9.)

Although state rules allude to alternative schools as temporary interventions for disruptive students, nearly 25 percent of programs extend the time to be served by students as a common disciplinary sanction. The State Board of Education states that "violation of rules may cause students to be removed from the program but shall not constitute grounds for *extending* the length of original suspension or expulsion." (Rule 0520-1-2-.09, (2)(c)). Twenty-four percent of programs, however, employ the sanction of extending a student's length of stay in the alternative school. This practice appears to

violate rules and regulations of the State Board of Education. The frequency with which extension is used by alternative schools suggests two possibilities: 1) the disciplinary strategies are out of alignment with the state rule, or 2) the extension of time is the result of *new* suspensions or expulsions in response to rule violation.

Exit transition and outcomes

The transition process for students leaving alternative school is underdeveloped or is not followed in most programs, and does not include long-term follow-up.

Establishment and implementation of an effective exit transition from alternative schools is critical for the reintegration of students into the regular school system. OEA identified this weakness in its previous 1995 report on alternative schools, noting that quality transition processes were not well-established: "[students] encounter negative reactions from former teachers and classmates when returning to regular classes."[53] State law calls upon alternative schools to (1) prepare students for an effective return to regular school and (2) prevent students from being repeat offenders. The *Alternative School Program Standards* advise that multiple stakeholders, such as representatives from the regular school, the alternative school, and parents, collaborate to establish a transition process and long range plan for students.

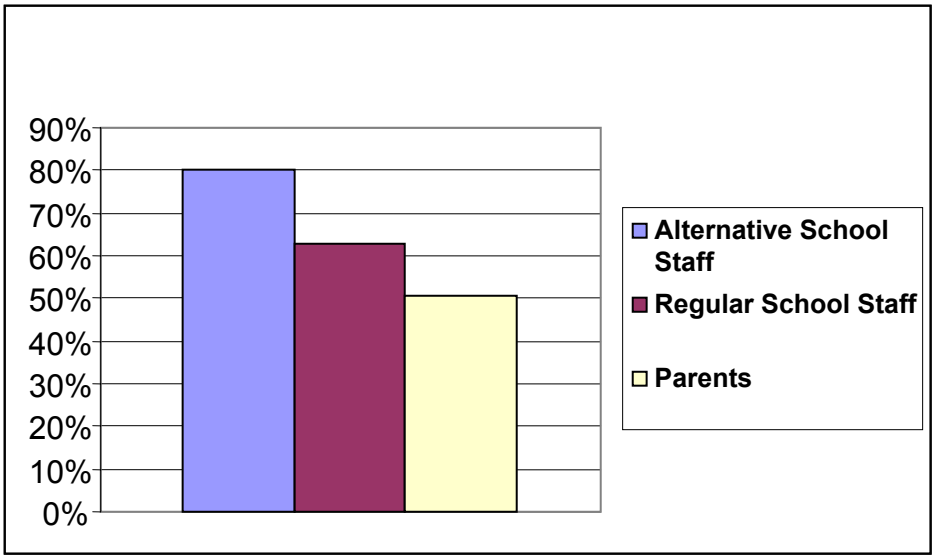
Over 70 percent of alternative school directors indicate that their school has established a process to guide the student's transition back to the regular school. Most frequently, the process calls for sharing information on course work completed and grades earned at the alternative school. In fact, forty percent of alternative schools indicated that they share only academic information with regular schools upon a student's transition, rather than more comprehensive behavioral information. Behavior information includes suggested activities for students, as well as behavior reports and attendance records while in the alternative school program. The sharing of comprehensive information is critical to effective reintegration in the regular school setting. Additionally, many alternative schools indicated the need for more mechanisms for student follow-up, including:

- A transition staff coordinator,
- Better data collection of student outcomes,
- On-going communication with regular schools, and
- Partnerships/collaboration with more community agencies.

The *Alternative School Program Standards* explicitly acknowledge the importance of long-range plans for students' transition. Such plans should involve the participation of multiple stakeholders and the implementation of quality practices. When asked who contributes to the transition process, responses of alternative school directors reveal that alternative school staff are the most involved, while staff at the regular school and parents participate less. In 80 percent of the schools, the alternative school staff contributes; regular school staff and parents contribute in 63 percent and 51 percent, respectively. The least involved participants in the transition process are those responsible for students' experiences after leaving alternative school.

[53] OEA, *Tennessee's Alternative Schools: Serving Disruptive Students*, September 1995, p. iii.

Exhibit 14 – Transition Participants



Source: Survey of Alternative School Directors, August – October, 2004.

Neither the department nor school systems systematically measure performance outcomes – dropout, graduation, attendance – of alternative school students. Alternative school directors frequently state that improving educational outcomes for students is a primary objective. However, the lack of data collection leaves program evaluation dependent upon anecdotal evidence. Only 15 percent of school systems reported that they track the dropout rate of the alternative school population. When asked to identify the dropout rate for the 2003-04 school year, the limitations of even this 15 percent became apparent. Data was often not available or methodology used was questionable considering the highly mobile nature of the alternative school student population. Others reported data reflecting students' dropout rates during their time within the alternative school rather than through the completion of their high school experience. These limitations affirm the need for greater long-term follow-up of alternative school students' outcomes.

