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What Does it Mean for Children?

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Alternative public schools have evolved from their origins in school choice and the progressive education movement of the 1920's into a system of schools that have become the assigned "dumping ground" for a population of ill-prepared, behaviorally disruptive youth, a population that is also disproportionately composed of minority students. Research suggests these schools fall short of providing an optimal educational opportunity for their students. There are multiple factors that place alternative school administrators "at risk" of failing in their charge to educate. Using a case study from a Midwestern alternative school, the author focuses on policy and the role of administrators, presenting interviews with the state legislator, the district superintendent responsible for oversight, and the school's onsite administrator. The essay demonstrates implications of policy that emphasizes behavior over education and argues the need to develop a cultural climate within the alternative school far different than that of the traditional school. Policy must engage the role of parents, healthcare workers, social workers, probation officers.

The catchall phrase used to describe children, who are poor, disenfranchised, and who are otherwise unable to matriculate successfully through the ranks of a traditional school environment is "at risk." These children are generally ill-prepared (with even minimal skills) to begin a socialization process that is necessary to acquire a quality education. Coupling this phenomenon (at risk) with children who are also perceived as incorrigible, usually results in children who are unable or unwilling to conform to traditional school culture. This partnership often sets off a causal chain in students that can run from academic incompetence, to poor school performance, to a dislike for school and school authority leading to the commission of inappropriate acts (Hirschi).

The law mandates that an education be provided for this student population. As a result, in recent years, we have experienced the growth of alternative schools for children who lack both academic and social skills. This kind of alternative school is designated to house students who have been described as incorrigible, disruptive, social misfits, and academically incompetent. This article examines the role of the administrators of these schools and their faculty who are responsible for providing students with a good education. The following questions will be explored in detail in this article: How do policymakers see the process of assuring a quality education for students facilitated, and what role do school leaders play in its implementation? What do leaders in alternative schools need to know to enhance educational opportunities for this student population? What does education really mean in this context? Does education look different in this setting?

The growth of alternative schools for behavior disordered students necessitates a closer examination of the administrator's position

For the purpose of this article, I have borrowed a definition from Lee, Lomotey, and Shujja (1994) that suggests that schooling /education should "foster the development of adequate skills in literacy, the humanities, and technologies that are necessary to negotiate economic self-sufficiency in society". However education, in this context, often looks different in its practical application. It assumes a different meaning from that which is generally accepted by society as a whole. This point will be expounded upon as the article unfolds.

This article seeks to understand why alternative school administrators may be especially "at risk" of failure to effectively oversee meaningful educational opportunities for their students. The growth of alternative schools for behavior disordered students necessitates a closer examination of the administrator's position and the increased responsibilities that come as a result of accepting this leadership role. I begin my discussion with a brief summary of the evolution of alternative schools. I will examine a case study of a Midwestern alternative middle school, focusing specifically on the role of administrators at this school. My analysis will provide demographic information on the student population followed by an interview with the state legislator who initiated the alternative school bill. I will provide perspectives about the alternative school from the district superintendent responsible for its oversight, followed by an interview with the alternative school's onsite administrator. Finally, I will discuss alternative approaches to address steps and direction that administrators may take to provide an optimal educational opportunity for their students in an alternative school setting.

Evolution of Alternative Schools

Alternative schools have been around for many decades. Cremin traces their origin to the 1920's and the Progressive Education movement. However, as noted by Deal and Nolan, the 1960's and 1970's reflect the greatest growth of these kinds of schools. They reported that there were over 5,000 alternative public schools during this time. Their data indicated that "over sixty percent of alternative schools had begun since 1962 and that over eighty percent had begun since 1970" (33). Many of these institutions held a variety of different objectives for their students. The majority of these schools were accessible to students as a matter of choice. This circumstance of choice has evolved into one where students are assigned to schools. When students are assigned to an alternative school, as in this case, emphasis is placed on dropouts and behaviorally disruptive youth. Research suggests that minority students disproportionately represent this student population. It further suggests that a great number of these schools are increasingly becoming dumping grounds and holding operations and therefore not providing an optimal educational opportunity for their students (Arnove and Strout 1980).

School Site

In 1993 a school referendum was passed in Midwestern State that created the Alternative School Program. Its purpose was to create another option to serve behavioral problem students. This included, but was not limited to, students failing, chronic truants, and students eligible for expulsion. The purpose was to provide a place outside the traditional school to send students when they had committed expellable offenses and nothing else seemed to work.

