

Silent Voices: Perspectives of At-Risk Students Who Participated in an Alternative
Education Program

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Education Program

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Table of Contents

Abstract..... *vii*

Acknowledgments..... *viii*

Chapter I..... *1*

 Background..... 1

 District-Operated Alternative Education..... 2

 Problem Statement 6

 Purpose of Study 6

 Research Questions 6

 Methodology..... 7

 Participants..... 7

 Data Collection Tools 9

 Procedures 9

 Positionality..... 10

 Limitations 10

 Expected Outcomes 11

 Definition of Key Terms..... 11

 Summary..... 13

Chapter II..... *15*

 Introduction..... 15

SILENT VOICES

Psychosocial Development.....	15
Montessori Theory.....	18
Dweck’s Mindset.....	20
School Climate	20
Transformational Leadership	22
Defining “At Risk”	23
Alternative Education and Students at Risk: Early Warning Systems.....	26
Alternative Education.....	27
Students in District-Administered Alternative Education	30
Student Perspectives in Alternative Education	32
<i>Chapter III</i>	35
METHODS	35
Aim of the Study.....	35
Research Questions	35
Participants.....	37
Data Collection Tools	41
Procedures	42
Data Analysis.....	43
Ethical Considerations.....	43
Trustworthiness.....	43

SILENT VOICES

Limitations	44
<i>CHAPTER IV.....</i>	<i>45</i>
Results.....	45
Review of Methodology	45
Interviews.....	40
Participants.....	38
Findings	45
Enrollment In Succeed	45
Feelings Entering the Program	50
Alternative Strategies	53
Empowerment/Accountability.....	54
Online Curriculum.....	55
Emotional/Behavioral Counseling/Additional Supports	56
Recommendations for the Program:	59
Correlation To Current Situation:.....	61
<i>Chapter V.....</i>	<i>64</i>
Discussion.....	64
Question 1.....	65
Question 2.....	69
Question 3.....	77

SILENT VOICES

Question 4.....	80
Question 5.....	81
Limitations	82
Future Research.....	83
Conclusions	84
<i>APPENDIX A</i>	<i>86</i>
<i>APPENDIX B</i>	<i>89</i>
<i>APPENDIX C</i>	<i>92</i>
<i>APPENDIX D</i>	<i>95</i>
<i>APPENDIX E</i>	<i>98</i>
<i>APPENDIX F</i>	<i>100</i>
<i>References</i>	<i>104</i>

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to analyze what impact the school-within-a-school alternative education program has on the at-risk students who participated in them. Although previous research has shown the positive impact of alternative education programs on at-risk students, it has not shown how specifically the school-within-a-school alternative education program model impacts at-risk students. It would be useful to know how the school-within-a-school alternative education program impacts levels of expectancy and feelings of separation in at-risk students. This study addresses the gap in the existing literature.

The current investigation investigated how the school-within-a-school alternative education program is perceived by students who are at-risk. Interviews conducted with participants were triangulated with analysis of school attendance, academic, and behavioral records and also interviews with program instructors and an outside licensed professional counselor (LPC) who provided behavioral counseling for participants in the Succeed program. Participants in the research reported an overall good experience in the Succeed program and credited the program for their current path and past academic success. Fifty percent of participants graduated a full year earlier than traditional graduation paths and 100% of participants acquired more academic credits during the year in Succeed than is expected in the traditional track. Describing strong relationships and increased academic, social, and emotion supports, student participants demonstrated success in their academics and development of increased coping skills.

SILENT VOICES

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SILENT VOICES

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Chapter I

Silent Voices: Perspectives of At-Risk Students Who Participated in an Alternative Education Program

While there has been extensive research regarding the need of alternative education models and their specific impact regarding graduation rates and discipline, there has been limited research regarding alternative education programs as perceived by the students who are attending the program. In addition, the existing research has often encompassed a wide net of alternative education that does not describe a specific method of alternative education being used. It would be useful to know how specific alternative education models, specifically, the school-within-a-school alternative education program, impacts levels of expectancy and feelings of separation in at-risk students.

Although previous research has shown the positive impact of alternative education programs on at-risk students regarding graduation rates and decreases in discipline, it has not shown how specifically the school-within-a-school alternative education program model impacts at-risk students and how the students perceive the programs in which they participate. This study will address the gap in the existing literature and investigate how the school-within-a-school alternative education program model impacts at-risk students and their level of expectancy and feelings of separation.

Background

There is a tremendous amount of confusion regarding the various alternative education programs in the United States, and, more specifically, what is the best approach for at-risk students. Just defining what alternative education is, is troublesome.

SILENT VOICES

Currently, in the United States, 43 states have their own formal definition of alternative education. The U.S. Department of Education's (ED) definition is the foundation for many of the states' definitions and is defined as "designed to address the needs of students which typically cannot be met in regular schools" (Carver & Lewis, 2010, p.1). Due to this confusion of defining what alternative education is, often times research conducted in this field is defined as pertaining to all alternative education, when, in fact, there are many formats and most research is limited to a specific format. Widely-used alternative education formats have limited research on the particular individual format.

The most recent reports by the ED on alternative education, based on data collected in 2007-2008, revealed 646,500 students who participated in alternative education, with over 86% of those students enrolled in alternative education managed by their own district. Overall, 64% of public-school districts offer some form of alternative education and 40% of all districts have at least one program that is managed by the home district, with the national total of 10,300 district administered programs. Of those programs/schools, 37% are housed inside the traditional school, 4% are located in a juvenile detention center, 4% are managed as charter schools, and 17% use distance education as the method of delivery (Carver & Lewis, 2010).

The numbers of enrolled students do not accurately reflect the need for alternative schooling. In the suburbs, 38% of schools reported being unable to add additional students due to staffing or space limitation (Carver & Lewis, 2010).

District-Operated Alternative Education

Of the 10,300 alternative education programs that are administered by the home district, 3,811 are based within the traditional school. In addition, the use of alternative

SILENT VOICES

education in specific grade levels varies with the following percentages representative of all schools that offer alternative education, and, then, more specifically, what percentage of those schools offer each grade level. Based on the existing research, grade twelve was offered at 96% of schools, while grade nine was offered at only 88%. The use of alternative education decreased dramatically in the middle school level with 41% offered for sixth grade, 57% for seventh grade, and 64% for ninth grade. (Carver & Lewis, 2010) There is a clear pattern demonstrating an increase in the offerings of alternative education as students' progress through their education. Currently, there is a 55% difference in alternative education offerings in sixth grade compared to twelfth grade.

Often, alternative education programs that are housed in the traditional school are called the school-within-a-school model and that format is currently utilized by 37% of schools in the United States that offer alternative education schools or programs (Carver & Lewis, 2010, p. 3). While 37% may use the school-within-a-school model, there are limited data regarding students in those particular program formats and their own specific perspective.

A northeast Ohio School District is home to the third largest high school in the state of Ohio with a student population of 2,704 students. Due to the size of the high school, various programs are offered to address the needs and concerns of students. One of the programs is Succeed. Succeed was created in 2014 and is a unique program that enrolls at-risk students who are not experiencing success in the traditional school model. Many of the students have emotional disturbances and have an independent educational plan (IEP). During the 2017-2018 school year, Succeed had a roster of 30 students and through a combination of traditional schooling and online course work, while also

SILENT VOICES

providing increased supports, Succeed attempted to increase the success of nontraditional students. Succeed is housed in a separate facility outside of the high school but is still considered a part of the main high school campus. The program employs two intervention specialists and two classroom aides.

A second program piloted at The high school Is Step Up. Step Up is for any student who may not also be finding success in the traditional educational school model. Through a combination of traditional schooling and online course work with increased supports, Step Up attempts to develop an individualized program to help provide each student the best chance to be successful. Step Up currently has a roster of 50 students and the students have a variety of reasons for being in Step Up including attendance problems, behavior concerns, and anxiety. Step Up is held in the The high school School building and employs two intervention specialists.

The main difference between the two programs is the severity of behavior concerns and required interventions. Students in the Succeed building have limited access to the high school building and in many cases are not in traditional classes due to behavior concerns. In contrast, the majority of Step Up students are in traditional classes and the program is often used for credit recovery and additional social/academic supports.

Many of the students in both programs are involved in the juvenile court system. Table 1 shows the percentage of students in each program that are on probation with the local juvenile court system.

SILENT VOICES

Table 1.

Percentage of Students on Probation in Programs

Program	Students on Probation	Total Enrollment	Percentage
Step Up	12	50	25%
Succeed	16	30	53%

Succeed has over 53% of its participants on probation and Step Up has 25%. Overall, the Step Up and Succeed programs enroll over 53% of all The high school students who are currently on probation through the Lake County juvenile court system. In addition, Table 2 demonstrates the amount of additional supports needed by identifying enrollment of students in each program who have an IEP.

Table 2.

Percentage of Students on an IEP in Programs

Program	Students on IEPs	Total Enrollment	Percentage
Step Up	27	50	54%
Succeed	24	30	80%

Succeed has over 80% of its population on an IEP and Step Up has 54% of students on an IEP. While both programs have been academically beneficial to students, there has been limited information regarding the students' personal experience in the program and its impact on the students' sense of belonging, satisfaction, and self-esteem

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Problem Statement

Although previous research has shown the positive impact of alternative education programs on at-risk students, it has not shown how specifically the school-within-a-school alternative education program model impacts at-risk students. It would be useful to know how the school-within-a-school alternative education program impacts levels of expectancy and feelings of separation in at-risk students. This study will address the gap in the existing literature. The current investigation investigates how the school-within-a-school alternative education program is perceived by students who are at-risk. Specifically, the current investigation will study, from the student perspective, what the experiences in alternative education means to the students, and their level of academic aspiration and feelings of belonging to the school district.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to analyze what impact the school-within-a-school alternative education program has on the at-risk students who participated in them and their level of expectancy and feelings of separation.

Research Questions

In order to obtain a better understanding of the impact of alternative education school-within-a-school program on students, research was be conducted to help gain a better understanding of the student perspectives in alternative education school-within-a-school program. The goal was to examine the following primary research questions:

SILENT VOICES

1. How did the student become identified as at-risk and enrolled in the alternative education program?
2. How did the students feel regarding their participation in the Succeed program?
3. How did the use of transformation leadership and other strategies in the succeed program impact the students and teachers?
4. How would the students improve the alternative education program in which they participated?
5. Does the student feel the alternative education program had a direct correlation to his or her current situation?

Methodology

Participants

In order to gain more insight into the impact of alternative education programs on students at risk, via student perspectives, a phenomenological research design was be utilized. The use of phenomenological methods can help researchers better understand the participants' experience of a specific situation and is summarized by Creswell (2006) as "data from persons who have experienced the phenomenon and develops a composite description of the essence of the experience for all of the individuals. This description consists of 'what' they experienced and 'how' they experienced it" (p. 58). Research was focused on psychological, phenomenological study and the experiences of at-risk students who participated in alternative educational programs, specifically, the Succeed program.

In terms of data, Creswell (2006) stated, "Data are collected from the individuals who have experienced the phenomenon. Often data collection in phenomenological

SILENT VOICES

studies consists of in-depth interviews and multiple interviews with participants” (p. 62).

Utilization of in-person interviews is a phenomenological method and the data was focused on alternative education programs and the individuals’ experiences with that program. The focus of questions consist of asking the participants what they have experienced in terms of alternative education programs, what meaning they attached to those experiences, and how that impacted them educationally, emotionally, and personally.

Participants involved in the research consisted of former students who had been enrolled in the Succeed program in A northeast Ohio School District at some point in their 9-to-12-grade school year and successfully graduated from The high school School. The participants in the study ranged in age from 18-25 years old, included male and female students, and a variety of ethnicities. As final participants were documented, a more specific breakdown of demographics was documented in the results section of this manuscript.

The type of sampling utilized was purposive, with the goal of representing participants in the Succeed program. Purposive sampling is useful in this research because the students being interviewed provide information that is relevant to this researcher and cannot be obtained from other students (Maxwell, 2013, p. 97).

Criteria of participant inclusion was based solely on participation in the Succeed program. Individual, archival data were obtained through The northeast ohio school district, with the participants’ permission. After acquiring Youngstown State University (YSU) Independent Review Board (IRB) approval, previous students were contacted in an effort to recruit them for participation. Graduation from the program is

SILENT VOICES

not a determining criterion and the goal is to interview all participants to learn perspectives from all students in the program.

Data Collection Tools

In order to answer the research questions posed, the use of structured interviews was implemented to collect data. Interview questions were created based on the theories of qualitative research design, as discussed by Maxwell (2013), and Wellington & Szczerbinski (2007) and were effective in understanding student perspectives in alternative education programs, specifically Succeed. The use of a structured interview was allowed for more control in the interview and greater ability to analyze using numerical coding and statistical analysis (Wellington & Szczerbinski, 2007, p. 84).

Questions utilized in the interviews were created to obtain student perspective on alternative education and on previous research of how to limit factors affecting the quality of the interview data. With the focus of a structured interview, questions were devised that avoided double barreled questions, two-in-one questions, being restrictive in nature, leading questions, and double questions. Interview data will be collected via audio-recording to allow for a verbatim account of the interview to be integrated into the analysis and eliminate possible recording bias. (Wellington & Szczerbinski, 2007, p. 86).

Procedures

The first procedure was to submit an IRB protocol to the YSU IRB for approval of the proposed project. Upon approval, the initial database of participants was gathered.

SILENT VOICES

Information on participants was obtained in collaboration with a northeast Ohio school district and the use of Infinite Campus records. Once compiled, each student was contacted either by phone, or in person, to seek permission to meet with them and conduct an interview. Interviews were conducted at locations that were agreed upon by the participant and included The high school School, Panera's, McDonalds, or the participants' homes.

