

At Risk and Silent: Giving Voice to Students Participating in an Alternative School-in-School Program

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Abstract

Students are placed in alternative educational arrangement for a variety of reasons. Some programs exist outside of the regular school district; however, some exist as part of the school district and on the same campuses as the main schools. These schools provide students with the opportunity to succeed in a different environment. The current investigation examines the alternative school from the perception of the student. This qualitative investigation includes four students who completed their high school education through an alternative school located on the campus of the local high school. Student feedback provides insight to school leaders on the role that alternative education can play in the student's success and what the students believe can be improved so that they are successful beyond the classroom. Results indicate that students were positive about their alternative school experience and believed their programming provided them with opportunities that supported both academic and person growth.

Keywords: alternative education, high school, at-risk students

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Alternative education settings are used extensively throughout the United States as placements for students who cannot perform adequately in a general school setting. Schools typically use some type of indicator of risk for academic failure to identify students for inclusion in alternative education such as attendance, behavior, and course grades (ED, 2016). However, there are large discrepancies across school districts and even states regarding the definition of alternative education with 43 states adopting their own formal definition of alternative education (Porowski et al., 2014). Although the U.S. Department of Education (DoE) provides a general definition of alternative education, it is up to states and districts to interpret how to incorporate the DoE's guidelines into their alternative education programs.

Oftentimes the term *alternative education* is used interchangeably to describe many ways of educating students using settings or methods different than in the general education classroom. Alternative education settings may include alternative classrooms within a school, school-within-a-school programs, separate alternative education buildings, continuing education schools, magnet schools, and distance education programs (Hefner-Packer, 1991; Raywid, 1994). These settings range from programs in which students have the option to self-enroll (i.e., magnet schools), programs that are a last chance before expulsion such as school-within-a-school or alternative education building, or remediation programs providing more specialized instruction focused on vocational skills (i.e., continuing education schools). Research on alternative schools often does not differentiate between program models of alternative education, which limits the amount of empirical evidence that can be generalized to specific program types (Carver & Lewis, 2010).

Alternative schools are typically located outside of the traditional school building. Foley and Pang (2006) report that most alternative programs are housed off-campus and 80% of those are closed campuses. There are distinctive differences between alternative schools and alternative programs; alternative programs are still housed within the home school or a traditional school setting (Carver & Lewis, 2010). The school-within-a-school model is an alternative education format where students attend a specialized program that includes academic, social, and/or behavioral programs and is housed in a traditional school building (Hefner-Packer, 1991). This type of program allows for students to be educated in an alternative setting without leaving the school building, therefore increasing proximity to typical peers, and reducing the stigma of attending a separate building.

Although historically alternative program participation was provided as part of a schools-of-choice initiative, most current programs function as an alternative to suspension or expulsion or as a punishment to disruptive behavior (Lehr, Tan, & Ysseldyke, 2009). Many alternative programs have become “dumping grounds” for students who are disruptive or who do not fit in socially at a traditional school setting (Foley & Pang, 2006). These students have failed to meet the expectations of schoolteachers and administrators, who may believe that excessive behavior or social problems may negatively affect the academic progress of other students (Munoz, 2004). Placement in alternative education programs may be influenced by traditional school staff, district level administration, a committee of teachers, administrators, and counselors, or even a juvenile justice system referral. A smaller percentage of referrals are made by the student themselves or by the parents of the student (Carver & Lewis, 2010). In a national survey, states reported that characteristics of alternative programs where students are placed based on district/school mandates typically focus on behavior change and discipline, academic

remediation, are short-term placements, and are an alternative to expulsion, whereas programs that are accessed voluntarily often have flexibility, small class size, individualized programming, and parent involvement (Lehr et al., 2009).