As with dropout data, alternative schools do not regularly measure outcomes regarding discipline referrals, attendance, and graduation. Performance assessments are limited to the students' performance *during* their stay in the alternative school program, but do not follow the outcomes of specific students once they return to regular school. Some alternative school directors do, however, track student recidivism.

According to survey responses, the 2003-04 average attendance rate for alternative school is lower than the average rate of the overall student population – 85.5 percent and 94.2 percent respectively. The reliability of the data may be suspect, however. To sustain funding in school systems, state law requires that students in attendance at alternative school be counted as if still in attendance in the regular school.[54] Such methodology, while rewarding systems for keeping students within an educational environment, hinders

[54] *T.C.A.* 49-6-3402(d).

accessibility to the disaggregated data needed to track students' movement into and out of the alternative school programs.

Without systems to measure student outcomes, accountability for performance relies heavily upon inconsistent, anecdotal evidence. Alternative school directors' predictions of students' performances after return to regular school are mixed. Those predicting poor performance outcomes for students commonly cite influences of student characteristics including – the at-risk nature of the population, course failure, lack of class credits, and truancy habits. Those predicting positive performance outcomes cite the influences of the alternative school program. These factors include the opportunity to continue earning credits, the individualized attention for students, lower student-teacher ratios, and the structured environment.

Recommendations

Legislative recommendations

The Education Oversight Committee, or the Senate and House Education Committees may wish to hear presentations from alternative school representatives and encourage legislators to make on-site visits to alternative school programs. State officials, school professionals, and alternative school staff lack a coherent awareness of the current scope of alternative school programs in Tennessee.

The General Assembly may wish to revise *Tennessee Code Annotated 49-1-520*, *Tennessee model dropout prevention program*, to address more explicitly the dropout tendencies of the alternative school student population. The legislation currently highlights 16 problems associated with student dropout, and calls upon model programs to combat those issues.[55] The General Assembly might also include alternative school remand as another focus for model dropout prevention programs.

The General Assembly may wish to require school systems to track the operation and performance of their alternative school programs. Because neither the department nor school systems measure performance – dropout, graduation, attendance – of alternative school students, accountability for performance relies heavily upon inconsistent, anecdotal evidence. Periodic reporting on alternative schools would provide policymakers with data on the overall performance of alternative schools statewide, as well as student outcome information. This information could be used to track the improvement progress of the state's alternative schools and hold the programs accountable. Such reports could also include items such as graduation rates, attendance rates, dropout rates, and other indicators of performance.

The General Assembly should consider again appropriating funds for alternative school pilot programs. In 1996, the General Assembly passed legislation establishing three pilot alternative schools sites, one in each grand division of the state, and provided funding for three-year pilots. Funding new pilot programs would provide recipients with

[55] *T.C.A.* 49-1-520(a2).

funding and technical support to improve their programs while also providing policymakers with performance and outcome data. In addition to emphasizing unique and effective academic and behavioral components, a new grant pilot program could include a component to monitor the progress, both academic and behavioral, of each individual alternative school student. The program evaluation component could require grant recipients to collect data on curriculum quality, discipline policy and procedures, and dropout rates.

Pilot program provisions might also require grant recipients to facilitate partnerships with the higher education community to improve data collection and analysis, program evaluation, and technical assistance. Another provision could require grant recipients to establish advisory councils composed of various community members, such as members of the education, business, health, and counseling community. Advisory councils could support alternative schools through fundraising and promoting community awareness and support. Pilot program provisions should encourage such councils to continue to meet after the end of the pilot project.

Administrative recommendations

The State Department of Education should pursue further collaboration with alternative school programs. Several strategies could address the need for (1) accessible information regarding the scope of alternative schools and (2) research-based and innovative practices for alternative school improvements.

1. The department may consider collaborating with the Alternative School Association. The association currently serves as an arena for dialogue and training of alternative school staff personnel.
2. The department may develop an alternative schools' clearinghouse to provide accessible, quality information at a central, online location. The clearinghouse might include components such as an alternative schools directory, a compilation of research-based practices for at-risk students, and a message board to share innovative practices working in alternative school programs.

The State Department of Education should review the quality of curriculum used in all alternative school programs. State law, rules, and standards reiterate that the curriculum in alternative school programs should be as similar as possible to that in regular schools. Both the content and the rigor of curriculum should be adequate to permit students to keep pace with their peers, especially when considering current public school issues of qualifying criteria for lottery scholarships, the development of a uniform grading scale, and value enhancement of the high school diploma. Remediation should also be made available.

The State Department of Education should develop appropriate guidelines for discipline and behavior modification strategies used in alternative schools. The Department of Mental Health and Commission on Children and Youth could provide useful input in establishing such guidelines. Currently local education agencies must submit the discipline policy used in the regular school system. The department should also require local education agencies to set standards for disciplinary practices in alternative school programs and report that information back to the department. The

Alternative School Program Standards recommend that alternative school programs "define clear, explicit student expectations and discipline plans," and "provide consistent, firm, and fair behavior management." The documentation of clear student expectations would promote consistency and fairness in behavior management and also make discipline policies and procedures more transparent for students, parents, school and state officials.

The State Department of Education should target alternative school staff for professional development regarding the needs of at-risk students. Alternative school directors repeatedly cited the need for better training of teachers to work with at-risk students. Accordingly, the department could develop professional training programs for alternative school staff, perhaps in coordination with the regular schools. Shared training promotes well-aligned, professional efforts for instructing at-risk students. The often-rapid transition between alternative and regular school settings makes instructional alignment an important aspect of the relationship between schools.