Participants were provided a copy of the questions at the start of the interview and the entire interview was recorded and transcribed into a word document at a later date. Once the interview had been coded, a follow-up interview was scheduled, and member-checking was conducted to ensure respondents' validation of their data. Follow-up questions could be asked to ensure rich data are collected and increased involvement occurs to increase trustworthiness. Triangulation of the data was conducted using the archived student records.

Positionality

Due to this researcher's personal involvement in alternative education, there is the possibility that the position may influence the study. In attempt to limit any possible bias, this researcher has attempted to focus research on student perspectives in the alternative education program and not the specific success of the program that this researcher manages. The outcome of this research does not impact the program in a positive or negative way, but rather provides research on how students perceived the program.

Limitations

SILENT VOICES

Limitations of the study are that the use of qualitative case study research can limit the ability to make external generalizations but can be used for internal generalizability. Maxwell (2013) defined generalization as “extending research results’ conclusions, or other accounts that are based on a study of particular individuals’ settings, times, or institutions to other individuals, settings, times, or institutions than those directly studied” (p. 138). However, while this is a research project, the findings can be used as a partial program evaluation of the Succeed program at The high school School. Findings from this investigation will provide needed evidence to support necessary change to improve student social, emotional, and academic outcomes.

While not all qualitative data are internally generalizable, through the use of the research methods and decision to include all participants in the research pool, this research has the ability to be internally generalizable. While qualitative research is often limited in direct connection, it can also provide information on theories or processes. (Maxwell, 2013, p. 138).

Expected Outcomes

The goal of the research in gleaning perspectives of students who participate in school-within-a-school alternative education programs is to help shed light on effective practices, in this specific form of alternative education, and guide further research on the subject and the impact of alternative education programs on at-risk students’ senses of belonging, satisfaction, and self-esteem.

Definition of Key Terms

SILENT VOICES

Alternative Education: has many interpretations, and, based on evaluation of all 43 states, along with the federal definition, a general rule is that the definition should include the population of students, the form of alternative education, the type of services that will be provided, and the hours in which it will be completed (Porowski, O'Connor, & Luo, 2014).

At-Risk Students: has many interpretations, but for the purpose of this study, at-risk will be defined as students who have an increased chance of educational failure (Carver & Lewis, 2010).

Individual Education Plan (IEP): is an individual education plan (Carver & Lewis, 2010).

PBIS: is defined as a “non-curricular universal prevention strategy that aims to modify the school environment by creating improved systems and procedures that promote positive change in staff and student behaviors” (Bradshaw, Koth, Thorton, & Leaf, 2008, p. 101).

Phenomenological Research: is obtaining data from the persons who have experienced the topic being researched. The goal is to attempt to capture their experience in terms of not only what they experienced, but how they experienced it (Creswell, 2012).

School Climate: has many different interpretations but is often defined as the overall quality of relationships within the school and the perceptions organizations' members have of organization attributes (Cocorada & Clinciu, 2009; Hendron & Kearney, 2016).

Subtractive Practices: is the concept of actions that result in students becoming more at-risk for educational failure (Valenzuela, 1999).

SILENT VOICES

Succeed Program: is a school-within-a-school alternative education program implemented in the Northeast Ohio school district. Started in 2014, Succeed participants are at-risk students who did not have academic success in the traditional classroom for various reasons. The average number of participants in the program is approximately 25 and the program employs two intervention specialists, two classroom aides, and several outside resources including mental health services.

Summary

In the following chapters, a literature review and methodology is examined. The literature review begins with a focus on defining at-risk students and what resources schools implement to help address this specific population of students. Results of past interventions will be reviewed including alternative education programs, which is the second focus of the literature review. Alternative education is often misunderstood and a review on how states define alternative education will be completed and an extensive review of what the main forms of alternative education are and how are they implemented in the United States. The final part of the literature review is an evaluation of how alternative education programs impact students at-risk and discussion of the lack of research and data on student perspectives who are defined as at-risk and participate in the school-within-a-school alternative education program.

Chapter 3 focuses on methodology and provides an overview of how the research will be conducted to better understand the perspectives of students who participated in a school-within-a-school alternative education program. In order to accomplish this, the chosen methodology path focuses on qualitative data in the form of phenomenological data. Through interviewing 2017 and 2018 graduates of a school-within-a-school

SILENT VOICES

alternative program, data will be codified and broken down into themes that analyze students' experiences in the program.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

In order to better understand the reasoning behind researching student perspectives in a school-within-a-school alternative education program, it is important to know who participates in these programs, and, more specifically, what type of programs in which they participate. Through a review of at-risk students, demonstration of the need will be provided that existed for these students that led to the creation and implementation of alternative education programs. Once the need is established, a review will be provided of the confusion that exists with alternative education. Various formats will be discussed along with the current research that exists. After describing the participants and the programs, a review of the impact of alternative education programs on at-risk students will be reviewed, along with gaps in data regarding the impact, specifically, with alternative education programs that utilize the school-within-a-school format.

Psychosocial Development

Erik Erikson (1993) developed a psychoanalytic theory that reviewed the eight stages of psychosocial development that all individuals go through. Each stage presents a paradox having two competing virtues; the individual ideally learns to master the virtue to become a productive member of society. If an individual was unable to successfully master a stage, there would be at risk of having core weaknesses later in life including withdrawal, compulsion, and inhibition. The eight stages of psychosocial development

SILENT VOICES

developed by Erikson (1993) each consisted of two opposed virtues. These stages are presented in Table 3.

Table 3.

Basic Strengths, Core Weaknesses, and Spheres of Social Interactions for Erikson's (1993) Stages

Stage	Basic Strength	Core Weakness	Sphere of Social Interactions
Basic Trust vs. Mistrust	Hope	Withdrawal	Mother of surrogate
Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt	Will	Compulsion	Parents
Initiative vs. Guilt	Purpose	Inhibition	Family
Industry vs. Inferiority	Competence	Inertia	School, Neighborhood
Identity vs. Role Confusion	Fidelity	Repudiation	Peers
Intimacy vs. Isolation	Love	Exclusivity	Partners (sex, friendship, cooperation, competition)
Generativity vs. Stagnation	Care	Rejection	Divided labor and shared household
Integrity vs. Despair	Wisdom	Disdain	“mankind” or “my kind”

Note. Reprinted from Fleming, J. A. (2018). *Psychological Perspectives on Human Development*. Retrieved from <http://swppr.org/Textbook/Preface--online.html>

According to Erickson (1993), stage one is the concept of trust versus mistrust and is the infancy stage. If an individual is unable to obtain the stage-one necessities, a

SILENT VOICES

level of mistrust will develop and possibly manifest itself in the individual. Erikson (1993) explained that individuals who were unable to meet the needs of each stage, could experience future issues regarding those items. Erikson (1993) stated, “underlying weakness of such trust is apparent in adult personalities in whom withdrawal into schizoid and depressive states is habitual (Erickson, 1993, p. 247)

Stage two is autonomy versus shame and doubt and deals with the toddler ages of individuals. During this period, individuals can identify with the ability to be autonomous and develop self-restraint. Lack of development can lead to lack of self-esteem and decreased levels of self-restraint (Erikson, 1993; Poole & Snarey, 2011).

According to Poole and Snarey (2011), stage three focuses on initiative versus guilt and relates to how parents encourage the child to grow or have increased feelings of guilt. During this learning stage, individuals begin to search for whom they will eventually become. Regarding education, Erickson (1993) stated, “... the child is at no time more ready to learn quickly and avidly, to become bigger in the sense of sharing obligation and performance than during this period of development” (p. 257).

Stage four deals with industry versus inferiority and includes the school-age period. During this time, the individual learns to either produce and become recognized or fail to produce and become inferior. At this stage, individuals are aware of the response of producing something and receiving recognition.

The last stage relevant to the current research is stage five: identity versus role confusion. During the fifth stage, the individual begins to form his or her identity and associate with similar-minded individuals. Individuals are most influenced by their peers during this phase and use several coping skills to address their own insecurity. Coping

SILENT VOICES

skills include taking on an identity that is not correct, but is easy, pausing on searching for his or her identity, and giving up on most things and lacking passion (Erikson, 1993; Poole & Snarey, 2011).

Stages one through five are relevant to the current investigation research in that failure to master these stages can result in behaviors that can identify a student as at-risk. Students who have increased mistrust, doubt, guilt, inferiority, and role confusion are more likely to have a difficult time developing strong relationships at schools with staff members. Erikson (1993) discussed the impacts of role confusion in adolescents and its impact by stating, “Young people can also be remarkably clannish, and rule in their exclusion of those who are ‘different’” ... such intolerance is a defense against a sense of identity confusion (p. 260).

Erikson’s (1993) review of the psychosocial development stages allows teachers to understand causes behind student behaviors, and, through increased interventions, students can address these conflicts and develop stronger relationships with adults and increase positive virtues (Poole & Snarey, 2011). Like Erikson’s research, Montessori research also involved an analysis of students’ psychosocial development and its impact on learning (Thayer-Bacon, 2012).

Montessori Theory

Maria Montessori in many ways can be considered the founder of alternative education concepts (Thayer-Bacon, 2012). Montessori was a physician turned educator who opened the Casa dei Bambini in 1907 and demonstrated the benefits of the Montessori Method of teaching. The Montessori Method of teaching is based on the concept of allowing students to learn based on their own initiative and pace (Thayer-

SILENT VOICES

Bacon, 2012). Thayer-Bacon (2012) summed up the concept by stating, “Much to everyone's amazement, Montessori discovered that preschool-age children have a strong desire to learn, and that they can learn on their own if placed in an environment that allows them the opportunity to do so” (p. 7).

While the Association Montessori Internationale has researched and established standards that encompass the main concepts of Maria Montessori's (2015) theory including class size, staff training, and uninterrupted work periods, the main concept of Montessori's (2015) theory can be summed as the concept of the absorbent mind. Montessori believed that children were able to absorb their environment during their adolescence phase and it was critical to educational development. Based on the absorbent mind concept, Montessori (2015) would pay special attention to activities, materials, and locations provided to children and attempted to foster environments that allowed for independence (Stoops, 1987).

Montessori (2013) explained, in great length, the reasoning behind focusing on the absorbent mind and how it was applicable to education. In a series of reprinted Montessori (2013) writings, she discussed child development and that current education structures limit the ability of a child to learn. Montessori (2015) believed that given freedom, students chose to learn more than required for the satisfaction of learning.

Montessori (2015) described the early concepts of what would become Carol Dweck's (2007) growth mindset. This is analogous to the idea that children are like water and will fill the shape they are placed in. If students are provided opportunity to learn and grow, they will rise to meet those opportunities and challenges.

SILENT VOICES

Dweck's Mindset

Carol Dweck's (2007) growth mindset is the foundation for alternative education and the concept that students, when provided the correct environment, can be successful. Dweck (2007) reviewed the theory of fixed mindsets, which maintains that individuals were limited in their ability to grow intellectually, whereas, growth mindset individuals believed that skills could be developed overtime and individuals were not limited in their ability to learn. The power of *yet* was the idea, that, if someone could not do something, they could learn to do it, but simply had not learned it *yet* (Dweck, 1996).

Dweck (2007) believed that this concept applied to not only academics, but social developmental as well. Research conducted by Dweck (2016) and Yeager (2016, pp. 38-39) demonstrated that fixed mindsets could often lead to increased feelings of shame. With growth mindsets, individuals were better able to handle rejection, with the belief that individuals were continuing to evolve and not fixed in their current state. Dweck (2016) and Yeager (2016, pp. 38-39) were able to demonstrate that growth mindset could have an impact on a large group of students regarding increased compassion and reduced aggression (Dweck, 2016). Dweck's (2007) mindsets' theory has important implications to the current investigation in the ability to impact social development in a large group of students and could help lead to an impact on school climate.

School Climate

There are hundreds of studies that demonstrate the positive and negative effects of a school climate, but even with all of the research, it can still be a hard topic to pinpoint and address. Hendron and Kearney (2016) described school climate as [it] "consists of

SILENT VOICES

components such as quality of student-teacher and interpersonal relationships. Other key elements include student autonomy, order, safety, clear and consistent rules and goals, opportunities for parent involvement, classroom organization, and effective instructional methods” (p. 109). Cocorada and Clinciu (2009) described school climate differently and stated, “the new meaning of climate is that of a measure of perceptions organization members have towards organizational attributes, influenced by members behaviors with a high status” (p. 342). While the definition may change, the impact school climate can have on students does not.

A positive school climate can address a number of student issues including absenteeism (Hendron and Kearney, 2016, p. 109). In addition, Hendron and Kearney (2016) stated, “students with negative feelings about school and relationships with school personnel show great attendance difficulties as well as antisocial behavior in the classroom” (p. 110). Hendron and Kearney (2016) went on to state that recent research has shown that schools with a more positive climate can have higher levels of academic achievement (p. 110). Once it is established that school climate can affect students, the next question becomes how to address it. Currently, in school systems, it is addressed through the use of PBIS.

PBIS has been defined as a “non-curricular universal prevention strategy that aims to modify the school environment by creating improved systems and procedures that promote positive change in staff and student behaviors” (Bradshaw et al., 2008, p. 101). Through creation and implementation of a systematic program to address climate, school districts have tried to improve culture and climate with the goal of improving the student experience. Previous research indicated that “PBIS was associated with a reduction in

SILENT VOICES

office discipline referrals and suspension, as well as improved academic performance” (Bradshaw et al., p. 101).