There is also variability in the entry and exit criteria of alternative programs (Lehr & Lange, 2003). The most frequently cited criteria for admission to alternative education programs are social-emotional issues, truancy problems, and behavioral disturbances (Foley & Pang, 2006). Students are often referred for more than one transgression, with some of the more common being physical fights or attacks, possession or use of drugs, disruptive verbal behavior, persistent academic failure, chronic truancy, and possession or use of a weapon (Carver & Lewis, 2010). Although the reasons a student is referred for alternative education may vary, an overarching theme is that alternative programs house students who are deemed to be at risk for school failure. It is also difficult for students to transition back to traditional school settings from an alternative program because of lack of support and unclear expectations for reintegration (Kelchner et al., 2017). It is important for placement in an alternative education setting to serve as a conduit for either successful graduation or reintegration back to the traditional school setting and not as a channel to end up in an even more restrictive placement such as a juvenile detention center or jail (Kelchner et al., 2017).

Student Perspectives

Students who participate in alternative education placements report vastly different experiences from when they attend a traditional school setting. For example, students describe their experiences in traditional school settings as isolating, with poor relationships with teachers and staff, obvious separation between peer groups, and an overall lack of respect for students (Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011). Additionally, students reported that rules in a traditional school

setting are rigid and do not consider individual cases or rationale for breaking rules. Students felt bullied and isolated in the traditional school setting and reported acting out due to feeling withdrawn and misunderstood (Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011).

In contrast, students who participate in alternative education program report that teachers respect, trust, and take a personal interest in students, go out of their way to help students, and maintain a positive school environment (Edgar-Smith & Palmer, 2015). Students in alternative education settings also report being given more responsibility and control over their decisions and being more included within the school (Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011). However, participants from both studies were enrolled in alternative education schools, not alternative programs housed within a traditional school setting.

Aim of the Study

Although studies have investigated student perceptions of alternative education programs, there is a lack of research investigating students involved in specific types of programs, notably the school-within-a-school model of alternative education. It is difficult to generalize knowledge gained from one type of setting to another without empirical evidence. Therefore, the current study used a qualitative investigative approach to examine student perspectives of those who participated in a school-within-a-school alternative education program. Specifically, the researchers asked the question: How do students in a school-within-a-school alternative education program describe their experiences and the perception of those experiences in the program?

Method

The aim of the current investigation is to gain a better understanding of student perspectives regarding alternative education programs in which they participated. The research questions guiding this investigation include:

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

Participants

Participants consisted of former students who had been enrolled in the Succeed Program in a NE Ohio school district. Started in 2014, the Succeed Program enrolled 30 students and through a combination of traditional schooling and online course work. While also providing increased support, the Succeed Program attempts to increase the success of nontraditional students. The Succeed Program is housed in a separate facility outside of the high school. The program employs two intervention specialists and two classroom aides. The participants in the study ranged in age from 18-25 years old, included male and female students, and a variety of ethnicities. The type of sampling utilized was purposive and with the goal of representing participants in the Succeed Program. Purposive sampling is useful in this research because the students being interviewed provide information that is relevant to alternative education research and cannot be obtained from other students (Maxwell, 2013, p. 97). Teachers were interviewed to verify information that was provided by the students.

Instrumentation

Questions utilized in the interviews were created based on the goal to obtain student perspectives on alternative education and on previous research of how to limit factors affecting the quality of the interview data. Interview data were collected via tape-recording since it allows for a verbatim account of the interview and eliminates possible recording bias and lack of verification of notetaking (Wellington & Szczerbinski, 2007, p. 86). Interview questions are provided in the Appendix A. In addition to interviews, student records were accessed for verification of students self-reported information regarding attendance, behavior, and academic performance.

Procedures

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

Participants were provided a copy of the questions at the start of the interview and the entire interview was recorded and transcribed into a word document later. Once the interview had been coded, a follow-up interview was scheduled and conducted to ensure respondent validation and for follow-up questions to be asked to ensure rich data were collected and increased involvement occurred to increase trustworthiness. All recordings and word documents were in the sole possession of the researcher and documents were stored on a password-protected Google cloud drive. Participant waivers were created based on the specific instructions of the

university Institutional Review Board. Interview questions were based on the theories of qualitative research design by Maxwell, (2013), and Wellington and Szczerbinski (2007).