The State Board of Education should revise the administrative rules and regulations to require greater systems of accountability for student outcomes in alternative school programs. Currently, the rules mandate that remand reasons for students be documented, and that end of year reports be submitted to the regular school for each student.[56] There is no standard system for tracking the performance outcomes of alternative school students. The board should require alternative school programs to submit more comprehensive "End-of-year Progress Reports" to the State Department of Education and local education agencies including, but not limited to, the following components:

1. academic and behavioral measures of students' performance
2. annual Improvement Plans for alternative school programs

The State Board of Education should convene a task force to address specific issues in alternative school programs. OEA identified specific issues that warrant further consideration and examination, yet were beyond the scope of this report. A task force could examine these issues and make recommendations to address them. Topics for the alternative schools task force should include, but not necessarily be limited to:

- Should the board incorporate any components of the *Alternative School Program Standards* into its rules and regulations?
- Should the board revise its administrative rules and regulations to ensure the fair treatment of students *within* alternative school programs?
- How can policymakers improve the data collection and tracking of outcomes for alternative school students?
- How can alternative school programs provide quality instruction for multiple grades and multiple subjects considering staff and resource limitations? Consider the following options:
    - Utilize technology and train instructors to maximize the use of supplemental technology programs

[56] State Board of Education, Administrative Rules and Regulations, Rule 0520-1-2-.09 2(e).

    - Develop incentives for teachers to work with alternative school students
- Should transportation be provided for alternative school students? This might include a cost-benefit analysis of transportation for alternative school students and alternatives, such as public buses in urban school systems, to school bus transportation.
- How alternative schools can balance NCLB's graduation rate calculations with continued support for GED programs?
- How can we encourage the replication of best alternative school practices in Tennessee?
- Should the state create an awards or incentive program (i.e., a three-star alternative school designation) to reward superior performance by alternative schools that meet high standards?
- How do behavioral interventions within regular school systems impact alternative school remands? This might include an analysis of best behavioral interventions within regular school systems.
- How can the state encourage collaboration between alternative school programs and the private and nonprofit sectors?
- Would alternative schools benefit from greater budgetary and administrative control? This might include an examination of whether some alternative schools and programs would benefit from obtaining their own separate school code.

The task force's membership should include principals and personnel from both alternative and regular schools, school system personnel, representatives from the counseling/behavioral services sector, representatives from the private and nonprofit sectors, and other representatives as identified by the State Board of Education.

The State Board of Education should consider revising its administrative rules and regulations regarding complaint processes for alternative schools. A complaint process or grievance procedure for alternative schools seems particularly important considering the number of alternative school remands, the scope of remand criteria, the at-risk nature of the student population, the proportion of special education students, and the relative isolation of some alternative school programs.

The BEP Review Committee should analyze the alternative schools component, and may wish to recommend adjustments to the ratio to increase funding for the state's alternative schools.[57] The BEP currently funds alternative schools at $2.85 per total ADM for grades K-12 plus $23.97 per ADM for grades 7-12. The BEP generated $11,873,983 for alternative school programs in 2004-05. Senate Joint Resolution No. 685 of the 103rd General Assembly urged the BEP review committee to make a thorough review and assessment of the alternative schools component of the BEP funding formula, acknowledging the importance of alternative schools for the success of Tennessee's children, economy, and welfare.

[57] Eyvette Johnson, BEP Coordinator, State Department of Education. The state share of this amount was $8,905,487; the local share was $2,968,496.

OEA survey respondents report numerous inadequately funded program components, including staff capacity, counseling/psychological services, building facilities, instructional supplies, academic programs, and admissions capacity. Inadequate funding may compromise alternative school programs' ability to remediate students and fulfill their mandates under state law and administrative rules and regulations.

Local education agency recommendations

Local education agencies should improve integration between regular schools and alternative schools. The state's alternative school programs recognize the value of collaboration with the regular school system, but the quality is inconsistent. Local education agencies should work to maintain the continuity of students' experience between the regular schools and the alternative school programs. Methods to achieve this might include:

1. school board representation for alternative school programs.
2. alternative school advisory councils involving regular school, alternative school, community, and parental representation. (See Appendix F – Unique Practices.)
3. combined professional development for regular and alternative school staff on relevant topics such as classroom management and behavioral intervention training.
4. shared in-service days and shared lesson-planning times for regular school and alternative school teachers to better align curriculum and instruction for alternative school students.

Local education agencies should improve transition and long-term services for alternative school students returning to the regular school setting. The transition process for students leaving alternative school is inadequate. Local education agencies should develop strategies to:

1. improve communication between regular and alternative school staff.
2. share well-documented records of students' experience within the alternative school program.
3. develop quality in-take procedures for students upon their entry into the regular school.
4. follow-up on students' experience once returned to the regular school system.

