Integrating research and practice to improve programming in a community-based alternative school

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Integrating research and practice to improve programming in a community-based alternative school

Abstract
The purpose of the present study was to evaluate a local alternative high school education program, assess areas of need, and make recommendations to strengthen programming as well as to support greater student success. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected to determine the needs of the Progressions Alternative School System (PASS) program, an alternative high school education program in suburban Oregon. The study utilized student attendance, standardized testing performance, and graduation rates to evaluate student outcomes compared to state and national averages as well as outcomes from other regional alternative programs. A review of best practices as well as information collected through surveys and interviews within the PASS program and other regional alternative programs was used to identify recommendations for improving student outcomes within the PASS program. Three regional programs were utilized as a comparison group. Data indicated that the PASS program fell below regional, state, and national averages for student attendance, testing scores, and graduation rates. Themes of relationships, teacher involvement in curriculum development, limited availability of resources and communication with students’ families emerged from teacher group interviews across regional programs. Strong-student teacher relationships and inflexibility of the current curriculum were particularly emphasized within the PASS program. Regional comparisons revealed both areas of weakness as well as a few areas of strength for the PASS program. Recommendations for improving student outcomes within the PASS program included the development of a curriculum utilizing direct instruction, the establishment of a stronger support system for students, the expansion of incentives for student participation, and a renovation of the program’s physical space. In addition to having particular relevance for the PASS program, the present study has implications for understanding characteristics of effective alternative school programming. Further, this study helps to inform the process of evaluating the success of an alternative program in the absence of state or federal data that are specific to alternative schools.

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INTEGRATING RESEARCH AND PRACTICE TO IMPROVE PROGRAMMING
IN A COMMUNITY-BASED ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY
OF
SCHOOL OF PROFESSIONAL PSYCHOLOGY
PACIFIC UNIVERSITY
HILLSBORO, OREGON

BY
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Abstract

The purpose of the present study was to evaluate a local alternative high school education program, assess areas of need, and make recommendations to strengthen programming as well as to support greater student success. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected to determine the needs of the Progressions Alternative School System (PASS) program, an alternative high school education program in suburban Oregon. The study utilized student attendance, standardized testing performance, and graduation rates to evaluate student outcomes compared to state and national averages as well as outcomes from other regional alternative programs. A review of best practices as well as information collected through surveys and interviews within the PASS program and other regional alternative programs was used to identify recommendations for improving student outcomes within the PASS program. Three regional programs were utilized as a comparison group. Data indicated that the PASS program fell below regional, state, and national averages for student attendance, testing scores, and graduation rates. Themes of relationships, teacher involvement in curriculum development, limited availability of resources and communication with students’ families emerged from teacher group interviews across regional programs. Strong-student teacher relationships and inflexibility of the current curriculum were particularly emphasized within the PASS program. Regional comparisons revealed both areas of weakness as well as a few areas of strength for the PASS program. Recommendations for improving student outcomes within the PASS program included the development of a curriculum utilizing direct instruction, the establishment of a stronger support system for students, the expansion of incentives for student participation, and a renovation of the program’s physical space. In addition to having particular relevance for the PASS program, the present study has implications for understanding characteristics of effective alternative school
programming. Further, this study helps to inform the process of evaluating the success of an alternative program in the absence of state or federal data that are specific to alternative schools.

*Keywords/Subject Terms: Alternative Schools, Alternative Education, Education Reform*
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Introduction

In an average year, a large majority (89%) of students in the United States (US) attend public secondary schools. During the 2010-2011 school year, over 15 million students in the US were enrolled in public high schools, compared to under 2 million students who were homeschooled or enrolled in private schools (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2011). These statistics can be observed at the state level as well. In Oregon, approximately 91% of students in grades K-12 were enrolled in the public school system during the 2010-2011 year and more than 163,000 students were enrolled in public secondary schools (grades 9-12) (Oregon Department of Education [ODE], 2011). However, because the public school system serves a broad range of students, the one-size-fits-all mentality of traditional public school settings is not able to meet the educational needs of all students (National Alternative Education Association [NAEA], 2009). Many students experience academic, social, and behavioral difficulties that lead them to struggle in public school environments (NAEA, 2009). For these students, attendance, engagement, and grades suffer. Fortunately, another chance for success may be provided for these students through enrollment in an alternative school.

Alternative schools can provide opportunity for instruction outside of a traditional school setting and often offer small classes and more 1:1 interaction with teachers (Raywid, 1994). Although alternative schools can take many forms, and can be funded privately or publicly, for the purpose of this discussion, only public alternative schools will be referenced as the focus of the current study will be on improving practices within a publicly-funded alternative program. According to the U.S. Department of Education (DOE), the term alternative education school is defined as “a public elementary/secondary school that (1) addresses needs of students that typically cannot be met in a regular school; (2) provides nontraditional education; (3) serves as
an adjunct to a regular school; or (4) falls outside the categories of regular, special education, or vocational education” (Sable, Plotts, & Mitchell, 2010, p. C-1). However, for the purpose of this discussion, the term alternative school will be further defined in accordance with Oregon state standards. In Oregon, an alternative school is defined as an educational setting designed to best serve the educational needs and interests of students who require additional academic supports because they do not meet state academic standards, require additional behavioral supports, are pregnant or parenting, have been expelled from school, have dropped out of school, are at risk of dropping out, or need additional supports to earn a diploma (ODE, 2011a).

Over the past decade, Oregon has seen fluctuation in the utilization of the alternative school option for education. The 2008 introduction of the Effective Behavioral and Instructional Support Systems (EBISS) Project, a federally funded grant project aimed at increasing student outcomes through identifying and supporting the needs of all children, increased the identification of student need for alternative programming and initially led to an increase in alternative school enrollment (15,061 students enrolled in 2008 compared to 21,561 students enrolled in 2009); however, more recent statewide budget cuts have reversed this trend (enrollment in 2010 dropped to 15,379; ODE, 2011a). Given the increased observed need for services for at-risk youth and the reductions in school budgets, it is important to establish practices that are able to best identify and meet the needs of students while simultaneously managing costs for districts.

The purpose of the current project is to identify and suggest ways to address the needs of a local alternative school. Relevant outcome goals will be discussed and information garnered from research on best practices in conjunction with data collected from regional alternative schools and administrator and faculty interviews will be utilized to identify efficient, low-cost,
and reasonable recommendations that can be implemented into the current structure of the school. For the purpose of this project, the term ‘needs assessment’ will be defined as: a systematic process by which needs are identified for the purpose of setting priorities to improve a program and the allocation of its resources (Witkin & Altschuld, 1995). This study will explore normative need, which will involve a consensus standard (i.e., best practices in the field of alternative education) against which a condition is compared; perceived need, which will reflect the needs of the target school as they are viewed by administration and faculty members; expressed need, which will include the attempts that the population has made to have a particular need met; and relative need, which reflect the gaps in and amongst similar communities (Kettner, Moroney, & Martin, 1999). These specific types of need will be addressed and evaluated to ensure that the proposed program to improve the efficacy of the alternative school discussed meets the needs of the target group.

**Alternative Education**

**Alternative Education Schools**

Alternative school practices (in varying forms) have been in place in the American educational system for over 50 years and have proven to be successful educational alternatives for many at-risk children (Lange & Sletton, 2002). As of 2008, there were over 10,000 established schools in the US that were considered to be alternative schools (Carver & Lewis, 2010; Lehr, Lanners, & Lange, 2003). It is therefore surprising that according to a 2008 study, only 64% of public schools in the US offered alternative programming in some form and only 40% of public schools offered at least one alternative school administered specifically by the home district (Carver & Lewis, 2010). Even more surprising still is the fact that there currently
exists no clear and universal definition of what constitutes an alternative school (Lehr et al., 2003).

Alternative schools vary greatly in their intended purposes and thus, programming, location, and enrollment standards may look quite different amongst schools within a single region or district. A discussion of these how these features affect alternative school design is necessary to further define the schools that will be addressed in this project.

**Type.** Alternative school goals and outcomes are greatly influenced by the services and programming that they offer; there is no uniform standard of what constitutes an alternative school. Thus, in an effort to clarify the breadth of services which alternative school programs may offer, researchers have made efforts to classify subtypes of alternative school programs. Raywid (1994) identified three types of alternative school programs. Type I alternative schools were identified as schools of choice that are often privately funded and emphasize unique and innovative programming. Conversely, Type II alternative school programs were recognized as “last chance” schools that are seldom schools of choice and which offer students opportunities for remediation following behavioral problems. Finally, Type III alternative school programs were defined as schools that were similarly remedial, but emphasized academic and social/emotional concerns.

The alternative schools discussed in this study are composites of Type II and Type III schools, as they aim to meet the needs of students who have been identified as at-risk due to behavioral and academic problems. Because these schools do offer second chances for at-risk students, instruction can often be challenging and current Type II and III schools typically have a number of strengths and weaknesses. Raywid (1994) noted that Type II schools have historically focused on how to “fix the student” (p. 27) and have demonstrated limited efficacy and failed to
reduce overall dropout rates and behavioral problems. It is important to note, however, that
traditional Type II schools have not been designed to provide the same level of support that Type
III schools offer and are often utilized punitively. According to Raywid, Type III schools have
fared better with regards to increasing attendance rates and credit accumulation, but have proven
costly and their benefits have not been shown to be lasting once students returned to their
traditional high schools.

**Location.** Among the challenges of establishing an alternative school program is simply
where to put it. The location of an alternative school can impact not only how it is viewed by
students and faculty, but may even impact how it is funded. Alternative schools have
traditionally been housed in three ways (Tobin & Sprague, 1999). The first of these ways is
within a separate building outside of the affiliated high school. This model is more common
amongst alternative schools compared to alternative programs and allows the alternative school
to function fairly independently, but also requires that a district have the resources to maintain an
additional facility (Carver & Lewis, 2010). Another concern with this model is that community-
based alternative programs/schools often have limited interactions with their districts (Ruzzi &
Kraemer, 2006). The second strategy for housing alternative schools utilizes a “school within a
school” (p.28) model in which alternative programs are based within their affiliated high school,
but with their own staff (Aron, 2006). This model allows schools to manage costs through the
maintenance of only one physical school building and presents the perception that the alternative
school is not entirely a separate entity from the main school. Finally, alternative classrooms are
often run as self-contained programs that allow students to participate in both special or
alternative education and general education classes. This system also helps to maintain district
costs and allows a more fluid transition back to school for students based in the alternative
program, but may prove more difficult to manage for populations that display high levels of behavioral problems.

Earlier research (Hefner-Packer, 1991) expanded alternative programs to include not only alternative classrooms, school within a school systems, and separate alternative schools, but also continuation schools that have vocational foci for students who have left the traditional school setting, and magnet schools in which alternative programs offer instruction in specific subject areas (most similar to Raywid’s (1994) Type I schools). Because the focus of the current study is on alternative schools for at-risk youth currently enrolled in high school, these latter two programs are not applicable to the present research and will not be reviewed.

**Reasons for enrollment.** As noted previously, alternative schools can vary in structure and location, but also can vary with respect to enrollment standards. Reasons for enrollment most greatly shape not only the programming of an alternative school, but can also suggest how it should be housed. A national review of alternative schools identified the most prominent enrollment reasons for utilizing alternative school placement. The researchers, Kochhar-Bryant and Lacey (2005), identified substance possession/use or physical attacks or fights as the most common precursors to referral (52% of schools endorsed these as the sole reason for referral). Other common referral reasons included: chronic truancy (51%); continual academic failure (50%); possession or use of a weapon other than a firearm (50%); and disruptive verbal behavior (45%); (Kochhar-Bryant & Lacey, 2005). These findings clearly identify a subset of youth who display behavioral and academic problems that may hinder students’ abilities to succeed in traditional classrooms. In light of these reasons for referral to an alternative school, it would appear that reducing behavioral problems, improving attendance rates, and increasing academic performance should be the primary goals of alternative education.
In summary, although alternative schools are ambiguously defined and can differ in structure and location, they often share similar reasons for enrollment. The next section is a review of educational outcomes relevant to alternative schools.

Important Educational Outcomes for Alternative Schools

Although alternative schools may vary in specific populations served, programming, and structure, they are all designed to best meet the academic needs of their enrolled populace. Successful alternative programs, therefore, do not merely warehouse difficult students, but also strive to improve the academic performance of high-risk students. This success can be measured a number of ways, but a few key outcomes are particularly relevant. First, due to the high rates of truancy amongst students referred to alternative schools and the impact that this can have upon academic achievement, maintaining a high level of student attendance should be a first priority for any alternative school. Second, because academic success is traditionally measured through grades, alternative schools that are meeting the needs of their students should also demonstrate improved academic grades amongst their students. Third, although alternative schools may be housed separately from their affiliated high schools, the performance of the students within alternative schools impacts the district outcomes where standardized testing is concerned and thus, improved standardized testing results is another key component of effective alternative schools. Finally, graduation rates are the ultimate measure of success for any high school and for alternative schools that house seniors, high graduation rates are a crucial measure of success. Relevant considerations and means for achieving these outcomes will be addressed in the following section.