The alternative high school opened its doors in 1995. The middle school opened shortly thereafter in a downtown building that formerly housed the Employment Office. Prior to this arrangement, both the high school and middle school were housed in the same building.

The middle school (where this study was conducted) has six classrooms including a shop class and a computer room. There are five regular accredited teachers, one resource/special education teacher, one social worker, two teacher aides, and an assistant director who oversees its management. During this study the school had twenty-eight middle school students of which fourteen were classified as Special Education. All were black except for two white males and one white female. However, all of the students occupied a low social economic status. This

was evidenced by their eligibility for free breakfast and lunch offered by the school.

These children are primarily black and poor and many have been labeled special education. Who will be held accountable to provide them with a quality educational opportunity? What is the state's position with regard to their education? An interview with the legislator who proposed the alternative school bill follows.

The State Level

The legislator indicated that there was sufficient evidence that supported a perception that schools are becoming increasingly unsafe: "There has been a significant proliferation of expulsions and suspensions that have been attributed to an increase in drug and alcohol abuse, assault and battery, and weapons in the schools."

He further said that he has two children in the public school system and that they needed a safe place to receive a good education. No responsible parent would argue the need for safe school environments. However, the question now becomes one that asks, will removing disruptive children from traditional schools assure a safe school environment? Simple cause and effect theory suggests that removing disruptive students will create safe schools. However, one might ask whether removal of criminals from society make society safe? The question begs further inquiry. Are these children disruptive by nature and therefore in need of isolation? Are there ecological conditions that influence their behavior? If so, how do we address these influences so that these conditions can be removed so that we don't simply create more disruptive students? Are these students simply products of a society that deem them expendable? Is it possible to remove all the "bad seeds?" Are administrators able to address these issues? The alternative school plan appears to be an easy solution to a very complex problem.

Further, questions exist concerning the way in which the special needs of these children will be addressed. What specifically are their needs? How pervasive is the issue of foster care, and what is its impact on disruptive students? Why are some children unable or unwilling to conform to the traditional school culture? Are schools then responsible for adjusting their climate to accommodate all students? Do they have the responsibility and capabilities to do so?

What is in place in the alternative environment that would be different and hence better than that which is currently offered in the traditional

public school? Many would argue that even traditional school environments are increasingly unsuccessful in providing an optimal educational opportunity for a swelling number of African American males particularly.

Not surprisingly, the legislator was only able to offer much of the same rhetoric espoused when the issue of alternative education and African American males is raised in academic forums. That is, change the pedagogical approach, comprise a smaller student- teacher ratio, and a smaller student population.

However, what effectively does this translate into? In many instances it means crowding students who share similar social and academic issues into smaller classrooms with teachers, who in many instances, do not have special education certification, who do not share like cultural values and whose primary responsibility is to make sure students behave. It quite often means utilizing textbooks that children cannot identify with, or relate to. Can this panacea translate into intensified reading remediation for fourteen-year-old students who cannot read? More often than not it means exposing students to a watered down regurgitation of the same themes and approaches to education used in the traditional public schools that have been unable to meet the needs of this non-traditional student population.

It is evident from the paucity of research in this area that this formula isn't sufficient to address the multi-layered issues that these children bring to the classroom, that is, issues that begin with being poor, male, black, and unfortunately, in some instances, children of dysfunctional families. It is incumbent upon legislators, whose responsibility it is to formulate effective policy governing school issues, to make informed decisions be made regarding the welfare of our children; particularly when they have the power to impact their lives. There is a moral obligation to promote policies that make provisions for all children to obtain an optimal educational opportunity. What is the superintendent's view of the alternative school?

Superintendent's View

An interview with the superintendent revealed masked concerns and apprehensions about what I had observed at the school since he knew that I had already been there conducting this study. He quickly reminded me that the school was still in its infancy, "It's under a new administration; therefore many issues continue to be worked on and

improved, including revision of enrollment eligibility guidelines, curriculum, and the referral process."