Interviews

Participants were chosen by meeting the criteria of having been a 2017-2018 graduate of the Succeed Program and being over the age of 18. Of the ten 2017-2018 graduates, eight were over the age of 18 at the time interviews were conducted. Over fifty percent of the population agreed to participate in the research and interviews were conducted with four of the Succeed Program graduates. Multiple attempts were made to contact other graduates and included both the researcher and Succeed Program staff members reaching out via phone calls to home phones, parents' cell phones, and graduates' personal phone numbers, if available.

Interviews were conducted at locations chosen by participants and ranged from local eateries to the building that housed the Succeed Program. The four graduate participants all agreed to have their interviews audio recorded and to allow access to their school records. Waivers were read to and signed by all participants immediately prior to interviews were conducted and forms were scanned and saved in a password-protected google drive. Participants were all provided a copy of the structured questions before the start of the interview and asked the identical questions in the same order to ensure consistency.

Data Analysis

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

In addition, member checking was completed to confirm findings and themes (Maxwell, 2013). Ultimately, the goal of the analysis was to understand student experiences and the meaning that they associate with their attendance at the alternative school-in-school.

Results

Participant's demographics

Participant demographics are provided for each participant for the purpose of identifying the differences and similarities that exist among these graduates. Participants are identified in no particular order.

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

Student Participant One was in the Succeed Program for two and half years.

Student Participant Two. This student is a male graduate who lives with his girlfriend in Eastlake. Prior to entering the Succeed program, Student Participant Two transferred from a neighboring school district where he described he was “failing just about everything.” After entering the program in October of his junior year, he graduated on time with a grade point average of 2.39. Student Participant Two is currently seeking employment and presented a

generally positive outlook on the path his life is heading and gave credit to the Succeed Program for his current path.

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

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

The findings of the research can be broken down into themes and subcategories that relate to the guiding research questions.

Enrollment in Succeed

The introductory interview questions asked how the participants became involved in the Succeed Program and how were their academics and behavior prior to entering Succeed. Several

respondents stated that attendance was a major factor in their enrollment in Succeed and was verified by both instructors and school records. Student Participant Three summarized her time before Succeed and stated:

I was on truancy for um—no I was on probation for truancy and my grades were slipping and I wasn't attending school, so we had to come together, like me and my team that I had in the school—to look at my other options because I wasn't getting appropriate education. I wasn't doing anything appropriately at the time.

A review of Student Participant Three's attendance confirms her comments and she missed over 97 days of school her first two years at the high school.

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

Lastly, academic progress was another category that repeatedly came up as a reason to consider entry into The Succeed Program. Student Participant Two summarized his grades and stated, "I was just kind of falling behind in all my classes you know... my academics um not

nearly as good um I was—I think failing just about everything if not failing then very behind in all my classes.” Student Participant One responded similarly regarding academic progress: “they weren’t really good. Like because I didn’t like really do the work.” Records of participants confirmed poor academic performance and not being on track to graduate prior to entering the Succeed Program and instructor interviews also discussed academic performance as an indicator for at-risk population.

School records were not always able to provide triangulation. In the case of Student Participant Four he was never enrolled in traditional schooling and entered from another alternative education setting. While this limited the triangulation from school records, it did provide insight in the contrast between alternative education models. When asked about his feelings entering the Succeed Program, he stated: “it felt a little weird...A lot of different personalities than where I was previously at. I didn’t know how to talk to people, how to communicate with people. I learned quick though.” The comparison provided by Student Participant Four helped again to confirm the other themes discussed including supports and alternative education strategies.

Feelings Entering the Program

While all student participants expressed a positive experience in the Succeed Program, each had their own individual experience of the initial transition into the program. Student Participant One described his initial feelings and stated: “at first I was like “nah,” because it was like a little building, then I got used to it.” Student Participant Four entered The Succeed Program from an out of district alternative education program and described his transition by stating: “it felt a little weird at first because I was in a different environment then I was used to. I didn’t have to get checked and stuff and get searched, so that was a little different.” The change

of environment was also noted with Student Participant Two who discussed the contrast between traditional classrooms and commented: “It was very laid back and it was a lot easier to focus. There was a lot less kids.” Student Participant Three stated that he was initially “apprehensive but it was a nice environment to um like put my feet into compared to—it was comfortable and just from the looks of it, at the beginning of it.”