Attendance. For any school, attendance is a crucial outcome and for students, attendance rates are strong correlates of academic achievement (National Forum on Education Statistics
Students who are not present cannot receive the academic or social opportunities that will enable them to successfully navigate the world around them later in life. For alternative schools, where truancy is a primary reason for referral, attendance is even more important. An alternative program can do no better in meeting the needs of its student body than can a traditional school if the students are not there. Improving attendance rates needs to be a goal for alternative schools not only because it is essential to providing adequate education, but also because the consequences of truancy can be quite significant. The National Center for School Engagement (NCSE) identified truancy as a precursor to delinquency and notes that truant students are more expensive to educate than non-truant peers, as they typically utilize more counselor time, generate more disciplinary referrals, and require more tutoring (Heilbrunn, 2005; NCSE, 2006). Additionally, truant students typically have lower graduation rates than students with consistent attendance, which has been additionally correlated with increased behavioral problems in adulthood (NFES, 2009).

Students who are frequently truant often additionally face a number of stressors that can impact or impede motivation and ability to attend school consistently. Researchers (e.g., Heilbrunn, 2005) have found that truants often come from low-income families, have parents who lack high school degrees, are often the victims of abuse or neglect, have mental health problems, and/or have parents with histories of criminality or substance abuse. Students from such backgrounds are typically those for whom alternative schools have been designed to serve—those who struggle with circumstances that make traditional education a failed option. If alternative schools cannot maintain attendance rates for these students, then they too will fail in serving these youth’s best interests. Fortunately, there are steps that schools can take towards
increasing student attendance rates. These suggestions will be discussed later under best practices.

**Grades.** Academic grades have long been the marker of academic success for students. For alternative school students, this is often an area in which they have experienced little success and consequently, improving student grades is a fundamental goal of alternative placements. Similar to attendance, poor grades can have a lasting negative impact for students. Poor academic performance has been linked to lower graduation rates, behavioral problems in school, and increased involvement in criminal activity (Sprague & Nishioka, 2004). Early identification of and intervention for at-risk youth is ideal; however, many students fall through the cracks or do not receive adequate intervention prior to enrollment in high school. For such students, attempts to improve academic performance may fall to the wayside of interventions aimed to address problematic behaviors and poor attendance. Finding students the right set of academic supports, can, however, lead to increased motivation to attend and participate in school (Sprague & Nishioka, 2004). Failing grades need to be addressed systemically and merely placing a student in an alternative program is not enough. Successful alternative schools need to tailor programming and instruction to meet the academic needs of their students. Suggestions for making these changes are discussed under best practices.

**Standardized testing.** With the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), a push for meeting academic proficiencies has come to the forefront of educational concerns. This act set a precedent of accountability for schools in ensuring adequate academic attainment for all students (Mero, 2005; No Child Left Behind Act [NCLB], 2002). Accountability under NCLB includes proficiency testing in primary and secondary schools as well as tracking of graduation and dropout rates (Mero, 2005). Currently, proficiency and progress in Oregon schools are measured
through the administration of statewide assessments known as the Oregon Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (OAKS) tests (Oregon Department of Education [ODE], 2008). These tests are administered annually to all 3rd through 10th grade students and test knowledge of content areas, including: Reading and Literature in grades 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 10, Math Knowledge and Skills in grades 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 10, Writing in grades 4, 7, and 10, and Science in grades 5, 8, and 10 (ODE, 2008).

Many states, including Oregon, have laws specific to alternative education programs (Lehr et al., 2003). In Oregon, legislation holds that resident districts are responsible for students participating in alternative education programs and that learning situations should be flexible with regard to environment, time, structure, and pedagogy and that alternative programs should be annually evaluated by the resident district (Alternative Education Programs, 2011).

Annual evaluations of alternative programs are additionally relevant for resident districts, as assessment results for students in alternative placements are aggregated with the results from their home district and can therefore impact state and federal funding for the district (ODE, 2011a). Because alternative school performance impacts district performance on standardized assessment, which in turn can impact district funding, steps should be taken to ensure that students in alternative programs are meeting proficiency goals.

**Graduation rates, dropout rates, and subsequent ramifications.** Because alternative schools do house senior students, it is important that these students are afforded the opportunity to complete academic work in a timely manner and earn their diplomas. Graduation rates are an area in which even traditional high schools appear to be falling short, yet they are a key marker for the success of any academic program. Of the 15+ million students enrolled in public high schools in the US, one-quarter do not graduate within 4 years and 4% drop out of school before
earning a diploma (Stillwell, Sable, & Plotts, 2011). Although these numbers represent some improvement over the past decade (the graduation rate in 2011 was 72%), they indicate that our schools are not meeting the needs of 25% of our students (Chapman, Laird, & Kewal Ramani, 2010). These numbers are even higher for low-income and minority students. Recent national dropout rates for Hispanic, American Indian/Alaska Native, and Black students were 6.0, 6.3, and 6.6 percent, respectively, compared to 3.4 for White students (Stillwell et al., 2011). In Oregon, 75% of students graduate with a regular diploma in 4 years; however, only 58% of Hispanic students and 54% of African American students graduate with a regular diploma in 4 years (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009; Chapman et al., 2010; Stillwell et al., 2011).

At a societal level, the cost of not graduating high school is steep: Non-graduates utilize more health and social service resources and are more likely than graduates to become incarcerated (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Burke Morison, 2006). Additionally, it is estimated that over the course of their lifetimes, graduates will generate more than $200,000 in high tax revenues and lower government expenditures compared to non-graduates (Blafanz, Bridgeland, Bruce, & Hornig Fox, 2012). However, the personal impact and lasting ramifications of not graduating can be even larger. Non-graduates earn an average of $9,200 less annually than high school graduates and are three times as likely to be unemployed (Bridgeland et al., 2006). When employed, non-graduates are often unable to support themselves independently and are twice as likely as graduates to live in poverty.

Sadly, dropping out of school is rarely a rapid process and instead represents a long-standing pattern of disengagement (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Because of this fact, most programs aimed at reducing dropout rates are unsuccessful. Within alternative schools, systemic changes need to be made early, before students have withdrawn from school. Such second chance
programs should be designed to work towards bolstering academic self-efficacy, motivation, and engagement as soon as students enroll. The next section is a review of the factors that can affect the success of alternative schools and programs.

**Characteristics of Alternative Schools that Affect Outcomes**

A number of factors impact the way that an alternative school operates and how successful it can be towards achieving its outcome goals. When designing an alternative program, administrators need to be mindful of the intended size of the school and the nature of its programming, as well as how it will be staffed and populated. Because the population of students within alternative schools is a unique one, schools should make efforts to structure learning environments in a manner most conducive to supporting high-risk groups.

**School size.** Whether housed independently or within a traditional high school, the size of an alternative program can directly impact the quality of education offered. Husted and Cavalluzzo (2001) noted that school size is an important factor related to achievement, participation, and behavior. Smaller school settings (with classroom student-teacher ratios of approximately 10:1) allow for stronger personal relationships and more personalized learning opportunities (Aron, 2006). Typically in such settings, students demonstrate higher attendance rates and improved dropout rates with fewer behavioral referrals.

**Programming.** Programming within alternative schools can range from online instruction and individualized course packets to didactic instruction and vocational training. Hence, how a school selects programming options can vastly alter the alternative school experience for students. Researchers (Husted & Cavalluzzo, 2001; Lehr, Moreau, Lange, & Lanners, 2004) have found that programming that includes interactive activities, promotes a sense of community amongst teachers and students, and have more teacher involvement in
designing the curricula lead to more successful schools and students. Additionally, Husted and Cavalluzzo (2001) found that schools that link educational experiences with future workplaces (including having vocational classes and programs) help students to find better, higher paying jobs after graduation. Such programs work best when schools are able to group students according to academic level and proficiency rather than by referral purpose.

**Staffing.** Low student to teacher ratios encourage greater engagement and a tighter sense of community for both students and staff (Herlihy & Quint, 2006; Husted & Cavalluzzo, 2001). However, there are other factors related to how an alternative school is staffed that can also impact its efficacy. Researchers (Kleiner, Porch, & Farris, 2002) have found that beyond the number of teachers teaching in alternative settings, specific qualities of teachers impacted the success of students. Teachers who voluntarily chose alternative education settings and who were well-trained and motivated elicited more successful student outcomes than teachers who were involuntarily assigned to these environments and were not as invested in working with an at-risk population (Almeida, Le, Steinberg, & Cervantes, 2010; Kleiner et al., 2002; Lehr et al., 2004). Additionally, when teachers were given the opportunity to design their curriculum and to have input regarding school policies, they reported more investment in working with students (Husted & Cavulluzzo, 2001).

**Student population.** A primary task for traditional and alternative high schools alike is to provide a safe, secure environment in which teens can grow academically and find supports during a period of rapid development. Adolescence is a complicated period for even the most well-adjusted teens. It is a time of immense physical change and preoccupation, when opinions of peers take the forefront to those of parents and when a drive for autonomy is met by societal,

Considering the research on normal adolescent development, it can be assumed that children within alternative schools are also experiencing a need for autonomy and identity development. This is where problems arise. According to Harris (1995) and Eccles (1999), typically developing children will experience conflicts with authority figures and will attempt to test limits and boundaries in an effort to explore their roles. However, such conflicts and testing in a school setting can be met with behavioral referrals, exclusion from reward opportunities, failing grades, and even removal from the school environment. Students who have experienced such setbacks and have been placed in alternative school settings may develop (or have already developed) negative beliefs and attitudes about the educational system.

Another area for concern for the target population involves the group socialization theory that suggests that adolescents adapt their behaviors based upon their peer group (Harris, 1995). In a typical setting, teens have a variety of peer groups from which to choose; however, students in alternative settings have only one: other at-risk students who have also been removed from traditional school settings. Through constant exposure to other children with academic and behavioral problems, including violent behaviors and gang affiliations, it is no surprise that alternative schools, if not carefully designed and monitored, can have the iatrogenic effect of actually exposing students to more delinquent behaviors (Gifford-Smith, Dodge, Dishion, & McCord, 2005; Leve & Chamberlain, 2005).

**Best Practices**

A review of the literature on best practices in school settings consistently leads to a discussion of student engagement. Typically, it is presumed that students who are highly
engaged in school are more likely than lesser-engaged peers to succeed academically and behaviorally and ultimately graduate on-time. Traditional and alternative schools that seek to improve programming and student outcomes cannot do so without exploring ways to increase student engagement. At a school level, this means providing students with a sense of autonomy, having clear and consistent goals, providing a range of extracurricular activities, implementing small class sizes, affording opportunities to affect policy, and giving students chances to become involved in projects that are culturally sensitive and have tangible outcomes (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; NCSE, n.d.b). Other effective strategies include having clear expectations about student and teacher roles, as well as building collaborative relationships with families and communities (NCSE, n.d.b). Through improving student engagement, it is likely that schools will see improvement in outcome goals universally; however, there are particular steps that alternative schools can take to ensure the best outcomes for their students. These steps, as well as best practices for specifically improving attendance and grades will be discussed as means to improve student outcomes in all areas.

**Best practices specific to alternative schools.** Ruzzi & Kraemer (2006) found that alternative schools are often isolated from best practices and from the practices of other alternative programs. Such isolation can lead to substandard and inadequate educational practices and thus, this situation demands that best practices be explored and revisited consistently. A consensus among researchers indicates that a number of factors specific to alternative schools additionally contribute to the success of students. First, schools must place a priority on the idea that it is the system and not the student that needs to adapt to improve student outcomes (Quinn & Poirier, 2007; Raywid, 1994). Second, because alternative schools are often housed separately from traditional schools, physical learning spaces should be clean, inviting, and well-maintained.
to ensure that students feel safe and welcomed in school (Aron, 2006; North Carolina Department of Public Instruction [NCDPI], n.d.). Alternative schools are also more effective when administrators strongly support their programs and are available to hear and address the concerns of teachers, students, and families (NCDPI, n.d.; Quinn & Poirier, 2007). Thus, it is important that administrators have regular contact with alternative schools that are housed apart from the primary school. To promote a clear understanding of the school’s function and to promote a sense of community, alternative schools should limit overall enrollment and present a clear mission, structure, and code of conduct (Cox, 2006; NCDPI, n.d.).

At the classroom level, it is important that student-teacher ratios be kept low (10:1 maximum) to allow for individualized attention and instruction and close, caring relationships (Aron, 2006; Cox, 2006; NCSE, n.d.; Quinn & Poirier, 2007; Tobin & Sprague, 1999). Classrooms should be structured to include clear expectations and guidelines and opportunities for positive reinforcement (Tobin & Sprague, 1999). Teachers should be specially and continually trained to work in alternative settings and should emphasize student successes and utilize a positive reward system rather than a punitive system to encourage appropriate student behaviors (Cox, 2006; Kleiner et al., 2002; NCDPI, n.d.; Quinn & Poirier, 2007; Tobin & Sprague, 1999). Adults within the program should build rapport and establish close or mentor-style relationships with students and monitor students’ behaviors and academic performance and impart a message of high expectations (Aron, 2006; Cox, 2006; Quinn, & Poirier, 2007; Tobin & Sprague, 1999).