One focus of school climate is to provide a better experience for the students and address their growing needs. In terms of increased student needs, Suitts (2016) stated, “52% of students across the nation's public schools are eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunch” (p. 36). The goal of PBIS is to improve climate, through increasingly meeting the needs of students, and, in some cases, that becomes meeting the most basic of needs. Suitts (2016) proceeded to discuss how low-income students are more inclined to need more assistance, and, without that assistance “they are generally more likely to have developmental issues and score low on school tests, fall behind in school, get entangled with criminal justice system, and fail to graduate from high school or attain a college degree (p. 37). Suitts’ (2016) research helped tie climate, PBIS, and student performance together to better understand the value of focusing on the topic of school climate. With school climate and student success demonstrated as being connected, the use of transformational leadership strategies can be utilized to help improve school climate.

Transformational Leadership

The focus on leadership strategies and implementing change with alternative education students and staff is paramount due to the, often, already established resistance among alternative education students. Due to this educational reluctance, the focus must turn to getting as many staff members and students as possible on board with any change or program to help increase the chance of success. McCarley, Peters, and Decman (2016) stated, “transformational leadership is more facilitative of education change and

SILENT VOICES

contributes to organizational improvement, effectiveness and school culture” (p. 323).

The use of transformational leadership has been utilized in the business world for years, with the idea of improving performance by increasing internal motivations. A transformational leader is described as a person who inspires his or her staff and helps foster leaders, builds teams, and helps set high expectations (McCarley et al., p. 323).

In addition to increased internal motivation, Aarons and Sommerfeld (2012) discussed that “transformational leadership is important in organizational outcomes both during change and during stable operations and predicts improved unit performance” (p. 423). When compared to other leadership styles, transformational leadership has demonstrated an increase in employee job performance and job satisfaction (Aarons & Sommerfeld, p. 424). The idea of implementing transformational leadership, with any change, is an appropriate strategy. Murphy (2016) stated, “A leader's failure to strategize how to respond to pushback may actually accelerate resistance” (p. 70). Students in alternative education programs often get labeled as difficult or unwilling to try, but with implementation of transformational leadership, specifically, the concept of inspiration motivation, administration can help better articulate students in alternative education programs and what it means to be at risk.

Defining “At Risk”

The term students at risk is open to many interpretations in education. The initial term at risk was first utilized by the famous report, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Education Reform*, completed by the National Commission on Excellence in Education in 1983. At the request, of then President Ronald Reagan, the commission compiled information showing our education system was lagging behind other developed countries

SILENT VOICES

and the risk was that we would have a generation of individuals who would lack basic skills and knowledge to be a productive member of Society (United States National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). The Commission went on to explain the goal of addressing the risk was to ensure that:

All, regardless of race or class or economic status, are entitled to a fair chance and to the tools for developing their individual powers of mind and spirit to the utmost. This promise means that all children by virtue of their own efforts, competently guided, can hope to attain the mature and informed judgment needed to secure gainful employment, and to manage their own lives, thereby serving not only their own interests but also the progress of society itself. (United States National Commission on Excellence in Education, Introduction, 1983)

Indicators were provided showing increased illiteracy in the United States, decreased standardized test scores, declining scholastic aptitude tests, decreased level of high-order intellectual skills, increased remediation courses, and decreases in academic comparison scores. In addition to detailed score data, the Commission provided general findings that indicated secondary curriculum was being diluted and students were being put in general tracks that failed to address individual needs. Expectations were being lowered and students were not provided with the study skills necessary to be successful (United States National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983).

Based on these findings, the Commission recommended five main foci for improvement including content, standards and expectations, time, teaching, and

SILENT VOICES

leadership/fiscal support. In the focus for teaching, eight recommendations were provided and numbers 4 and 5 were:

4. The time available for learning should be expanded through better classroom management and organization of the school day. If necessary, additional time should be found to meet the special needs of slow learners, the gifted, and others who need more instructional diversity than can be accommodated during a conventional school day or school year.
5. The burden on teachers for maintaining discipline should be reduced through the development of firm and fair codes of student conduct that are enforced consistently, and by considering alternative classrooms, programs, and schools to meet the needs of continually disruptive students.(United States National Commission on Excellence in Education, Introduction, 1983).

These recommendations helped to identify students who would be deemed at-risk and provide the foundation and reasoning for additional supports including alternative education programs and schools.

While *A Nation At Risk* was the one of the most recognized first uses of the term, since the report, students deemed at risk often have a wide array of explanations for being grouped into that category. The most common definition generally accepted is students who are at risk of educational failure; but what leads to being titled at risk for this? Although no concrete combination is listed, several categories are often markers as points of concern and can help identify students who may be at risk of educational failure. The main risk factors commonly associated with designating students at risk include grade

SILENT VOICES

performance, attendance, and disruptive behavior (Carver & Lewis, 2010; ED, 2016; Evers, 2009; Sweig, 2013).

In addition to the three main indicators, other factors commonly included are criminal records, low socio-economic status, learning disabilities, and language barriers. These factors can become barriers to academic success and, thus, are identified as at risk for possible academic failure (Zweig, 2013).

Alternative Education and Students at Risk: Early Warning Systems

Once established indicators are created to determine who is at risk, the next step is to identify how at-risk students are reviewed for possible inclusion for alternative education. In order to determine how students were placed in alternative education settings, the U.S Department of Education created, provided, and reviewed the National Survey on High School strategies designed to help at-risk student graduates in 2014. This survey was taken by over 2,000 high schools and focused on how students were identified for inclusion in alternative education. Key findings included that over 50% of schools used some form of early warning to identify students at risk of academic failure. Early warning systems included a focus on the three main indicators, attendance, behavior, and course performance (grades). These three main indicators of early warning systems align with the definition of at risk that is generally accepted by education systems (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

While early warning systems helped identify students at risk, there was not a specific indicator that caused an introduction of an intervention. Interventions were provided most frequently for truancy and the most common type of intervention provided was a meeting with administrators and teachers, which occurred 85% of the time an

SILENT VOICES

intervention was triggered. Specific academic support interventions were used less frequently and included credit-recovery courses utilizing 62% of the time, academic support courses being used 41% of the time, and, mandatory tutoring, 61% of the time. Based on the data, it can be assumed that multiple interventions could be assigned at any one time (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

While early warning systems focus on interventions in general, the U.S. Department of Education also published the *Alternative Schools and Programs for Public School Students At Risk of Education Failure: 2007-2008*. This document focused specifically on alternative education settings and is relevant to the current investigation because of its focus on district-administered alternative education. In order to fully understand the benefits of alternative education, the term, itself, must be defined.

Alternative Education

While the term is used frequently in education, there are a tremendous amount of discrepancies among staff, schools, and states regarding what alternative education is and what it is not. Defining alternative education is often met with broadly defined and frequently different definitions. Currently, 43 states have their own formal definition of alternative education (Porowski et al., 2014). One example is the definition from the state of Wisconsin and Tony Evers (2009), Wisconsin State Superintendent:

an instructional program, approved by the school board, that utilizes successful alternative or adaptive school structures and teaching techniques and that is incorporated into existing, traditional classrooms or regularly scheduled curricular programs, or that is offered in place of regularly scheduled curricular programs. Alternative education does not

SILENT VOICES

include a private school or a home-based private educational program. (p. 1)

The ED's definition is the foundation for many of the states' definitions and is defined as "designed to address the needs of students that typically cannot be met in regular schools" (Carver & Lewis, 2010, p. 1). Based on evaluations of all 43 states, along with the federal definition, a general rule is that the definition of alternative education should include the population of students, the form of alternative education, the type of services that will be provided, and the hours in which it will be completed (Porowski, et al., 2014).

Once the definition is formalized, the next step is to determine what form of alternative education is being utilized. Often, the word alternative in education is used interchangeably to represent many different forms of education. There are two widely accepted organizational concepts for alternative education. The first concept, defined by Raywid (1994), is broken down into three tiers: Popular Innovations, Last Chance Programs, and Remedial Focus.

Tier 1, titled Popular Innovations, is related to schools and are schools typically defined as magnet schools based on the idea of choice and individualized/specialized learning. Popular Innovations can include STEM schools, career/technical, and fine/performing arts. These schools are open enrollment to all students (Raywid, 1994; National Dropout Prevention Center, 2018).

Tier 2 is titled Last Chance Programs, also school related, and are defined as schools more in line with typical connotations of alternative education that can often be an option prior to expulsion. The main difference is that these programs are not

SILENT VOICES

enrolled-based on option or student choice. While behavior is addressed in Last Chance Programs, curriculum, in most cases, is not modified (Raywid, 1994).

Tier 3 is titled Remedial Focus and has more student-oriented programs and goals for academic/social/emotional remediation and supports. A student enrolled in tier 3 is put in the program with the assumption that a focus on community and individuals' deficiencies can eventually lead to their re-entry into the traditional setting (Raywid, 1994, National Dropout Prevention Center, 2018).

In addition to Raywid (1994), another widely accepted organizational model is Hefner-Packer's (1991) five alternative education models which are described as including alternative classrooms, school-within-a-school, separate alternative education, continuation school, and magnet school. The alternative classroom is a classroom within the traditional school building, but self-contained. The school-within-a-school model is still housed in the traditional school building, but it is a specialized education program and can include social or behavior programs. The separate alternative school can still be operated by the home district but has its own academic and social/behavior programs. The continuation school is separate from the traditional model and it is often for students who are no longer attending school and provides a more specialized instruction with focuses on job skills. The magnet school is located outside of the traditional high school and can include STEM schools, career/technical, and fine/performing arts (National Dropout Prevention Center, 2018; Hefner-Packer, 1991).

For the purposes of this investigation, the focus is on alternative education models in which the student is still enrolled in their own home district. Both the school-within-a-

SILENT VOICES

school and alternative classroom would be relevant. Based on the Hefner-Packer (1991) model, a definitive separation is created between what is considered alternative schools and alternative programs. Alternative programs follow the school-within-a-school and alternative classroom model and are usually still in the traditional school. Alternative schools deviate from that program and result in students who are no longer a part of the traditional setting (Carver & Lewis, 2010).

Students in District-Administered Alternative Education

Students in alternative education programs are often placed for a variety of reasons as listed in Table 4. In many cases, districts listed staff, student, and parent requests as reasons for entry into an alternative education program (Carver & Lewis, 2010).

SILENT VOICES

Table 4.

Means of Placement of Students in District-Administered Alternative Education

Type of Recommendation	Means That Influence Placement to a Moderate Extent
District Level Admin.	54%
Regular School Staff	75%
Committee of Teachers, Admin., and Counselors	71%
Student Request	41%
Parent Request	48%
Result of Functional Behavioral Assessment	28%
Criminal Justice System Referral	23%
Other	6%

There are a number of different reasons found in the extant research for student admission into alternative education (Carver & Lewis, 2010). Of the school districts that offer their own alternative education program, they listed the following potential reasons for entry in the program as presented in Table 5.

SILENT VOICES

Table 5.

Possible Reasons for Transfer to an Alternative Education Program by School Districts That Manage Their Own Program

Reason	Percent of School Districts that Offer Alternative Education Programs
Possession or use of a firearm	42%
Possession or use of a weapon other than a firearm	51%
Possession, distribution, or use of alcohol or drugs	57%
Arrest or involvement with the criminal justice system	42%
Physical attacks or fights	61%
Disruptive verbal behavior	57%
Chronic truancy	53%
Continual academic failure	57%
Pregnancy/teen parenthood	31%
Mental health needs	27%
Other	5%

All these reasons provide a great context for, not only, the reasons why students are enrolled in alternative education, but, more specifically, what category of student is often enrolled: students determined to be at risk.

Student Perspectives in Alternative Education

Current research is limited in terms of student perspectives of who participated in a school-within-a-school alternative education model, but research has been completed

SILENT VOICES

about alternative education in general. Students who participated in an alternative education school described a very different experience from their traditional school experience as shown in Table 6.

Table 6.

Major Themes

Experiences at traditional schools	Experiences at solution-focused alternative high school
Poor teacher relationships	Positive teacher relationships
Lack of safety	Improving maturity and responsibility
Overly rigid authority	Understanding about social issues
Problems with peer relationships	Better peer relationships and supportive atmosphere

Note. Lagana-Riordan, C., Aguilar, J. P., Franklin, C., Streeter, C. L., Kim, J. S., Tripodi, S. J., & Hopson, L. M. (2011). At-risk students' perceptions of traditional schools and a solution-focused public alternative school. *Preventing School Failure, 55*(3), 105–114. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10459880903472843>

Students described their experiences at traditional schools as tense, rigid, and isolating. Relationships with teachers were described as poor and students felt that teachers did not have the time available to build a strong relationship. Students also remarked that they felt they were not provided with the same level of respect that was expected towards staff; safety was an additional concern and many students felt bullied

SILENT VOICES

and/or uncomfortable in the school environment. With regards to discipline, students discussed the rules as being rigid and did not take into account specific, individual cases of a behavior. The concept of equity was discussed and handling issues on an individual basis. Lastly, students discussed the concept of isolation and separation among school groups. Students deemed at risk may be more likely to act out, in their opinion, due to the feelings of being withdrawn (Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011).

Students who participated in the alternative education program discussed a different set of norms described as relaxed, flexible, and inclusive. Teachers were described as caring, trained, non-judgmental, and accepting, which helped build strong relationships. Students were given more responsibility and felt that increased expectations allowed for more control over their decisions. Staff members were described as being role models and willing to discuss individual social issues students were experiencing. This led to staff members being able to refer students for additional needed services. Lastly, students felt more included in their school due to improved atmosphere (Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011).

While previous research has helped to shed light into the perspectives of students who attended alternative education schools, it does not help to better understand students' perspectives who stay in their home school and participate in an alternative education program, as opposed to an entirely new school. The current investigation addresses the lacunae in the existing literature regarding alternative educational programs that are delivered as a school-within-a-school.