It should be noted that three of the four student participants expressed excitement about enrollment in the Succeed Program, albeit with some form of initial hesitation. Student Participant Three summed up her feelings, stating: “I thought I needed a more intense program, for like, more so an outpatient like, therapeutic incorporation with school, that’s what I thought...I thought it was a good fit.”

Alternative Strategies

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

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

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

The role that not meeting basic needs on student success cannot be overstated and the participant interviews showed a strong deficit in basic levels of needs in students who participated in the Succeed program. The research also appears to show that once basic needs are met, students can continue to move up on the hierarchy of needs with strong relationships, increased goals, and in some cases, level of self-actualization.

Empowerment/Accountability

The strongest response from participants related the idea of feeling empowered when in the Succeed Program. Student Participant Three discussed empowerment and stated: "you just genuinely like got to take on your independence." Student Participant Two discussed having increased responsibility and commented: "responsible in the fact of you know you could earn the response—or the privileges, you could earn privileges and also—and they could be taken away."

Online Curriculum

The empowerment felt by participants was enabled partially using an online curriculum that allowed for a more individualized learning experience for each student. Student Participant Three stated:

It allowed me to work at my own pace and uh, you know, if I didn't understand things or if I did understand things, I wouldn't have to you know wait for somebody else or I

would go and get that help on my own so to speak. And be like, ‘okay this is this’ but still it helped me have that independence and I thought it was good for me specifically, because that’s how I am. Take that initiative.

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

Emotional/Behavioral Counseling/Additional Supports

Social and emotional services were provided by an outside organization on a weekly basis. Student Participant Three discussed the environment that was created by the additional emotional and behavioral supports provided in the Program and stated:

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

Student Participant Three also discussed the impact counseling had in providing support, indicating:

I would utilize it on occasion if I had some episodes or what not. It helped me kind of stay on track while I was attending school, like in school, so I could like regain my focus, collect my thoughts.

Reflections on Current Programming

The student participants all agreed that the Succeed Program had a positive impact on their lives and helped to mold their current situation. Student Participant Four discussed how the instructors in the Succeed Program helped him obtain his current job, stating:

They just tell me take this, take this, go to this uh, what's it called, interview, go to this interview. It's at the high school. Endless opportunities. So, I went there, next I think couple days I got hired. The next week I think I was hired into Lincoln Electric.

Student Participant Three was more direct in giving credit and when asked if Succeed had a direct role in your current situation responded and stated: "Most Definitely. I would not be where I am today without that program. There's no way."

Student Participant Two discussed the role that the Succeed Program had in developing coping skills and said:

I do think that it has prepared me in a sense of you know, that it just kind of gave me not a reality check, but just kind of gave me the ability to kind of sit back and look at things you know. Not 'oh I got to do this, this, this and this,' and more of, you know, 'I got to do this one thing at a time' and just kind of take a step back and look at things without, you know, being all frustrated and confused.

Through interviews conducted with participants and triangulation with analysis of school attendance, academic, behavioral records, and interviews with adult stakeholders, a more complete understanding of the Succeed Program was able to be developed and verified.

Recommendations for the Program

The student participants were extremely positive in reflecting on their experience in the program but did provide some insight into ways to improve the program. Student Participant Three discussed the result of having multiple behavior students together and commented: "a lot

of kids with behavioral issues that would ask out and I think that would disrupt the environment sometimes.” When followed up with the question of did students outbursts escalate other students that were in there, Student Participant Three responded “oh yeah.” Student Participant One reiterated comments regarding behavior students and when asked what something was, he would change said “certain kids” and when asked if he meant certain kids might have an attitude, he responded “yeah.” Student Participant Two focused on the academics and desire for increased rigor and described his experience and stated:

I think that it was, not easy, but it was very easy to kind of work your way around. Um you know you could answer questions on a test and get them all wrong and um and keep guessing until you had gotten them right. And each question would have its own-- each answer would have its own little uh, significance that-- so you know you would remember you know ‘Sally had what colored hair,’ if the answer was blue, you’d you know, you’d see-- you wouldn’t even have to read the question.