Academic expectations in alternative programs should be clear and lessons should impart “real-world” (Martin & Halperin, 2006, p.33) activities, lessons, or messages that are applicable to student goals (Aron, 2006; Martin & Halperin, 2006; NCDPI, n.d.). Instruction should also be
individualized and adjusted to meet the needs of individuals and small groups of students (Aron, 2006; Tobin & Sprague, 1999). Specific behavioral problems and skill deficits should additionally be addressed through problem-solving and social skills training (Tobin & Sprague, 1999). Finally, strong alternative programs foster relationships with a student’s family and community. This can include opportunities to work within the community or frequent parent contact or training (Aron, 2006; Cox, 2006; NCDPI, n.d.; Tobin & Sprague, 1999).

**Best practices for improving attendance.** Because attendance is such a key component to building a successful school experience, and because it is often an area of difficulty for students enrolled in alternative programs, it is crucial that schools examine ways to encourage regular attendance from their students. Best practices regarding improving attendance in schools include elements that encourage having schools work with families (Adequate Yearly Progress [AYP] Handbook, 2008; NCSE, n.d.a; Reimer & Dimock, 2005). Recommendations include making parents and students feel welcome at the school, immediately contacting family members when a student misses classes, and working with families collaboratively to find solutions to attendance problems. Beyond being a welcoming place, schools should create an environment that enables students to feel successful, but also safe and respected (AYP Handbook, 2008; NAEA, 2009). Making sure that students understand that the school does care about their attendance is another important facet of improving attendance rates. Some strategies aimed at this goal include empowering and encouraging teachers to take actions towards improving attendance through positively recognizing or rewarding students for attending classes, engaging students in a discussion about absences when they have missed classes, and working to examine and address student concerns. Schools can also work systemically and consider closing campuses during breaks (e.g., keeping students on campus for lunch or free periods) to reduce the temptation and
opportunity to skip, providing an array of extracurricular and after school programs and activities, developing a relationship with businesses to encourage students staying in schools (e.g., closing to minors during school hours, informing the school or law enforcement when students are observed engaging in truant behaviors), and working with local law enforcement to reduce truancy. Finally, discipline policies and procedures should be clearly outlined, understood, and implemented in a fair and consistent manner (AYP Handbook, 2008; NAEA, 2009; NCSE, n.d.a).

The National Center for School Engagement (NCSE) (Heilbrunn, 2005; NCSE, 2006) echoed these recommendations and suggested that schools should monitor attendance, clearly review policies with students and parents and work to identify the motivations of students. The NCSE (2006) also noted that schools and teachers need to consistently communicate with students and families and work with families around barriers. Schools should also make programmatic changes, including: establishing a system of grading based on attendance (with an appeals process); developing a re-engagement plan for truant students; improving systems for tracking attendance; and utilizing in-school suspensions, detentions, and community service as alternatives to out-of school consequences. The elimination of automatic F’s for students who miss a certain number of class periods may also prevent students from losing motivation. In place of the F’s for missed classes system, schools could instead offer opportunities for students to earn back attendance credits through attending Saturday classes. Using extracurricular activities as incentives for attendance has also been effective in improving student attendance and engagement in school. Additionally, conducting home-visits is recommended to insure family involvement and identify areas of need (NCSE, 2006).
Finally, best practices for improving school attendance include the building of collaborative relationships between school and community agencies (NAEA, 2009; Reimer & Dimock, 2005). Partnerships amongst agencies such as juvenile justice, community health agencies, local businesses, social service providers, government agencies, and schools have been shown to effectively improve school attendance rates. Such collaboration can include regular meetings between school and community agencies to address issues facing youth in the community and evaluate areas of strength and need.

**Best practices for improving engagement and grades.** As previously discussed, alternative schools that do not improve students’ grades fail their students and ultimately do not serve their intended purposes. Because academic performance can be influenced by a number of factors, improving grades should entail systemically assessing student needs, identifying areas of risk (for academic failure), and tailoring educational strategies to fit these needs. Student engagement is often a key factor in determining how successful a student will be and thus, increasing engagement should be included in any system designed to improve academic performance. Engagement in classes may fluctuate for a variety of reasons, including, but not limited to, previous academic successes or failures, social interactions at school, mental health issues, and family stressors. Without knowing what is specifically impacting a student’s ability to attend or engage in school, it is not possible to intervene appropriately. Thus, it is imperative that schools establish systems in which at-risk students are identified quickly. Sprague and Nishioka (2004) identified two pilot programs for middle school students in Oregon which utilized positive behavioral supports occurring at the school, family, and community levels. Although these programs were implemented for a younger population than is the target of the current study, the programs employed interventions that may be useful at the secondary
education level as well (Sprague & Nishioka, 2004). These programs were successful in improving student engagement through the use of emphasized behavioral supports for all students and screening procedures for identifying at-risk students, as well as adult mentorship, tutoring, alternative methods of discipline, skills training, and case management within the school setting (Sprague & Nishioka, 2004). Additionally, the schools in the pilot studies worked collaboratively with families and community support agencies to increase engagement through greater family involvement and utilization of appropriate support skills (Sprague & Nishioka, 2004).

Interventions, including systemic changes to programming that specifically target student grades have also been identified in the literature. Herlihy and Quint (2006) reviewed four different programs aimed to address the needs of children who were at-risk when entering high school. Their findings indicated that improving instruction and personalizing the educational experience were crucial ingredients in building academic success. Herlihy and Quint (2006) concluded that academic improvement was possible for students entering secondary school academically behind and noted that longer class periods, opportunities to catch-up on work, and high quality curricula and teaching training could work to this end. They also identified the development of small learning communities in which students have personal relationships with faculty advisors as crucial elements in allowing students to feel connected with their schools.

Through structuring alternative programs in ways that encourage student engagement, camaraderie, attendance, and high academic achievement, schools will likely find that students are also better prepared for proficiency tests, graduation, and entry into the real world. Students and teachers will also be more likely to have positive experiences related to the alternative program (Aron, 2006; Tobin & Sprague, 1999). Before assessing the target school for this study
with regards to best practices, however, it is important to consider its unique characteristics. The next section will be focused specifically on characteristics of the target alternative program.

**Characteristics of the Target School**

A number of factors distinguish the alternative program that is the focus of this study and its population from other school populations nationally and even regionally. Because the student population in this study and within this program is comprised of adolescent high school students who have been identified as at-risk and who have been placed in an alternative school setting, this group differs from typically-developing adolescent populations in a number of ways. However, it is generally more consistent with the populations of typical alternative schools. Most obviously, students in the target program have experienced academic and/or behavioral problems that have impeded their school performance and warranted intervention. Given the location of the target program, it is likely that other issues particular to the demographics of this region and program have placed students at risk before they actually displayed academic difficulties. The target program that is the focus of this study is henceforth referred to as the PASS Program to protect the confidentiality of its students and staff.

Husted and Cavalluzzo, (2001) noted that a number of factors can place a student at risk for school failure. Student demographic factors (such as race), family-related factors (e.g., single-parent homes and parent substance abuse), peer factors (including having a delinquent peer group), economic factors (namely low socioeconomic background), individual factors (such as goals and self-efficacy), and school-related factors (e.g., previous academic or behavioral problems) can all contribute independently, but also in conjunction with one another, to marginalization and lower academic achievement. A review of the characteristics of the PASS
Program will identify how some of these issues may pose additional risk concerns for the identified student population.

**Context of the present study.** To best understand the target group, it is important to understand the demographics of the district and geographical region which it encompasses. In order to protect the confidentiality of the organization in this study, the following pseudonyms will be used: as noted previously, the target alternative school will be known as the Progressions Alternative School System (PASS) Program and is located in Redwood County, Oregon as part of the Columbia School District.

Redwood County is one of Oregon’s largest counties. The county is predominantly suburban and is one of the fastest growing counties in the state, adding 30% more residents between 2000 and 2008 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010a). It is one of the most diverse counties in Oregon; over 25% of the population is non-White. A large portion of the population is comprised of immigrants from Latin America and Asia (23.8%). To simplify demographic information and for the purpose of this study, the term ‘Latino’ will henceforth be used to describe all populations from South, Central, and Latin America, including Mexico.

Redwood County has seen a 62% increase in its Latino population from 2000 to 2008 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010b). Currently, 15.3% of the county’s residents are Latino and comprise 20% of the state’s Latino population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010b; Commission on Children and Families [CCF], 2010). The county also has one of the state’s largest populations of children under 18 years of age (26.1% of the county’s population). The poverty rate for children in the region was at 14.5% in 2008 and is even higher for Latino children (37.8% of the Latino child population lived in poverty in 2008). During the past decade, the county has also seen an overall increase in the number of ethnic minority students (25% in 2000 to 41% in 2009).
The region has experienced a significant increase in the utilization of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF; i.e., a 42% growth from 2008-2009) and food stamps (i.e., a 47% growth from 2008-2009), and in 2009, 14% of children in the county were uninsured (Commission on Children and Families [CCF], 2010). Recognizing and addressing the needs of students from low-income families is crucial to providing students with adequate educational opportunities as students from low-income backgrounds are more less likely to be academically prepared than their peers, less likely to meet or exceed benchmarks on standardized testing, less likely to attend a 4-year college, and less likely to have parents who attended college (Fergus et al, 2008).

The Columbia School District is located in a particularly rural section of Redwood County. The district covers 225 square miles and serves approximately 6,100 students. Columbia High School serves approximately 2,000 students, of whom 54.0% are identified as White and 41.9% are identified as Latino (ODE, 2011a). The PASS program is a branch of the public high school and is housed and staffed separately from Columbia High School.

Because the Columbia School District has such a high Latino student enrollment compared to other schools locally and nationally, it is important to identify ways that this population may differ from traditional populations in US schools. Nationally, Latino student enrollment in public schools has doubled from 1981 to 2009 (Aud et al., 2011). Oregon has seen an even more rapid increase in the enrollment of Latino students in public schools, with enrollment growth of 113% from 1999 to 2009. Columbia School District has further seen an increase in Latino student enrollment that is larger than any other district in Redwood County, and 65% of students in the PASS program identify as Latino (Castillo, 2010; ODE, 2011a). Unfortunately, in the face of increasing enrollment numbers, educational institutions have failed
to ensure that minority youth are being afforded the same opportunities for academic attainment that other populations receive. As previously discussed, the national dropout rate for Latino students is currently more than double that of White, non-Latino students (Bloomfield & James, 2007; NCES, 2004). In Oregon, the 2008-2009 graduation rate for Latino students was 52.6% compared to 70.1% for White students (Castillo, 2010). Successful programming for any school in this position must address the needs of this population and ensure that these students do not fall through the cracks.

Clearly, ethnic minority students face a range of challenges that disadvantage them in traditional school settings. Students who identify as Latino can face language and cultural barriers that extend beyond the scope of services offered through English support programs and beyond what are measured by English proficiency tests (Galindo & Reardon, 2006; Reardon & Galindo, 2009). This group is also at a higher risk for socioeconomic disadvantage and may be more likely than their non-Latino, White counterparts to have access to fewer educational resources during childhood (Borman & Rachuba, 2001; Galindo & Reardon, 2006; Reardon & Galindo, 2009). Thus, strategies to support Latino students need to occur at multiple levels.

Successfully addressing the needs of the Latino students within the Columbia School District and specifically within the PASS Program should consider strategies that have been found to be effective with Latino student populations. Such strategies include increasing engagement through developing curricula that emphasize problem-solving, teamwork, and communication skills (Borman & Rachuba, 2001; Husted & Cavalluzzo, 2001). Additionally, real-world application of academic lessons is especially valuable for Latino students (Borman & Rachuba, 2001). Researchers (Delpit, 2006; Fenzel, 2009) have also noted that ethnic minority students, including Latino students, respond more favorably to teachers who are authoritarian.
and direct in their styles, but who also demand respect and challenge students to perform. For Latino students, the quality of a student’s relationship with his or her teacher has also been found to correlate with academic successes and students tended to have improved relationships if teachers were viewed as helpful and flexible in teaching strategies (Fenzel, 2009).

Despite the disadvantages faced by Latino children, Latino parents are likely to have high educational expectations for their children (Galindo & Reardon, 2006). Unfortunately, these expectations are met with challenges. Parents of contextually and linguistically disadvantaged children (those with limited English proficiency whose families are recent immigrants) are more likely to have low socioeconomic status and lower education levels than White parents (Galindo & Reardon, 2006). These factors can greatly increase risk for dropout and school failure. Thus, previously discussed emphases on parent involvement and positive family relationships with schools may be an even greater factor that contributes to the motivation and success of Latino students in alternative schools (Fenzel, 2009).