During our conversation, the superintendent indicated three ways in which a student could be enrolled in the alternative school. The first is self-selection. A student or a parent may decide that the student is having too many problems in the traditional school and opt for a change in venue that may help to improve the situation. The second way a student could be enrolled is by faculty referral. This procedure required a faculty member to recommend a student be sent to the alternative school. This was usually a result of problems that a teacher was having with a student. This notion suggests that by removing a student from the traditional school and placing him/her into a smaller school environment, the student's problem may be adequately assessed and subsequently addressed. It further suggests that students would receive individualized attention, therefore providing better opportunities for both teacher and student to interact and ultimately address the social and academic needs of the student. The third way a student could be enrolled involved expulsion of a student from the traditional public school. The school board had to approve all expulsions.

During my interviews with students, faculty and staff, I found one student who enrolled in the alternative school by choice. The student knew the director of the alternative school from his elementary school years where he was in constant trouble. At that time, the director was a teacher at an elementary school that handled the children that were sent to the time-out room. Soon after the alternative middle school opened, the teacher became its director.

In his traditional school, the student continued to get into trouble. He bumped into his old teacher in the Dean's office at his middle school. It was then that he asked could he enroll in the alternative school. He felt he had a better chance of staying out of trouble. It should be noted that this student was on his last leg at the public school. It was simply a matter of (a very short) time before he would have been placed in the alternative school by the referral process or expulsion.

Other students interviewed indicated that they were mandated to the school as a result of the second process, i.e., faculty referral. Faculty referral was the process most often used because it was the last step before expulsion. In accepting the faculty referral, the student avoided the inevitable expulsion that would have left a permanent scar on his/her record. In other words, though some teachers may have had some altruistic motive in the interest of the student, such as more individual attention, it was more likely that a teacher didn't know what else to do

to reach the student and therefore it was necessary for something else to happen (Dunbar, 1999). The teacher had had enough!

The third step was seldom exercised because most parents opted for the second feeling that it would be in the best interest of their child. Parents were sold a bill of goods about the alternative school that left them with a sense that problems that faced their child in the traditional school were the child's fault. Further, parents were led to believe that staff and faculty would be more sensitive and better prepared to address the child's needs. Parents were convinced that problems could and would be addressed more effectively in an alternative school environment.

When asked about his vision for the alternative school the superintendent said that he believed in the program. "I am totally committed to its goals. I'd like to see a change in the behavior of the kids. What are their problems and how can we best address them?"

The alternative school has become a solution without an understanding of the problem.

The superintendent made it clear that changing the behavior of students was a primary goal. He said there had been a decline in the number of suspensions generally but wasn't sure what it could be attributed to. Could it be a result of a decline in student enrollment due to an increase in dropouts, juvenile incarceration, or increased enrollment in the alternative school? In effect a plan was put into place that displaced and hence marginalized students that had no built in mechanism from which to measure its effectiveness.

He indicated that there had been an increase in the number of suspensions due to violence and that the age of students suspended was becoming increasingly younger. Again, here is a problem with no way of understanding its origin. Yet, as the head administrator, he is responsible for overseeing the educational opportunities for these children.

The solution for many districts has become one to simply remove students from the traditional schools and segregate them in an environment (all to themselves) where they can't contaminate others. A question that must be addressed asks "what are the social conditions that lend itself to inappropriate behavior by this student population?" The alternative school has become a solution without an understanding of the problem. It's a quick fix for a problem in need of more than a band-aid. Is this simply a way of policing a crisis? Are alternative schools simply a microcosm of society as a whole? Do they simply portray the

relationship between social forces and the contradictions existing within them?

The superintendent closed our conversation by briefly alluding to one of the social conditions that schools now face that impact the role of administrators. He mentioned a kindergarten student that had been in six foster homes in five years. This issue, he conceded, was quickly becoming a more significant social problem that impacts children directly while also impacting school districts and their role in meeting the needs of a diverse student population. Where do we go from here? An interview with a state legislator helps to further probe these critical issues.

On-site Administrator

Mr. Sheldon, in his first year as Assistant Director of the district's alternative school program and principal of this middle alternative school greeted me as he unlocked the front door permitting me to enter. It's early so kids hadn't begun to arrive. I had been observing students and teacher interactions for the past few weeks so I was no stranger to the school or to Mr. Sheldon. As a result of what I had observed during the past weeks, Mr. Sheldon and I agreed that mornings were the best time for us to engage in a sustained and substantive dialogue. It was clear that once the school opened its doors and children began to arrive, quiet moments for conversation would be next to impossible.