When asked how he would change the online program he stated:

For example you know, they could make it so that way it wouldn’t let you go on to the next question if you got the first question wrong, you’d have to go read-- go back and read the passage to you know, continue on.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine how students enrolled in a school-within-a-school alternative education program describe their experiences and their perceptions of those experiences. This study contributes to the sparse body of research examining student perceptions of alternative education, particularly those programs housed within a traditional school building. The phenomenological nature of the study allowed us to specifically gain perspectives of those

students participating in the alternative program. The triangulation of data collected from school attendance, academic and behavioral records, and interviews with adult stakeholders allowed for the students interview responses to be examined in a more holistic manner.

Of the four participants, all were risk of educational failure. Student Participant One, Two, and Three had poor grade performance, and a review of their records confirmed that they were either failing courses and missing credits. Student Participants One and Four were referred for disruptive behavior and physical attacks, validating previous studies indicating that many students are placed in alternative programs due to behavioral problems (Lehr et al., 2009; Munoz, 2004). Student Participant Three had poor attendance, missing over 97 school days in the first two years of high school. The presence of learning disabilities for all four students and low socio-economic status for three students provided additional evidence that the students included in the Succeed program were referred because they met some of the most frequently cited criteria for admission to alternative programs (Carver & Lewis, 2010; Foley & Pang, 2006). Additionally, the students were placed in the Succeed program based on the recommendation of a committee of teachers, administrators, and counselors, which is a commonly used practice (Carver & Lewis, 2010).

Students who participate in alternative education describe their experiences as being different from when enrolled in a traditional school setting (Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011), and the students in the current study are no different. Like results from Lagana-Riordan and colleagues (2011), students in the current study described the alternative setting as fostering positive teacher relationships, allowing for more personal responsibility for the educative experience, more inclusive, and providing more student control for decisions. However, students in the current study did not experience a lack of safety in the traditional school setting. This led to the students

not necessarily mentioning that the alternative placement felt like a safer environment. One reason for this difference is perhaps because the school-within-a-school model continues to house students in the same building as the general education programming, the students did not feel the Succeed program was necessarily safer than the traditional setting.

An over-arching theme that was drawn from the interviews is that all student participants communicated a feeling that the Succeed program allowed them to grow academically and personally. The students were not ashamed or embarrassed for being removed from the traditional classroom but instead were relieved to finally be placed in an environment that met their personal social, emotional, and educational needs. The students discussed the power of personal relationship-building, trust, and identity as reasons why they felt they thrived in the Succeed program. When examining psychosocial development, students can increase positive value growth and develop stronger relationships when teachers understand the underlying theories that allow for a connection between a child's development and their behaviors (Poole & Snarey, 2011). Both the students and adult stakeholders recognized that if a student's basic needs of safety, security, and support are not met then they have difficulty performing academically. The Succeed program is not just about increasing academic abilities but improving students' overall wellbeing and the ability to create and sustain meaningful relationships.

The use of alternative strategies had a large impact on students. Teacher interviews suggested that the program focused more on the individual student needs to encourage positive performance instead of "giving them negative reasonings to get their work done, like you're going to fail, you're not going to be able to do this." Encouragement was a theme the teachers emphasized as being vital to fostering an environment where the students could feel safe and successful. The teachers endeavored to provide an environment where the student could be

successful that is systematically different from the general education classroom. Although not explicitly stated, it can be inferred that a growth mindset approach was taken within the Succeed program, where students can develop skills and are not limited in their ability to learn (Dweck, 2007).

Although all participants reported positive experiences in the program, there were some areas that could be improved. Most of the instruction was provided through an online program, and a lack of close adult supervision allowed students to “cheat the system” by clicking repeatedly to get the correct answer and perhaps not gaining or retaining the intended knowledge. Both the students and teachers noted that the academic rigor of the program could be increased and provided several suggestions how to do so. One student suggested having some on-site lectures by teachers to provide more supports for learning the material.