**Aim of the Present Study**

Enrollment patterns amongst alternative school programs have changed recently due to increased need and reduced school budgets. With increasing numbers of students being identified as being at-risk of school failure or dropout and simultaneous reductions in services offered, it is important to understand the efficacy of current alternative school practices in Oregon and specifically within the Columbia School district. To obtain information about current programming and student results within the PASS Program and other alternative schools in Redwood County, a survey was designed to collect information about the PASS Program’s governance, curriculum, population demographics, staffing, and instruction. The purpose of this study is to gather information about national and regional alternative schools and use the
information to contribute to a needs assessment of the PASS Program and inform recommendations for program modifications within the PASS Program. Previously discussed national data, collected through educational databases and a literature review, were supplemented with regional data through the administration of surveys and interviews with regional alternative school administrators and faculty. Interviews with administrators and faculty at the PASS program, as well as direct observations of the program were conducted to identify areas of need with regard to attendance, proficiency scores, and graduation rates. Grades were not utilized as an outcome measure for this study due to the variability amongst schools with regards to their assignment as well as modifications in how grades are assigned on a student-to-student basis (e.g., weighted courses and A, B, C grades versus pass/fail classes).

The following hypotheses are based on the preceding literature review and will be evaluated in the present study.

**Hypotheses**

1. It is hypothesized that a comparison of best practices in alternative education and current practices within the PASS program will identify areas of need for the PASS program with regards to attendance, standardized testing scores, and graduation rates compared to national and state averages.

2. It is hypothesized that a comparison of practices and outcomes at other regional alternative schools and current practices within the PASS program will identify areas of need for the PASS program with regards to attendance, standardized testing scores, and graduation rates compared to other regional alternative schools.

3. It is hypothesized that a comparison of best practices in alternative education and current practices at regional alternative schools and within the PASS program will indicate
strategies for improving the current structure and curriculum of the PASS program.

Method

Participants

A search of the Oregon state education department website was conducted to identify alternative high school programs serving Redwood County. Four programs (including the PASS Program) were identified (programs will be referred to by pseudonyms: Douglas, Evergreen, and Frasier). After contacting the site director for the PASS program to introduce the nature and scope of the current study and to secure participation, site directors at each alternative school were contacted through email to inform them of the nature of the study and to recruit alternative programs for participation.

Design and Procedure

Administrators at the four alternative school programs were contacted and invited to participate in the project. Administrators were emailed a demographic survey prior to an in-person interview. All Faculty members from each school were offered an opportunity to be interviewed and administered surveys. In all, 4 administrators, 21 teachers (including one also serving as an administrator), 3 teaching aides, and 1 school counselor participated in the study.

Site directors from the comparison schools and from the PASS program were emailed a demographic survey (Appendix A) with questions regarding the composition of the student body for the most recent school year. The administrators were then interviewed (Appendix B) regarding school programming and curriculum. Teachers and instructional aides within the comparison schools were also given a survey (Appendix C) with Likert-type questions regarding programming at their schools, and were then interviewed (Appendix D) in a group format regarding the schools’ curricula and programming. Participants were encouraged to provide
personal suggestions and observations to improve programming. Teachers who were unable to participate in the group interview in person were given the opportunity to complete the teacher survey and mail it to the investigator. These surveys did not collect any identifying data other than program name. Teachers and instructional aides within the PASS program were also interviewed individually (Appendix D) about the program and completed a survey (Appendix C) with Likert-Type questions about areas of concern and satisfaction.

**Participant Alternative School Programs**

The next section includes a description of each alternative school program in Redwood County in order to provide detailed information about the program in terms of its location, size, student composition, staff, and availability of resources.

**PASS program.** The PASS program is housed separately from its affiliated high school enrolls approximately 100 students. The student body is 38% female and 62% male and is predominantly Hispanic (65%) and White (35%). Fourteen percent of students are served under an Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

Within the program, there are three regular education teachers and two full-time and half-time instructional assistants. One of the teachers was hired as the lead teacher and serves as the administrator for the program. During the course of the current study, the lead teacher changed two times; the first lead teacher participated in the pre-study observations, whereas the second participated in interviews and surveys, and the third joined the program following surveys, interviews, and observations. Of the other two teachers, one was hired when the program was initiated and the other was involuntarily placed at the program. There are approximately 25 students in each classroom and students are assigned to classrooms based upon space,
personality, and needs. They are usually referred by the primary high school due to behavior problems and credit deficiency.

Students within the PASS program have the opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities within the traditional high school, but not within the alternative program; however, the administrator indicated that participation is very low. The administrator reported conducting focus groups about extracurricular activities at the high school and noted that students expressed little interest in participating in activities at the high school. The administrator did note that other incentives have been put into place to encourage student attendance, including a Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports system, perfect attendance parties, gift card drawings for attendance, and raffle tickets earned though meeting behavioral expectations in the classroom. The administrator noted that under this system, attendance rates have improved 12% and there has been a 90% reduction in suspensions from the previous school year.

The lead teacher was interviewed individually and as a part of the group interview which included two other teachers and three aides. Teacher surveys were completed and collected at the time of the group interview.

**Douglas program.** The Douglas program is a community school housed within the same building as two other high school programs, but is separate from the primary high school. Enrollment at Douglas is varied and ranges from 135-185 students and the gender makeup of the student body is usually around 50% female and 50% male. At the time of the study, 47% of students were identified as Hispanic, 41% as White, 5% as Multiracial, 2% as Black, 2% as Pacific Islander, and 1% Native American. Approximately 25% of students have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP).
Within the program, there are 11 regular education teachers, 1 full-time and 1 half-time special education teachers, and 1 half-time ESL teacher working in 11 classrooms. There are approximately 15-20 students in each classroom. Students are referred to the program by their high school counselors and apply for admission. Students attending the Douglas program are able to earn regular or modified diplomas. Teachers generally select the courses that they will teach.

Currently, there are no extracurricular opportunities for students in the Douglas program; however, the administrator indicated that this is an area that the school is “working on.” The school did not have any incentives in place to encourage attendance at the time of this study, but administrators were in the process of developing a points-based system tying attendance to credits.

One administrator from the Douglas program and seven teachers participated in the current study. The administrator was interviewed individually and all teachers participated in a single group interview. Teacher surveys were completed and collected at the time of the group interview.

**Evergreen program.** The Evergreen program is located in two separate buildings, one which houses the high school and middle school alternative programs and a second which houses out-of-school programs; neither is housed within the primary high school. The enrollment capacity in the high school alternative program is 90 students, with a total enrollment of 115 during the most recent school year due to students graduating mid-year. The student body is predominantly (70%) female compared to male (30%) and ethnic/racial makeup of the student body is 52% Hispanic, 44% White, 2% Asian, and 2% Black. Approximately 28% of students have an IEP.
There are 9 high school teachers and 13 assistant teachers who work across the middle and high school programs to address the needs of students with regard to educational assistance, career planning, parenting, bilingual needs, special education, and school to work. Teachers are assigned to courses based upon vacancy and many teachers work in multiple programs. The student-teacher ratio is 18:1. Enrollment in the Evergreen program is voluntary and students apply for admission. Students typically stay in the program until they graduate (the average length of enrollment is 2 years). Students can earn a regular or modified diploma from their own high school.

Within the Evergreen program, extracurricular activities are tied to credit opportunities, including a Key Club affiliated with Kiwanis and a MIKE (Multicultural Kidney Education Program) club. The program also offers a cooking class for teen parents which works with the Oregon Food Bank. The program offers a lunch club with the principal as an incentive for attendance and built-in time once weekly to recognize student achievements. One administrator from the Evergreen program and six teachers participated in the current study. The administrator was interviewed individually and five teachers participated in a single group interview. The sixth teacher was interviewed individually due to a scheduling conflict. Teacher surveys were completed and collected at the time of the interviews.

**Frasier program.** The Frasier program is housed separately from the primary high school and enrolls approximately 60 students at a given time. The student body makeup includes 56% females and 44% males. Of the students enrolled, 43% were identified as Hispanic, 43% as White, 6% as Multiracial, 3% as Black, 3% as Native American/Alaska Native, and 2% as Asian. Approximately 17% of students enrolled are served by an IEP.
There are five high school teachers, two instructional assistants, and one counselor within the program. Teachers apply to work in the Frasier program. The average numbers of students in each classroom is 16 and students typically work with their school counselors to apply for admission. Enrollment in the Frasier program is voluntary and students apply for admission. Students typically stay in the program for 18 months and can earn a high school diploma or Certificate of Completion.

The Frasier program does not offer extracurricular activities, but administrators do make efforts to connect students with activities at the affiliated high school. The program also offers Starbucks cards for students with full attendance and individualized incentive programs. Students who do not meet attendance standards are required to come in to school early and are put onto an attendance contract.

One administrator from the Frasier program, five teachers, and one counselor participated in the current study. The administrator was interviewed individually and the five teachers participated in a single group interview. The counselor completed survey questions independently and mailed them to the investigator. All other teacher surveys were completed and collected at the time of the group interview.

Measures

A demographic survey for administrators was developed based upon a literature review and Web-based searches of information about alternative school programming and practices at the state and national levels (see Appendix A). The administrator survey was designed to be disseminated through email and completed prior to the administrator interview. Following a similar procedure, a survey for teachers was additionally developed to identify areas of concern and satisfaction (Appendix B). To ensure a degree of confidentiality, this survey was designed to
be administered in-person, prior to interviews; however, faculty who could not be present for the interviews were given the option to complete the survey independently and mail it to the investigator.

After reviewing literature regarding best practices in alternative schools and reviewing the goals established during the preliminary needs assessment, administrator and teacher interviews were developed to inquire about current programming and best practices. Administrator interviews (Appendix C) were developed to be administered individually and were comprised of open-ended questions about programs. Teacher interviews (Appendix D) were designed to be administered in a group format and were comprised of open-ended questions about programming and policies.

Brief (30 minute) observations were conducted on 2 separate days in each of the classrooms at the PASS program in an effort to collect and supplement data about programming implementation and student-teacher interactions. During these observations, the primary investigator collected data about the number of students, teachers, and aides present, number of students engaging in on/off-task behaviors, number of student-teacher interactions, and frequency of direct instruction at 1-minute intervals. Data were collected using an observation schedule designed by the primary investigator to collect relevant information (Appendix E). Attendance, participation, and instruction were captured utilizing tally marks and student-teacher interactions were captured through briefly diagramming the room at the bottom of the observation form prior to beginning the observation and checking off each student in the diagram as interactions happened.

**Analysis**
**Quantitative data.** Survey and interview data were grouped by relevant outcomes (attendance, proficiency testing rates, graduation rates) by the primary investigator. ANOVAs were conducted to compare regional and national alternative schools with the PASS Program with regards to demographic and outcome data. Kruskal-Wallis tests were utilized to compare teacher survey ratings among the PASS program and regional alternative programs.

**Qualitative data.** Qualitative data for surveys and interviews were collected, compiled, and transcribed. Relevant themes, areas where the other programs were similar or different to the PASS Program, and perceived areas of strengths and weaknesses for the PASS Program were identified by the principal investigator and reviewed by an independent qualitative reviewer separate from the principal investigator utilizing the phenomenological approach recommended by Creswell (2007).

**Recommendation compilation.** Recommendations for improving the PASS Program were compiled based upon information obtained through quantitative and qualitative analyses and a literature review of best practices. In addition to the principal investigator, an independent reviewer experienced in utilizing the phenomenological approach to qualitative data analysis reviewed all data to ensure that all relevant themes were identified and that all relevant analyses were completed. Recommendations for other districts were compiled and provided to district administrators separate from the current project.

**Results**

**Quantitative Analyses of Administrator and Teacher Surveys**

Data collected from administrator and teacher surveys from the PASS program were compared to national, state, regional data to determine areas of need within the PASS program.

**Comparison of PASS program to state and national data.** Because alternative school
data are often aggregated with district data, no state or national data for alternative programs are available for comparison with PASS program data. However, state and national public high school data can provide a comparison for how the PASS program is performing compared to traditional school settings. Thus, attendance, standardized testing scores, and graduation rate data from the PASS program were collected and compared to state and national averages. State averages were compiled after data were collected from the Oregon Department of Education’s Annual Report Cards for every public high school and alternative program reporting attendance, testing results, and graduation rates for the 2010-11 and 2011-2012 school years (ODE, 2011b; ODE, 2012).

**Attendance.** Average daily attendance data from 218 public high schools and alternative programs in Oregon were collected for the 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 school years. The PASS program’s average daily attendance during the 2010-2011 (50%) and 2011-2012 (55%) school years, was far below that of the state average ($M = 91.05\%$, $SD = 5.44$ and $M = 91.33\%$, $SD = 5.46$), and fell seven to eight standard deviations below the state average. The reported average daily attendance for the PASS program was lower than all other schools and alternative programs reporting attendance data. Because not all states collect and report attendance data, the attendance rate for the PASS program cannot be compared to a national average.

**Standardized testing.** Results on Reading and Math portions of OAKS testing were collected from 218 public high schools and alternative programs in Oregon for the 2011-2012 school year. The percentage of PASS program students meeting or exceeding benchmark scores in Reading (37%) fell more than three standard deviations below the state average ($M = 80.80$, $SD = 14.29$). Conversely, the percentage of PASS program students meeting or exceeding benchmark scores in Math (52%) was within one standard deviation of the state average ($M =$
62.02\%, \ SD = 18.14). Compared to national data from 2009, the PASS program was lower in Reading with only 37\% of students meeting benchmarks compared to 74\% nationally. With regard to Math testing, the performance of PASS program students was also lower than the national average of 64\% of students at or above benchmarks.