Local education agencies should consider alternative administrative options to provide alternative school education. Although the majority of alternative school programs operate under the administration of the local school board, some programs operate under alternative administrative arrangements, such as partnering with other local educational agencies or contracting with independent providers. State law allows local education agencies to join together and establish an alternative school serving multiple school systems.[58] One survey respondent suggested centralizing alternative school operations as a solution for small school systems struggling to provide adequate

[58] *T.C.A.* 49-6-3402 (a): "In providing alternative schools, any two (2) or more boards may join together and establish a school attended by students of any such school system; furthermore, any board may, by mutually acceptable agreement with another board, send its suspended or expelled students to any alternative school already in operation."

alternative education programming with limited funding. By combining and centralizing resources, space, and staff, several school systems within relatively close proximity could provide more efficient and effective alternative education for their students. Several school systems in west Tennessee reported providing joint alternative school programming. Carroll County Schools reported operating its alternative school program in conjunction with the Huntingdon, Hollow Rock-Bruceton, McKenzie, South Carroll, and West Carroll special school districts.

Contracting with specialized providers is another alternative administrative arrangement local education agencies could explore to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the alternative educational services offered to their students.[59] One example of school systems contracting with a non-profit organization can be found in Grainger County. Kingswood School, Inc. is a day treatment program for children and adolescents who have behavioral and /or emotional problems.[60] Two area school systems, Jefferson and Grainger County Schools, contract with the agency to provide alternative schooling to their students.[61] The arrangement offers economies of scale through Kingswood's staff (the organization trains one set of staff to serve students from multiple counties) and its facility (one location, less need for capital improvements, less public school space used). Securing and paying for transportation to the facility, however, has been a problem for systems.

The Kingswood academic and behavioral curriculum includes:

- individual treatment plans designed to address students' problem areas;
- individual, group, and family therapy;
- individual programs of academic and other educational needs for all students, including non-special education students;
- psychological-educational groups (i.e., assertiveness training, decision making, and topics of relevance);
- alcohol and drug education and group therapy;
- GED preparation;
- core curriculum of academic courses;
- complete special education services;
- a referral source for students needing additional therapeutic services; and
- a behavioral modification program that incorporates peer confrontation and evaluation.[62]

[59] Note: Before implementing any administrative changes, LEAs should thoroughly evaluate the costs (facilities, transportation, etc.) of partnering with other systems or non-LEA organizations.
[60] Kingswood School, Inc., "Day Treatment Student Handbook," p. 1. Note: Kingswood is licensed by the Department of Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities and is a state-accredited private school.
[61] Interview with Darrell Helton, Administrator, Kingswood School, Inc., January 26, 2005. Note: Jefferson County's contract is for the system's entire alternative school program, while Grainger County contracts with the agency for individual students. Hancock and Claiborne County have contracted with Kingswood in the past.
[62] Kingswood School, Inc., pp. 1, 22.

Appendix A
Senate Joint Resolution 746, 2004

By Jackson

A RESOLUTION to direct the Department of Education to conduct a study on the quality of the curriculum and punishment policies and procedures utilized by alternative schools in Tennessee.

WHEREAS, the education of our youth must be a priority for Tennessee to continue to prosper and compete in the 21st century and the educational opportunities available to each student are of vital importance; and

WHEREAS, the Education Improvement Act of 1992 required each local school district in Tennessee to create at least one alternative school for students in grades 7 through 12 who have been suspended or expelled from their traditional institution; and

WHEREAS, the Tennessee Higher Education Commission reported to the Senate Education Committee on January 28, 2004 that only 55 out of every 100 freshmen entering high school in Tennessee today will graduate with a high school diploma; and

WHEREAS, the successful matriculation of every student through the use of a quality curriculum along with appropriate instruction, policies and procedures should be Tennessee's goal; and

WHEREAS, a complete review and evaluation of Tennessee's alternative schools is required to determine the status of the program and provide factual information for this body to appropriately address this most important issue; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED THIRD GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING, that the Department of Education is directed to conduct a study of the alternative schools across Tennessee to evaluate: (1) the quality of the curriculum utilized by the schools, (2) the policies and procedures relative to discipline and punishment and (3) the drop out rate for alternative school students.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, it is the legislative intent that such study be concluded and its results and findings, including any recommendations, be presented to the Oversight Committee on Education no later than April 1, 2005.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an enrolled copy of this resolution be transmitted to the Commissioner of Education.

Appendix B
Alternative School Programs Identified

Alcoa	Alcoa High School Alternative School
Anderson County	The Learn Center
Athens	The Pathway School
Bedford County	Bedford County Alternative School
Bledsoe County	Bledsoe County Alternative School
Blount County	Everett Learning Opportunity Center
Bradley County	Horizon
Bristol	Bristol Alternative School
Campbell County	Campbell County Alternative
Cannon County	Cannon County Alternative School
Carroll County*	Carroll Academy
Carter County	Lift Academy
Cheatham County	Cheatham County Alternative School
Chester County	Chester County Alternative School
Claiborne County	Renaissance Center
Clay County	Clay County Alternative School
Cleveland City	Teen Learning Center
Cocke County	Cocke County Alternative School
Coffee County	Riverview Alternative
Crockett County	Crockett County Alternative Learning Center
Cumberland County	Cumberland County Alternative Learning Center
Davidson County	Baxter Alternative Learning Center
	Cohn Alternative Learning Center
	McCann Alternative Learning Center
	New Beginnings
Dayton	Dayton Alternative Classroom
Decatur County	Decatur County Alternative School
DeKalb County	DeKalb County High School Alternative Learning Center
Dickson County	New Directions Academy
Dyer County*	Dyer County/Dyersburg Alternative School
Dyersburg*	Dyer County/Dyersburg Alternative School
Elizabethton	The Learning Academy
Fayette County	Fayette County Alternative School
Fayetteville	Fayetteville County Alternative School
Fentress County	Fentress County Alternative School
Franklin SSD*	Williamson County Alternative Learning Center
Franklin County	Franklin County Alternative School
Gibson County	Gibson Alternative Learning Center
Giles County	Giles County Alternative School
Grainger County*	Grainger County Alternative School
	Kingswood School, Inc.
Greene County	Greene County Alternative School