Although all the students strongly felt the Succeed program helped them successfully graduate school whereas they would not have been on track to graduate without the program, one gap in the program is preparing students for life post-graduation. Although half of the student participants graduated a year early from high school, half of the students were also unemployed nine months following graduation. Perhaps the year that was omitted could have incorporated more vocational programming, career exploration, and living skills into the curriculum to better prepare students for life after graduation. Students mentioned that assistance with transition planning would have been beneficial, but they were unsure of what those services would look like.

Limitations of the Study

Although this qualitative investigation provided a rich description of a school-within-a-school model and how it is perceived by the students, it is not without limitations. The choice to

use qualitative methods limits the number of external generalizations that can be made (Maxwell, 2013). We chose to limit the participants to those who successfully graduated from the Succeed program, which limits the number of potential participants. Additionally, although two of the identified pool of possible participants participated in the study, we were unable to gain participation from all graduates of the program. This limited sample perhaps skews the results of the study to include only those who had either overly positive or negative views of the program or for which the program provided positive results.

Future Directions

Based on the results of this study, there are multiple avenues for future research. Future studies could extend the participant group to include not only those who successfully graduated from the program but those who did not graduate to determine barriers that may have impeded their graduation. Based on the types of barriers found, additional supports could be explored to bolster student success. Additionally, investigations into what transition planning services that best help students acclimate to either reintegration to traditional settings or post-secondary options is necessary. Future studies could examine the types and duration of services that can best help students transition into other settings. Future researchers could also collect data on other types of alternative education programs that are provided within a traditional school setting such as self-contained alternative classrooms and compare perspectives of students in these programs to the those in the school-within-a-school model.

Conclusion

Alternative education settings are commonly used as placement options for students who cannot perform successfully within the general education setting. The current study is the first known study to examine student experiences within a school-within-a-school alternative

education program. The Succeed program allowed students to successfully graduate from high school and grow as a person. Although alternative strategies, individualized attention, and personal relationship-building helped students thrive within the program, the addition of transition planning and a more rigorous academic structure may increase positive student outcomes post-graduation.

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Biographies:

Joe Glavan, Ed.D completed his doctorate in Educational Leadership in 2019. Currently, he is the director of Career-Technical Education for Lake Shore Compact. Lake Shore is a Compact Career-Technical Planning District which includes the public schools of Mentor, Euclid and Wickliffe City - Mentor being the lead district. Additionally, Dr. Glavan is Secretary of the Ohio

Association of Comprehensive and Compact Career-Technical Schools (Ohio CCS), Ohio. He has served as a school principal, assistant principal, and as an adjunct professor.

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Karen H. Larwin, Ph.D. earned her Ph.D. from Kent State University in Evaluation, Measurement, and Applied Statistics in 2007. She currently serves as a Professor at Youngstown State University. For more than a decade, Dr. Larwin has participated as the evaluator on multiple federal and state-wide grant-supported projects focusing on improving children and adults' health, education, and quality of life. She currently serves as an evaluator for the Ohio Commission on Minority Health, the Higher Learning Commission, and CAEP. Her teaching has focused on empowering master's level and doctoral students to use research in their daily work arenas. In addition to her teaching, community service, and scholarship, Dr. Larwin serves as a chair for the American Evaluation Association Quantitative Methods section and the chair of the YSU Institutional Review Board.

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Dr. Aspiranti received her Ph.D. in School Psychology from the University of Tennessee-Knoxville. She completed her pre-doctoral training through the Tennessee Internship Consortium with a focus on assessment and intervention for children with autism. She worked as a school psychologist in a rural public school district and holds her professional license in psychology.

Her primary research interests include the development and validation of academic and behavioral interventions in a school-based setting, particularly using single-case design.

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APPENDIX A

Questions during Round One included:

How do you become enrolled in the Succeed program?

How was your academics and behavior prior to Succeed?

How long were you in Succeed? Please describe the program for me.

Was there anything you particularly enjoyed about Succeed?

Was there anything you did you did not enjoy about Succeed?

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

How did you end your enrollment at Succeed? (graduate, drop out, etc.)

What are you currently doing?

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

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

Round Two of interviews was used to review what the student said during round one, and to verify that the researchers' interpretations were correct, from the student's perspective.