**Gratuation rates.** The 4-year (27\%) and 5-year (48\%) cohort graduation rates from the PASS program were again below average 4-year (\(M = 69.88\%, \ SD = 19.19\)) and 5-year (\(M = 74.39\%, \ SD = 16.27\)) cohort graduation rates statewide. However, while the 4-year cohort graduation rate was more than two standard deviations lower than the state average, the 5-year cohort rate was within two standard deviations of the state average. Nationally, the graduation rate is 76\%, indicating that again the PASS program was lower compared to national standards.

**Comparison of PASS program to regional alternative programs.** To determine how the PASS program compares to other regional alternative programs, attendance, standardized testing scores, and graduation rate data from the PASS program was collected and compared to data from the three other regional alternative schools.

**Attendance.** During the 2010-2011 school year, the average daily attendance rate of the PASS program was 50\%. This was the lowest of all alternative programs in Redwood County, and was 30\% lower than the next lowest attendance rate within the Douglas program (80\%). Attendance rates for the Evergreen and Frasier programs were 91\% and 84\%, respectively. During the 2011-2012 school year, the PASS program attendance rate (55\%) was also lower than those of the comparison schools (Douglas = 72\%, Evergreen = 91\%; Frasier did not have data for the 2011-2012 year).

**Standardized testing.** During the 2010-2011 school year, the percentage of students meeting or exceeding OAKS benchmarks in Reading was 37\%. This percentage was lower than
those of the Evergreen (71%) and Frasier (63%) programs, but was higher than the percentage of students meeting or exceeding Reading benchmarks in the Douglas program (<5%). With regard to Math proficiency, the PASS program fared the best of the surveyed alternative programs, with 52% of students meeting or exceeding the OAKS Math benchmarks, compared to less than 5% of students in the Douglas program, 21% in the Evergreen program, and 22% in the Frasier program.

**Graduation rates.** The 4-year (27%) and 5-year (48%) cohort graduation rates from the PASS program were lower than those of comparison schools. The Frasier program had the highest 4-year graduation rate (98%), but did not report 5-year cohort rates. The Evergreen program was slightly lower with 4- and 5-year cohort graduation rates of 94% and 96%, respectively, and the Douglas program had a 69% 4-year cohort graduation rate and a 74% 5-year cohort graduation rate.

**Teacher survey results.** Mean ratings from teacher surveys are presented in Table 1. A Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted to evaluate the differences among teacher responses from the four comparison programs (PASS, Douglas, Evergreen, Frasier) on the six survey questions (How satisfied are you with the current programming at your school?, How involved were you in developing the current programming?, How familiar are you with program policies/procedures regarding attendance, behavior problems, etc.?, How familiar do you think students are with program policies/procedures regarding attendance, behavior problems, etc.?, How satisfied are you with the level of interaction that you have with students’ families?, and How effective do you believe the current program to be?). There were no significant differences among teacher ratings on questions one through five; however, the test was significant on question six \( \chi^2(3, N = 25) = 10.269, p = .016 \) with a mean rank of 12.50 for Douglas, 12.92 for PASS, 6.92 for
Evergreen, and 19.75 for Frasier. The proportion of variability in the ranked dependent variable accounted for by program was .428, indicating a strong relationship between programs and teacher perceptions of program effectiveness. No other significant results from teacher surveys were found.

Follow up tests were conducted to evaluate pairwise differences among the four groups using Kruskal-Wallis tests. The results of these tests indicated a significant difference between the Frasier program and the Evergreen program. Teacher ratings of program effectiveness for the Frasier program were significantly higher than those for the Evergreen program.

Generally, teacher survey responses across districts indicated that teachers felt somewhat satisfied with current programming, but felt that they had little input into designing it. Responses also revealed that teachers believed that both they and their students were very familiar with program policies and procedures. Teachers reported being somewhat satisfied with their levels of interaction with students’ families and perception of program effectiveness varied from very low within the Evergreen program and high within the Frasier program.

**Qualitative analyses of administrator and teacher interviews**

A review of individual administrator interviews and teacher group interviews yielded common themes. To ensure fidelity to the meaning of participants’ responses, the process of identifying themes included the use of an independent qualitative reviewer who analyzed data separately from the principal investigator. Common themes were identified at both the interdistrict and intradistrict levels as well as between administrators and teachers. Interdistrict themes that emerged included: 1) staff-student relationships, 2) inclusion of teachers in curriculum and program development, 3) district and school resources, and 4) communication
and contact with families. Themes that arose at the intradistrict level will be discussed for each school individually.

**Interdistrict theme: Staff-student relationships.** Caring and supportive relationships between staff and students were identified as the greatest strength within each alternative program by both teachers and administrators.

**Administrator perceptions.** Administrators reported that strong relationships were essential to program success, as teachers need to be able to identify when at-risk students are struggling and provide the appropriate level of individualized support that may not be as critical in traditional school settings. They viewed these relationships as part of a healing process for students who have not been successful in other academic settings. The relationships and support provided were noted to include emotional support as well as academic support in order to best meet the needs of the population. Although the importance of relationships was cited by all administrators, one administrator included a caveat that strong relationships between teachers and students could at times become double-edged swords in that teachers may provide more support than is necessary, thus preventing students from functioning more independently in the classroom.

**Teacher perceptions.** Teachers also endorsed the significance of strong relationships with students. Some teachers noted that close relationships enhance academic interventions and provide opportunities for mentorship. One teacher noted that staff-student relationships were a key component in engaging students who may feel disconnected from school. Additionally, teachers reported that close relationships amongst teachers was also an important element of school functioning in that it helped teachers to feel supported by one another.
Interdistrict theme: Inclusion of teachers in curriculum and program development.

Although specific goals of alternative programming varied from district to district, the curricula and structure of the alternative programs tended to be determined at an administrative or district level for the surveyed schools.

Administrator perceptions. All administrators interviewed indicated that programming was determined in a top-down fashion, but that teachers did have input with regard to implementation. One administrator cited the need for teachers to modify instruction and lessons to meet the needs of the students and stressed the importance of teacher flexibility. In this school, the principal noted that there was diversity in the type of instruction offered, from packet work to didactic instruction, to need-based academic intervention programs. An administrator within another district noted that teacher input is crucial and that often teachers will develop a curriculum based upon their own interests, which allowed more flexibility in instruction, including greater opportunities for hands-on learning experiences. Within the other districts, there was less emphasis on the inclusion of teachers in developing curricula. At the target district, the administrator noted that the curriculum was geared toward credit recovery and included pass packets. This approach was based on a proficiency model adopted by the district, without teacher input; however, teachers were able to establish their own culture of rules and classroom expectations. At the fourth school, the administrator indicated that the program was undergoing a redesign and noted that the staff had much input in the process.

Teacher perceptions. Teacher perceptions regarding the development of curricula and programming differed from that of administrators. Contrary to administrator perceptions, teachers were more likely to feel that the programming and curricula were given to them without opportunity to provide feedback. One teacher stated that the programming was “imposed” and
“forced” upon the teachers, but that they were hopeful that the new program would include greater feedback from teachers. Another teacher reported feeling that teacher input was based upon forced choices that overlooked important aspects of alternative education in favor of designing a program that could meet certain standards with regard to testing performance and graduation rates. In the target district, two teachers noted that staff input comprised roughly 10% of the programming and that the rest was dictated by the district and that, consequently, teachers were unable to teach what they wanted to teach or provide much direct instruction to students. In another district, teachers noted that state mandates limited the input that teachers and students could have in program design which served to eliminate much of the alternative flavor of the school. Several teachers also stated that expecting disenfranchised youth placed in alternative settings to meet universal standards was, in essence, setting them and the programs up for failure.

Overall, administrators and teachers acknowledged the importance of including teachers in the decision-making process, but also recognized a heavily top-down approach to curriculum development. Interestingly, administrators perceived a greater influence of teachers on curricula than did teachers, who reported feeling disconnected from the development process.

**Interdistrict theme: District and school resources.** Budgetary and resource limitations were concerns among all individuals interviewed. Many of these constraints reflect district limitations that are exacerbated at the alternative school level.

**Administrator perceptions.** An administrator for the target program noted that budget limitations had resulted in an inadequate facility, oversized classroom populations, and outdated technology. While other administrators echoed these concerns, some noted that budget constraints also limited the number of faculty hired and thereby reduced each teacher’s flexibility. Time was also noted to be a limited resource by administrators, who reported that
programming changes and increased standards left little opportunity to provide professional development or exploration of new approaches.

**Teacher perceptions.** Teachers also emphasized the impact of budget constraints on facility maintenance, technology, and oversized classroom populations. Teachers further stated low budgets contributed to outdated curricula. Teachers also noted that time was a limited resource in terms of their abilities to make gains with students—students who are credit deficient or academically far behind their peers are often placed in alternative settings for short periods of time, making “catching up” an overwhelming task.

**Interdistrict theme: communication and contact with families.** Administrators and teachers acknowledged areas of weakness with regard to communication between students’ families and school staff.

**Administrator perceptions.** All administrators interviewed indicated that prior to initial enrollment, there was some form of interview process in which students’ families participated. However, contact with families after this point was reported to be limited and primarily negative in nature, although two of the administrators did indicate that there were parent conferences held at set times during the year. Several of the programs reportedly held family nights or events during the school year, but administrators reported unanimously that these nights were typically poorly attended and deemed unsuccessful. Administrators indicated that phone calls were made to families when students were absent or when they displayed academic or behavioral problems, but that no formal systems were in place to provide calls when students were doing well. In fact, one administrator noted that calls to students’ families were encouraged for both positive and negative behaviors, but that calls were more frequent when students were struggling in some area.
**Teacher perceptions.** Across programs, teachers indicated that contact with students’ families was very poor. At the target program, one teacher noted that they are more likely to see parents accidentally within the home communities than they are to see them at the school or as a function of their teaching role. Teachers noted that calls were made home for negative behaviors, but also identified that more contact was needed. One group of teachers additionally discussed their desire to see more family-based interventions and outreach to help better support students. Overall, teachers indicated that they would like to have more opportunities to connect with students’ families, but that currently contact with families was limited due to both inadequate outreach systems and poor family response to outreach.

Administrators and teachers within the alternative programs surveyed universally identified strong staff-student relationships as an important element of alternative programming. Additionally, administrators and faculty also recognized areas for growth with regard to the inclusion of teachers in curriculum and program development and greater communication and contact with students’ families. All staff also expressed concern about the availability of district and school resources.

**Intradistrict themes.** Within each district, themes relevant to the specific programs also arose. In some cases, these themes mirrored interdistrict themes, whereas many were distinctive and reflected elements of that program.

**PASS Program.** The PASS program was unique amongst the surveyed schools in that the administrator was also a teacher within the program. Although this was reported to impact the availability and flexibility of the administrator, it also allowed for greater communication between the administrator and the teachers, leading to consensus between administration and faculty regarding program strengths and needs. Relationships were again stressed as a key
strength of the PASS program, both by the administrator and by the teachers. The administrator noted that the culture of the school had previously been very negative for teachers and students and that by fostering close relationships with students, this was gradually improving. Teachers noted that relationships have further been cultivated by having aides accompany the same group of students through classes during the day, allowing adults to better observe and communicate about student difficulties. Per the administrator and teachers’ reports, this emphasis on relationships has led to fewer behavioral problems. Additionally, teachers noted that peer relationships amongst faculty have further promoted a culture of support. Teachers noted that these relationships have helped to mitigate frustration about programming and limited resources.

Within the PASS program, teachers reported that the curriculum lacked flexibility and opportunities for direct instruction and the administrator noted that there was limited teacher input in designing the curriculum. With the goal of the program being credit recovery, much of the curriculum is presented through pass packets and online programs; however, faculty noted that the technology and the curriculum were outdated and that student engagement was poor. Additionally, the state of the program’s facility was noted to be weakness by both the teachers and the administrator.

**Douglas program.** Attitudes of staff at the first comparison school, the Douglas program, were generally negative and expressed a culture of frustration. There was consensus that programming and curricula were traditionally very top-down, limiting opportunities for teachers to provide feedback. While it was expressed by both the administrator and the teachers that new programming would include more teacher input, teachers indicated that input was limited to forced choices. A common theme that emerged within this program was that of inadequate communication. The administrator reported that staff had been emailed about programming ideas
and options and were encouraged to provide feedback, but staff noted that the administration was not as flexible as they should be and that teachers were often left out of important conversations or not informed of changes until decisions had already been made. They noted that lack of communication has compounded the stress that teachers face. One teacher even noted that there appeared to be a mismatch between administrators and the program. Teachers noted that frequent program changes without adequate communication have led to teachers feeling powerless in their classrooms.

In general, there was little consensus between teachers and the administrator at this site, though both acknowledged that the program was “in crisis” at the time of the interviews. Relationships between teachers and students were again noted as a strength by both the teachers and the administrator; however, teachers noted that this could mean that teachers “put themselves on the line” for students. The administrator also qualified relationships as a strength by noting that teachers at time provide too much support to students, thus creating students that could be “a little passive.”