During my observations, I watched as Mr. Sheldon diffused several volatile situations without a lot of commotion. Children didn't appear to rattle him. Often, students could be heard yelling at the top of their lungs, angry for any number of reasons, but Mr. Sheldon always kept his cool, speaking softly to students, knowing that a calm rational voice would often settle a loud, combative student.

I often heard him say, "Gentlemen you know you can't play that way. You know how it will end up." Mr. Sheldon often made this comment to students who were engaged in what appeared to be ordinary horseplay. Under ordinary circumstances, horseplay for students is an expected part of growing up. However, at the alternative school, horseplay inevitably ended up in a physical altercation.

Administrator's Perspective

Mr. Sheldon and I proceeded to his office to discuss concerns he had about issues that have manifest since he had taken over the

leadership position at the alternative middle school. Mr. Sheldon said the school needed to be restructured:

> *I knew the reputation this program had gotten–one of a "dumping ground"– a place where kids were not doing anything. However, it was a convenient place for the district to send the kids they didn't want to deal with. As far as traditional school administrators were concerned, academics were secondary –because of the nature of difficulties that our kids have. As a result, we have schools that view this school as not being a traditional school (in the sense of academics) because school to those on the outside is academics–to prepare kids for technical, vocational, business, and the future. This school isn't doing it.*

There are obvious philosophical differences between Mr. Sheldon's perception of what an alternative school should provide and those of the state legislator, the superintendent or his colleagues in traditional public schools.

Conflict in Ideology

When asked the district's perspective on what was supposed to happen in the alternative school Mr. Sheldon said:

> *It was pretty well evident to me in one of our first staff meetings. My description to the parent was one that suggested that students must work hard to show people that they can perform in the classroom both academically and behaviorally. Then, they would be allowed to go back. Our goal was to prepare these kids to go back to their home school and that could be done within the first semester and looking into the second semester.*

However, Mr. Sheldon learned from traditional school administrators that they were not interested in students returning to their schools. Mr. Sheldon told me that one administrator told him that since these students where in junior high, he should make "them ready to go to high school when that time comes."

Under these circumstances, placement in the alternative school is not viewed as an interim stop before returning to traditional school. School administrators do not want these students back. The perception of the alternative school from the perspective of traditional school administrators could be interpreted in several ways. The ideal notion is that students sent to alternative school will receive the necessary academic and social skills that will enable them to return to a more traditional school environment. However what more frequently occurs is the belief that alternative schools are for children who are failures.

Operating from this perspective dooms students to watered down curriculums, low expectations and subsequently a self-fulfilling prophecy dictating a sense of impending failure. Once children are banished to alternative school environments they are often forgotten about. Traditional schools have "washed their hands" of them and left their fate in the hands administrators and teachers who are charged with the responsibility to rehabilitate and subsequently return them to a school system where they have already experienced failure and where they are not wanted. The prevailing behavior is one that suggests, "we've got them out of here now you deal with them." In this instance, alternative school is simply a convenient out for traditional middle school administrators to place their troubled students. However, important questions exist concerning what administrators of alternative schools can do to meet the needs of its population. That is, how can alternative school administrators avoid failure in their efforts to meet the needs of these children? Mr. Sheldon addresses this point from several different perspectives.

Sheldon suggests that the image of the school must be changed. "We do need to change the way people look at us. We must show people that we were doing academics and that we don't simply have kids come here for a half-day or for an hour and then just leave. People should know that this is a program that looks like theirs."

A question that immediately comes to mind concerning Mr. Sheldon's vision of what the school should look like to an outsider is one that asks should alternative schools look like traditional schools?

Does Alternative School Mirror Traditional School?

In responding to this query Mr. Sheldon said:

> *It's the perception that matters. If they perceive us as looking like them, then perhaps, they will accept us. Does that mean that we are going to be like them? No, that's not the intent. No, I think the intent in terms of alternatives, at least my view here, is that I want to show that as an alternative our goal is to form personal relationships with students and through those personal relationships with students show that these students are capable. I think it is all too easy at the middle school and the high school to lose that relationship with students, and as a result all you are seeing then is surface behaviors that have no deeper meanings for the administrators and they'll just deal with those behaviors by policy. Dealing with kids on an individual basis, building a relationship with kids, finding out more about how they think, why they're doing what they are doing, and helping to encourage them to change if what they are doing isn't successful for them. This is part of our mission. I think this is what we are able to do in this environment, more so than what could be done in those other environments. So long term, the effectiveness of our alternative school is going to be what kind of change could we make in those middle schools and high schools systematically.*

Mr. Sheldon raises a number of points here that could contribute to the success or failure of students who attend alternative schools. First, can the perception of alternative schools be changed from one that is thought of as a "dumping ground" to one that supports a nurturing environment? Second, how can relationships be developed between traditional schools and alternative schools that benefit children? Third, who are these children and how do they end up in the alternative school? And finally, how do you develop relationships with children who have experienced few successes both in and out of school in order to meet their need?