Greeneville	Greeneville City Alternative School
Grundy County	Grundy County Judges' Alternative School
Hamblen County	Miller-Boyd Alternative School
Hamilton County	Washington Alternative
Hancock County	Hancock High Alternative School
Hardeman County	Hardeman County Learning Center (Bolivar)
Hardin County	Hardin County Alternative School
Hawkins County	Hawkins County Alternative School
Haywood County	Haywood County Alternative School
	Justice Academy
Henderson County	Juvenile Academy
Henry County	Henry County Alternative Learning Center
Hickman County	Hickman County Alternative School
Hollow Rock-Bruceton*	Carroll Academy
Houston County	Houston County Alternative School
Humboldt	Humboldt Alternative Classroom
Humphreys County	Humphreys County Alternative School
Huntingdon*	Carroll Academy
Jackson County	Jackson County Alternative Learning Center
Jefferson County*	Kingswood School, Inc.
Johnson City	Science Hill
Johnson County	Extended Service Center
Kingsport	New Horizons
Knox County	Karnes Annex Alternative Program
	Knox County Evening Alternative School Program
	Richard Yoakley School
Lauderdale County	Lauderdale County Alternative School
Lawrence County	Achievement Academy
Lebanon	Lebanon Alternative Classroom
Lenoir City	Lenoir City Alternative Classroom
Lewis County	Lewis County Alternative Classroom
Lexington	Lexington City Alternative Classroom
Lincoln County	Lincoln County Alternative School
Loudon County	Loudon County Alternative School
Macon County	Macon County Alternative Learning Center
Madison County	South Highland Learning Center
	West Jackson Alternative Learning Center
Manchester	Manchester Alternative Classroom
Marion County	Marion County Alternative School
Marshall County	Marshall County Alternative School
Maryville	Maryville Academy
Maury County	College Hill Alternative School
McKenzie*	Carroll Academy
McMinn County	The Centennial School
McNairy County	McNairy County Alternative School

Meigs County	Meigs County Alternative Program
Memphis City	Calvary Learning Center
	Grizzlies Academy
	Hamilton Alternative Center
	Ida B. Wells Academy
	Idlewild Learning Center
	Kansas Career Academy
	Kenneth S. Robinson Center
	Lakeside Alternative
	Middle College High
	Northside Alternative Center
	Oakhaven Alternative Center
	Pyramid Academy
	Riverview Alternative Center
	Sheffield Alternative Center
	Southside High Alternative
	Tall Tress Alternative
	Trezevant Career Academy
Milan	Milan Alternative School
Monroe County	Monroe County Alternative School
Montgomery County	Alternative Center Greenwood Complex
Moore County	Moore County Alternative School
Morgan County	Morgan County Alternative School
Newport	Newport City Alternative School
Oak Ridge	Oak Ridge Alternative Program – Elementary
	Oak Ridge Alternative Program – Secondary
Obion County	Obion County Alternative School
Oneida	Oneida Alternative School
Overton County	CLUE
Perry County	Perry County Alternative School
Pickett County	Pickett County Alternative School
Polk County	Polk County Alternative School
	Polk County In-School Suspension
Putnam County	Dry Valley School
Rhea County	Rhea County Alternative School (Evansville Center)
Roane County	Midtown Education Center
Robertson County	Robertson County Alternative Program
Rutherford County	Daniel McKee Alternative School
	Smyrna West Alternative School
Scott County	Scott County Alternative School
Sequatchie County	Sequatchie County Alternative School
Sevier County	Hardin Alternative School
Shelby County	Shelby County Alternative Learning Center
Smith County	Smith County Alternative Learning Center
South Carroll*	Carroll Academy

Stewart County	Stewart County Alternative Learning Center
Sullivan County	Sullivan County Alternative Program
Sumner County	R.T. Fisher
Sweetwater County	Sweetwater Alternative Center
Tipton County	Tipton County Alternative Learning Center
Trenton	Trenton Alternative School
Tullahoma	Tullahoma Alternative School
Unicoi County	Unicoi County Alternative Classroom
Union City	Union City Alternative School – High School
	Union City Alternative School – Middle School
Union County	Union County Alternative Center
Van Buren County	Van Buren Alternative Classroom
Warren County	Warren Academy
Washington County	Midway
Wayne County	Wayne County Alternative Education Program
Weakley County	Weakley County Alternative School
West Carroll*	Carroll Academy
White County	White County Alternative Learning Center
Williamson County*	Williamson County Alternative Learning Center
Wilson County	M.A.P. Academy

* School system operates alternative school program in partnership with one or more additional school systems.