Another theme that emerged during interviews at this site was that of a stigmatized culture. The administrator noted that students have told her that they do not feel proud to go to their school and that the school has a reputation for being “a school for losers.” Teachers echoed this concern noting that students have stated “Why would I even want to go there?” Both the administrator and teachers noted that the stigma related to the school needed to change; however, the two again diverged with regard to the path to take. The administrator stated that improving the school should include higher standards, hard work on the part of the teachers, and time, whereas, the teachers indicated that the program has become increasingly “mainstream” and that
solution to fixing its culture is to embrace its alternative identity and turning the curriculum over to teachers.

**Evergreen program.** During interviews with staff at the Evergreen program, themes of relationships, communication, and consistency emerged. Both the administrator and the teachers noted that teachers develop strong relationships with students and want to see them be successful. Per the administrator, the pedagogy is heavily based upon building relationships with students to best identify student strengths, barriers to success, and opportunities for hands-on, experiential learning. Teachers noted that this approach has helped them to feel freer in designing instruction and has allowed them to utilize their relationships with students to develop individualized activities.

Teachers at this site noted that they would like more opportunities to collaborate with one another and believe that communication amongst teachers can be limited. They also reported that they would prefer to have more opportunities to communicate with teachers from the traditional high school. The administrator also noted that communication between the teachers at the alternative programs and those at the district high school is an area that should be improved. The administrator conceptualized this communication as being a means of professional development that could increase the efficacy of programming and better meet the needs of the students. Additionally, both the administrator and teachers described communication with students’ families as being limited and difficult to maintain.

Teachers and the administrator at this site also reported that additional fallout from limited communication was inconsistency in the implementation of rules and program policies. The administrator noted that there can be poor follow through with regard to interventions for
students and teachers noted that they often do not follow their own rules. One teacher noted that a student commented that rules are often very different from one classroom to another.

*Frasier program.* Interviews with the administrator and teachers at the Frasier program yielded familiar themes: relationships, communication with families, and resources. The administrator at this site noted that teachers are very concerned about students and their futures. Teachers also identified their relationships with students as a strength and noted that there is a symbiotic relationship that exists between teachers and administrators, which enables teachers to provide feedback and suggestions. Teachers reported that small class sizes have enabled them to build closer relationships with students and provide individual attention, instruction, and intervention.

Where relationships within the school were viewed as a strength, teachers and administrators saw communication with students’ families as an area of weakness within the program. Teachers noted that there is not enough opportunity to provide supports for families and the administrator reported that beyond built-in conferences, most communication with families is limited to calls regarding negative student issues.

Another area of concern within this site was a lack of resources. The administrator reported that there is a struggle to raise standards and help students to be successful given time constraints, whereas teachers noted that being a small program can be limiting with regard to the types of individualized opportunities they are able to offer students. For example, one teacher noted that there are limited fine arts resources available and another noted that technology does not always work adequately. Teachers also noted feeling limited with regard to resources available to address transition to post-secondary placements and with navigating systems for undocumented students.
Classroom Observations

Three 30-minute classroom observations were conducted in each of the three classrooms within the PASS program. Observations were conducted by the primary investigator utilizing an observation system developed by the primary investigator to collect data relevant to the study (Appendix E). The first observation took place in the morning during an English class in which one teacher and one substitute aide worked with 18 students (50% female, 50% male). During the observation, students were required to work independently 61% of the time, with 39% of the class time including direct instruction. The percentage of students engaging in on-task behaviors ranged from 44% and 58% during the observation and 72% of the students had 1:1 interactions with the teacher or aide. Off-task behaviors included talking, texting, taking pictures, and sleeping. The classroom was verbally redirected three times during the observation.

The second observation took place in the morning in a Science class in which one teacher and one aide worked with 16 students (25% female, 75% male). During the observation, students were required to work independently at computers 100% of the time. The percentage of students engaging in on-task behaviors ranged from 44% and 56% during the observation and 69% of the students had 1:1 interactions with the teacher or aide. Off-task behaviors included talking, texting, hitting peers, leaving the classroom, and using the computers for non-school purposes. Students were verbally redirected three times during the observation.

The third observation took place before lunch in a Math class in which one teacher and one aide worked with 21 students (62% female, 38% male). Either the teacher or aide was out of the room for approximately 50% of the observation. During the observation, students were required to work independently at computers or their desks 100% of the time. The percentage of students engaging in on-task behaviors ranged from 48% and 67% during the observation and
95% of the students had 1:1 interactions with the teacher or aide. Off-task behaviors included talking, texting, leaving the classroom, and putting heads down. Students were verbally redirected six times during the observation.

There was very little direct instruction in the classrooms, which is consistent with the programming described by the administrator. During the observation, student engagement and participation in appropriate activities was low and at any given time, approximately half of the students observed were engaging in off-task behaviors. While redirection of behaviors was minimal, teachers and aides were available and interacted with most of the students in each classroom. This interaction ranged from answering questions to tapping students on the shoulder to inquire about progress or compliment work. Based upon these observations, increasing student engagement may be an area for growth within this program.

**Strategies for Improving the Current Structure and Curriculum of the PASS Program**

One of the objectives of this study was to compile strategies that might be beneficial for addressing the current weaknesses identified when comparing the PASS program to national standards as well as to other regional programs. This section summarizes the problems that were identified in the main results section as well as providing improvement strategies from best practices to address each area of weaknesses.

**PASS program data compared to state data, national data, and best practices.**

Attendance, standardized testing results, and graduation rates for the PASS program were compared to state and national data as well as to best practices in alternative education. Although national attendance data were not available, outcome data from the PASS program does indicate that this program falls below other Oregon high schools with regard to attendance rates and below state and national averages on standardized testing and graduation rates. A review of best
practices for improving school attendance, testing performance, and graduation rates provides a contrast to the current practices within the PASS program and indicates some areas for improvement.

**Attendance.** The average daily attendance rate for the PASS program was significantly lower than the state average for alternative programs and was in fact, the lowest of any alternative program within the state of Oregon. The implications of these findings are numerous and warrant exploration of specific strategies aimed at improving attendance for the PASS program. Best practices in improving attendance include: development of comprehensive programs, family involvement, collaboration amongst agencies, incentives and sanctions, and supportive contexts (Reimer & Dimock, 2005). A comparison of each of these factors with current PASS program practices highlights areas for potential program modification.

**Best practice: Comprehensive programs.** Comprehensive programs consider sociocultural factors, resources, and personal attributes of the student body. In the context of the PASS program, this includes programming that addresses needs specific to Latino students, students from low-income families, and students at-risk for academic and socioemotional difficulties.

**Needs specific to Latino students.** The PASS program currently has an administrative assistant who is Spanish-speaking and facilitates communication with Spanish-speaking families. Researchers (Delpit, 2006; Fenzel, 2009) have found that Latino students show increased academic success when they have strong relationships with teachers and view teachers as direct and authoritarian and challenge students to perform. While teacher interviews at the PASS indicate that teachers view relationships with students as strong, classroom observations and the administrator interview suggest that there is little direct instruction and that teachers’ roles and opportunities to engage students may be limited to classroom management and involve few
opportunities for direct instruction. Although little didactic instruction does not preclude teachers from being direct or authoritative, there may be fewer opportunities for teachers within the PASS program to display these traits or challenge students to reach their academic potential. The PASS program does include some direct instruction for its career class; however, the curriculum itself does not offer opportunities for students to engage in lessons that include problem-solving, teamwork, communication skills, or real-world application of academic lessons which have been indicated to provide enhanced and effective learning opportunities for Latino students (Borman & Rachuba, 2001; Husted & Cavalluzzo, 2001).

**Needs specific to students from low-income families.** Researchers have suggested that students from low-income backgrounds entering high school face a number of academic disadvantages, including academic underperformance compared to high-income peers, lower performance on standardized testing, lower rates of 4-year college enrollment, and lower rates of degree attainment (Fergus et al., 2008; Jimerson, Reschly, & Hess, 2008). Because alternative programs are, in themselves, a level of intervention for at-risk students, programming needs to identify ways in which economically disadvantaged students may have fallen behind peers academically and implement specific strategies to allow students make up lost credits or receive remedial support. Addressing the needs of these students within the PASS program should include providing opportunities for students to make up gaps in achievement that are already present and the promotion of high expectations and support. One way that the PASS program attends to this concern is by providing credit recovery opportunities. In fact, the main objective of the curriculum within the PASS program is credit recovery. However, the administrator acknowledged that with such an emphasis on recovery, the program is not able to offer individualized or experiential learning opportunities that can increase student engagement and
interest in attending school. Additionally, this emphasis on credit recovery may lead to an academic climate in which striving for high academic achievement beyond making up missed credits is overlooked.

Needs specific to students at-risk for academic and socioemotional difficulties. While their regular education peers have access to a wide range of courses and instructional strategies, PASS program students are limited to the pass packets and credit recovery software provided to help them meet academic standards. However, these students are also limited with regard to the support systems available to them on a consistent basis. As previously discussed, students within the Columbia School District are likely to come from low socioeconomic status households and are often members of a racial/ethnic minority group—two factors which place them at risk for academic difficulties. Beyond these factors, PASS students are also identified as being at-risk due to behavioral and emotional disturbances. Unfortunately, despite research demonstrating that behavioral and emotional difficulties interfere with students’ abilities to learn in school, most children with diagnosable mental health disorders do not receive treatment (Doll & Cummings, 2008). At the PASS program, an on-site counselor is only available to students twice weekly and there is no consistent access to mental health services within the program.

Best practice: Family involvement. In additional to a comprehensive program to address student characteristics that may impede attendance, best practices in improving attendance rates include increasing engagement of students’ families (NCSE, 2005). As reported by the administrator and the teachers within the PASS program, contact with students’ families is often limited to admissions meetings and phone calls to report absences. For students whose families speak Spanish, these calls are made by the administrative assistant and not the administrator. However, when aiming to reduce truancy and increase school engagement, best practices involve
not just communicating with families when students are having difficulties, but also including families actively in the educational process by establishing trusting relationships with families, working with families to understand their perceptions and perspectives, understanding the family structure and its impacts, helping families access community resources, and involving families in important educational decisions (Ortiz, Flanagan, & Dynda, 2008; Reimer & Cash, 2003; Reimer & Dimock, 2005).

**Best practice: Collaboration.** Collaboration amongst agencies including schools, juvenile justice organizations, community health agencies, local businesses, social service providers, and government agencies, has demonstrated success in improving school attendance rates (Reimer & Dimock, 2005). Currently, students enrolled at the PASS program are not involved with any community partnerships like students in the Evergreen program. Increased collaboration with the primary high school and community organizations, agencies, and businesses may be an underutilized means for the PASS program to address some of its attendance difficulties.

**Best practice: Incentives and sanctions.** With regard to providing incentives and sanctions for attendance, the PASS program has made efforts to reinforce attendance. At the time of the administrator interview, the program had recently established a PBIS system, which reportedly increased attendance by 12% during its first year. The program also adapted its suspension policy to reduce out of school suspensions and saw a 90% reduction in the number of suspension days from the previous year. Additionally, students’ families were called every day for every student who was absent and the program began holding a chips and salsa party for perfect attendance each week and drawings for gift cards for students who show up on time. These steps appear to be on the right track; however, it will be important for the PASS program administration and faculty to find more ways to engage all stakeholders (e.g., students’ families
and community agencies) to build a positive and supportive atmosphere in line with PBIS standards (McKevitt, & Braaksma, 2008).

**Best practice: Supportive context.** An effective PBIS system is an excellent way for the PASS program to establish a supportive context in which learning can occur. Further assessment of the PASS program’s implementation of this model is beyond the scope of this study and would be needed to identify its efficacy. However, interviews and observations do indicate ways in which the PASS program has been successful in establishing a supportive context and ways in which it can continue to improve. At the heart of a supportive context is the relationship that teachers have with students (Reimer & Dimock, 2005). As previously discussed, teacher perceptions of relationships with students are strong, yet programming lacks opportunities for strong student-teacher engagement. The establishing of a community dialogue around attendance and truancy is another important feature of developing a supportive context for students and another area in which the PASS program could build its presence (Reimer & Dimock, 2005). Finally, the physical state of the PASS program needs to be addressed further. The administrator for the PASS program noted that the building and classrooms are barren, while teachers reported that the technology available is outdated. Such an environment is not a welcoming one in which students can take pride. Budgetary constraints were cited as a key impediment to improving the space and the administrator noted that the program was working with the Ford Institute Leadership Project to make renovations and updates.

**Standardized testing.** Beyond attendance rates, standardized testing scores from the PASS program were significantly lower than national and state averages in Reading and somewhat lower than state and national averages in Math. Outcome goals of standardized testing including realignment of curricula to match educational standards, reallocation of resources to improve
educational efficacy, revived motivation for teachers and students to improve educational achievement, and re-examination of educational equity (Brayden & Tayrose, 2008).