Meeting Needs of Students

Many students placed in this alternative school have needs that require special attention. For example, many students are at least two years behind academically while others are unable to read beyond simple letter recognition. Many of these children live in foster homes or live with an extended family member(s) who has been worn thin as a result of problems with the student. Many have already been in and out of trouble with juvénile authorities. For most of these children, the alternative school is the "last house on the block" (Dunbar 1999). This environment is supposed to "straighten them out." It's supposed to provide them with the support to change their behavior and provide them an optimal educational opportunity. However what most often occurs does not fit this bill. Students are placed in classrooms with students who have experienced many of the same difficulties. Some students are special education and some are on medication. Most are at different academic levels yet they are grouped together where generic lessons are planned to keep them busy and quiet. Academics are not the focal point, transforming behavior is. This responsibility falls on the shoulders of the alternative school administrator.

Discipline and Staff Preparation

Mr. Sheldon spoke about the difficulties with changing behavior in children and preparing the staff for this daunting task.

> *As far as the skills of the teachers here, they are dedicated people. But as far as being skilled to be able to work with a number of these kids, there is definitely concern about this for me. At this point it's been difficult for me to watch because I come from situation where I have seen our staff develop. We were at a fairly high level of training for working with this sort of student population. If I needed to step away from a situation, I knew that somebody else was able to and capable of stepping into it and dealing with it. They had their own style*

but they were capable. I don't have that sense here. So, I do see myself having to deal with a lot of situations and, at some point, I think it is going to become overwhelming as our numbers increase. At this point, I see it as a modeling stage. I'm hoping that people are picking up on how I am dealing with kids. At the next stage I give some direct coaching to the teachers, that is, to step in to take a look at what is going on. I think there is a general focus or philosophy of working with kids, and I am not sure it's present here. They've used the Boys-town Model; they've heavily used a social skill approach, and they've used the ART, the Aggression Replacement Training Model. The latter model has been placed in the curriculum. I don't think that it's quite enough. So, the training and staff development is something we are going to need to work on.

Meeting Academic Needs

Mr. Sheldon indicated that academic deficiencies are part of the reason for the behavior problems these students experience. I think academic problems among students are a larger issue at the middle school. That may well be why they are here. Many of the students are identified as special education students. They are receiving more direct instruction from the Special Education teacher. However, we teach children in a self-contained classroom. One of the problems using this method is that we place six or seven disturbed kids in one room. Unfortunately, they would pick up each other's disturbed behavior. The ideal situation would be to move to a resource model, where support is provided to kids in a regular classroom environment. The benefit received by students from this type of program would be a far greater benefit because they will have more opportunities to choose from in terms of friends and different behaviors. When you put this number of kids together with similar social difficulties and similar types of behavior profiles what you will find is that they learn from each other's poor behaviors.

Role Models

Now, it becomes a situation where you, as an administrator, hope that a student comes walking in the door that has a goal in mind and that their goal is to make amends for their mistake so that they can return to their home school. I think we have a couple kids here who are doing that. If we didn't, we'd be in sorry shape because I don't think we could provide the necessary modeling, given what we have in terms of our ability to do therapeutic work with the kids and given the skill level that we have here. It would be difficult to do that. So, in a sense, I rely on fortune that we would have some kids that would rise and come above a lot of the negative behavior. The ideal situation is that some

students would show themselves as peer group leaders. Perhaps modeling appropriate behavior would influence their peers. In terms of the classroom work and the teachers' ability to modify instruction based upon students' academic ability, I would say that half of our teachers are capable of making the adjustments. Though academics are a crucial concern at the school, juvenile delinquency is also a critical issue facing alternative school administrators.

Juvenile Delinquency

Juvenile court weighs heavy on their minds, and it does interfere with school. It's a priority, I guess. I could take another slant on that. That is, one of the things they face when they go into the courtroom is a mandate from the judge that they must do well in school. And so, given that message, given the stick that goes behind that message, you will see students make either a positive change or leave. The choices these kids make determine how we can help them. For those kids that leave, there's not a whole lot that we can do because it is all a matter of choice. You are given the message here. You've made this mistake. Now, here is how you can make amends, here is how you correct it, here's how we want you to correct it. Now, here's your choice. You can do as you are capable of doing or you can face the consequences that could be detention time or prolonged probation.

Summary

One of the questions that began this discussion asked how policymakers viewed the process of educating students placed in an alternative school environment. It is clear from the interview that the policy in effect simply sanctioned the displacement of disruptive students into isolated environments. These environments served only to marginalize children that the traditional school could no longer cope with. There exists no clear plan in which to effectively address the needs of this student population. The fact is, this legislator has school-aged children who need a safe place to obtain an education. This is a primary reason for proposing the alternative school plan. This is a genuine concern for most parents. However, for the legislator, the concern has implications that affect more children than his own. As a public official, he has a moral and public obligation to act in the interest of all children. In this case, there was no sense that there was a grave concern to educate those students displaced. The superintendent wanted the children to learn how to behave. He wanted evidence that they changed their lives. He had no insights as to how this change was to occur.

In the case of this study, there were fewer children in the individual classes hence a smaller student/teacher ratio, but this alone did not manifest into an enriching educational opportunity for students. In many instances, students used books that the school district discarded. In essence, students were subjected to a diluted version of pedagogical practices that turned them away from the traditional school culture in the first place. Again, in this case, there was one special education teacher whose responsibility it was to facilitate the regular teacher's efforts to educate the fourteen children who had been assessed as special education students. Many of these students were sent to the special education teacher when they became disruptive in the behavior-disordered classroom, or they became disruptive when told that it was time to see the special education teacher. Students felt as though they were really "dumb" (in their own words) when they were sent to or retrieved by the special education teacher. As a result, they resisted efforts by the teacher to help engage them in their work assignments. Many of the assignments were rote memorization of material that students felt was totally irrelevant to their lives. There was no engagement between students and school assignments that held any significant meaning. Students did not buy into the alternative school ethos.

The cultural climate of the alternative school must be different from that offered in a traditional school.

This administrator is "at-risk" of failure to facilitate the education of these children. Students have been placed in this environment under the auspices of essentially rehabilitating them. He is responsible for "changing their behavior" without a viable and testable plan from which to work. Students are placed without school personnel having significant knowledge of their history. The administrator suggested that it took months to get to know them. That is, "to get beyond students' surface behavior." The goal became one that focused on behavior rather than on education. In the meantime, students emulated inappropriate behavior while teachers and administrators remained uncertain of the best plan to execute to address the problem. This generally resulted in chaos.

The ultimate goal of education should be that of "fostering the development of adequate skills . . . "(Shujja et.al 1994). However, in this context, despite efforts to look like and hence emulate the traditional school culture were unsuccessful. Part of the problem may be the notion that a goal should be to look like a traditional school. If educators would begin to think about the possibility that the traditional school may be part of the problem for these students, then perhaps emulating the traditional school would not be as important.

The cultural climate of the alternative school must be different from that offered in a traditional school. Traditional schools have not worked for these students. In order to form personal relationships with students, the administrators should learn something about the culture of the students.

They must know the language of the student so that they are better able to communicate. They must have constant contact with the family. Parents must be encouraged to come to school. If transportation is an issue then it must be addressed and remedied. A comprehensive package must be assembled that includes seeking the support of outside agencies that can address the needs of the parents as well as the student. Many of these students have problems that reach beyond the school walls.

Leadership for this cultural change must come from the top. Policymakers must understand the need for change for these students. Further, policymakers must address problems of students from a holistic perspective. The issues that students bring into the classroom often originate someplace outside of school. School cannot bear the sole responsibility. Policy that excludes the role of the parent or primary caretaker, probation officer, social worker, and the healthcare worker is policy doomed for failure.

School superintendents must utilize existing research concerning alternative approaches to traditional school. Administrators must ask what are the objectives and how do they plan to meet them. They must know in advance histories of students and ask how this knowledge can assist in achieving the objectives. And finally, benchmarks should be established to assess whether the goals have been met. Until these questions are asked and until directives are executed, administrators in alternative schools will continue to be "at risk" of failure to effectively educate this student population.

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1