METHODS

Aim of the Study

The aim of the current investigation is to gain a better understanding of student perspectives in regard to alternative education programs in which they participated. Due to lack of phenomenological research in student perspectives who participate in school-within-a-school alternative education programs, this specific research can help guide further research into how alternative education programs impact students holistically and not just academically. In addition, gathering data from key stakeholders in alternative education programs (students) can be a useful tool in determining strategies that are most beneficial to students at risk.

Research Questions

In order to obtain a better understanding of student perspectives in alternative education programs, the following primary research questions will be researched:

1. How did the student become identified as at-risk and enrolled in the alternative education program?
2. How did the students feel regarding their participation in the Succeed program?
3. How did the use of transformation leadership and other strategies in the succeed program impact the students and teachers?
4. How would the students improve the alternative education program in which they participated?

SILENT VOICES

5. Does the student feel the alternative education program had a direct correlation to his or her current situation?

Research Design

In an attempt to provide new data to alternative education research, the goal to focus on was not student success or failures, which has been researched thoroughly, but, instead, focus on the perspective of the student, which is often overlooked. In order to obtain an authentic student perspective, phenomenological research design was utilized. The use of phenomenological methods can help researchers better understand the participants experience of a specific situation and is summarized by Creswell (2012) as “data from persons who have experienced the phenomenon and develops [*sic*] a composite description of the essence of the experience for all of the individuals. This description consists of ‘what’ they experienced and ‘how’ they experienced it” (p. 58). There are two main types of phenomenological research methods: hermeneutic and psychological. Hermeneutic is the idea that the researcher can spend time evaluating the phenomenon in relation to the individuals and then summarize the experience. Psychological is based “less on the interpretations of the researcher and more on a description of the experiences of participants” (Creswell, 2012, p. 59). This investigation focused on psychological phenomenological study and experiences of students who participated in alternative educational programs, specifically the Succeed program.

The procedures for phenomenological research include making the decision of which approach to utilize. Once the approach is chosen, there must be a concrete idea of what type of phenomenon is going to be studied. In terms of data, Creswell (2012) stated, “Data are collected from the individuals who have experienced the phenomenon.

SILENT VOICES

Often data collection in phenomenological studies consists of in-depth interviews and multiple interviews with participants” (p. 62). The two main questions asked in data collection are “*What have you experienced in terms of the phenomenon*” and “*what contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences with the phenomenon?*” Once the data were collected, they were analyzed, coded, and summarized.

Participants

Participants consisted of former students who had been enrolled in the Succeed program in a northeast Ohio School District. Started in 2014, Succeed currently has a roster of 30 students and through a combination of traditional schooling and online course work, while also providing increased supports, Succeed attempts to increase the success of nontraditional students. Succeed is housed in a separate facility outside of the high school. The program employs two intervention specialists and two classroom aides. The participants in the study ranged in age from 18-25 years old, included male and female students, and a variety of ethnicities. As final participants were documented, a more specific breakdown of demographics will be provided.

The type of sampling utilized was purposive and with the goal of representing participants in the Succeed program. Purposive sampling is useful in this research because the students being interviewed provide information that is relevant to alternative education research and cannot be obtained from other students (Maxwell, 2013, p. 97). Purposive sampling meets the goal of achieving representatives of the Succeed setting and was described by Maxwell (2013):

SILENT VOICES

The first is achieving representatives or typicality of the settings, individuals, or activities selected. Because, as noted previously, random sampling is likely to achieve this only with a large sample size, deliberately selecting cases, individuals, or situations that are known to be typical provides far more confidence that the conclusions adequately represent the average members of the population. (p. 98)

Criteria of participants to be in the study were based solely on participation and graduation from the Succeed program. Individual data were obtained through the a northeast Ohio school district and each participant received notification via mail, phone, or email asking if they would like to participate in the research investigation.

Participants Details

Tom (pseudonym): A male graduate who lives with his mother and with his grandmother in Cleveland. Prior to entering the Succeed program, Tom received over 31 behavior referrals in a two-month span and earned a 1.0 grade point average his first quarter at The high school. After entering the program, Tom completed all required academics and graduated an entire year early with an overall grade point average of 2.14. Behaviors also decreased during the Succeed program and there were only 11 documented behavior referrals for the remaining two-and-one-half years Tom was at The high school. Tom is currently seeking employment and presented a generally positive view of his time in Succeed. Tom was in the Succeed program for two and half years.

Mar (pseudonym): A male graduate who lives with his girlfriend. Prior to entering the Succeed program, Mar transferred from a neighboring school district where he described he was “failing just about everything.” After entering the program in October of his

SILENT VOICES

junior year, he graduated on time with a grade point average of 2.39. Mar is currently seeking employment and presented a generally positive outlook on the path his life is heading and gave credit to the Succeed program for his current path.

Sue (pseudonym): A female graduate who lives with her Mother. Prior to entering the Succeed program, Sue was in her own words “*on probation for truancy.. I wasn’t attending school.*” Sue missed over 97 days of school in less than two years of being at the high school. After entering the program, her truancy decreased to less than 12 days her senior year. She graduated with a 2.714 and is a student full time at the local community college. Sue has an extremely positive outlook on her current life path and credits the Succeed program for her success.

Roy (pseudonym): A male graduate who lives with his parents. Prior to entering the Succeed program, Roy was enrolled in an out of district alternative education program for six years. After entering the program, Roy completed over ten credits in one year and graduated a year early. Roy’s cumulative 3.14 grade point average and placed him in the 55th percentile in his graduating class. Roy is employed full time at a local manufacturing organization and credits Succeed with his current success and helping him obtain his current position.

Mr. Field (pseudonym): A male instructor who has taught in the Succeed program for four years. Prior to joining the Succeed program, Mr. Field was employed in an out of district alternative education school that dealt with students he described as having “*significant behaviors*” from Cleveland and East Cleveland School Districts. After serving a long-term substitute position in the Succeed program, he was hired for that position by a northeast Ohio school district.

SILENT VOICES

Mr. Cohen (pseudonym): A male instructor who has taught in the Succeed program for four years. Prior to joining the Succeed program, Mr. Cohen was employed in a neighboring district instructing another school-within-a-school educational program. Teacher number two was involved in the planning stages of the Succeed program and was brought over to help implement that program.

Mr. Jung (pseudonym): A male licensed professional counselor (LPC) who is employed by an outside behavior health organization. The organization is contracted through northeast Ohio schools to provide behavior health services K-12 and the outside LPC provides services for the Succeed program for ten hours per week. Outside LPC outside provides support of additional services for students in the Step Up program.

Interviews

Participants were chosen by meeting the criteria of having been a 2017-2018 graduate of the Succeed Program and being over the age of 18. Of the 10 2017-2018 graduates, eight were over the age of 18 at the time interviews were conducted. Over 50% of the population agreed to participate in the research and interviews were conducted with four Succeed graduates. In addition, to aid in triangulation of data, interviews were conducted with both Succeed program instructors and the LPC who provided behavioral counseling for participants in the Succeed program. Multiple attempts were made to contact other graduates and included both the researcher and Succeed staff members reaching out via phone calls to home phones, parents' cell phones, and graduates' personal phone numbers, if available.

Interviews were conducted at locations chosen by participants and ranged from a local eateries to the building that housed the Succeed program. The four graduate

SILENT VOICES

participants all agreed to have their interviews audio recorded and to allow access to their school records. Waivers were read to and signed by all participants immediately prior to interviews were conducted and forms were scanned and saved in a password-protected google drive. Participants were all provided a copy of the structured questions before the start of the interview and asked the identical questions in the same order to ensure consistency.

Data Collection Tools

In order to answer the research questions posed, the use of structured interviews was implemented to collect data. Interview questions were created based on the theories of qualitative research design by Maxwell (2013), and Wellington and Szczerbinski (2007) and were designed to gain understanding of student perspectives in alternative education programs, specifically Succeed. The use of a structured interview allowed for more control in the interview and greater ability to analyze using numerical coding and statistical analysis (Wellington & Szczerbinski, 2007, p. 84).

Questions utilized in the interviews were created based on the goal to obtain student perspectives on alternative education and also on previous research of how to limit factors affecting the quality of the interview data. With the focus of a structured interview, double-barreled questions were avoided, as were two-in-one questions, leading questions, and double questions. Double-barreled questions touch upon more than one issue yet allows only for one answer. An example would be asking what resources were most helpful and, specifically, designate how some of the resources helped. Two-in-one questions are when the researcher combines opposites; for example, what resources were the most and least helpful for you? Restrictive

SILENT VOICES

questions eliminate possible answers; for example, do you think that alternative education is as good as traditional schooling? Leading questions are when the researcher would explain their thoughts and have participants follow up after. Lastly, double questions are when the researcher includes more than one concept in the question. For example, do you ever feel angry and depressed in the Succeed program? Interview data were collected via tape-recording since it allows for a verbatim account of the interview and eliminates possible recording bias and lack of verification of notetaking (Wellington & Szczerbinski, 2007, p. 86).

Procedures

The first procedure was to submit an IRB protocol to the YSU IRB for approval of the proposed project. Upon approval, the initial database of participants was gathered. Information on participants was obtained in collaboration with a northeast Ohio school district and the use of Infinite Campus records. Once compiled, individuals were contacted via phone or email to seek permission to meet with them and conduct an interview. Interviews were conducted at locations that were agreed upon by the participant and included The high school School, Panera's, McDonalds, or the participants home.

Participants were provided a copy of the questions at the start of the interview and the entire interview was recorded and transcribed into a word document at a later date. Once the interview had been coded, a follow-up interview was scheduled and conducted to ensure respondent validation and for follow-up questions to be asked to ensure rich data were collected and increased involvement occurred to increase trustworthiness. All recordings and word documents were in the sole possession of the researcher and

SILENT VOICES

documents were stored on a password-protected Google cloud drive. Participant waivers were created based on the specific instructions of the YSU IRB (Appendix A). Interview questions were based on the theories of qualitative research design by Maxwell, (2013), and Wellington and Szczerbinski (2007) (Appendix B).

Data Analysis

Interviews were transcribed, coded, and categorized to look for emerging patterns, themes, and used as the basis for follow-up interviews. Coding was completed based on initial organizational categories, then, follow-up substantive categories and subcategories that were derived from field notes and artifacts collected during the research. Interview data were also compared with existing data that were collected from school records to check for accuracy. In addition, member checking was completed to confirm findings and themes (Maxwell, 2013).

Ethical Considerations

In order to maintain impartiality during the study, several practices were implemented as methods to address ethical considerations. Participant identities were not recorded, and all audio recordings were kept in a password-protected cloud space. All reporting was done in a way as to not reveal the identity of any participant.

Trustworthiness

In order to ensure that the research findings were valid and reliable, multiple procedures were used to ensure impartiality and reliability. Validity was established through member checking of the data with each of the participants, rich data collection,

SILENT VOICES

and triangulation of data with available school records. The use of respondent validation involved providing respondents with copies of their responses and conclusions made based on the information. Their responses helped limit misinterpretation. Using rich data involved having more long-term interaction with respondents and also the process of having a well-developed interview that provided increased data. Triangulation of the data ensured that information was complete and correct (Maxwell, 2013, p.126). Auditing of data was conducted by at least one additional reader of interview transcripts. It was expected that the data would be reliable as (a) participants were not be pressured to respond to any question, (b) participants were finished with their secondary education so they should have no concerns about retribution, and (c) participants were encouraged to use their voice to improve alternative education for future students.

Limitations

The use of qualitative case study research can limit the ability to make external generalizations but can be used for internal generalizability. Maxwell (2013) defined generalization as “extending research results’ conclusions, or other accounts that are based on a study of particular individuals’ settings, times, or institutions to other individuals, settings, times, or insulations than those directly studied” (p. 138).

While not all qualitative data are internally generalizable, through the use of the chosen research methods and decision to include all graduate participants in the research pool, the research has the ability to be internally generalizable. While qualitative research is often limited in direct connection, it can also provide information on theories or processes in place of a current study that may be useful in other cases (Maxwell, 2013, p. 138).

CHAPTER IV

Results

Review of Methodology

Interviews conducted with participants were triangulated with analysis of school attendance, academic, behavioral records, and interviews with program instructors and an outside licensed professional counselor (LPC) who provided behavioral counseling for participants in the Succeed program.

Findings

The findings of the research can be broken down into themes and subcategories that relate to the guiding research questions. Each research question guided specific interview questions and a blue print analysis for both graduate and professional questions can be located in appendix D and E.

Enrollment In Succeed

The introductory interview questions asked how the participants became involved in Succeed and also how were their academics and behavior prior to entering Succeed. Several respondents stated that attendance was a major factor in their enrollment in Succeed and was verified by both instructors and school records. Sue summarized her time before Succeed and stated:

I was on truancy for um—no I was on probation for truancy and my grades were slipping and I wasn't attending school, so we had to come together, like me and my team that I had in the school—to look at my

SILENT VOICES

other options because I wasn't getting appropriate education. I wasn't doing anything appropriately at the time

A review of participant three's attendance confirms her comments and she missed over 97 days of school her first two years at The high school School.

Both instructors also discussed student attendance prior to entering the Succeed program. Teacher number one discussed reason for truancy and stated:

attendance for a lot of kids was not great you know, a lot of them are experiencing challenges in the classroom or in the high school building itself. A lot of them just start checking out to avoid you know the confrontation, or the consistent um negative interactions they'd have with staff, with teachers, and with administration about their attendance. So they would stop coming just to avoid any of those situations

Mr. Cohen also elaborated and discussed that attendance concerns was one of the main reasons the program was created stating:

one of the stipulations was there was grave concern for student attendance and behavioral write-ups. Um, before the program was implemented, they said they were having a real hard time getting the kids to come to school, and office referrals. So when we got into the Succeed program and developed the program, we noticed a vast increase in students coming to school, wanting to come to school in this program. And we also noticed that a lot of the referrals went

SILENT VOICES

down. So for whatever reason, them buying into the Succeed program, attendance increased, and office referrals decreased

In addition to attendance, behavior was another main factor that played into enrollment in Succeed. Respondents made several comments regarding behavior including Tom who said, “*I didn’t really get along with teachers.*” Upon review of his school records showed that he had over 31 referrals within the first two months of his freshman year at The high school School. After his transfer to Succeed, the remaining seven months produced only five referrals. The following two years also continued to see a decrease with zero referrals the second year in Succeed, and six in his final year in the program. Of the six referrals acquired during his last year in Succeed, half were from incidences that occurred outside of Succeed and were in traditional classes. Half of the student participants either had a behavior record or were transferred from a traditional alternative education setting. The other half entered in the program due to a mix of attendance and academics poor performance.

Both instructors confirmed what the participants and records showed regarding behavior being a precursor to entry into Succeed. Mr. Field added, when asked about how students were referred, that

if the students displaying negative behaviors in the classroom setting, it could come from the teacher. If the students having negative behaviors in your social like um lunch period, study halls, it could maybe come from the administrator who notices a significant amount of referrals um or a counselor that has concerns about a student’s progress

SILENT VOICES

Mr. Cohen added that

a lot of times, the principals at the high school have been meeting to say listen, these kids are having too many issues within the school, a lot of you know suspensions, detentions, ASRs or what have you what not and your[sic] not being successful in the traditional classroom, and maybe there might be a better placement for them

Lastly, academic progress was another category that repeatedly came up as a reason to consider entry into Succeed. Mar summarized his grades and said, *“I was just kind of falling behind in all my classes you know... my academics um not nearly as good um I was—I think failing just about everything if not failing then very behind in all my classes.”* Tom responded similarly regarding academic progress: *“they weren’t really good. Like because I didn’t like really do the work.”*

Records of participants provide insight into poor academic performance and not being on track to graduate prior to entering the Succeed program and instructor interviews also discussed academic performance as an indicator for at-risk population. Teacher #1 mentioned regarding the referral process *“students exhibiting certain behaviors or having some deficiencies of some sort in the general education setting.”*

School records were not always able to provide triangulation. In the case of Roy, he was never enrolled in traditional schooling and entered Succeed from another alternative education setting. While this limited the triangulation from school records, it did provide insight in the contrast between alternative education models. When asked about his feelings entering Succeed, he said *“it felt a little weird at first because I was in a different environment than I was used to. I didn’t have to get checked and stuff and get*

SILENT VOICES

searched, so that was a little different. A lot of different personalities than where I was previously at. I didn't know how to talk to people, how to communicate with people. I learned quick though." The comparison provided by Roy helped again to confirm the other themes discussed including supports and alternative education strategies.

The LPC offered his own insight on the reasoning behind a student enrollment in Succeed and, when asked if academics or behavior played a role, he stated:

that's like the chicken or the egg. Typically, in my experience by the time kids get to the high school level, if they're coming to a classroom like Succeed, their behavioral problems have been going on for a number of years. Schools have been doing interventions with them, special ed services. A number of things have been going on for years and years. And typically, what I see behaviorally, emotionally, is that all along the line the kids have not been developing their academic skills, because the behaviors, the emotions have been getting in the way. So, by the time they get to our level and they get working with me, they're typically at least 14-15 years old here in this program, and you know all the way up until seniors. Their skills are what I think of as almost swiss cheese, where they miss vital things throughout the years. Topics that teachers, that school readiness skills for the next level. So when they get frustrated and they don't understand, you know kids typically act out behaviorally

The LPC elaborated and discussed students who had lacked basic needs being met as possible reasons for their enrollment in Succeed and stated:

SILENT VOICES

Principally it all goes back to like Maslow's Hierarchy, where you need to take care of a person's very foundational needs like love and acceptance, warmth, good nutrition, being in a safe environment. And so many times kids don't have all those basic needs taken care of outside of the school

He added that *"probably all of them in this program, have had enough childhood experiences that are adversely affecting their ability to function, much less learn."*

Feelings Entering the Program

While all interviewees expressed a positive experience in the Succeed program, each had their own individual experience of the initial transition into the program. Tom described his initial feelings and said, *"at first I was like "nah", because it was like a little building, then I got used to it."* Roy entered Succeed from an out of district alternative education program and described his transition by stating *"it felt a little weird at first because I was in a different environment than I was used to. I didn't have to get checked and stuff and get searched, so that was a little different."* The change of environment was also noted with Mar who discussed the contrast between traditional classrooms and said *"It was very laid back and it was a lot easier to focus. There was a lot less kids."* Sue stated he was initially *"apprehensive.. but it was a nice environment to um like put my feet into compared to—it was comfortable and just from the looks of it, at the beginning of it."*

Both instructors and the LPC echoed similar statements that the transition depended on the student. The LPC summarized the different reactions and said:

it's a spectrum. Some kids come back here and are very timid, afraid, nervous, fearful. Um the socially awkward ones, the anxious ones tend

SILENT VOICES

to withdraw, and it takes a nurturing environment in that case to teach them that we accept you, and we're going to be here for you. And gradually they relax and loosen up. And the more openly defiant ones learn that you know their defiance in other school settings have gotten tossed out. They've gotten kicked out, sent out, expelled, whatever. Um they learn that just by coming in here the anger goes away eventually, because you know what, they too are accepted here

Mr. Field discussed the initial hesitation students feel entering the program and that “*So at times some students um do have some negative behaviors coming into the program because they have maybe some negative connotations themselves of what the program is ... And then once it starts working for them and they start seeing success academically and behaviorally and socially, and they start earning some of the incentives, uh that all kind of goes away.*” Mr. Cohen discussed the evolution that students go through entering the program and the process it takes to become acclimated and said:

some students will come in here and be like ‘oh my gosh, I don't wanna be here, we're in that building,’ and they're kind of shell shocked. And-- and so, those students, it's typically-- you introduce them to the program and then it takes them a little while to adjust to the program because you got to remember, a lot of times students come from a high school where they have all freedoms in the world. And they have a lot of unstructured time. And it's sometimes that gets them in trouble. So when they come over here, they-they-- some of the students would be

SILENT VOICES

kind up upset and they would hold it against them. Until you sit them down, you show them what they need to do, and then a lot of the times we have reward systems built in within this program. And one of the big reward programs that they like is to leave early. Some of the kids do not like being in school for 7 hours a day. Some of them like to get their work done, get out, work and that's a lot of it. So the students that kind of like don't buy in at first, eventually what happens is, they see what the program is, they get to know the teachers. We form a trust with the students. We don't hold grudges against the students. Um so lot of them warm up to the idea. And then eventually they buy into the system. It's more of like a family. This becomes like their home away from home and they buy into that. They tell us, because it's a smaller program, it's not, you know, a classroom of a hundred kids, they start telling us their stories and you listen to them. And I think that's how they get involved in the Succeed program, is they buy into the whole concept of Succeed. Some of the students want to come in here. So those students it's not difficult to get them involved, they buy right into the concept of Succeed. So it's kind of weird how-how they buy into it, but eventually they all do

It should be noted that 75% of student participants expressed excitement about enrollment in the Succeed program, albeit with some form of initial hesitation. Sue summed up her feelings, thusly, *"I thought I needed a more intense program, for like,*

SILENT VOICES

more so an outpatient like, therapeutic incorporation with school, that's what I thought...I thought it was a good fit."

Alternative Strategies

A common theme that came from all participants including student, instructor, and outside support was that the use of alternative strategies had a significant impact on each participant. Students discussed a different feeling when being a part of the Succeed program, compared to the traditional classroom. Tom, providing the most compelling contrast, said *"in the normal school like, I didn't talk to nobody. And, then when I got in there, there was like, who was like, I don't know. They were showing like love."*

Instructors also compared the difference between the traditional school and why it was beneficial to students and Mr. Field said *"they just needed a different setting. And then once it starts working for them and they start seeing success academically and behaviorally and socially, and they start earning some of the incentives, un that all kind of goes away."* When discussing why the Succeed program worked for students, Teacher #1 elaborated that the program allowed them to *"kind of target each students' needs and then building a day that works for them, providing them with services that work for them and that they need to be successful and to gain the skills they need that they were lacking before coming here."*

The LPC also elaborated on the different atmosphere being provided in Succeed and, when asked if the relationships in Succeed with students are stronger than those in a traditional setting, he said:

it has to. Um, if you want a kid to be successful back here, you have to realize first of all they've been unsuccessful to the point where they can't

SILENT VOICES

be serviced in the mainstream classroom anymore... So part of the coming back here is that, you know they need to be accepted. And for a teacher to look at the kid who's been thrown out of everything and to go, you're welcome here, we want you to be here. That's huge

Empowerment/Accountability

The strongest response from participants related the idea of feeling empowered when in the Succeed program. Sue discussed empowerment and said, *“you just genuinely like got to take on your independence.”* Mar discussed having increased responsibility and said, *“responsible in the fact of you know you could earn the response—or the privileges, you could earn privileges and also—and they could be taken away.”*

Instructors also discussed the feeling of empowerment for their own work and when Mr. Cohen was asked if they felt empowered, they said “absolutely” and went on to elaborate adding:

I would say yes. And to some degree because we know the students probably the best. And when we will speak to an administrator and say, “hey listen, you know, it is just a really bad day, can you just really look into this and maybe we can come up with a different alternative for a, you know a consequence for poor choices” They will strongly consider it...the administration here that we've had in succeed, have all taken the time to talk to the staff and to get both sides of the story and see what consequence would be reasonable at that time

SILENT VOICES

This led to a transformational leadership model being utilized with students and both instructors confirmed the implementation of transformational leadership and empowerment. Mr. Field discussed empowerment offering:

yes, individualized you know it's more encouraging for the student to get their work then presenting—well giving them negative reasonings to get their work done, like you going to fail you're not going to be able to do this, you're not going to be able to do that. Its more just reminding them "hey let's get to work, so we can go home today", let's get to work so we can have lunch that Miss K's made for everyone, its giving the students a little bit more freedom and just remind them instead of presenting negative reinforcements to them

Online Curriculum

The empowerment felt by participants was enabled partially by the use of an online curriculum that allowed for a more individualized learning experience for each student. Sue stated:

It allowed me to work at my own pace and uh, you know, if I didn't understand things or if I did understand things, I wouldn't have to you know wait for somebody else or I would go and get that help on my own so to speak. And be like, 'okay this is this' but still it helped me have that independence and I thought it was good for me specifically, because that's how I am. Take that initiative

Both instructors agreed with the benefits of individualized instruction and discussed how it was a useful tool in limiting students falling behind in their academics, a common

SILENT VOICES

occurrence in the traditional classroom, and helped limit outbursts. Mr. Cohen summarized the benefit and said:

Like for instance say like uh, you're taking a math class and for some reason you're just not feeling math, well you can jump on English class. In a classroom setting you're stuck in say math class for 40 minutes. And then if something happens and they send you out to CLC or anything like that, you're not only missing that day's work, but you may get a 0 for the assignment. So you are falling behind, you're getting further and further in the hole, kind of like so you can't get out. Like quicksand, like being in quicksand, you can't get out. So sometimes the students will just fall further and further behind. This way we map it out for you and if you feel like you are going to do science, and you want to do science, well you can do science that day. You come in and do math, you can do a little bit of both

The review of school records also confirmed that students were successful in their coursework. Student records demonstrated that 50% of the student participants in this study graduated a full year early from high school and the remaining 50% exceeded the annual credit recommendation to graduate in a four-year period.

Emotional/Behavioral Counseling/Additional Supports

Social and emotional services were provided by an outside organization on a weekly basis. Mr. Field discussed the format and said

Counseling services that do come in multiple times a week. Um, they do small group instruction with the kids. We have two groups. Uh, one based on a social kind of social anxiety-based group, and we have kind of a behavioral defiant

SILENT VOICES

group - that they can address both of those separate groups' needs when needed.

They also do one-on-one counseling sessions as needed

Sue discussed the environment that was created by the additional emotional and behavioral supports provided in the Succeed program and said:

my instructors were very welcoming and uh, friendly, and they gave me a good base to uh-- not only academically, but also like emotionally with my issues. And they allowed me to just come as I was, and we'd go from there. And I like the access to counselors, that was nice. As well as just like the comfort because there were like couches and I got to have my own room almost essentially. And just that was just a comfortable atmosphere to learn in

Mr. Cohen followed up with benefits of providing students additional supports and life skills and stated:

You know what, a lot of times kids would come in here and they just, they don't know-- they don't know for instance the proper way to treat other people. They don't know boundaries. They don't know, that it's not okay to tell your boss or your peer or your supervisor to-- you know-- I'll just say it out there, they cuss at you. And they think it's okay. So during the course of the years we have these students, you know, you get to know them. And you know they become a part of the family. And then once you get them hooked on being a part of your family, then you teach them and develop them. Okay, greeting people, looking at them in the eye. If you need a break, I'd rather you learn to get up, take a 5 minute break, walk away, come back, calm down, then go back at it again. Self-reflection, you teach them how to self-reflect. Okay, what happened at this

SILENT VOICES

incident? And then after they explain what happened, okay what could we do differently? You teach them techniques like this. You teach them breathing techniques. You teach them okay, we used to have a treadmill in here, where some students needed to get the energy out. So they eventually learned, I need a break, I need to go jog for 5 minutes on the treadmill, 10 minutes, just to get rid of that anxiety

Sue also discussed the impact counseling had in providing support: *“I would utilize it on occasion if I had some episodes or what not. It helped me kind of stay on track while I was attending school, like in school, so I could like regain my focus, collect my thoughts.”*

Addressing the social and emotional deficits appeared to be paramount to helping students become successful. The LPC discussed basic hierarchy of needs and how many of the students who participated in the Succeed program lacked the foundational needs being met, in addition to trauma and said:

probably all of them in this program, have had enough childhood experiences that are adversely affecting their ability to function, much less learn. And teachers should be made aware of that kind of thing, because you're yelling at them about not paying attention and geez, the reason they were up all night was because mom and dad were fighting so much they couldn't-- the kids couldn't sleep. And no fault to the teachers for not thinking of these things, there job is to teach, but come on, if a child over a number of years is left to abuse, neglect, they get stuck. I mean you're talking about the developmental age of a-- chronological age of a 16 year old, being more like that of a 12 year old due to

SILENT VOICES

some of these traumas. And no matter where we look in society, they're there. We find them all over the place. In fact, Ohio has adopted this ACE study as kind of the foundation of developing trauma therapy. It's a growing field. Instead of asking what's wrong with that kid, we're asking the question - what happened to you? And how do we not remediate that, but how do we cure that? How do we heal that? How do we make you well again? And we're not just talking about schooling, but you know lifelong. Statistics say that the higher number of adverse childhood experiences you have, your earning potential, your health, your family relationships, they're all-- they all take a ding

Recommendations for the Program:

The student participants were extremely positive in reflecting on their experience in the program but did provide some insight into ways to improve the program. Sue discussed the result of having multiple behavior students together and said, *“a lot of kids with behavioral issues that would ask out and I think that would disrupt the environment sometimes.”* When followed up with the question of did students outbursts escalate other students that were in there, Sue responded *“oh yeah.”* Tom reiterated comments regarding behavior students and when asked what was something he would change said *“certain kids”* and when asked if he meant certain kids might have an attitude, he responded *“yeah.”* Mar focused on the academics and desire for increased rigor and described his experience and stated:

I think that it was, not easy, but it was very easy to kind of work your way around. Um you know you could answer questions on a test and get them all wrong and um and keep guessing until you had gotten them right. And each

SILENT VOICES

question would have its own-- each answer would have its own little uh, significance that-- so you know you would remember you know 'Sally had what colored hair,' if the answer was blue you'd you know, you'd see-- you wouldn't even have to read the question

When asked how he would change the online program he said, *"for example you know, they could make it so that way it wouldn't let you go on to the next question if you got the first question wrong you'd have to go read-- go back and read the passage to you know, continue on."*

The LPC discussed the transition plan following graduation for students and ensuring students are prepared to enter the next stage of their life. The LPC summarized his observation and said:

I would ask the schools to question this - sometimes in the zeal to get a kid done with school when you see a little spark ignite, the schools jump on that and want the kids to be-- you know, graduate as quickly as possible, so they don't have to linger. I think what the school neglects is though, is when they see a 9th grader who's well motivated, they try to get him involved in some kind of transitional program, vocational program, tech program, that yeah it gets them ready, it gives them their certificate when they graduate, but the downside is the kid's done at age 17 with all his academic or her academic, and the goals are all met, the certificate's earned and unfortunately 17 year olds in this area with these type of emotional disturbances, are rarely capable of showing the emotional maturity the uh, emotional intelligence of going out and functioning independently as an adult in the work world. I think it just gets

SILENT VOICES

kind of forced on them and then all of a sudden at 17, when they should still have another year of school left, they're sitting home on their parents couch and everybody's kind of shrugging their shoulders saying, 'what do you do next?' Um, I think I would look at that as, yeah there's nothing wrong with giving a 16 year old that kind of vocational training, but I think the evaluation has to come on the backend. Is this kid ready to function on their own outside of school? And perhaps not sometimes

Correlation To Current Situation:

The student participants all agreed that the Succeed program had a positive impact on their lives and helped to mold their current situation. Roy discussed how the instructors in the Succeed program helped him obtain his current job and said *"They just tell me take this, take this, go to this uh, what's it called, interview, go to this interview. It's at the high school. Endless opportunities. So I went there, next I think couple days I got hired. The next week I think I was hired into Lincoln Electric."* Sue was more direct in giving credit and when asked if Succeed had a direct role in your current situation responded and said *"Most Definitely. I would not be where I am today without that program. There's no way."*

Mar discussed the role that the Succeed program had in developing coping skills and said:

I do think that it has prepared me in a sense of you know, that it just kind of gave me not a reality check, but just kind of gave me the ability to kind of sit back and look at things you know. Not 'oh I got to do this, this, this and this', and more of, you know, 'I got to do this one thing at a time' and just kind of

SILENT VOICES

take a step back and look at things without, you know, being all frustrated and confused

In addition to discussing the role Succeed had on participants' current situations', when asked what the outcome might have been if Succeed program did not exist, the LPC said:

I think if a modified curriculum for them was not created and the supports of the teachers, myself, Miss K, I don't think these-- a lot of these kids would have the personal motivation, not because they don't want to, but because they're just so skill deficient. Where over the years education has been neglected, whether-- for whatever reason, that they just don't have the personal skills to push through on their own. They need this type of environment. And it's good for them

Mr. Field echoed the sentiments of the LPC when imagining student outcomes if the Succeed program did not exist and said:

I think there'd be a lot higher dropout rate in the district. I think we give kids an opportunity they didn't know was possible. Um, we show them a path to graduation that you know many people don't-- wouldn't even consider or think about or think outside the box in how to address these students. So many of them come from situations a lot of educators can't process or understand, you know, low-income, emotional, physical, sexual abuse, and families where education has never just been a priority. A lot of our students are first-time high-school graduates, so showing them and

SILENT VOICES

giving them that opportunity is huge. Um and hopefully sets them up to be productive members of society after graduating

Through interviews conducted with participants and triangulation with analysis of school attendance, academic, behavioral records, and interviews with program instructors and an outside licensed professional counselor (LPC), a holistic understanding of the Succeed program was able to be developed. In the following chapter, an analysis is conducted of the research completed. In addition, connections will be discussed with existing research on alternative education and possible future research topics.

Chapter V

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to analyze what impact the school-within-a-school alternative education program had on the at-risk students who participated in them. While there has been extensive research regarding the need of alternative education models and their specific impact regarding graduation rates and discipline, there has been limited research regarding alternative education programs as perceived by the students who are attending the programs. In addition, the existing research has often encompassed a wide net of alternative education that does not describe a specific method of alternative education being used. It would be useful to know how specific alternative education models, specifically, the school-within-a-school alternative education program, impacts at-risk students.

In order to gain more insight into the impact of alternative education programs on students at risk, via student perspectives, a phenomenological research design was utilized. Research focused on psychological, phenomenological study and the experiences of at-risk students who participated in alternative educational programs, specifically, the Succeed program. Purposive Sampling was used to ensure participants were representative of students in the Succeed program.

Interviews were conducted with participants and triangulated with analysis of school attendance, academic, and behavioral records in addition to interviews with program instructors and an outside LPC who provided behavioral counseling for

SILENT VOICES

participants in the Succeed program. The following is a summary of the research results related to the primary research questions.

Question 1

How did the student become identified as at-risk and enrolled in the alternative education program?

Identification

The most common definition generally accepted of at-risk is students who are at risk of educational failure, but not what leads to being titled at risk. While no concrete combination is listed, several categories are often markers as points of concern and can help identify students who may be at risk of educational failure. The main risk factors commonly associated with designating students at risk include grade performance, attendance, and disruptive behavior. (Carver & Lewis, 2010; U.S. Department of Education, 2016; Evers, 2009; Sweig, 2013).

All student graduate participants in the research aligned with past research and fell into one of the main risk factors commonly associated with designating students at risk including grade performance, attendance, and disruptive behavior. Fifty percent of the graduate participants were identified with two of the three main risk factors. Tom was identified by both grade performance and disruptive behavior. Mar was identified by grade performance, Sue was identified by grade performance and attendance, and Roy was identified by disruptive behavior.

In addition to the three main indicators, other factors commonly investigated included criminal records, low socio-economic status, learning disabilities, and language barriers (Zweig, 2013). Through analysis of school records, 70% of graduate student

SILENT VOICES

participants were designated as qualifying for free- and reduced-price meals, which would imply low socio-economic status. In addition, 100% of the graduate participants were identified by the district as having some form of learning disability and were each provided with an IEP.

When the main risk factors as identified by previous research are applied to the current research, there appears to be a correlation with those indicators and all student graduate participants. Upon review of the seven designated factors described in past research Tom had four of the indicators, Mar had two indicators, Sue had four indicators, and Roy had four indicators.

Enrollment

Once established indicators are created to determine who is at risk, the next step is to identify how at-risk students are reviewed for possible inclusion in alternative education. Students in alternative education programs are often placed for a variety of reasons as listed in Table 3. In many cases, the districts listed staff, student, and parent requests as reasons for entry into an alternative education program (Carver & Lewis, 2010). The student graduate participants fell into the same category for decision to enter into the Succeed program, through a committee of teachers, administrators, and counselors. Based on research published in the *Alternative Schools and Programs for Public School Students At Risk of Educational Failure: 2007–08*, this research aligned with 71% of respondents who listed teachers, a committee of teachers, administrators, and counselors as means of placement.

Looking past the identification of at-risk and the means of placement, existing research explained a number of different reasons found for student admission into

SILENT VOICES

alternative education (Carver & Lewis, 2010). Of the school districts that offer their own alternative education program, they listed the following potential reasons for entry in the program as presented in Table 7.

Table 7.

Possible Reasons for Transfer to an Alternative Education Program by School Districts That Manager Their Own Program

Reason	Percent of School Districts that Offer Alternative Education Programs
Possession or use of a firearm	42%
Possession or use of a weapon other than a firearm	51%
Possession, distribution, or use of alcohol or drugs	57%
Arrest or involvement with the criminal justice system	42%
Physical attacks or fights	61%
Disruptive verbal behavior	57%
Chronic truancy	53%
Continual academic failure	57%
Pregnancy/teen parenthood	31%
Mental health needs	27%
Other	5%

All these reasons provide a great context for, not only, the reasons why students are enrolled in alternative education, but, more specifically, what category of student is often enrolled: students determined to be at risk.

SILENT VOICES

The research introduced in this study echoed previous research in the reasoning behind students entering an alternative education program. Of the student graduate participants, all exhibited at least one of the reasons listed in Table 5 and in 75% of the cases, exhibited multiple reasons listed in Table 5. Tom, two, and three expressed continual academic failure as a reason for entry into the Succeed program. A review of their academic records verified that students were either credit deficient or failing courses at the time of entry into the Succeed program.

Chronic truancy was also a reason listed by previous research and confirmed again by participants in the research. Sue explained chronic absenteeism as her reason for entry in the Succeed program and review of academic records confirmed the truancy. Sue missed over 97 days of school her first two years at The high school School. Instructors for the program also reiterated the analysis of attendance in determination of entry to Succeed and said

one of the stipulations was there was grave concern for student attendance and behavioral write-ups. Um, before the program was implemented, they said they were having a real hard time getting the kids to come to school, and office referrals. So, when we got into the Succeed program and developed the program, we noticed a vast increase in students coming to school, wanting to come to school in this program

Disruptive verbal behavior and physical attacks were also listed in previous research and Roy confirmed in his interview that entry into the Succeed program was based on previous behavior concerns. Roy transferred into the Succeed program from an out-of-district alternative education program and provided the reasoning behind

SILENT VOICES

placement: *"I transferred to uh, the school when I was ready to go from re-education. So my behavior was a little bit better where I could go back to public school and stuff."* A review of academic records also documents that during the one year in the Succeed program, Roy had one behavioral referral and it was for a *"physical altercation."*

Question 2

How did the students feel regarding their participation in the Succeed Program?

Current research is limited in terms of student perspectives of who participated in a school-within-a-school alternative education model, but research has been completed about alternative education in general. Students who participated in an alternative education school described a different experience from their traditional school experience and is described in Table 8. Students described their experiences at traditional schools as tense, rigid, and isolating. Prior research stated that students who participated in the alternative education program discussed a different set of norms described as relaxed, flexible, and inclusive. Teachers were described as caring, trained, non-judgmental, and accepting, which helped build strong relationships. Students were given more responsibility for their own education and felt that increased expectations allowed for more control over their decisions. Staff members were described as role models who were willing to discuss individual social issues students were having. This led to staff members' advantages to refer students for additional needed services. Lastly, students felt more included in their school due to improved atmosphere (Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011).

SILENT VOICES

Table 8.

Major Themes

Experiences at traditional schools	Experiences at solution-focused alternative high school
Poor teacher relationships	Positive teacher relationships
Lack of safety	Improving maturity and responsibility
Overly rigid authority	Understanding about social issues
Problems with peer relationships	Better peer relationships and supportive atmosphere

Note. Lagana-Riordan, C., Aguilar, J. P., Franklin, C., Streeter, C. L., Kim, J. S., Tripodi, S. J., & Hopson, L. M. (2011). At-risk students' perceptions of traditional schools and a solution-focused public alternative school. *Preventing School Failure, 55*(3), 105–114. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10459880903472843>

The results from this research echo the research regarding student perspectives in generalized alternative education and apply to the schools employing a school alternative education model. Common misconceptions were that participants would be timid, reluctant, and possibly embarrassed from being removed from the traditional classroom, but the student participants in this research expressed a sense of relief from finally being able to find an environment that met their needs. All participants had generally positive feelings regarding participation in the Succeed program and acknowledged that the traditional classroom was unable to meet their specific needs. Discussions of additional supports, small class settings, and strong interpersonal relationships were listed as

SILENT VOICES

deciding factors for entry into the Succeed program. Tom said, “*in the normal school like, I didn’t talk to nobody. And. Then when I got in there, they was like who was like, I don’t know. They were showing like love.*”

Looking at major themes from Table 5, there is a possible correlation based on conversations with the student graduate participants from the Succeed program. All four major themes listed in table 5 were described in great depths by all of the participants. Reasons behind each of their successes were attributed to many of the themes described in past research.

In addition, many of the experiences listed at traditional schools in Table 5 also appeared in conversations and were listed as reasons for student graduate participants’ desires to enter the Succeed program. The one theme absent from all student graduate participants was the experience of lack of safety in the traditional school.

Psychosocial Development

All student and instructor participants interviews alluded to the connection between psychosocial development and acceptance of entrance into the Succeed program. The eight stages of psychosocial development developed by Erikson (1993) each consisted of two opposed virtues. These stages are presented in Table 9.

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Table 9.

Basic Strengths, Core Weaknesses, and Spheres of Social Interactions for Erikson's (1993) Stages

Stage	Basic Strength	Core Weakness	Sphere of Social Interactions
Basic Trust vs. Mistrust	Hope	Withdrawal	Mother of surrogate
Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt	Will	Compulsion	Parents
Initiative vs. Guilt	Purpose	Inhibition	Family
Industry vs. Inferiority	Competence	Inertia	School, Neighborhood
Identity vs. Role Confusion	Fidelity	Repudiation	Peers
Intimacy vs. Isolation	Love	Exclusivity	Partners (sex, friendship, cooperation, competition)
Generativity vs. Stagnation	Care	Rejection	Divided labor and shared household
Integrity vs. Despair	Wisdom	Disdain	“mankind” or “my kind”

Note. Reprinted from Fleming, J. A. (2018). *Psychological Perspectives on Human Development*. Retrieved from <http://swppr.org/Textbook/Preface--online.html>

According to Erickson (1993), individuals could struggle with earlier stages if they were unable to master that stages strength. In place of that stages strength, the core weakness could take its place.

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Erickson's stages are important for the current investigation research in that failure to master these stages can result in behaviors that can identify a student as at-risk. Students who have increased mistrust, doubt, guilt, inferiority, and role confusion are likely to struggle in school and be at risk for academic failure.

Through review of each stage teachers are able to better understand their students and the reasoning behind their behaviors. Through increased interventions teachers are able to increase positive relationships with students and increase positive outcomes (Poole & Snarey, 2011). The student participants all discussed the strength in relationships in the Succeed program and a subsequent increase in their desire to be successful. Mar discussed the power of relationships and said:

I think you know the more personal the relationship is with the student and the teacher, I think it helps them academically. You know they'll-- rather than just someone, just someone that you know is above you telling you to do something, it's not like that. They say you know, okay you build a relationship with them and then you know I think it makes it easier to follow direction, rather than again just having some of the you knows, up here and you know, you're down there and they just tell you to do it.

Hierarchy of Needs

The core of the participant interviews touched on the concept of hierarchy of needs and negative consequences resulting when basic needs are not met. This possibly provides the best explanation for not only the acceptance of students into entering the Succeed program, but for the decrease in negative behaviors and increase in personal success.

SILENT VOICES

Abraham Maslow (1954) discussed a hierarchy of needs and how the inability to have basic needs met can lead to increased negative behavior saying, “*Children who are reared in an unthreatening, loving family do not ordinarily react as we have described.*” The LPC extensively discussed the impact of basic needs of safety and security not being met:

Principally it all goes back to like Maslow’s Hierarchy, where you need to take care of a person’s very foundational needs like love and acceptance, warmth, good nutrition, being in a safe environment. And so many times kids don’t have all those basic needs taken care of outside of the school. And the school wants to be a nurturing place, but I realize that it’s not their job to parent them. So when a kid comes into a situation like this, part of my foundation, my background, is developmental trauma and developmental theory. I rely not just on knowing about the basic needs of kids but using my training to build off their experience.

The LPC went on to discuss students in the Succeed program and said:

probably all of them in this program, have had enough childhood experiences that are adversely affecting their ability to function, much less learn. And teachers should be made aware of that kind of thing, because you’re yelling at them about not paying attention and geez, the reason they were up all night was because mom and dad were fighting so much they couldn’t-- the kids couldn’t sleep. And no fault to the teachers for not thinking of these things, there job is to teach, but come on, if a child over a number of years is left to abuse, neglect, they get stuck. I mean you’re talking about the developmental age of a-- chronological age of a 16 year old, being more like that of a 12 year old due to

SILENT VOICES

some of these traumas. And no matter where we look in society, they're there. We find them all over the place. In fact, Ohio has adopted this ACE study as kind of the foundation of developing trauma therapy. It's a growing field. Instead of asking what's wrong with that kid, we're asking the question - what happened to you? And how do we not remediate that, but how do we cure that? How do we heal that? How do we make you well again? And we're not just talking about schooling, but you know lifelong. Statistics say that the higher number of adverse childhood experiences you have, your earning potential, your health, your family relationships, they're all-- they all take a ding

Mr. Field also discussed the idea of basic needs not being met and said:

Of course, yeah. I think a lot of kids, they're just not even nurtured on a basic level, whether it's at home or at school. Um, you know malnourishment, even just emotional support. Um, encouragement from parents or adults or guardians in their life, they've never had. Um, the feeling of safety, a lot of kids go home and don't even feel safe due to environments they live in and the people that are in their homes on a daily basis.

With a better understanding of the students' backgrounds, the LPC discussed the gradual acceptance process into the Succeed program by the students and explained:

it takes a nurturing environment in that case to teach them that we accept you, and we're going to be here for you. And gradually they relax and loosen up. And the more openly defiant ones learn that you know their defiance in other school settings have gotten tossed out. They've gotten kicked out, sent out, expelled, whatever. Um they learn that just by coming in here the anger goes away eventually, because you

SILENT VOICES

know what, they too are accepted here. They too have a role. Somebody's going to help them instead of just send them home.

Sue discussed the impact of a safe and nurturing environment and said:

my instructors were very welcoming and uh, friendly, and they gave me a good base to uh-- not only academically, but also like emotionally with my issues. And they allowed me to just come as I was, and we'd go from there. And I like the access to counselors, that was nice. As well as just like the comfort because there were like couches and I got to have my own room almost essentially. And just that was just a comfortable atmosphere to learn in

Once students were accepted in to the Succeed program and began to receive some of the basic levels of needs, higher levels of needs were able to emerge and as Maslow (1954) stated, “ If both the physiological and the safety needs are fairly well gratified, there will emerge the love and affection and belongingness needs... he will strive with great intensity to achieve this goal” (p.43). The desire for love and belonging met through relationships developed at Succeed was discussed by Mar who added:

they're not just there about academics. They let you know that. They let you know that there for you know just any kind of support. If you're having a bad day, they'll ask you about it. They'll go out of their way to you know tell someone else that they're helping, say 'hey, give me a second, let me go make sure they're okay.' That really shows that they genuinely care about their students and how they're doing, not just in school, but also in their personal life

The role that not meeting basic needs on student success cannot be overstated and the participant interviews showed a strong deficit in basic levels of needs in students who

SILENT VOICES

participated in the Succeed program. The research also appears to show that once basic needs are able to be met, students can continue to move up on the hierarchy of needs with strong relationships, increased goals, and in some cases, level of self-actualization.

Question 3

How did the use of alternative strategies and services in the Succeed program impact the students and teachers?

The most intriguing outcome from participant interviews was discovering the impact alternative strategies and services had on student graduate participants. The implementation of transformational leadership, along with strong relationships and increased social and emotional support helped student participants in various ways.

The focus on leadership strategies and implementing change with alternative education students and staff were paramount due to the, often, already established resistance among alternative education students. Due to this educational reluctance, the focus turned to getting as many staff members and students as possible on board with any change or program to help increase the chance of success.

In addition to increased internal motivation, Aarons and Sommerfeld (2012) discussed that “transformational leadership is important in organizational outcomes both during change and during stable operations and predicts improved unit performance” (p. 423). Murphy (2016) stated, “A leader's failure to strategize how to respond to pushback may actually accelerate resistance” (p. 70). Students in alternative education programs often get labeled as difficult or unwilling to try, but with implementation of transformational leadership, specifically, the concept of inspiration motivation,

SILENT VOICES

administration can help better identify students in alternative education programs and what it means to be at risk.

Both Succeed instructors discussed empowerment and the feeling of focusing on the individual. Mr. Field offered:

individualized. You know it's more encouraging of the student to get to their work than presenting-- well giving them negative reasonings to get their work done, like you're going to fail, you're not going to be able to do this, you're not going to be able to do that. It's more just reminding them 'hey, let's get to work, so we can go home today,' 'let's get to work so we can have lunch that Miss K's made for everyone,' it's giving the students a little bit more freedom and just reminding them instead of presenting negative reinforcements to them

Each participant discussed the feeling of “empowerment” and Sue summed it up best:

I felt empowered because I got to take on the responsibility of my actions and my academics and my schedule, so to speak. And you know it was just a nice um kind of way to stand myself up and get back on my feet, with everything that was going on in my life academically outside of school, you know. It was the place that helped me pick myself up

Mr. Field's quote above discussed being “encouraging” and touches base on the issue of growth mindset and providing each student a sense of opportunity that did not exist in the traditional classroom. Carol Dweck's (2007) growth mindset is the foundation for alternative education and the concept that students, when

SILENT VOICES

provided the correct environment, can be successful. Dweck (2007) reviewed the theory of fixed mindsets, which maintains that individuals were limited in their ability to grow intellectually, whereas, growth mindset individuals believed that skills could be developed overtime and individuals were not limited in their ability to learn. The power of *yet* was the idea, that, if someone could not do something, they could learn to do it, but simply had not learned it *yet* (Dweck, 1996).

Pertaining to growth mindset, Mar described the impact of strong positive relationships and said:

I think it's nice. I think honestly, I think it applies academically. I think you know the more personal the relationship is with the student and the teacher, I think it helps them academically. You know they'll-- rather than just someone, just someone that you know is above you telling you to do something, it's not like that. They say you know, okay you build a relationship with them and then you know I think it makes it easier to follow direction, rather than again just having some of the you knows up here, and you know you're down there and they just tell you to do it

Mr. Field reiterated this sentiment and said:

some students um do have some negative behaviors coming in to the program because they have maybe some negative connotations themselves of what the program is, what kids are in the program. Um, we're separated from the main building, so there's like a little bit of a stigma attached to it at times from kids coming in, like this is the dumb

SILENT VOICES

building or the special building. So it takes some of them a little bit of time to realize, a lot of these kids are no different than kids in the building, they just needed a different setting. And then once it starts working for them and they start seeing success academically and behaviorally and socially, and they start earning some of the incentives, uh that all kind of goes away

Utilizing the concepts of transformational leadership, strong relationships, and growth mindset in the Succeed Program student participants were able to decrease negative behaviors and improve academic performance.

Question 4

How would the students improve the alternative education program in which they participated?

While all participants acknowledged a positive experience in the Succeed program, several items were noted that could possibly help improve the program. One item noted by several participants was additional supports and increased rigor in the academic component of the program. As discussed by Mar, academics were mainly provided via the online platform and students discovered ways to circumvent the intended outcomes by simply clicking repeatedly. Sue also reiterated the need for increased rigor and the need for additional modes of delivery explaining “*Like even getting a teacher out there to lecture for an extended period of time, doesn’t have to be long, just like something more, you know.*” The need for increased academic rigor, along with additional modes of delivery, would be beneficial to all students, regardless of post-graduation plans. As Mar said when discussing the benefits of increasing rigor, “*You*

SILENT VOICES

know, as much as they might not realize it at the time, I think that once they graduate, they'll say you know 'wow, as nice as it was to-- as easy as it was online, I still learned something from it.'

The LPC also discussed the need to ensure students and families are prepared for what comes after graduation. Half of the student participants graduated an entire year early from high school and half of the student participants were unemployed nine months following graduation from the Succeed program struggling to determine what is next. It could be beneficial to have some transition program implemented into Succeed to help students and parents better understand a path after graduation. All student participants agreed in the follow-up interview that some type of transition plan would have been beneficial but were unspecific in how it should be developed. Mar offered

I think that would be very beneficial. Um, you know because again, like we were saying with the personal relationship, building that with the teachers you feel comfortable, you know. I know I did. I would feel comfortable saying - 'I don't want to go to college.' I mean I do, I would like to go to college to get a degree in business management, but you know with them, I would feel comfortable saying 'that's not really for me.' As opposed to a guidance counselor or something like that

Question 5

Does the student feel the alternative education program had a direct correlation to his or her current situation?

All participants were emphatic in giving the Succeed program credit for helping them get to their current situation. If not for the Succeed program, participants felt they

SILENT VOICES

would have either not graduated from High School, or at minimum, not been on track to graduate on time. Both instructors and the LPC agreed that the Succeed program provided students the opportunity to become successful with the right mix of supports and encouragement.

Limitations

The use of qualitative case study research limits the ability to make external generalizations but can be used for internal generalizability. Maxwell defined (2013) generalization as “extending research results’ conclusions, or other accounts that are based on a study of particular individuals’ settings, times, or institutions to other individuals, settings, times, or insulations than those directly studied” (p. 138).

While not all qualitative data are internally generalizable, through the use of the chosen research methods and decision to include all graduate participants in the research pool, the research has the ability to be internally generalizable. While qualitative research is often limited in direct connection, it can provide information on theories or processes in place of a current study that may be processes in places in other cases. (Maxwell, 2013, p. 138).

While 50% of the 2017-2018 Succeed program graduates over the age of 18 participated in the research, the research was still limited in the ability to interview all graduates. In addition, once the initial interviews were coded, a follow-up interview was scheduled and conducted to ensure respondent validation so that rich data were collected, and increased involvement occurred to augment trustworthiness. Follow-up interviews were conducted with 75% of student graduate participants and 100% of teacher

SILENT VOICES

participants. The inability to have increased respondent validation from Tom is a limitation of the research.

Future Research

Interviewing student graduates of the Succeed program helped provide insight into practices that were beneficial for the students in the program and also identified items that could help provide additional supports. Based on the interview results, there are multiple areas that could further the research that was completed. Pathways for additional research include barriers to graduation for non-graduates, student perspectives from those who participated in the Step Up program and the benefits of increased supports, specifically increased transition planning.

While the research completed in this dissertation focused on only the graduates of the Succeed program, it could be beneficial to interview students who did not graduate from the Succeed and try to determine the barriers that limited their graduation. Through this research, additional supports could be explored to help support students in the Succeed program.

Having heard from students in the Succeed program describe a desire for increased academic rigor, it could be beneficial to interview students who participated in the Step Up program and see if they share the desire for increased academic rigor. The main difference between the two programs is that Succeed students are provided academics through the online platform and Step Up students are provided academics through a more blended model of traditional schooling supplemented with the online platform.

SILENT VOICES

Based on feedback from student graduate participants and the outside LPC, research into increased transitional planning could be beneficial for students in alternative education settings. Tom and Mar expressed a general confusion of what the next steps were in their lives; both were currently unemployed and living with their parents when the interviews were conducted, nine months after their graduation from the Succeed program. Even Sue and Roy, who appear to have a chosen path, agreed that additional transition services would have been useful in planning prior to graduation.

Conclusions

The current investigation explored how the school-within-a-school alternative education program is perceived by students who are at-risk. Interviews conducted with participants were triangulated with analysis of school attendance, academic, behavioral records, and interviews with program instructors and an outside licensed professional counselor (LPC) who provided behavioral counseling for participants in the Succeed program. Participants in the research reported an overall good experience in the Succeed program and credited the program for their current path and past academic success. Fifty percent of participants graduated a full year earlier than they would have in traditional graduation paths and 100% of participants acquired more academic credits during the year in Succeed than is expected in the traditional track. Describing strong relationships and increased academic, social, and emotional supports, student participants demonstrated increased success in their academics, decreased truancy, decreased behavior referrals, and development of increased coping skills.

Based on the research conducted with student graduates of the Succeed program, it could be beneficial for the program to continue to focus on increasing additional

SILENT VOICES

supports, specifically related to social and emotional support. Demonstrated throughout the research was a lack of basic-level needs being met by these specific students that possibly resulted in negative behaviors leading to the identification of being at risk. Once admitted into the Succeed program, students appeared to have had many of the basic level needs met, which led to increased positive behaviors and outcomes. All student graduate participants credited the Succeed program with providing them coping skills and the ability to handle daily situations.

In addition to increased social and emotional support, research into additional transition activities could help students after they graduate from the Succeed program. Seventy five percent of participants described a desire for additional transition services and believe it would have aided their transition from the program. Lastly, 75% of participants discussed the need for possible additional delivery modes of instruction. While all graduate student participants credited the online instruction system for allowing them to work independently at their own pace, a desire emerged for traditional instruction in limited amounts.

This is the first known study that examines the alternative school within the district from the student perspective. Graduates of the program provided insights about their experiences in the alternative program as well as the meaning of those experiences to their successful completion of school, and regarding their current life path. The stories that are central to this research will have a positive impact on the alternative school moving forward. While these voices were previously silent, the power that they bring improving the experiences of future graduates will resonate for a better tomorrow.

SILENT VOICES

APPENDIX A

SILENT VOICES

PARTICIPANT CONSENT AND WAIVER

Dear _____:

I am Joseph A. Glavan, a doctoral student from Youngstown State University and I am conducting a study to investigate student perspectives in regard to alternative education programs in which they participated. In this study, you will be asked to participate in two interviews. We will meet for two sessions, at a mutually agreeable location, and your participation should take about 30 minutes each time. During the interview you will be asked a series of questions pertaining to your experience in the alternative education program known as Succeed. Interviews will be recorded for transcription purposes and you will be provided a copy of the interview once it was transcribed to confirm accuracy of transcription. In addition to the interview, permission will be asked to view your educational record while you attended The high school School.

You may be at risk of harm because of this research. The potential harm includes the interview you will complete because it asks about your time in the alternative education program and you may have negative emotional feelings when answering the questions. The likelihood that you will be harmed is minimized because you may desire not to answer any questions at any time, and you may stop the interview at any time.

The benefits from being in this study are that valuable data will be obtained on student perspectives in regard to alternative education programs in which they participated. This data will be useful in helping improve alternative education programs and will be able to be accessed by other universities and education professionals.

SILENT VOICES

Your privacy is important, and I will handle all information collected about you in a confidential manner. I will report the results of the project in a way that will not identify you. I do plan to present the results of the study to Youngstown State University.

You do not have to be in this study. If you don't want to, you can say no without losing any benefits that you are entitled to. If you do agree, you can stop participating at any time. If you wish to withdraw just tell me or the contact person listed below.

If you have questions about this research project please contact Joe Glavan, researcher of this. His number is [REDACTED] and email address is [REDACTED]. You may also contact Dr. Karen H. Larwin, the YSU faculty member supervising this study. Her number is 330-509-5266 and her email address is khlarwin@ysu.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a participant in a research project, you may contact the Office of Grants and Sponsored Programs at YSU (330-941-2377) or at YSUIRB@ysu.edu

I understand the study described above and have been given a copy of this consent document. I am 18 years of age or older and I agree to participate.

Signature of Participant Date

I agree to have my responses audio recorded during the interview.

Signature of Participant Date

I agree to have my school records examined.

Signature of Participant Date

SILENT VOICES

APPENDIX B

SILENT VOICES

STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol

Date: _____

Time: _____

Location: _____

Release form signed: y/n

Interviewee number: _____

Interviewer: _____

Notes to interviewee:

Thank you for your participation. I appreciate your taking the time to meet with me and I look forward to hearing about your experience in the Succeed program. Your privacy is the main concern and your responses will be confidential. Your name will not appear in my publication in any way. This interview should take approximately 30-45 minutes, but you may stop the interview at any time. Our interview is going to focus on your personal experiences in the Succeed program. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Entry:

How did you become enrolled in the Succeed program?

How were your academics and behavior prior to Succeed?

Program:

How long were you in Succeed?

How did you feel about your participation in the Succeed program?

SILENT VOICES

Please describe the program for me.

Was there anything you particularly enjoyed about Succeed?

Was there anything you did you did not enjoy about Succeed or would change?

Was there any specific programs or activities in Succeed that you felt was helpful?

Exit:

What are you currently doing?

Do you feel Succeed had a direct role in your current situation?

Is there anything you would like to add to our conversation?

Closure:

Thank you again for agreeing to speak with me. I will have the audio recording of our interview transcribed and will contact you once it has been completed to set up a follow-up interview.

SILENT VOICES

APPENDIX C

SILENT VOICES

STRUCTURED STUDENT INTERVIEW TWO PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol: Interview 2

Date: _____

Time: _____

Location: _____

Interviewee number: _____

Interviewer: _____

Notes to interviewee:

Thank you again for your continued participation. I appreciate your taking the time to meet with me again and I look forward to hearing more about your experience in the Succeed program. Again, your privacy is the main concern and your responses will be confidential. Your name will not appear in my publication in any way. This interview should take approximately 15-30 minutes, but you may stop the interview at any time. Our interview is going to focus on your personal experiences in the Succeed program. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Transcript:

- Having been provided a copy of the transcript of our first conversation, do you have any questions regarding it? Do you feel it accurately reflects your feelings and thoughts?

Prior to Succeed:

- Can you please discuss your academics prior to entering the Succeed program?

SILENT VOICES

- Can you please discuss your attendance prior to entering the Succeed program?
- Can you please discuss your behavior prior to entering the Succeed program?

Entry:

- Can you think back to when you found out you were being moved to the Succeed program. How did you find out?
- How did you feel about the move?

Program:

- A common theme in in my interviews has been the concept of autonomy and empowerment. Can you tell me more about your experience if you felt empowered and if so, how and why?
- Additional services provided in the Succeed program included the use of outside counseling, did you utilize this service and if so, can you tell me about your experience?
- Can you discuss the cooking component in the succeed program and your experience with it? How did participating make you feel?
- Did you have the opportunity to volunteer with any groups while in the succeed program, i.e., Cardinal Lab and if so, how did that make you feel?

Exit:

- Do you think you changed as part of the program? How so?"
- Where do you think you would be today if you did not enter the program?
- What advice would you give to a current participant?

Closure:

Thank you again for agreeing to speak with me.

SILENT VOICES

APPENDIX D

SILENT VOICES

STRUCTURED TEACHER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol

Date: _____

Time: _____

Location: _____

Release form signed: y/n

Interviewee number: _____

Interviewer: _____

Notes to interviewee:

Thank you for your participation. I appreciate your taking the time to meet with me and I look forward to hearing about your experience in the Succeed program. Your privacy is the main concern and your responses will be confidential. Your name will not appear in my publication in anyway. This interview should take approximately 30-45 minutes, but you may stop the interview at any time. Our interview is going to focus on your personal experiences in the Succeed program. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Entry:

How did you become involved in the Succeed program?

How do students typically become involved in the Succeed program?

Program:

How do students respond to being involved in the Succeed program?

Please describe the basic concept of the Succeed program and a typical day?

SILENT VOICES

What strategies and services do you implement/provide in the Succeed program that are different than a traditional classroom?

How has the use of these strategies and services implemented impacted you as a teacher personally and what impact has it had on the students?

Is there a student that sticks out in your mind who has excelled in the program and would you discuss that student?

Exit:

What is your vision of success for students involved in Succeed?

Is there anything you would like to add to our conversation?

Closure:

Thank you again for agreeing to speak with me. I will have the audio recording of our interview transcribed and will contact you once it has been completed to set up a follow-up interview.

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APPENDIX E

SILENT VOICES

BLUEPRINT ANALYSIS FOR GRADUATE QUESTIONS

Primary Research Question	Dissertation topics	Sub Question
1. How did the student become identified as at-risk and enrolled in the alternative education program?	Past research on reason for inclusion	How did you become enrolled in the Succeed program? How were your academics and behavior prior to Succeed?
2. How did the students feel regarding their participation in the Succeed program?	Feelings of separation, empowerment, possible inclusion in group	How long were you in Succeed? How did you feel about your participation in the Succeed program?
3. How did the use of alternative strategies and services in the succeed program impact the students and teachers?	Transformational leadership Growth Mindset Montessori Erikson	Please describe the program for me. Was there anything you particularly enjoyed about Succeed? Was there anything you did you did not enjoy about Succeed? Was there any specific programs or activities in Succeed that you felt was helpful?
4. How would the student improve the alternative education program in which they participated?	Feelings of separation.	Was there anything you did you did not enjoy about Succeed or would change?
5. Does the student feel the alternative education program had a direct correlation to his or her current situation?	Did transformational leadership, growth mindset, Montessori theory, and Erikson meeting needs have an impact on the students.	What are you currently doing? Do you feel Succeed had a direct role in your current situation?

SILENT VOICES

APPENDIX F

SILENT VOICES

BLUEPRINT ANALYSIS FOR TEACHER QUESTIONS

Primary Research Question	Dissertation topics	Sub Question
1. How did the student become identified as at-risk and enrolled in the alternative education program?	Past research on reason for inclusion	How did you become involved in the Succeed program? How do students typically become involved in the Succeed program?
2. How did the students feel regarding their participation in the Succeed program?	Feelings of separation, empowerment, possible inclusion in group	How do students respond to being involved in the Succeed program?
3. How did the use of alternative strategies and services in the succeed program impact the students and teachers?	Transformational leadership Growth Mindset Montessori Erikson	Please describe the basic concept of the Succeed program and a typical day? What strategies and services do you implement/provide in the Succeed program? How has the use of transformational leadership and the other strategies implemented impacted you as a teacher and what impact has it had on the students? Is there a student that sticks out in your mind who has excelled in the program?
4. How would the student improve the alternative education program in which they participated?	Feelings of separation.	
5. Does the student feel the alternative education program had a direct correlation to his or her current situation?	Transformational leadership, growth mindset, Montessori theory, and Erikson	What is your vision of success for students involved in Succeed?

SILENT VOICES

APPENDIX G



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Office of Research
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February 2, 2019

Dr. Karen Larwin, Principal Investigator
Mr. Joe Glavan, Co-investigator
Department of Counseling, School Psychology & Educational Leadership
UNIVERSITY

RE: HSRC PROTOCOL NUMBER: 110-2019
TITLE: Silent Voices: Perspectives of At-Risk Students Who Participated in an
Alternative Education Program


Dear Dr. Larwin and Mr. Glavan:

The Institutional Review Board has reviewed the abovementioned protocol and determined that it is exempt from full committee review based on a DHHS Category 2 exemption.

Any changes in your research activity should be promptly reported to the Institutional Review Board and may not be initiated without IRB approval except where necessary to eliminate hazard to human subjects. Any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects should also be promptly reported to the IRB.

The IRB would like to extend its best wishes to you in the conduct of this study.

Sincerely,


Dr. Greg Dillon
Interim Associate Vice President for Research
Authorized Institutional Official

GD:cc

c: Dr. Jake Protivnak, Chair
Department of Counseling, School Psychology & Educational Leadership

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