**Best practice: Improving curriculum.** As previously noted, curriculum is currently a weakness in the PASS program and making improvements to this area will likely require an evaluation of how funds are allocated within the program. Although alternative programs tend to be more costly to run than traditional education programs, evidence does support the use of alternative programs for increasing student achievement and positive behavior; however, a key component to successful programs is thorough evaluation and use of longitudinal data (Reimer & Cash, 2003). In terms of the PASS program, this may include combining outcome indicators such as graduation rates, attendance, and testing results with anecdotal information about how the program is working day-to-day to determine how funds should be allocated to best meet the needs of the students.

**Best practice: Improving motivation.** Student motivation appears to be another area of weakness within the PASS program. Targeted interventions to improve student motivation should address increasing students’ feelings of competence, sense of autonomy, interest in subject matter, and relatedness to peers, teachers, and the school (Usher & Kober, 2012). Teachers play a significant role in fostering an environment which values and promotes student competence, autonomy, interest, and relatedness and interestingly, teacher expectations for students are one of the strongest predictors of student motivation (Sciarra & Ambrosino, 2011).

Within the PASS program, student-teacher relationships are strong; however, the opportunities for teachers to engage students in lessons that are personally relevant and appealing are limited. Furthermore, if the dominant mindset within the PASS program is that the program is designed for credit recovery, teachers may not have or impart high expectations for their
students. Researchers (Sciarra & Ambrosino, 2011) have found that teachers often base expectations upon a student’s current grades which does not bode well for students enrolled in an alternative program due to academic underachievement. Similarly concerning is the finding that teachers tend to have the lowest expectations for Latino students compared with other racial and ethnic groups (2011). Given the high representation of Latino students within the PASS program, teacher expectations for students may need to be addressed directly. Through improvements to the current curricula, teachers in the PASS program may be able to increase student engagement; however, changing teacher expectations for students may require increased professional development for teachers and a reform of program ideology.

Additionally, teachers can play a role in increasing student motivation through the facilitation of communication with parents. Teacher communication with families is an important factor in increasing student motivation and increasing parent expectations for students (Usher & Kober, 2012). At the PASS program this communication is poor and there may be little incentive for teachers to make extra efforts to engage parents. Thus, administrative decisions to provide teachers within the PASS program guidance in facilitating communication with families, as well as designated opportunities or incentives for doing so (some schools have implemented merit pay plans correlated with parent attendance at parent-teacher conferences) may be needed to improve teachers’ outreach efforts and ultimately students’ motivation (Usher & Kober, 2012).

**Graduation rates.** Four- and five-year cohort graduation rates were also significantly lower than Oregon state averages and somewhat lower than national averages. Research indicates that high school dropout is not resultant from a single incident or factor and is often the consequence of a combination of interrelated factors, including academic failure, disinterest in school, problematic behaviors, and life events (Princiotta & Reyna, 2009). For at-risk students many of
these factors have already played a role in their educational experiences. By definition, students enrolling in alternative programs such as the PASS program are often referred to such programs specifically due to academic problems, disengagement, problematic behaviors, and life events (ODE, 2011a). Thus, it is not surprising that graduation rates for the PASS program are low compared to state and national high schools. Regardless of this fact, graduation rates remain a marker for the success of alternative programs and means for increasing the graduation rate for the PASS program should be explored.

**Best practice: Improving graduation rates.** The National Governors Association (NGA) outlined four actions needed for improving graduation rates, including promoting high school graduation for all, targeting youth at risk of dropping out, reengaging youth who have dropped out of school, and providing rigorous, relevant pathways to a high school credential (Princiotta & Reyna, 2009). Although the recommendations for addressing these areas presented by the NGA were aimed at legislative and systemic change on a large scale, strategies for promoting graduation, targeting at-risk youth, reengaging students who have dropped out, and providing rigorous educational pathways at a program level should be explored (Princiotta & Reyna, 2009).

With regard to challenging students and helping those at risk for dropout, including those enrolled in alternative programs, research has indicated that programs which utilize small class sizes, accelerated instruction, and intensive counseling services are more effective than those that are less intensive and offer fewer counseling opportunities (Baenen, 2009; Reimer & Cash, 2003). Researchers (Darling-Hammond & Friedlander, 2008) have also noted that personalization of the school environment, rigorous and relevant instruction, and professional learning and collaboration for teachers are core features of programs that are successful in graduating minority students from low-income families such as those enrolled in the PASS
program. For the PASS program, incorporating these elements may include reducing class sizes, incorporating more didactic and experiential learning opportunities, and more opportunities for planning and professional development for teachers.

**PASS program data compared to regional alternative program data.** In addition to examining how the PASS program compared to state and national schools, the current study explored the areas of attendance, standardized test performance, and graduation rates amongst the PASS program and similar, regional alternative programs. In addition to areas for improvement addressed in the best practices sections above, information collected from surveys and interviews was utilized to identify further ways in which the PASS program may make improvements based upon what the other programs had implemented.

Compared to other regional alternative programs, the PASS program had the lowest attendance rates as well as the lowest graduation rates and second lowest standardized test performance in Reading. The program did, however, have the highest standardized Math scores of the surveyed programs, indicating an area of relative strength. In reviewing administrator and teacher surveys and interviews, two areas in which the PASS program appeared to differ from other regional alternative schools stood out as possible contributors to its weaknesses: the lack of direct instruction and the poor quality of the educational space.

A frequently noted difference between the PASS program and all other programs was the amount of direct instruction and student engagement. The administrator and teachers from the PASS program indicated that a lack of direct instruction was a general program weakness. Teachers perceived this as contributing to low student engagement which was also noted during classroom observations. As previously addressed, increasing direct instruction and allowing teachers to actively teach may improve both student attendance and motivation (and in turn
testing scores and graduation rates). Although implementing a new curriculum incorporating more direct instruction may require greater initial investment of time and resources, the PASS program may better serve its students and yield better outcomes by following direct instruction models such as the ones utilized by other regional programs.

Although budget constraints were reported to be obstacles in all programs, teachers in the PASS program had particular concerns related to quality of the program’s facility and physical space. Inviting, well-maintained learning spaces and school grounds are often cited as important features of programs that make students feel safe and welcome (Aron, 2006; NCDPI, n.d.; Reimer & Cash, 2003). Improving the quality and appearance of the facility housing the PASS program as well as its classrooms may be another avenue for increasing student attendance, engagement, and achievement.

Discussion

Nationally, the need for enrollment in alternative education programs is on the rise, while school budgets and available resources are simultaneously being reduced. Thus, the impetus for careful evaluation of alternative programming and the identification of effective strategies for meeting student needs is strong. The current study reviewed data from national and state alternative schools as well as alternative programs in Redwood County to identify strengths and areas for growth within the PASS program. Attendance, standardized testing, and graduation data were utilized in combination with qualitative information collected through teacher and administrator surveys and interviews, classroom observations, and a review of best practices in determining areas for growth and recommendations specific to improving student outcomes within the PASS program.
Results from comparisons of PASS program outcomes to national and state standards as well as to best practices in alternative education indicated areas of normative need. Attendance rates, standardized testing scores, and graduation rates for the PASS program were lower than state and national averages and administrator interviews and classroom observations revealed that the current curriculum and programming do not meet best practice standards. Responses during the teacher and administrator interviews at the PASS program reflected a perceived need for improvements as many of the faculty reported believing that programming and resources were inadequate and that changes would be necessary to improve student outcomes. Related to this, expressed need was reflected by the administrative decisions to participate in the current study as well as to make programmatic and faculty changes during the course of this study.

Finally, relative need for improvements to the PASS program was expressed through observations of outcome gaps between the PASS program and other alternative programs in Redwood County. The PASS program had the lowest attendance rates as well as the lowest graduation rates and the second lowest standardized test performance in Reading. Standardized Math scores for students at the PASS program were an area of strength. Further differences between the PASS program and other regional alternative schools were the lack of direct instruction in the curriculum and the low quality of the school’s environment for students.

During the course of the current study, normative, perceived, expressed, and relative needs for change in the PASS program were established. These areas of need are reflective of the different types of need as reviewed in the literature (Kettner, et al., 1999; Witkin & Altschuld, 1995) and are necessary for a program evaluation to be comprehensive and have ecological relevance.
A goal of this study was to review and synthesize best practices in the field of alternative education. Based upon data collected from other regional alternative programs and best practices in alternative education, recommendations for PASS program changes will be made in the following section. This section is resultant from the compilation of the entire program evaluation process including the literature review, benchmark comparisons, and quantitative and qualitative analyses.

**Best Practice Recommendations**

The current study examined how the PASS program compared to state and national high schools as well as to regional alternative programs in the areas of attendance, standardized test performance, and graduation rates—all markers for a successful school program. The programming was additionally compared to standards of best practice for alternative programs and high schools. Compared to regional, state, and national attendance rates, standardized test scores, and graduation rates the PASS program has a number of outcome areas in which its performance indicates room for growth. A review of best practices compiled with data collected from surveys and interviews with faculty and administrators within other regional alternative programs has lead to the identification of several program recommendations specifically designed for the PASS program. This section synthesizes the presenting concerns for the PASS program as well as specific recommendations tailored to this program.

1. **Expansion of curriculum and instruction:** The current curriculum of the PASS program was designed to allow students independence in achieving credit recovery; however, the lack of didactic instruction, hands-on learning opportunities, and social engagement appears to have contributed to a disengaged student body and frustrated faculty, neither of which contributes to a challenging or appealing learning
environment. Although the utilization of pass packets and credit recovery software allow students with diverse needs to be housed in a single classroom, standardized test scores and graduation rates indicate that students’ academic needs are not being fully met. The PASS program administrator stated that it would be ideal to group students by grade level and credit needs in order to provide opportunities for didactic instruction and group learning, however, budget and space constraints may limit opportunities to do so. An alternative means of incorporating direct instruction or experiential learning into the current system may be to have teachers work with small subgroups with similar needs at designated times while other students complete independent work. Such a system could allow for individualized learning opportunities, direct engagement with teachers, increased opportunities for strong staff-student relationships to develop, and increased opportunities for teachers to impart high expectations (Kirschner, Sweller, & Clark, 2006). In accordance with best practices, such changes to the current curriculum and system should be developed with teacher input and opportunities for teachers to collaborate with administrators in establishing roles and policies (Reimer & Cash, 2003).

2. Increased support systems: Although members of the PASS program community identified relationships between students and teachers as a strength of the current system, there are many gaps in how much support is available to students. Because teachers are the most visible and accessible supports that students have, and because teacher expectations for students have a significant impact on student motivation, it is important that staff recruitment for assignment to the PASS program be determined based upon not only teacher qualifications with regard to subject matter, but also by
teacher investment and interest in working with an at-risk population in an alternative setting (Sciarra & Ambrosino, 2011). In order to preserve staff commitment to working with this population, providing teachers with professional development opportunities specific to working in an alternative setting is strongly encouraged. Although good student-teacher relationships are foundational to a successful alternative program and the maintenance of these relationships should be considered when making programmatic changes, student-teacher relationships may not provide the level of support that many at-risk students require. Increased availability of on-site counseling would be an ideal approach to meeting the needs of students, but budgetary constraints may limit the feasibility of this option. Alternatively, increasing the school’s presence within the community through partnership programs as well as increasing the frequency and quality of outreach to students’ families may be more cost-effective means of connecting students with resources and building greater support networks. In an effort to further meet students’ needs, administrators within the district and PASS program may additionally consider partnering with local organizations (e.g., local, low-cost mental health clinics) to provide students with counseling services.

3. Evaluation of positive incentives for students: The PBIS system in place at the PASS program should affirm and reinforce the program’s values and expectations while promoting a culture of pride, high expectations, and positive reinforcement amongst students, teachers, families, and the surrounding community. Thus, it will be important for teachers and administrators to evaluate how this system has been implemented and assess for ways to improve its application. Working with students to
identify meaningful reinforcers for attendance, behavior, and academic achievement and effort may also help in building student investment (Carney, 2005; NCSE, 2006; Reimer & Dimock, 2005). Qualitative observations and outcome data should be continuously collected and reviewed by administrators as well as other important stakeholders (e.g., teachers, parent representatives, community representatives, etc.) to inform programming decisions (Putnam & Hehl, 2005).

4. Improved physical setting: Limited funding for the PASS program is certainly a contributor to the current quality of its facility. Per the administrator, the building and its classrooms are barren and its technology outdated. It was indicated that the program is working with the Ford Institute Leadership Project to make renovations and updates, which will hopefully improve the physical presence of the building and encourage students to take pride in their program as research indicates the importance of the physical learning environment (Aron, 2006; North Carolina Department of Public Instruction [NCDPI], n.d.). Identifying and prioritizing target areas of the building will be necessary when allocating funds from a limit budget; however, the program may also benefit from utilizing experiential learning opportunities for students to enhance the space. Assisting with minor renovations and aesthetic transformations such as developing a garden, or making repairs to furniture or spaces, could provide hands-on, vocational opportunities for students to practice real-world skills in a way that is meaningful. Through partnering with community organizations and local companies the PASS program may additionally be able to collect donations such as paint, tools, decorations, etc. to assist in such projects.
Recommendations for the expansion of the curriculum and instruction, increased support systems, evaluation of positive incentives for students, and an improved physical setting are designed to increase student engagement and potential for success while also allowing for the PASS program to remain a viable alternative school and individualize learning opportunities for its students. Although making sweeping programmatic changes is not financially feasible or recommended without input from the program’s stakeholders, the above recommendations suggest potential targets and directions for change which may improve the day-to-day atmosphere of the program and opportunities for student success.