Appendix C
Survey Respondents

OEA surveyed school superintendents and alternative school directors in each local education agency in August and September 2004. Survey response rates were as follows: Superintendent Survey – 136 surveys mailed with 106 returned for a response rate of 77.94 percent. Alternative School Directors – 152 surveys mailed with 107 returned for a response rate of 70.39 percent. Note: 96.32 percent of Tennessee school districts are represented by one or both surveys.

Directors of Schools Survey - Respondents

Alamo	Hamblen County	Oak Ridge
Anderson County	Hamilton County	Obion County
Bedford County	Hancock County	Oneida
Bells	Hardeman County	Overton County
Benton County	Hawkins County	Paris
Blount County	Haywood County	Pickett County
Bradford	Henderson County	Putnam County
Bradley County	Henry County	Richard City
Bristol	Hickman County	Roane County
Carroll County	Hollow Rock-Bruceton	Robertson County
Carter County	Houston County	Rogersville
Cheatham County	Humphreys County	Rutherford County
Chester County	Huntingdon	Scott County
Claiborne County	Jackson County	Sequatchie County
Clay County	Johnson County	Sevier County
Cleveland	Knox County	Shelby County
Clinton	Lake County	South Carroll
Cocke County	Lauderdale County	Stewart County
Coffee County	Lawrence County	Sullivan County
Crockett County	Lebanon	Sweetwater
Cumberland County	Lenoir City	Tipton County
Dayton	Lewis County	Trenton
Decatur County	Lexington	Trousdale County
DeKalb County	Loudon County	Tullahoma
Dickson County	Manchester County	Unicoi County
Dyer County	Marion County	Union City
Dyersburg	Maryville	Van Buren County
Elizabethton	McNairy County	Warren County
Etowah	Meigs County	Wayne County
Fayetteville	Memphis City	Weakley County
Fentress County	Milan	West Carroll
Franklin SSD	Monroe County	White County
Giles County	Montgomery County	Williamson County
Grainger County	Moore County	Wilson County

Greene County	Morgan County	
Greeneville	Newport	

Directors of Schools Survey – Late Respondents

Surveys returned after response deadline; responses not included in survey analyses.

Grundy County	Perry County	Washington County
Hardin County	Polk County	
Davidson County	Sumner County	

Alternative School Directors Survey – Respondents

Alcoa	Haywood County – Justice Academy	Moore County
Anderson County	Henderson County	Morgan County
Athens	Henry County	Newport City
Bedford County	Hickman County	Oak Ridge – Elementary
Bledsoe County	Houston County	Oak Ridge – Secondary
Blount County	Humboldt	Obion County
Cannon County	Humphreys County	Oneida
Carroll County	Jackson County	Perry County
Carter County	Johnson City	Polk County – Alternative School
Cheatham County	Kingsport	Polk County – In-school Suspension
Chester County	Kingswood School, Inc.	Rhea County
Claiborne County	Knox County – Richard Yoakley	Richard City (none)
Clay County	Lauderdale County	Roane County
Cleveland City	Lewis County	Robertson County
Cumberland County	Lincoln County	Rutherford County – Daniel McKee
Decatur County	Macon County	Scott County
Dickson County	Madison County – South Highland Learning Center	Sevier County
Elizabethton	Manchester	Shelby County
Etowah (none)	Marshall County	Smith County
Fayette County	Maryville	Stewart County
Fayetteville County	Maury County	Sullivan County
Fentress County	Memphis – Calvary Learning Center	Sumner County
Franklin County	Memphis – Grizzlies Academy	Sweetwater
Franklin SSD – Williamson County Alternative Learning Center	Memphis – Hamilton Alternative Center	Tipton County

Gibson County	Memphis – Ida B. Wells Academy	Trenton
Giles County	Memphis – Kenneth S. Robinson Center	Tullahoma
Grainger County	Memphis – Middle College High	Union City – High School
Greene County	Memphis – Northside Alternative Center	Union City – Middle School
Greeneville City	Memphis – Oakhaven Alternative Center	Union County
Grundy County	Memphis – Pyramid Academy	Warren County
Hamilton County	Memphis – Riverview Alternative Center	Washington County
Hancock County	Memphis – Sheffield Alternative Center	Wayne County
Hardeman County	Memphis – Southside High Alternative	Weakley County
Hawkins County	Memphis – Trezevant Career Academy	White County
Haywood County – Alternative School	Milan	Williamson County Alternative Learning Center
	Monroe County	Wilson County

Alternative School Directors Survey – Late Respondents

Surveys returned after response deadline; responses not included in survey analyses.

Bristol	Lawrence County
Hardin County	Unicoi County

Appendix D
Interviewees

- Steven Hornsby – General Counsel, Department of Children's Services
- Mr. and Mrs. Joel Damons – parents, Dickson County Schools
- Donna Wright – Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum & Instruction, Knox County Schools
- Ed Hedgepeth – Director of High Schools, Knox County Schools
- Bobby Gratz – Director of Middle Schools, Knox County Schools
- Buell Snyder – Principal, Jefferson County High School; Kentucky
- Sandy Johnson – Chief Instructional Officer, Metro Nashville Public Schools
- Harold Ford – Principal, Middle College High School
- R. Allen Williams – Principal, Midtown Educational Center
- Jan Bushing – Director of School-based Support Services, TN Dept of Education
- Mike Hermann – Director of Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Program, TN Dept of Education
- Joseph Fisher – Assistant Commissioner of Special Education, TN Dept of Education
- John Scott – Assistant Commissioner of Teaching & Learning, TN Dept of Education
- Debra Owens – Deputy Executive Director, Administration, TN State Board of Education
- Shirley Wilds – Attorney, TN Protection & Advocacy, Inc.
- Tim Wood – Analyst, TN Protection & Advocacy, Inc.
- Senator Doug Jackson – Senator, Dickson County
- Stephen Smith – Director of Government Relations/Communications, TN School Boards Association
- Brenda McGee, Dean Hill Rivkin – Attorneys, Knox County
- Chuck Cagle – Attorney; Lewis, King, Krieg & Waldrop, P.C.

Appendix E
Site-Visits

- East Tennessee
  - Anderson County
  - Bradley County
  - Carter County
  - Grainger County
  - Hamilton County
  - Knox County
  - Scott County
- Middle Tennessee:
  - Davidson County
  - Dickson County
  - Rutherford County
  - Williamson County
- West Tennessee:
  - Chester County
  - Gibson County
  - Haywood County
  - Memphis City Schools
  - Shelby County
- Louisville, KY
  - Jefferson County

Appendix F
Unique Practices

OEA analysts visited 16 counties around the state in researching this report, conducting on-site visits at various alternative schools and interviewing alternative school staff and/or district level personnel. OEA also collected written materials, such as student handbooks and policy documents, during on-site visits or from survey respondents. The following section highlights some of the unique practices from two alternative school programs culled from OEA research.

The Alternative Learning Center[1]
The Johnson City School System operates an Alternative Learning Center (ALC) housing the following five specialized programs:

- **Alternative Learning Program** – serves students who chronically disrupt the regular classroom environment, are truant, struggle with academics, and commit zero tolerance offences.
- **Self-contained resource classroom** –a classroom for special education students
- **Juvenile Education Academy** – serves students who have been unsuccessful in the Alternative Learning Program and are at risk for state custody placement
- **Optional High School and GED +2** – The Optional High School program gives students with 20 or more credits who have not graduated the option of enrolling in school to complete their remaining credits. The GED +2 program gives students with a very limited number of credits the opportunity to earn a GED diploma.
- **In-school suspension program** – serves both Alternative Learning Program and Science Hill High School students in grades 10-12.

Upon a student's entrance into the program, a counselor collects data on the student's social history, medical information, court involvement, and family services for use in making appropriate interventions. The intake process also includes an evaluation of the student's family needs, including an evaluation of the family's need for social services, mental health screening/treatment, substance abuse screening/treatment, intensive case management, employability skills, and the need for family preservation specialist services. The ALC encourages partnerships between the home and school by inviting parents to complete a **home-school contract**, which provides consequences for the student at home based on a student's academic and behavioral progress.

The ALC program also includes **restorative conferencing** for students. Restorative conferencing allows a student and his or her parents and supporters to meet with the person(s) affected by the student's actions to "discuss ways in which the harm can be repaired and the student restored to the community."[2] For example, a student whose

[1] Fax from Dr. Toni McGriff, Superintendent, Johnson City Schools, October 8, 2004.
[2] Note: Students must admit their offense and the person that referred the student must agree before beginning a restorative conference. Restorative conferencing is not available for zero tolerance infractions.

placement at the ALC resulted from an altercation with a specific teacher would meet in a restorative conference with that teacher to make amends for his or her past misbehavior. This process allows students to better understand how their actions impact others.

The Juvenile Education Academy (JEA) is a joint partnership among Johnson City Schools, the Johnson City Juvenile Court, the Department of Children's Services, and Frontier Health, a private, not-for-profit mental and behavioral health organization.[3] The JEA curriculum focuses on therapeutic support services such as crisis intervention and individual, group, and family counseling. The JEA also provides options unique to alternative schools in Tennessee for students who maintain good behavior through mainstreaming. **Mainstreaming** grants students who consistently exhibit good behavior several academic options upon reaching a certain behavior level. Qualifying students may:

1. Remain at the JEA with Honor privileges for the remainder of the session;
2. Attend the JEA for a partial day and Science Hill High School for a partial day;
3. Attend Science Hill High School; or
4. Attend Optional High School or GED +2 Programs.

External public and private institutions assist the ALC in fulfilling its mission through Washington County's Promise, a county affiliate of the America's Promise program. An **Alternative Learning Advisory Council**, comprised of educators, counselors, social workers, administrators, and businessmen, provides advocacy and support for ALC teachers and staff through community partners such as East Tennessee State University, First Tennessee Bank, and the Washington County Health Department.

The M.A.P. Academy[4]

Wilson County Schools provides alternative education for its students through the Modified Academic Program (M.A.P.) Academy, a joint partnership among the following organizations:

- Wilson County Schools – provides teachers, school curriculum and academic functions
- Wilson County Youth Ranch – The Wilson County Youth Ranch is a children's home offering counseling and therapy for adolescents struggling with alcohol, drugs, aggression etc. The Youth Ranch provides counseling, behavior modification, and community projects for the M.A.P. Academy
- Wilson County Juvenile Court System – supplies referrals and technical assistance.

M.A.P. Academy staff develop an **Individual Program Plan and Goals** for all students upon entering the program. This program plan identifies individual academic and behavioral goals and designs a plan to fulfill them. The program plan outlines the academic and behavioral goals a student must achieve before graduating from the

[3] Frontier Health provides counseling services for students through a full-time, on-site therapist.
[4] M.A.P. Academy 2004-2005 Handbook, Received on August 25, 2004.

academy and returning to regular school. The program plan also encourages parental participation by assigning parents some responsibility for the academic and behavioral success of their child. M.A.P. Academy expects parents to meet or have contact with M.A.P. staff at least once per week to evaluate student progress and collaborate with M.A.P. staff in follow-up work, services, or evaluations when the student returns back to regular school. M.A.P. Academy also provides **weekly parenting classes**, encouraging attendance by linking a student's progression in the program to parental and child participation.

In addition to academics, students at M.A.P. Academy receive counseling on behavioral, interpersonal, and social skills at least twice weekly, with some individual counseling if necessary. The M.A.P. Academy trains all staff in behavior modification skills, including crisis intervention, therapeutic techniques, and conflict resolution, among others. Students also participate in a **service learning community project** that benefits the community, such as "landscaping at senior citizens centers, clearing trails or picking up trash at state or city parks, painting or light maintenance work at local non-profits."

M.A.P. Academy staff address student behavioral problems by helping students understand and correct their behavior through the **Life Space Interview** classroom counseling approach. The Life Space Interview follows seven steps:

1. **Isolate** – Removing student from classroom to a more private area
2. **Explore** – Exploring the student's point of view
3. **Share** – Staff share their point of view with student
4. **Connect** – Staff assist student in linking student behavior with other behaviors
5. **Alternate** – Staff and student discuss behavior
6. **Plan** – Staff and student discuss plan for student to improve
7. **Enter** – Student returns back to group/classroom

In Spring 2004, the M.A.P. Academy instituted the **WhyTry Program**, a 10 part program designed to help students better understand their reactions to events and the consequences the follow their actions. In use in over 300 school districts in the United States, Canada, and Australia, the WhyTry program's purpose is to teach students the following skills:

- Basic problem solving
- Anger management
- Understanding consequences of decisions
- Removing the negative labels placed upon them
- Dealing with peer pressure
- Living and keeping society's laws and rules
- Building a support system
- Having goals and a vision of their future.[5]

[5] The WhyTry Organization, WhyTry Product Information, http://www.whytry.org/products.html, accessed November 22, 2004.

According to the program's website, demonstrations have linked the program with truancy reduction, academic improvement, and increased graduation rates.

A Board of Directors monitors and oversees M.A.P. Academy's effectiveness, mission, and goals. School district-level personnel and the M.A.P. Academy principal, along with the directors of the Wilson County Youth Ranch, and a Wilson County Juvenile Judge and several Youth Service Officers comprise the Board.

Appendix G
Agency Responses

STATE OF TENNESSEE
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
6TH FLOOR, ANDREW JOHNSON TOWER
710 JAMES ROBERTSON PARKWAY
NASHVILLE, TN 37243-0375

PHIL BREDESEN
GOVERNOR

LANA C. SEIVERS, Ed.D.
COMMISSIONER

March 24, 2005

Ms. Ethel R. Detch, Director
Offices of Research and Education Accountability
Comptroller of the Treasury
Suite 1700, James K. Polk Building
Nashville, TN 37243-0268

Dear Ms. Detch:

Thank you for the opportunity to review and respond to the report your office recently compiled on Tennessee's Alternative Schools. You and your staff are to be commended for a comprehensive and informative analysis of this issue.

The Department and I take very seriously the educational achievement and behavioral management of students placed in Alternative Schools, just as we do for all students. For this reason, we have recently committed a full time person to work with Alternative Schools. One of her first actions will be to establish a Study Council for Alternative Schools. Central to our mission of helping teachers teach and students learn has been extensive professional development for teachers, and we concur with your recommendation that we assist the Alternative School staff by offering training that would be useful to their situation.

Again, we appreciate the opportunity to review and respond to this report. We look forward to collaborating with you as we identify best practice strategies for improving the experience students have while attending an Alternative School setting.

Sincerely,

Keith Brewer, Ed.D.
Deputy Commissioner

DR. GARY L. NIXON
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

PHIL BREDESEN
GOVERNOR

TENNESSEE
STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION
9TH FLOOR, ANDREW JOHNSON TOWER
710 JAMES ROBERTSON PARKWAY
NASHVILLE, TN 37243-1050
(615) 741-2966
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March 28, 2005

Mr. Phillip Doss, Assistant Director
Office of Educational Accountability
505 Deaderick Street, Suite 1700
Nashville, TN 37243-7911

Dear Mr. Doss:

I have reviewed the report on Tennessee's alternative schools. The findings appear to accurately describe the current situation for Tennessee's alternative schools.

The report recommends that the Board revise its rules to require school systems to be more accountable for student outcomes and to require a more comprehensive reporting of academic and behavioral measures and an annual improvement plan. The Board will work with the Department of Education to develop appropriate revisions to the rules.

The report further recommends that the Board convene a task force to address specific issues. The Board concurs with this recommendation.

Finally, the report recommends that the BEP Review Committee analyze the alternative schools component in the formula and consider recommending adjustments to the ratio to increase funding for the state's alternative schools. The Board concurs with this recommendation and will place the item on the next BEP Review Committee's agenda.

Sincerely,

Gary Nixon

Gary Nixon
Executive Director

GLN/pc

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