On the whole, the PASS program fell below state and national standards with regard to attendance rates, standardized testing scores, and graduation rates. Despite teacher ratings of program effectiveness being comparable to those of other regional alternative programs, outcome data in the areas of attendance rates, standardized testing scores, and graduation rates were generally lower for the PASS program than for other regional programs. A review of best practices to promote attendance, academic achievement/testing performance, and graduation rates revealed many areas in which the PASS program could adapt its current programming and policies to better serve its students and surrounding community. Implementation of a more active and engaging curriculum, development of a more comprehensive support system for students, inclusion of greater incentives for student participation, and the improvement of school grounds may all contribute to increased student motivation and performance and overall program efficacy.

**Limitations and Future Directions**

Through the collection and examination of both qualitative and quantitative data, the current study provided insight into how programming within the PASS program is implemented
and perceived. The comparison of student outcomes to regional, state, and national statistics enabled the investigator to identify areas of need within the PASS program. By examining these specific PASS program weaknesses, as well as best practices and practices utilized by similar, regional alternative programs, the investigator was able to provide targeted recommendations specific to the PASS program’s needs and resources. However, the current study was limited by a number of factors including changes within the PASS program during the course of the study, the impact of group interviews and impression management, a small sample size, and limitations in the availability of alternative education data.

Changes in administrators and programming complicated the assessment of the PASS program. During the course of data collection, there were three different lead teachers/administrators for the PASS program, one of whom participated in a pre-study evaluation, a second who was interviewed and surveyed, and a third who was consulted during the compilation of data. Along with administrator changes, the teachers changed, as did elements of the programming, curriculum, and data collection. For example, a career education course was added to the PASS program and a PBIS system was implemented. Plans for renovations and use of space also changed, as did the school’s system for tracking student attendance, grades, and demographic information. Although the pre-study needs assessment was conducted prior to many of these changes being implemented, recommendations for the PASS program were based upon interviews, surveys, and observations conducted in the midst of changes and data may not be wholly reflective of the PASS program as it is structured presently. In addition to the PASS program, at least one of the other regional alternative programs in the study was also in the process of implementing systemic changes to address poor student outcomes. It is possible that teacher and administrator responses about programs were influenced by frustration with previous
systems or disruptions to the status quo or were overly optimistic due to perceived improvements.

As with most qualitative research involving the presence of an investigator or utilization of a group interview format, it is possible that responses were influenced by the presence of others. Especially within the PASS program, it is possible that the dual role of the lead teacher as the administrator and the consequential inclusion of the lead teacher in the teacher group interview may have impacted the candor of the other participants. In a group interview in another program, teachers specifically asked if administrators would be privy to their responses and the administrator in turn inquired about district identification in the dissemination of findings. Although all participants were informed of the anonymity of their responses and use of pseudonyms for labeling participating programs, it is possible that responses may have been influenced by impression management or that those participating in group interviews may have restricted or inflated responses depending upon group responses and dynamics. Additionally, teacher surveys, though completed independently and confidentially, may have also been influenced by the group interview which preceded the administration of surveys.

The study was additionally limited by the number of alternative programs available to participate in the study. Although all alternative high school programs in the designated county were included in the study and programs within neighboring counties may have had student populations less generalizable to that of the PASS program, the inclusion of only three comparison programs limited variability in programming and responses from which to draw recommendations. A small sample size additionally affects the generalizability of the current findings and recommendations as they are limited to a particular type of alternative program addressing the needs of a specific student population.
Furthermore, a significant limitation was the availability of alternative school data. There is currently no comprehensive system for collecting and reporting alternative school data. Because alternative programs can vary vastly in structure and purpose and because alternative school data are often aggregated with district high school data, it was not possible compare the PASS program to state and national data for similar programs. Improved alternative program data collection and dissemination at state and national levels is needed to clearly establish alternative program standards and expectations useful for future research and for maintaining standards for student success. At the local level, procedures for data collection and evaluation also need to be established to better identify areas of progress and need. For example, none the regional programs surveyed collected information about recidivism rates and administrators expressed difficulty with easily accessing attendance, testing, and graduation data. Within the PASS program specifically, the data archive system was changed during the course of the study, leaving the program administrator with no access to data from previous years. The establishment of an easily accessible database as well as a system for reviewing data would enable the PASS program to better track student outcomes, including factors not examined in the current study such as recidivism, chronic absenteeism, and grades/credits earned, and to utilize data to better inform programmatic changes.

Because the scope of this study was limited to pooling data collected to inform recommendations specific to the PASS program, much qualitative data collected from interviews and surveys was omitted from the results. This data, though not included in the current study, will be utilized to provide targeted recommendations for each participating program independent from the current study.

As the demand for school accountability and education alternatives for at-risk students
increase and school resources decrease, research focusing on identifying and implementing effective alternative education practices is likely to become increasingly relevant and essential for progress. Although the focus of the current study was a single, rural alternative program, areas of weakness within the PASS program, including the lack of an engaging curriculum, limited resources, poor student outcomes, and limited utilization of outcome data to inform practice are not likely isolated to the PASS program. Even amongst the other regional alternative programs participating in this study, teachers and administrators expressed interest in finding ways to improve programming for their students while working within the constraints of their limited budgets.

It is likely that similar studies of alternative programs nationwide would reveal that many of the country’s alternative programs are not meeting nationally accepted standards in education and that poor collection of student outcome data in these schools as well as a lack of appropriate comparison data contributes to these deficits being overlooked and ignored. Examining specific program policies and goals is essential to providing optimal, or even adequate, educational opportunities to students enrolled in alternative programs. Thus, to best meet the needs of students, districts nationally should consider developing systems for collecting and evaluating outcome data and using this data to identify next steps in curriculum development and resource allocation. Similarly, ongoing evaluation of alternative education practices and outcomes can guide the establishment a comprehensive set of best practices for alternative education programs and national standards specific to alternative education.

We are grateful for the cooperation of the school districts that participated in this study. University-community partnerships provide a potential resource for school districts constrained by budget cuts and limited resources to enhance programming, receive assistance with
evaluation, and find additional resources. Universities are a neutral party in the evaluation process and are able to gain independent information from teachers and administrators who are distrustful of district level evaluations and may be concerned that their responses will lead to further budget cuts. In summary, there are a number of ways that the current study could be improved as well as a number of future directions that can be used to further the goal of improving alternative school education.

Conclusions

The current study was designed to examine the strengths and weaknesses of the PASS program as they related to student attendance, standardized testing performance, and graduation rates and to utilize best practices and practices implemented at other regional alternative programs to develop recommendations for improving alternative education within the PASS program. The researcher established the presence of normative and relative need for programmatic changes as student outcomes within the PASS program fell below regional, state, and national averages for student attendance, testing scores, and graduation rates, and PASS program policies did not meet the standards of best practice. Teachers and administrator responses indicated perceived need for programmatic changes as well as expressed need through efforts to redesign and restructure programming. Good student-teacher relationships were identified as a strength of the program and recommendations for improving student outcomes included the development of an engaging curriculum utilizing direct instruction, the establishment of a strong support system for students, and the expansion of incentives for student participation, and a renovation of the program’s physical space.

This study has implications not only for improving the PASS program, but also for the necessity of program evaluation as a process that alternative schools should undertake to ensure
student success. This study illustrates the importance of comparing a program to best practices in the literature, national and state level benchmarks, as well as to regional programs of a similar nature in order to evaluate how the program is functioning. The process of evaluation leads to an identification of strengths, weaknesses, and needs that can then be addressed to improve the quality of the education that alternative school students receive. Finally, this study investigated an underserved group in the educational system (i.e., high-risk youth who have failed to achieve in a regular education environment). This group deserves a strong and effective educational experience in an alternative school setting, and it is only through the process of evaluation and setting appropriate standards that this will occur.
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Table 1

*Mean Teacher Ratings on Survey Questions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Question 1 (M, SD)</th>
<th>Question 2 (M, SD)</th>
<th>Question 3 (M, SD)</th>
<th>Question 4 (M, SD)</th>
<th>Question 5 (M, SD)</th>
<th>Question 6 (M, SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Douglas</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.43 (0.99)</td>
<td>2.00 (1.53)</td>
<td>3.57 (0.54)</td>
<td>3.14 (0.90)</td>
<td>2.71 (0.95)</td>
<td>2.57 (1.13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evergreen</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.50 (0.55)</td>
<td>1.00 (0.63)</td>
<td>3.33 (0.52)</td>
<td>2.33 (0.82)</td>
<td>2.17 (0.98)</td>
<td>1.83 (0.41)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frasier</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.33 (0.82)</td>
<td>2.33 (1.37)</td>
<td>3.83 (0.41)</td>
<td>3.50 (0.55)</td>
<td>2.83 (0.75)</td>
<td>3.50 (0.55)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PASS</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.17 (0.75)</td>
<td>1.67 (1.37)</td>
<td>3.83 (0.41)</td>
<td>3.50 (0.55)</td>
<td>2.17 (1.33)</td>
<td>2.58 (0.80)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2

Mean Program, National, and State Attendance, Proficiency, and Graduation Rates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Attendance Rate</th>
<th>Reading Proficiency Rate</th>
<th>Math Proficiency Rate</th>
<th>Graduation Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PASS</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>74% (2009 data)</td>
<td>64% (2009 data)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Douglas</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>&lt;5%</td>
<td>&lt;5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evergreen</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frasier</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix A

Administrator Survey

Where is the school located (i.e., is it within the high school or a separate building?)?

How many students are enrolled at a single time?

How many teachers work in the program?

How are teachers assigned to work in the alternative setting?

Are there aides or instructional assistants working in the program? If so, how many?

How many classrooms are there?

Approximately how many students are in each class?

How are students assigned to classrooms?

How are students referred to the program (are students placed voluntarily or involuntarily?)

What is the gender make up of the student body?

What is the ethnic/racial makeup of the student body?

Do students return to their regular school within the same school year? If so, what percentage do?

What is the average duration of enrollment?

For seniors graduating from the program, what diploma options are available?

How many students enrolled in the program have an IEP?

How many students enrolled in the program receive ELL services?

What are the reasons for placement in the program?

What grades are served? Are students divided by grade level?

What requirements exist for teachers (e.g., education, training, etc.)?

How does the program receive funding?
Are mental health/counseling services available on site? How often (daily, during particular hours)?

What is the recidivism rate for students who have returned to their regular school?

What percentage of students that meet or exceed benchmarks in English Language Arts and Math?

What was the attendance rate for the most recent school year? Previous?

What was the graduation rate of seniors for the most recent school year? Previous?

What is the 4-5 year cohort graduation rate?
### Appendix B

**Teacher Survey**

Please use the following scale to rate your responses to the questions below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Very little</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Very Much</td>
<td>Completely</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. How satisfied are you with the current programming at your school?
   - 0 1 2 3 4

2. How involved were you in developing the current programming?
   - 0 1 2 3 4

3. How familiar are you with program policies/procedures regarding attendance, behavior problems, etc.?
   - 0 1 2 3 4

4. How familiar do you think students are with program policies/procedures regarding attendance, behavior problems, etc.?
   - 0 1 2 3 4

5. How satisfied are you with the level of interaction that you have with students’ families?
   - 0 1 2 3 4

6. How effective do you believe the current program to be?
   - 0 1 2 3 4
Appendix C
Administrator Interview

Programming
Describe the current curriculum.
How was the curriculum developed?
How were procedures, routines, and policies established?
What are the focus, goals, and objectives of your alternative programming?
Describe the instructional methods and pedagogy of the program.
What procedures are in place for students who do not attend?
How are behavior problems handled?
Are there any incentive programs for participation/attendance?
How much interaction is there between the school and students’ families?
Are there extracurricular opportunities available for students?
How does the program monitor progress?
What are current areas of strength within the program?
What are current areas of weakness within the program?

Follow up
What suggestions would you make to improve the current program?
What known or potential barriers may impede the implementation of these suggestions?
Are there elements of the program that have not been addressed that would be relevant to the current study?
Appendix D

Teacher Interview

Describe the current programming at the school.

How was the programming established? (How involved were teachers? Students?)

What are some current areas of strength within the program?

What are some current areas of weakness within the program?

Describe program policies/procedures regarding attendance, behavior problems, etc.

How familiar do you think students are with program policies/procedures regarding attendance, behavior problems, etc.?

How much interaction do you typically have with students’ families?

What type of interaction do you typically have with students’ families?

What suggestions would you make to improve the current program? Potential barriers?

Are there elements of the program that have not been addressed that would be relevant to the current study?
Appendix E

Classroom Observations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minute</th>
<th># Students</th>
<th># Teachers/Aides</th>
<th># Students On-task</th>
<th># Students Off-task</th>
<th>Direct Instruction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
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<td>8</td>
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<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
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<td>16</td>
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<td>18</td>
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</tr>
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1:1 Interactions: