

# **An Overview of Alternative Education**

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Laudan Y. Aron  
The Urban Institute

January 2006

*First in a series of papers on alternative education*

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## **An Overview of Alternative Education**

*“...there is another more pressing challenge before us...that has the potential to damage our ability to compete and succeed in a global economy. That challenge is the deterioration of our education system...graduation rates are hovering only around seventy percent nationwide...Not enough of America’s next generation are learning the skills required in the 21st Century and will soon be looking to us to provide them job training. Eighty percent of the fastest growing jobs require education and training beyond high school. These are the jobs that will drive innovation in the world economy and determine which country will lead that economy.”*

Assistant Secretary Emily Stover DeRocco

In a speech to the National Association of Workforce Boards

March 4, 2005

Washington, D.C.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Since the publication of *A Nation At Risk* in 1983 that sounded alarms about the quality of the nation’s schools, the United States has been on a path toward restructuring its education system. In 1990, the bipartisan Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce led by two former Secretaries of the U.S. Department of Labor noted in its report, *America’s Choice: High Skills or Low Wages!*, that the United States, unlike all the other countries that it competes with economically, does not have a system of education standards identifying what all students need to know and do to succeed in the 21st century economy. Since then, states and school districts have been focusing their efforts on adopting high academic standards, improving accountability, and achieving excellence. The No Child Left Behind Act, proposed by President Bush and passed by the Congress in 2001, has continued to push to strengthen our nation’s schools through a system of state standards, tests and a national accountability system, and a targeted effort to help low-performing schools and students.

Current estimates put the number of youth who are not in school, do not have a diploma, and not working at 3.8 million (Aron et al. 2003, p. 5); however, “little attention is being paid to the need for scaled efforts to reconnect these dropouts to education options that prepare them for success in the economy of the future” (Harris 2005, p. 2). These youth need access to high quality alternative education and training opportunities to equip them to compete in today’s labor market.

High school completion rates peaked in 1969 at 77.1 percent and have gradually declined to 69.9 percent (Barton 2005, p. 2).<sup>1</sup> The earning power of individuals with less than a high school education (and even of high school graduates) has fallen continuously over the last several decades. In 1971, male dropouts working full-time earned \$35,087 (in 2002 dollars). By 2002, this figure had fallen 35 percent, to \$23,903. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics in its publication, *Occupational Outlook, Winter 2004-2005*, “when an occupation has workers with different levels of education, the worker with more education is better able to compete for the job (Moncarz, R. and Crosby, O. 2004-2005, p. 6).” The *Outlook* goes on to describe how individuals with a high school degree and some college or vocational training are more likely to be hired, to earn more when they start a job and over a lifetime, and to become supervisors. Clearly, a high school diploma and some form of post-secondary education and training are now critical to succeeding in the new global economy of the 21st century.

Alternative pathways to educational success are needed at every step of the way, ranging from essential early intervention and prevention strategies in the early years, to a multiplicity of high-quality alternative options within mainstream K-12 systems at the middle and high school levels, and finally to opportunities outside of the mainstream for those who have been unable to learn and thrive in the general education system. The main focus of this review for the U.S. Department of Labor is **community- or district-based programs that have as their primary focus the re-engagement of out-of-school youth in learning in order to better prepare these youth to successfully enter high growth occupations and careers.**

Below we review some preliminary efforts to develop a typology and define ‘alternative education,’ as well as several promising programs, models, and initiatives that provide out-of-school youth with real second chance opportunities. We then turn to the issue of how many out-of-school youth are involved in alternative education, how many need these options, and other evidence concerning youth who need access to alternative education programs. The final section discusses the current policy environment for alternative education, some of the funding streams available to support programs for out-of-school youth, and how underused funding streams might be tapped for this effort.

Before turning to these topics, it is important to keep in mind that youth do not disconnect from traditional developmental pathways (or high schools for that matter)

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<sup>1</sup> Congress acknowledged the severity of the dropout problem by including graduation rate accountability provisions in the NCLB legislation enacted in 2002. Getting consensus on accurate graduation and dropout rates has typically been difficult as state and local education systems use different methods; in fact, the National Center for Educational Statistics has recently developed a standard formula for calculating these rates that will be used to determine if states are meeting their Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) goals on dropout and graduation rates.

because of the failure of any one system.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, *reconnecting* youth requires collaboration and coordination among multiple youth-serving systems: these certainly include school and youth employment and training programs, but also child protective service systems, the juvenile justice system, and a variety of health and human services agencies, such as mental health and substance abuse treatment agencies, crisis intervention centers, runaway and homeless youth shelters, and others.

### **WHAT DO WE MEAN BY 'ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION'?**

The term 'alternative education' in its broadest sense covers all educational activities that fall outside the *traditional* K-12 school system (including home schooling, GED preparation programs, special programs for gifted children, charter schools, etc.), although the term is often used to describe programs serving vulnerable youth who are no longer in traditional schools. Ironically, because they are often associated with students who were unsuccessful in the past, many alternative schools are thought to be of much poorer quality than the traditional K-12 school system, and yet because they are challenged to motivate and educate disengaged students many alternative education programs are highly valued for their innovation and creativity.

The Common Core of Data, the U.S. Department of Education's primary database on public elementary and secondary education, defines an alternative education school as "a public elementary/secondary school that addresses needs of students that typically cannot be met in a regular school, provides nontraditional education, serves as an adjunct to a regular school, or falls outside the categories of regular, special education or vocational education" (U.S. Department of Education 2002, Table 2, p. 14).

A definitive typology of the many types of alternative education schools and programs that fall within this rather broad definition has yet to be developed and accepted by the field. Aron and Zweig's review (2003, p. 20) discusses many dimensions of interest that could be used in the development of a typology including the target population, the program's purpose or focus, the physical setting relative to regular schools or other institutions such as residential treatment or juvenile justice facilities, the educational focus or credential offered, the administrative home or sponsor, and how it is funded. These are the many dimensions that distinguish alternative programs from more traditional ones. A three-type typology

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<sup>2</sup> By traditional developmental pathways we mean that youth are generally connected to the education, employment, or organizations that prepare them for a successful transition to adulthood.

developed by Mary Anne Raywid (1994, p. 26–31) is based on a program’s *goals* as their distinguishing characteristic and has been described as follows:

- **TYPE I** schools “offer full-time, multiyear, education options for students of all kinds, including those needing more individualization, those seeking an innovative or challenging curriculum, or dropouts wishing to earn their diplomas. A full instructional program offers students the credits needed for graduation. Students choose to attend. Other characteristics include divergence from standard school organization and practices (deregulation, flexibility, autonomy, and teacher and student empowerment); an especially caring, professional staff; small size and small classes; and a personalized, whole-student approach that builds a sense of affiliation and features individual instruction, self-paced work, and career counseling. Models range from schools-within-schools to magnet schools, charter schools, schools without walls, experiential schools, career-focused and job-based schools, dropout-recovery programs, after-hours schools, and schools in atypical settings like shopping malls and museums.”
- **TYPE II** schools whose distinguishing “characteristic is discipline, which aims to segregate, contain, and reform disruptive students. Students typically do not choose to attend, but are sent to the school for specified time periods or until behavior requirements are met. Since placement is short-term, the curriculum is limited to a few basic, required courses or is entirely supplied by the ‘home school’ as a list of assignments. Familiar models include last-chance schools and in-school suspension.”
- **TYPE III** programs “provide short-term but therapeutic settings for students with social and emotional problems that create academic and behavioral barriers to learning. Although Type III programs target specific populations—offering counseling, access to social services, and academic remediation—students can choose not to participate.”

Type I includes many of the original alternative education programs developed for at-risk youth and are often referred to as ‘popular innovations’ or ‘true educational alternatives.’ Programs for high school dropouts or potential dropouts and sponsored by school districts would fit into the Type I category, along with newer programs for students unable to pass standardized tests (Krentz 2005). The other two types are more correctional in focus, one being primarily disciplinary (‘last chance’ or ‘soft jail’ programs) and the other therapeutic (‘treatment’ programs). Most of these operate separately from regular schools, although some are sponsored by school districts.

Raywid’s and other preliminary research suggests that the first group of programs—the true educational alternatives—are the most successful, while alternative discipline programs are much less likely to lead to substantial student gains. Rigorous evaluation studies are

still needed, but anecdotal evidence suggests that outcomes for therapeutic programs are more mixed, with students often making progress while enrolled but regressing when they return to a more traditional school. It may be that therapeutic programs have limited long-term impact on academic gains because they are often short-term. Providing high-quality individualized therapeutic supports along with educational instruction over a longer period of time (e.g., two years or more) may indeed lead to better outcomes.

It should also be noted that the distinctions between Raywid's original program types are beginning to blur as more programs use a mix of strategies and/or address multiple objectives. Type I and Type II schools, for example, are increasingly likely to offer clinical counseling (a Type III characteristic). Raywid has proposed a more recent three-level classification that combines Types II and III into a single group whose focus is on 'changing the student.' A second grouping is focused on 'changing the school' and is analogous to the first type described above, and her newly-defined third group is focused on 'changing the educational system' more broadly.

Yet another promising typology, proposed by Melissa Roderick of the University of Chicago, puts students' *educational needs* at front and center. Rather than focusing on a student's demographic characteristic (or 'risk factor') or even a program characteristic, this typology focuses on the educational problems or challenges students present (Aron et al. 2003, p. 28). Roderick has identified several distinct groups:

- Students who have fallen 'off track' because they have gotten into trouble and need short-term systems of recovery to route them back into high schools. The goal of getting them back into regular high schools is both appropriate and realistic for this group.
- Students who have prematurely transitioned to adulthood either because they are (about to become) parents, or have home situations that do not allow them to attend school regularly (e.g., immigrant children taking care of siblings while their parents work, those coming out of the juvenile justice system with many demands on their time, etc.).
- Students who have fallen substantially off track educationally, but are older and are returning to obtain the credits they need to transition into community colleges (or other programs) very rapidly. These include, for example, older individuals who are just a few credits away from graduation (many of whom dropped out at age 16 or 17), or are transitioning out of the jail system, or have had a pregnancy and are now ready to complete their secondary schooling. Roderick noted that these students are currently populating most alternative education programs in large urban areas—they are a very diverse group and tend to be well served by the existing alternative school system.

- The final group consists of students who have fallen substantially behind educationally—they have significant problems, very low reading-levels, and are often way over age for grade. Many of these children have been retained repeatedly and a number of them have come out of special education. They include 17- or 18-year-olds with third and fourth grade reading levels who have never graduated from 8th grade (or who have gone to high school for a few years but have never actually accumulated any credits). This is a very large group of youth, and most school systems do not have any programs that can meet their needs.

Rodderick argues that by targeting a particular demographic or ‘problem’ group, such as pregnant/parenting teens, programs may be setting themselves up for failure if the students encompass too much educational diversity. As a group, pregnant/parenting teens may include students who are two credits away from graduation, others who are wards of child welfare agencies and who have multiple problems such as being far over age for grade, and yet others who have significant behavioral problems and may be weaving in and out of the juvenile justice system. No single school or program can be expected to handle such a wide array of educational and other needs.

For purposes of this paper, alternative education will broadly refer to *schools or programs that are set up by states, school districts, or other entities to serve young people who are not succeeding in a traditional public school environment. Alternative education programs offer students who are failing academically or may have learning disabilities, behavioral problems, or poor attendance an opportunity to achieve in a different setting and use different and innovative learning methods. While there are many different kinds of alternative schools and programs, they are often characterized by their flexible schedules, smaller teacher-student ratios, and modified curricula.*<sup>3</sup>

The table on the next page illustrates the diverse nature of alternative education: its students and their educational needs, the goals of the programs, additional services students may receive, and potential funding streams.

<sup>3</sup> This definition is adapted from one found in *Education Week* as cited in White (2003).

## AN OVERVIEW OF ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

### The Diversity of Alternative Education

The shaded area highlights the Department of Labor's targeted focus.

<b>Target Population</b>	<b>Educational Needs</b>	<b>Educational Objectives</b>	<b>Other Services</b>	<b>Funding Streams</b>
In high school, behind academically > 4 <sup>th</sup> grade < 8 <sup>th</sup> grade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Standards-based remediation</li> <li>▪ Special Education</li> <li>▪ ELL</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Diploma</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ College &amp; Career Counseling</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ IDEA</li> <li>▪ Title I</li> <li>▪ Striving Readers</li> <li>▪ ADA</li> <li>▪ Perkins</li> </ul>
In high school, substantially behind academically < 4 <sup>th</sup> grade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Special Education</li> <li>▪ ELL</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Diploma</li> <li>▪ Alternative Diploma</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ OJT</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Title I</li> <li>▪ IDEA</li> <li>▪ Voc Rehab</li> <li>▪ ADA</li> <li>▪ Perkins</li> </ul>
In high school, not attending	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Dropout recovery</li> <li>▪ Special Education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Diploma</li> <li>▪ GED</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Counseling</li> <li>▪ Drug Rehab</li> <li>▪ Day Care</li> <li>▪ Shelter/Foster Home</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ IDEA</li> <li>▪ Title I</li> <li>▪ ADA</li> <li>▪ Perkins</li> </ul>
Dropout between 16-18, risk factors vary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Credit retrieval</li> <li>▪ Small group learning</li> <li>▪ Standards-based, alternative curriculum</li> <li>▪ Work based learning</li> <li>▪ Twilight school</li> <li>▪ Special Education</li> <li>▪ Adult Basic Education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Diploma</li> <li>▪ GED</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Counseling</li> <li>▪ Drug Rehab</li> <li>▪ Day Care</li> <li>▪ Employment services</li> <li>▪ Flexible hours</li> <li>▪ Health care</li> <li>▪ Case management</li> <li>▪ Career counseling</li> <li>▪ Work readiness training</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ IDEA</li> <li>▪ Private grants</li> <li>▪ WIA</li> <li>▪ TANF</li> <li>▪ Other state, local funding</li> <li>▪ AEFLA</li> </ul>
Dropout and over age 18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Credit retrieval</li> <li>▪ Small group learning</li> <li>▪ Standards-based, alternative curriculum</li> <li>▪ Dual enrollment</li> <li>▪ Modular credits</li> <li>▪ On-line learning</li> <li>▪ Work based learning</li> <li>▪ Evening school</li> <li>▪ Special Education</li> <li>▪ Adult Basic Education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Diploma</li> <li>▪ GED</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Counseling</li> <li>▪ Drug Rehab</li> <li>▪ Day Care</li> <li>▪ Employment services</li> <li>▪ Flexible hours</li> <li>▪ Health care</li> <li>▪ Case management</li> <li>▪ College &amp; career counseling</li> <li>▪ Work readiness training</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ IDEA</li> <li>▪ Private grants</li> <li>▪ WIA</li> <li>▪ TANF</li> <li>▪ Other state, local funding</li> <li>▪ AEFLA</li> </ul>
Incarcerated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Credit retrieval</li> <li>▪ Small group learning</li> <li>▪ Standards-based, alternative curriculum</li> <li>▪ Work based learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Diploma</li> <li>▪ GED</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Counseling</li> <li>▪ Drug Rehab</li> <li>▪ Career exploration &amp; counseling</li> <li>▪ Work readiness training</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Juvenile Justice</li> <li>▪ Private Grants</li> <li>▪ IDEA</li> </ul>

Developed by Betsy Brown Ruzzi (2005), Washington, D.C.: National Center on Education and the Economy

### WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE STUDENTS WHO NEED ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION?

Wald and Martinez (2003) observe that the great majority of youth who reach age 25 *without* successfully transitioning into independent adulthood (which they define as not being incarcerated; capable of being self-sufficient; not suffering from a major, preventable physical or mental illness (including addictions); embedded in a social support network; and an adequate parent, if they have a child) fall into one of the following overlapping groups: (1) those who do not complete high school; (2) youth deeply involved in the juvenile justice system; (3) young, unmarried mothers; and (4) adolescents in the child welfare system. They also estimate based on data from 1997 to 2001 that *at any given point in time* there are about 1 million youth ages 14 to 17 (or six percent of all youth of this age) falling in one of these 'high-risk' groups.<sup>4</sup> The corresponding figures for older youth are 1.8 million long-term unemployed or incarcerated young adult, aged 18 to 24, at any point in the 1997 to 2001 period (a period of relatively low unemployment) or about seven percent of all 18- to-24-year-olds. More recently, drawing on unpublished data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Barton (2005) reports that in 2003, 1.1 million youth aged 16 to 19 did not have a high school diploma (or GED) and were not enrolled in school, and another 2.4 million youth age 20 to 24, were in the same situation for a grand total of 3.5 million youth.

Most reports on the dropout crisis point to the severity of the problem among black, Hispanic, and other minority youth, especially among boys (Orfield 2004). Drawing on a new and more consistent method of calculating graduation rates based on enrollment data that each district provides annually through the Common Core of Data, the Civil Rights Project at Harvard University recently issued a report that shows the overall graduation rate of 68 percent masks significant variation by race/ethnicity and gender.<sup>5</sup> Half of all black students in the country do not graduate from high school and for boys the graduation rate is an astonishing 43 percent. Rates among Hispanics and American Indians are also low at 48 and 47 percent, respectively. Minority youth are especially in need of new and better options.

<sup>4</sup> This figure includes 520,000 dropouts; 95,400 young people incarcerated in the juvenile justice (83,900) and adult (11,500) systems; 337,657 14 to 17 year olds in foster care or recently returned from foster care; and 175,000 unmarried 14-17 year old mothers. Note the groups are overlapping and the authors made various assumptions about the extent of overlap when summing across the four groups. As the authors observe, this estimate is for a point in time and does not reflect the share of all youth age 14 to 17 who will fall into one of these four risk groups before reaching age 18: they estimate this latter figure at over 20 percent or about 3.2 million youth.

<sup>5</sup> These estimates are based on a measure called the Cumulative Promotion Index (CPI) developed by Christopher Swanson of the Urban Institute (see Swanson 2004).

**National Graduation Rates by Race/Gender**

	All	Female	Male
American Indian/AK Nat	51.1	51.4	47.0
Asian/Pacific Islander	76.8	80.0	72.6
Hispanic	53.2	58.5	48.0
Black	50.2	56.2	42.8
White	74.9	77.0	70.8
<b>All Students</b>	<b>68.0</b>	<b>72.0</b>	<b>64.1</b>

Source: Orfield (2004) *Losing Our Future: How Minority Youth Are Being Left Behind by the Graduation Rate Crisis*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Civil Rights Project at Harvard University

Another recent study found that a high school that serves a majority of minority students is five times more likely than a high school that serves a majority of white students to promote half or fewer of its freshmen students to senior status on time (Balfanz et al 2004). This same study ‘locates’ the dropout crisis in specific states and communities across the country: 80 percent of the nation’s high schools producing the highest numbers of dropouts are in just 15 states (Arizona, California, Georgia, Florida, Illinois, Louisiana, Michigan, Mississippi, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and Texas) and five southern states lead the country in number and level of concentration of high schools with weak promoting power (Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Florida, and Texas).<sup>6</sup> These findings may be helpful for geographical targeting of resources and program development. We also know more informally that the need is greatest among older students who are substantially behind educationally (see earlier discussion of Roderick’s typology). This too can be useful in developing targeted strategies for those youth in greatest need.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Promoting power is indicated by the share of *freshman* who graduate from high school.

<sup>7</sup> The information above is reported by race and gender. Obviously, graduating from high school is not solely a function of race and gender. Graduation rates, however, are often reported by race of the student while other variables of interest, such as students’ poverty status and family income, are not. The latter are often measured by proxy through indicators such as free or reduced price meals (FRPM), but these are limited since many eligible students, especially in high school, do not want to be stigmatized by participating in FRPM programs.

### WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT CURRENT ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAMS?

#### *How Many Alternative Education Programs Exist?*

To date, there is no precise accounting of the number or types of alternative schools or programs in the United States. Available estimates suggest that there are over 20,000 alternative schools and programs currently in operation, most designed to reach students at risk for school failure (Lange et al 2002). These figures are for all vulnerable youth, not just out-of-school youth. More recently, a study by the ETS Policy Information Center estimates the number of full-time, federally funded education, employment, and national service programs available to teen-aged high school dropouts at about 100,000 (based on an estimated total of 300,000 opportunities for the 2.4 million low-income 16- to-24-year-olds who left school without a diploma or received a diploma but could not find a job) (Barton 2005). As we will discuss in a later section on funding, the discrepancy between what is available and what is needed is not necessarily a resource issue.

Some limited data on alternative education programs are available from the District Survey of Alternative Schools and Programs through the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES). The survey documented the number and types of alternative schools and programs for vulnerable youth available through the public school system. Although the survey leaves out alternative schools in private and/or nonprofit settings, it represents the first survey ever of its kind. Conducted in 2001, the survey drew on a nationally representative sample of 1,534 public school districts. Students in alternative schools and programs reported in this survey were generally attending because they were at risk of failing, as defined by poor grades, truancy, disruptive behavior, suspension, pregnancy, or other factors known to be indicators of leaving school early.

Thirty-nine percent of public school districts had at least one alternative school or program for at-risk students in grades 1 through 12 representing 10,900 such programs during the 2000-01 school year. Of those districts reporting at-risk programming, such programs were offered to secondary level students in 88 to 92 percent of the districts, to middle school level students in 46 to 67 percent of the districts, and to elementary level students in 10 to 21 percent of the districts. Urban school districts, districts with high minority student populations, and districts with high poverty rates were more likely than other districts to have such programs. Over half of these programs were delivered in facilities separate from regular school buildings, four percent were in juvenile detention centers, three percent were in community centers, and one percent were charter schools.

Despite the number of school districts with such programs, survey results indicate that there does not seem to be enough alternative school and programming slots for the number of youth who require them. Fifty-four percent of school districts with such programming reported demand exceeded their capacity for services within the last three years, and 33 percent were unable to enroll new students into alternative educational options during the 1999-2000 school year. Most districts resolved this shortfall by developing waiting lists for their programs.

The difficulties involved in counting (or estimating) the number of alternative education opportunities points to the need to develop a system for characterizing these programs. Without a working definition of alternative education and knowledge of how many youth can be served by existing programs there is no way of determining what gaps are in the system (how big these gaps are, in what communities, and for what types of youth). It also prevents policymakers from moving onto the larger and more compelling questions about the quality of academic programs, policy considerations, and funding strategies.

### *What Kinds of Alternative Education Programs Exist?*

A broad look at the universe of alternative education programs immediately reveals a wide variety of models. Early and Middle College high schools, Career Academies, Diploma Plus, College Gateway Programs, experiential learning environments, and Twilight Academies are just some of the alternative models that school districts and community-based organizations operate, either as charter schools, contract schools, or independently. Many well-established and stable national alternative education programs are also helping vulnerable youth. Some of the better known ones include Job Corps, YouthBuild, the Center for Employment and Training (CET), and Youth Service and Conservation Corps (see Appendix A for full descriptions of these program models).

### *What are the Noteworthy Attributes of High Quality Alternative Education Programs?*

The research base for understanding what works and for whom in alternative education is evolving. There are few scientifically based, rigorous evaluations establishing what program components lead to various positive outcomes for youth. The newness of the field means that researchers and policymakers are still examining the characteristics of promising programs, but lists of these characteristics are starting to converge and point to what should be measured and monitored as more rigorous evaluations are funded and implemented. The

following section synthesizes the literature on the key characteristics of promising alternative education programs. This is a preliminary list and each of these attributes require further study (see Appendix B for the sources of these noteworthy characteristics).

- ***Academic Instruction:*** Successful programs have a clear focus on academic learning that combines high academic standards with engaging and creative instruction and a culture of high expectations for all students. Learning must be relevant and applicable to life outside of school and to future learning and work opportunities. Applied learning is an important component of the academic program. This is often where employers can play important roles as partners. The curricula address the education and career interests of the students. The curricula are academically rigorous and tied to state standards and accountability systems. Learning goals are known by the students, staff, and parents. Students have personalized learning plans and set learning goals based on their individual plans. There are opportunities for youth to catch up and accelerate knowledge and skills. A mixture of instructional approaches is available to help youth achieve academic objectives.
- ***Instructional Staff:*** Instructors in successful alternative programs choose to be part of the program, routinely employ positive discipline techniques, and establish rapport with students and peers. They have high expectations of the youth, are certified in their academic content area, and are creative in their classrooms. They have a role in governing the school and designing the program and curriculum.
- ***Professional Development:*** Successful alternative education programs provide instructors with ongoing professional development activities that help them maintain an academic focus, enhance teaching strategies, and develop alternative instructional methods. Staff development involves teacher input, work with colleagues, and opportunities to visit and observe teaching in other settings.
- ***Size:*** Many alternative education programs are small with a low teacher/student ratio and have small classes that encourage caring relationships between youth and adults.
- ***Facility:*** Effective alternative learning programs are in clean and well-maintained buildings (not necessarily a traditional school house) that are attractive and inviting and that foster emotional well-being, a sense of pride, and safety. In some instances, the programs are located away from other high schools in ‘neutral’ territory. Most are close to public transportation.
- ***Relationships/Building a Sense of Community:*** Successful alternative education programs link to a wide variety of community organizations (cultural, social service, educational, etc.) and the business community to provide assistance and opportunities for participants.

Through partnerships with the business community, alternative education providers are able to provide their students with job shadowing and internship opportunities, guest speakers, and company tours, and receive valuable input into their curriculum and project development. Connections with community organizations can provide health care, mental health services, cultural and recreational opportunities for youth in their schools.

- **Leadership, Governance, Administration, and Oversight:** Many studies highlight the need for administrative and bureaucratic autonomy and operational flexibility. Administrators, teachers, support services staff, students, and parents should be involved in the different aspects of the program. This autonomy builds trust and loyalty among the staff. A successful alternative education program has a strong, engaged, continuous, and competent leadership, preferably with a teacher/director administering the program.
- **Student Supports:** Successful alternative education programs support their students through flexible individualized programming with high expectations and clear rules of behavior. They provide opportunities for youth to participate and have a voice in school matters. Structure, curricula, and supportive services are designed with both the educational and social needs of the student in mind. Many schools do daily follow-up with all students who are absent or tardy and develop reward systems to promote attendance and academic achievement. Programs are both highly structured and extremely flexible. Rules for the school, which the students help create, are few, simple, and consistently enforced. There are processes in place that assist students in transitioning from school to work and from high school to post-high school training.
- **Other contributing factors** include clearly identified goals; the integration of research into practice in areas such as assessment, curriculum, and teacher training; the integration of special education services and ELL; and stable and diverse funding.

These noteworthy practices or attributes are striking not only in how similar they all are, but in that most are qualities that would seem to benefit *any* educational program, not just 'alternative' ones.

### HOW CAN RECENT RESEARCH ON YOUTH PROGRAMMING INFORM ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION?

With support from the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, Child Trends recently completed a comprehensive review of scientifically rigorous studies on youth serving programs. Using an overarching youth development framework, separate studies examine employment

programs (Jekielek 2002), academic achievement programs (Redd 2002), and programs for educationally disadvantaged older youth (Hair 2003). For each group of programs, the reviewers examined evidence for program effects in four domains of youth development: educational achievement and cognitive development; health and safety; social and emotional well-being; and self-sufficiency. Summarized below are the results for the first of these domains, educational achievement. And the outcomes considered include educational attainment; school retention (grade repetition); basic academic/cognitive achievement and skills (reading, writing, and mathematics); study, data collection, and analysis skills; oral and interpersonal communication skills; foreign and English language proficiency skills; technology skills; performing and visual arts skills; achievement motivation; academic self-concept, and school engagement.

### *Employment Programs:*

The employment programs reviewed include Career Academies, Career Beginnings, Hospital Youth Mentoring, Job Corps, JOBSTART, JTPA, Junior Achievement, JROTC-Career Academy, STEP, and YIEPP.<sup>8</sup> In general, the review found that while employment programs reduce absences from school, the evidence that these programs have a positive impact on educational achievement in high school is ‘conditional at best.’ Some programs appear to promote positive academic attitudes and increase the likelihood that students will take academic courses, but the overall findings on whether or not these programs lead to earning a high school diploma or GED is mixed. Yet other studies that extend beyond those programs for which there are rigorous evaluations have found: employment programs may be most beneficial for younger teens and for youths at high risk of poor educational or employment outcomes; at least one program has demonstrated that supportive adult and peer relationships are key to producing positive outcomes related to self-sufficiency; one study has found that the more well-structured a program, the more likely youths are to participate; some beneficial impacts have been found across school-based, residential, and community-based programs; and no one type of job training stands out as most effective (Jekielek et al 2002).

<sup>8</sup> Note that with the exception of JOBSTART, which serves economically disadvantaged dropouts age 17 to 21, all of these programs include high school students.

*Academic Achievement Programs:*

The results for academic achievement programs are somewhat different. In general the evidence suggests that non-school academic-oriented youth development programs *are* able to improve some educational outcomes but the evidence is very mixed. Programs were generally better able to affect academic-related outcomes (e.g., academic skills, school attendance, educational goals, and credits earned) than more pure academic outcomes (e.g., grades, test scores, and educational attainment). It also appears that programs with a strong academic focus are more effective in producing better academic outcomes than those with a weaker academic focus. Other findings suggest longer participation and more frequent participation are related to better educational outcomes and that longer participation promotes longer lasting effects.

*Programs for Older Youth:*

Finally, Child Trends also looked at programs serving educationally disadvantaged older youth (Hair et al. 2003), a group of particular interest for this study because it appears that few existing alternative education programs serve this group of youth. Drawing on 12 programs<sup>9</sup> that have been subject to rigorous evaluation, the majority of which focus on employment and/or education, the study found that in general the programs do improve

**CHALLENGES TO SERVING OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTH**

The findings from the Child Trends reviews are not surprising given the challenging environments in which many programs must operate including:

*Engaging out-of-school youth in a training program of any sort can itself be very difficult.* These youth, unlike their in-school counterparts, are typically disconnected from institutions for learning and disaffected with structured learning environments. This lack of connection can make it difficult for training programs to identify and enroll prospective participants.

*Enrollment and retention are challenges* as well because out-of-school youth often need to earn an immediate income, due to family responsibilities or for other causes. Similarly, they have other responsibilities that make regular attendance in a skills development program difficult, and have substantial barriers to successful participation—including problems with substance abuse, involvement with the criminal justice system, low self-esteem, uncertain motivation, or family problems.

*Programs for out-of-school youth rarely plan on more than a single year of participation,* and are often even much shorter than this. This fact gives rise to a struggle to telescope within a shorter length of participation the overall mix and sequence of services than would be desirable.

Aggravating the problem, *most program participants will lack the basic skills and work readiness skills* required for competence in the labor market and thus will need extensive remediation before being ready for the demands of the high-performance work world.

Source: Karka (2004), *Strategies for Serving Out-of-School Youth*. Columbus, OH: Ohio Learning Work Connection

<sup>9</sup> These are Alcohol Skills Training Program; Job Corps; JOBSTART; Job Training Partnership Act; New Chance; Nurse Home Visitation Program; Ohio Learning, Earning and Parenting Program; School Attendance Demonstration Project; Skill-Based Intervention on Condom Use; Teenage Parenting Demonstration; Youth Corps; and AmeriCorps.

educational outcomes (although none explicitly tried to influence academic outcomes). Three of the four programs that had employment as a primary goal and educational attainment as a secondary goal achieved moderate impacts on earning a GED or high school diploma (Job Corps, JOBSTART, and JTPA). Two of the three programs that tracked school attendance demonstrated moderate improvements on this outcome (the Ohio Learning, Earning, and Parenting Program and the School Attendance Demonstration Project). One program (the Nurse Home Visitation Program) had a moderate effect on better enrollment in educational programs but these effects waned over time. And another program (the School Attendance Demonstration Project) had a small but significant impact on school attendance and this increased over time. Finally, the programs did not target cognitive outcomes and the one program that looked at this outcome did not find any impact on academic skills.

As the Child Trends studies demonstrate, systematic research is still needed to definitely link specific program components with intended outcomes, and also to establish what works and *for whom*.

### **WHAT NEW ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAMS AND INITIATIVES ARE UNDERWAY?**

In response to a growing need for more and better alternative education options in many communities across the country, a variety of new initiatives are underway. They include the Alternative High School Initiative launched in 2002 by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, with support from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the Kellogg Foundation, and the Walter S. Johnson Foundation. These efforts involve replicating a variety of existing alternative education models in new communities including Diploma Plus developed by Commonwealth Corporation ([www.commcorp.org](http://www.commcorp.org)); the Maya Angelou Charter School developed by See Forever ([www.seeforever.org](http://www.seeforever.org)); Performance Learning Schools developed by Communities in Schools Georgia ([www.cisga.org/PLCinfo.html](http://www.cisga.org/PLCinfo.html)); the Black Alliance for Educational Options ([www.baao.org](http://www.baao.org)); Street Schools ([www.nass.org](http://www.nass.org)); and YouthBuild Schools ([www.youthbuild.org](http://www.youthbuild.org)). The Big Picture Company ([www.bigpicture.org](http://www.bigpicture.org)) is coordinating the Alternative High School Initiative.

Yet another organization, Jobs for the Future, is working with the Youth Transition Funders Group, Carnegie Corporation, and the U.S. Department of Labor to document and disseminate efforts to promote alternative pathways and connect out-of-school youth to post-secondary options (see [www.jff.org](http://www.jff.org)).

The Youth Transition Funders Group, which includes the Carnegie Corporation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Walter S. Johnson Foundation, the Meyers Foundation, the Mott Foundation, and the William Penn Foundation, is also working with five cities to develop systemic approaches to reenroll struggling students. Jobs for the Future is also working with these cities to provide additional support and document their progress in building quality alternative education systems.

The National League of Cities' (NLC) Institute for Youth, Education, and Families (IYEF) is developing in-depth case studies to look at cross-system collaborative efforts to engage disconnected youth in Albany, Boston, and San Diego. IYEF will also produce briefer case studies of promising collaborative efforts involving at least two systems in Baltimore, Corpus Christi (TX), Philadelphia, San Francisco, and San Jose. NLC is also supporting mayoral education advisors to address alternative education options among other topics.

Portland, Oregon has come closest to building a true 'system' of comprehensive and innovative educational alternatives that reengage out-of-school youth in addition to serving other vulnerable students. State legislation allows a portion of state per-pupil funding to follow students to alternative settings, and state policy allows districts to award graduation credit based on proficiency. Portland Public Schools views its 19 community-based alternative programs as part of its continuum of educational offerings and views the providers as partners in their mission to educate all children. These community-based organization (CBO) alternatives are very much part of the school district's strategy to retain youth at-risk of dropping out and re-engage those youth that have already dropped out. The 19 programs are very diverse and range in size from ten students to 754 students (over the course of the year). They are spread out geographically across Portland, and include drop-in programs, GED programs, small diploma granting programs, and community college programs. They also offer specialized supportive services for homeless youth, teen parents, recent immigrants, and English Language Learners. What they share is a common mission—to re-engage young people in their education. In all, 2,232 high school students were served through these programs in 2003-2004 (The Coalition for Metro Area Community-Based Schools: CMACS, undated).<sup>10</sup>

Job Corps Centers across the country now offer high school diploma programs to participating students. Often partnering with local school districts, community colleges, charter-school operators, or community-based organizations, Job Corps Centers are working

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<sup>10</sup> Two of Portland's alternative education programs (Portland Youth Builders and Portland Community College Gateway to College Program) are among those being replicated nationally by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

to boost their academic offerings beyond the GED. Some Centers are using new, standards-based curriculum leading to a high school degree. The curriculum is broken into modules and uses small-group, individualized, and applied learning strategies in a classroom setting.

Life Skills Centers, administered by the private group, White Hat Management, help at-risk students and high school dropout students, ages 16 to 22, earn a high school diploma (not a GED) and become placed in a job. There are currently 24 Life Skills Centers educating nearly 10,000 students in Ohio, Arizona, Colorado, and Michigan. The program is tuition-free and draws on a proprietary curriculum to combine academics, life skills preparation, and workplace training and uses state-certified teachers who assist students to learn at their own pace using computer-based instruction. The schools provide a safe, secure, positive learning environment. Over 5,000 students have already graduated with a state-recognized diploma and a job.

### **WHAT OUTCOMES SHOULD ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAMS DEMONSTRATE?**

Currently there are few rigorous studies (using random assignment, control groups, etc.) that examine student outcomes and program effectiveness of alternative education. Clearly more research is needed in this area, especially given that accountability and outcome measures used in schools may not be sufficient for alternative education. The Employment and Training Administration's new youth vision emphasizes the need to ensure that youth served in alternative education programs will receive a high quality education that adheres to the state standards developed in response to the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation. Alternative education accountability measures should include interim measures and measures that track continuous 'added value' or recognize that some youth may cycle in and out of a program before experiencing steady progress. Presumably, many program administrators and agencies sponsoring alternative education programs do have some type of internal management information, and it can be expected that as the field continues to develop, more findings and reports on this topic will emerge.

Work has advanced on what types of outcome measures *should* be targeted and monitored. Alternative education programs are first and foremost *educational* programs, so they need to focus on preparing students academically while also meeting the additional needs of their students. Evaluations of them should include a variety of educational and other outcomes for participants.

A recent comprehensive effort to document the multiple ‘domains’ of positive youth development (Hair et al 2003) identified the following outcomes within the educational attainment and cognitive development domain:

- Educational Attainment
- Grade Repetition
- Achievement Motivation
- Academic Self-Concept
- School Engagement
- Good Study Skills
- Basic Skills: Reading, Writing, and Mathematics
- Higher-Order Thinking Skills
- Oral and Interpersonal Communication Skills
- Language Skills
- Arts Participation Skills and Knowledge
- Computer Technology Skills
- Research Related Skills

Clearly these measures are not unique to alternative education students or settings, and details such as the exact thresholds, frequency of measurement, and use of supplemental measures need to be considered as the standards are applied to alternative education programs. Aron and Zweig (2003) have already noted the importance of developing accountability systems as well as investing in better data collection and analysis that would feed into these systems. Part of the challenge involves figuring out “how to introduce high academic standards in alternative education systems without sacrificing the elements that make alternative programs successful, and without compromising the integrity of the high standards” (NGA Center for Best Practices 2001, p.1). The NGA Center for Best Practices recommends the following in an effort to bring high standards to alternative education:

- Strengthen links between traditional and nontraditional education systems;
- Invest resources to support the transition to high academic standards and beyond;
- Improve ‘early warning systems’ to identify lower-performing students;
- Support longer-term alternative education programs;
- Develop data-driven accountability measures for alternative education programs;
- Develop enhanced GED programs; and
- Collect data.

In *America's Choice: High Skills or Low Wages*, the bipartisan Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce also argues for a *standards-based* alternative education system that would include the following elements:

- A single high standard for all students whether in traditional schools or in alternative education programs;
- A funding system that ensures that the country spends at least the same amount on students in alternative education programs as in traditional schools;
- An accountability system for both alternative education programs and traditional schools tied to helping students meet high standards; and
- A counseling and referral system in every community that provides students access to the programs best suited to their need (National Center on Education and the Economy 1990).

### WHAT CURRENT POLICIES AFFECT ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION?

Currently, public school systems and educators are still responding to the many principles and strategies embedded in the bipartisan No Child Left Behind legislation. Originally passed by the Congress in 2001, the four pillars underlying the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act—stronger accountability for results, more freedom for states and communities, proven education methods, and more choices for parents—seem to perfectly support the development of high quality educational alternatives for all youth, *especially* those who are struggling in their current schools.

No Child Left Behind has impacted low-performing students in a number of ways. These include:

- Early identification of learning problems in the core subjects of reading, writing, and math in elementary school;
- More help for struggling elementary and middle school students during and after school;
- The use of reading programs that regularly check student progress and promote re-teaching for struggling readers;
- Help for Title I schools consistently performing below standard (not meeting AYP);
- A new Striving Readers program in middle school to help struggling students improve their reading performance;

- The opportunity for students in low-performing schools to move to high performing schools; and
- Making sure all schools employ ‘highly qualified’ teachers.

Overall, NCLB has made great strides in focusing attention and resources on low-performing schools and their students. To date, this focus and funding has been on the elementary level, and now with Striving Readers, at the middle school level. Testing requirements impact all education levels, however, and high school reform is now the next major focus of education reform. The positive impacts of NCLB can benefit students who are at-risk of dropping out or have dropped out.

## **WHAT FUNDING SOURCES ARE AVAILABLE TO SUPPORT ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION?**

Funding sources for alternative education programs are highly variable. As the NGA Center for Best Practices observed in 2001: “Most alternative education programs’ budgets are based on a variety of unreliable funding sources, such as grants, charitable contributions, and fees for service. Some alternative education programs may also receive state and local education funds—although these funds are often less than the per-pupil funding that traditional schools receive” (p. 6-7).

A recent review of state-level legislation on alternative education (Lehr et al. 2003) identified 32 states as having some policy or language in the law addressing alternative education funding (this ranged from very general language to detailed funding plans). Sources of funding included federal, state, and local monies, and grant money, and the legislation often stated explicitly that programs or schools could receive money from more than one source. State funds were most often mentioned as a source of funding for alternative schools; this was followed by local funds, grants or private contracts (e.g., Safe Schools Education grant, regional juvenile service grant and foundation grants), and finally, federal sources. Note that these reflect all alternative education efforts within states, not just those focused on reengaging out-of-school youth.

In an effort to think more creatively about how to fund programs for out-of-school youth, some researchers have noted that ‘non traditional’ education funding can and should be used for out-of-school youth.

As Gruber (2000) argues in *Using Educational Resources for Out-of-School Youth*:

“Through resources at the secondary level and post-secondary level, education dollars can potentially fund program services for out-of-school youth at a scale that exceeds JTPA at the height of its funding. Perhaps more important, education funding is more flexible than many traditional resources; can support longer term programs and can provide more comprehensive services. At a time when all youth, regardless of formal school status, require some form of post-secondary education, these resources provide a foundation for communities to create pathways to college for youth who have dropped out of school” (p. 1).

Through a variety of mechanisms including charter schools and local school board agreements, many providers of alternative education are tapping into the more than \$275 billion in federal, state, and local dollars that support public schools (Gruber 2000). They are able to access annual per-pupil allocations ranging from \$2,500 to \$7,500 per year to develop a wide variety of programs for at-risk and out-of-school youth. These include long-term and comprehensive interventions such as GED, high school degree, and college preparation programs, and, in some places, post-secondary education.

In some communities, the funds support what amounts to an alternative network or system for at-risk and out-of-school youth as was described earlier for Portland, Oregon. Gruber reports that there are programs in Houston, Milwaukee, Minneapolis, Seattle, Kansas City, Tucson, Philadelphia, and New York among other places that are currently using education resources to support alternative programs for out-of-school youth. Seattle, Portland, and Baltimore are also trying to access federal Pell grants (which provide funds up to \$4,050 per student per year in 2004-2005) to prepare out-of-school youth for post-secondary education, connect them to college, and sustain them once there. Gruber notes that unclear regulations, a lack of knowledge, a lack of priority for out-of-school youth, and a lack of organization explain why many communities have not taken advantage of these resources to develop an alternative education system for students unable to succeed in traditional schools.

The challenges of tapping into these funding streams should not be underestimated. Navigating local school district financing is a complex task not only administratively and fiscally but also politically (Allum 2005); however, when per pupil funds follow the youth, such as in Portland, Oregon, funds can support high quality educational alternatives within communities.

**CONCLUSIONS**

Midway through the first decade of the 21st century, the U.S. is restructuring its education system with the help of No Child Left Behind by adopting high academic standards and accountability systems and focusing more attention and resources on low-performing schools. Efforts within the K-12 system need to be supplemented with high quality alternative education opportunities that meet the same high standards developed by states in response to the No Child Left Behind legislation for the large number of youth who, for a variety of reasons, have not been able to succeed in traditional schools. As many as 3.5 million youth are not enrolled in school, lack a high school diploma (or GED), and are unemployed. Current alternative routes, beyond traditional public schools, to the skills, socialization, and credentials these young people will require to succeed in the 21st century innovation economy are very limited; estimates range between 100,000 to 200,000 slots nationally. As part of its effort to “look at the systems and structures that support and feed our economy and ask if they are equipped to handle the demands of the global economy” (DeRocco 2005), the U.S. Department of Labor believes that better access to alternative education options for students who are substantially behind educationally is critical. Developing this access will require strategic thinking about what resources (financial and other) need to be harnessed, how these resources should be invested, and for whom. This paper and the others to follow in this series will set the stage for this thinking as well as sound policy and program development supporting vulnerable youth in need of high quality educational alternatives.

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**APPENDIX A: PROMISING MODELS OF ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAMS**

- **Career Academies** are described as a ‘school within a school’ providing a small learning community for 30-60 students. These students stay in the same cohort over 2 to 4 years, take classes together, remain with the same group of teachers, follow a curriculum that includes both academic and career-oriented courses, and participate in work internships and other career-related experiences outside the classroom. Career Academies also receive input and support from community resources and local employers. Since the late 1960s, the Career Academy approach has taken root in an estimated 2,000 high schools across the country (see <http://casn.berkeley.edu/> or <http://www.ncacinc.org/>).
- **Job Corps** is a federally funded residential program that has been operating since 1964 and enrolls more than 60,000 youth (the majority of whom are high school dropouts), ages 16 to 24, through its 120 Centers across the country. At no cost to the student, Job Corps provides a variety of educational and vocational training programs as well as a monthly allowance for students. Its goals are to provide youth with an opportunity to develop skills; learn a trade; obtain a high school diploma or GED; and receive assistance in getting a job or applying to post-secondary education such as community college (see [http://jobcorps.doleta.gov/prog\\_design.cfm](http://jobcorps.doleta.gov/prog_design.cfm)).
- **YouthBuild USA** programs are funded by city and federal agencies, local and national foundations, corporate sponsors, and community based non-profits. Established in 1978, YouthBuild is located in 200 local programs across the country and seeks to serve youth aged 16 to 24 years who are unemployed and high-school dropouts. Students alternate weeks between a construction site, building affordable housing for homeless and low-income people, and a classroom, working toward their GED or high school diploma while learning job skills. Since its inception, the program has trained over 40,000 youth and created more than 12,000 units of affordable housing (see <http://www.youthbuild.org/>).
- **Gateway to College** is a nationally recognized high school completion program for high school dropouts funded through contracts with local school districts and run in collaboration with Portland Community College (PCC). Students earn an average of sixty-four PCC college credits along with their high school diplomas. The PCC Prep programs also enrolled nearly 1500 young people, between the ages of 16 and 20, who had dropped out or had never attended high school during fiscal year 2002-2003. These students pursued their GED, high school diploma, or enhanced English literacy through PCC Prep’s three programs. Of these students, slightly more than 20 percent had dropped out of school more than once. Of this percentage, slightly more than 75 percent

completed their educational goals, continued with their education, or were employed at the end of year or at program exit. While the program builds the skills needed for college-level work, it also takes individual needs into consideration. Those who need more time and instruction than is possible in their classes receive additional tutoring. Also, instructors exhibit an understanding attitude regarding the varying challenges that this population encounters, while at the same time maintaining high expectations for all students. In 2004, Portland Community College received a \$4.85 million grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to nationally replicate the “Gateway to College” program at eight community colleges across the country (see <http://www.gatewaytocollege.org/>).

- **ISUS (Improved Solutions for Urban Systems):** In response to employer demand, ISUS combines employment and education in a charter school setting so that students earn a high school diploma and college credits, while progressing toward nationally recognized certification for occupations in high-demand industries, including construction, computer technology, and manufacturing. ISUS offers out-of-school youth the opportunity to gain employment training, as well as education through industry-focused charter schools in the areas of construction, information technology, and manufacturing technology. ISUS schools integrate industry-certified high skills training with academics, youth development, and significant community service opportunities. Employer partnerships support every aspect of this organization. Employer partnerships support curriculum design, certification training, and employment placement, while ISUS serves as a ‘supplier’ of goods and services for the construction, manufacturing, and information technology industries (see <http://www.isusinc.com/default2.asp>).
- **Open Meadow Alternative School** offers a small community-learning environment for students who had difficulty in other educational settings; 84 percent of new students at Open Meadow had dropped out of school prior to attending Open Meadow. Students learn to experience success and a sense of purpose practicing a commitment to personal responsibility, accountability, and respectful relationships. Designed to cater to the needs of every child’s learning abilities, classes accommodate a variety of learning styles and skill levels. Open Meadow Alternative Schools is one of the longest-operating alternative education programs in Portland, having served young people in North Portland since 1971. Open Meadow serves students ranging from 10 to 24 years of age in six different programs: Open Meadow High School, Open Meadow Middle School, and Open Meadow Transition Programs. Transition programs include: Corps Restoring the Urban Environment (CRUE—a project-based learning program for high school aged students), STEP UP (a tutoring and mentoring program partnership with Portland Public Schools), Corporate Connections (a work experience and internship program for

high school graduates), and Youth Opportunity (YO!- a program for young people in a designated enterprise zone) (see <http://www.openmeadow.org>).

- **The Center for Employment and Training (CET)** was established in 1967 and operates through a national network of 31 vocational educational centers in 11 states and Washington, D.C. It is both a privately and federally funded program that serves low-income, disadvantaged persons of age 17 and older (over half of all participants are high school dropouts) by providing them with skills and job training five days a week, six to seven hours day, at their own pace. The goal is to prepare them for long-term job placement and over the years it has trained and placed more than 100,000 people into jobs. The program offers an industry-recognized training certificate; a GED-prep course is offered only during off-hours (see <http://www.cetweb.org/index.html>).
- **Youth Service and Conservation Corps** is a program originating in the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC)s of the 1930s. Corps are state and local programs that currently operate in 31 states. Corps enrolls about 23,000 out-of-school youth, age 18 to 25 annually, who provide communities with 14.5 million hours of service year-round. In return for their efforts to restore and strengthen their communities, corps members receive: (1) a living allowance; (2) classroom training to improve basic competencies and, if necessary, to secure a GED or high school diploma; (3) experiential and environmental service-learning based education; (4) generic and technical skills training; (5) a wide range of supportive services; and, in many cases, (6) an AmeriCorps post-service educational award (see <http://www.nascc.org/>).
- **Early and Middle College High Schools** are small high schools, funded through both private and public dollars, that provide first-generation, low-income, English language learners, and students of color attaining the opportunity to leave with a high school diploma and a two-year Associate of Arts degree or sufficient college credits to enter a four-year, liberal arts program as a junior. Early College High Schools also include outreach to middle schools to promote academic preparation and awareness of the Early College High School option. There are over 45 schools, in 19 states, serving over 8,000 students (see <http://www.earlycolleges.org/Library.html>).
- **Twilight Academies**, or schools, are an after-hours program for students who have serious attendance or discipline problems or who are entering the school after being suspended from another school or released from incarceration. Twilight works with a student for four to five weeks in hopes that the students may be admitted into (or back into) day school by doing well and earning credits in the Twilight program (see <http://www.csos.jhu.edu/>).

Appendix B: Sources of Noteworthy Attributes of Alternative Programs/Schools

<p><b>A. JFF<sup>1</sup></b> 1. High academic standards transparently linked to future learning &amp; work opportunities</p>	<p><b>B. EDNet<sup>2</sup></b> 1. The school/program presents clearly articulated academic &amp; applied learning goals</p>	<p><b>C. Urban Institute<sup>3</sup></b> 1. High academic standards &amp; expectations</p>	<p><b>D. Janice M. &amp; Chester W. Dugger<sup>4</sup></b> 1. Teachers selected for the program consistently maintained high expectations for students, routinely employed positive discipline techniques, &amp; primarily established rapport with students &amp; peers.</p>	<p><b>E. Leone &amp; Drakeford<sup>5</sup></b> 1. Clear focus on academic learning that comings high academic standards with engaging &amp; creative instruction.</p>	<p><b>F. National Association of State Boards of Education (1996)</b> 1. Clear &amp; high education standards &amp; expectation. The curriculum is not diluted or 'watered down' &amp; the curricula is often expanded to enhance the educational &amp; vocational interests of the students.</p>	<p><b>G. Mary Ann Raywid<sup>6</sup></b> 1. They are small</p>	<p><b>H. Walter G. Secada<sup>7</sup></b> 1. Personalized student programs</p>	<p><b>I. Camilla A. Lehr &amp; Cheryl M. Lange<sup>8</sup></b> 1. Individualized flexible programming</p>	<p><b>J. Cheryl Lange &amp; Sara J. Sletten<sup>9</sup></b> 1. Clearly identified goals to inform both evaluation &amp; enrollment</p>
<p>2. Small, caring environment with low teacher/student ratios</p>	<p>2. The academic program reflects rigorous academic &amp; applied learning standards necessary for students to have future success in post-secondary education &amp; the workplace</p>	<p>2. Small schools &amp; class sizes</p>	<p>2. Location of schools was away from other high schools in neutral territory, close to public transportation</p>	<p>2. Ambitious professional development: teachers are provided with stimulating, ongoing professional development activities that help teachers to maintain an academic focus, enhance teaching strategies, &amp; develop alternative instructional methods.</p>	<p>2. Well defined standards of behavior</p>	<p>2. Both the program &amp; organization were designed by those who were going to operate them</p>	<p>2. Smaller class size</p>	<p>2. High expectations</p>	<p>2. Wholehearted implementation without a piecemeal approach to structuring programs</p>

1 Jobs for the Future: *The Dropout Crisis: Promising Approaches in Prevention and Recovery* by Adria Steinberg, Cheryl Almeida

2 National Youth Employment Coalition: *ED Net Assessment Instrument* by Mala Thakur

3 The Urban Institute: *Educational Alternatives for Vulnerable Youth: Student Needs, Program Types, and Research Directions* by Laudan Aron and Janine Zweig

4 From the April/May 1998 *High School Journal* article entitled "An Evaluation of a Successful Alternative High School"

5 From the November/December 1999 *Clearing House* article entitled "Alternative Education: From a "Last Chance" to a Proactive Model"

6 From an *Educational Leadership* article entitled "Alternative Schools: The State of the Art" by Mary Ann Rayward

7 From the November/December 1999 *Clearing House* article entitled "Lessons Learned by the Hispanic Dropout Project" by H. Walter and G. Secada

8 From *Preventing School Failure* (Vol 47, No. 2) article entitled "Alternative Schools: Serving Students With and Without Disabilities: What Are the Current Issues and Challenges?" by Camilla A. Lehr and Cheryl M. Lange

9 *Alternative Education: A Brief History and Research Synthesis*, February 1, 2002 by J. Cheryl Lange and Sara J. Sletten

Appendix B: Sources of Noteworthy Attributes of Alternative Programs/Schools

<p><b>A. JFF</b></p> <p>3. Individualized flexible programs with high expectations &amp; clear rules of behavior</p>	<p><b>B. EDNet</b></p> <p>3. The academic program emphasizes the connection between real life &amp; learning.</p> <p>4. Uses a mixture of instructional approaches to help youth achieve academic &amp; applied learning objectives</p>	<p><b>C. Urban Institute</b></p> <p>3. High-quality student-centered programs that actively engage teachers, parents &amp; other community members</p> <p>4. Administrative &amp; bureaucratic autonomy</p>	<p><b>D. Janice M. &amp; Chester W. Dugger</b></p> <p>3. Curriculum is highly individualized &amp; includes a high degree of hands-on activities</p> <p>4. Enrollment is limited to 100 students; class size is seldom over 15, &amp; teacher/student ration is 1 to 12.</p>	<p><b>E. Leone &amp; Drakeford</b></p> <p>3. Strong level of professional autonomy &amp; decision making; effective schools provide autonomy that builds trust &amp; loyalty among staff.</p> <p>4. Sense of community; schools that focus on the creation &amp; maintenance of intentional communities are more likely to succeed that bureaucratically organized schools</p>	<p><b>F. National Association of State Boards of Education (1996)</b></p> <p>3. An expanded curriculum that foster the development of interpersonal &amp; social skills</p> <p>4. Structure, curricula, &amp; support services are designed with both the educational &amp; social needs of the student in mind.</p> <p>5. Low teacher/student ratios</p>	<p><b>G. Mary Ann Raywid</b></p> <p>3. They took their character, theme, or emphasis from the strengths &amp; interests of the teachers who conceived the school.</p> <p>4. The teachers all chose the program with subsequent teachers selected with the input of present staff</p> <p>5. Students &amp; families chose the program</p>	<p><b>H. Walter G. Secada</b></p> <p>3. Non-judgmental attitude toward students.</p> <p>4. Respectful treatment of students &amp; their families</p> <p>5. Diverse teaching work force.</p>	<p><b>I. Camilla A. Lehr &amp; Cheryl M. Lange</b></p> <p>3. Small school size</p> <p>4. Emphasis on care &amp; concern</p> <p>5. Learning is relevant &amp; applicable to life outside of school</p> <p>6. Flexibility &amp; openness to innovation &amp; new approaches</p> <p>7. Students &amp; teachers choose to be there.</p>	<p><b>J. Cheryl Lange &amp; Sara J. Sletten</b></p> <p>3. Student-centered atmosphere</p> <p>4. Integration of research &amp; practice in areas such as assessment, curriculum, teacher competencies, &amp; integration of special education services</p> <p>5. Training &amp; support for teachers who work with at-risk populations with or without disabilities</p> <p>6. Links to multiple agencies; an element that may become increasingly important as alternatives are required to serve students with special education needs</p>
<p>4. Opportunities for youth to catch up &amp; accelerate knowledge &amp; skills</p>	<p>6. Transition to &amp; from the school/program is smooth, seamless &amp; informed.</p>	<p>5. Teachers &amp; students choose to be in the program.</p>	<p>5. A family atmosphere is created at the school</p>	<p>5. Alternative education programs need to identify essential elements of the curriculum &amp; how the program links with other agencies &amp; services for youth.</p>	<p>6. Site-based management/flexibility. Administrators, teachers, support services staff, students, &amp; parents are involved in the different aspects of the of the programs/schools</p>	<p>6. A teacher-director administered the program</p>			<p>7. The superintendent sustained the autonomy &amp; protected the integrity of the mini-schools located in larger schools.</p>
<p>7. Opportunities for youth to participate &amp; have voice in school matters</p>	<p>7. Helps students overcome barriers that make transition difficult</p>		<p>7. Ongoing formative, summative, &amp; self-evaluation</p>			<p>6. Goal setting is a regular part of academic curriculum</p>			

Appendix B: Sources of Noteworthy Attributes of Alternative Programs/Schools

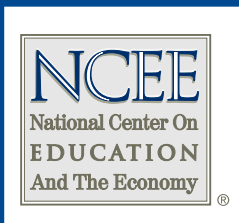
<p><b>A. JFF</b> 8. Shared sense of community &amp; mutual trust</p>	<p><b>B. EDNet</b> 8. A well-developed professional development program for its entire staff.</p>	<p><b>C. Urban Institute</b></p>	<p><b>D. Janice M. &amp; Chester W. Dugger</b> 8. The alternative school staff works closely with other community agencies to remove barriers to students' success in school.</p>	<p><b>E. Leone &amp; Drakeford</b></p>	<p><b>F. National Association of State Boards of Education (1996)</b> 8. Provide healthy physical environments that foster education, emotional well-being, a sense of pride, &amp; safety.</p>	<p><b>G. Mary Ann Raywid</b></p>	<p><b>H. Walter G. Secada</b></p>	<p><b>I. Camilla A. Lehr &amp; Cheryl M. Lange</b></p>	<p><b>J. Cheryl Lange &amp; Sara J. Sletten</b></p>
<p>9. Parental involvement</p>	<p>9. Staff &amp; faculty are qualified, committed, ethical, &amp; credible to the students</p>		<p>9. Daily follow-up is made on all students who are absent or tardy. An extensive extrinsic reward system is in place to promote attendance &amp; academic achievement</p>			<p>9. All of the programs were relatively free from district interference &amp; the administration also buffered them from the demands of central school officials.</p>			
<p>10. Links to community organizations</p>	<p>10. The physical environment is conducive to learning.</p>		<p>10. Staff development is ongoing &amp; comprehensive as is team building.</p>			<p>10. Continuity of leadership</p>			
<p>11. A clean &amp; well-maintained school that is attractive &amp; inviting</p>	<p>11. Students are involved as active, respected contributors.</p>		<p>11. An individualized process of transitioning from school to work &amp; from high school to post-high school training is in place for each student.</p>						
<p>12. Clearly identified goals to inform both evaluation &amp; enrollment</p>	<p>12. Sustained relationships between students &amp; caring, knowledgeable adults are nurtured</p>		<p>12. The program is both highly structured &amp; extremely flexible. Rules for the school, which the students help to create, are few, simple &amp; consistently enforced.</p>						
<p>13. Wholehearted implementation without a piecemeal approach to structuring programs</p>	<p>13. Services that help students become responsible &amp; informed adults are identified &amp; access provided</p>		<p>13. All students must apply for acceptance into the school, take part in an interview, &amp; complete a better year of tests &amp; questionnaires. No student is forced to attend the school</p>						

Appendix B: Sources of Noteworthy Attributes of Alternative Programs/Schools

<p><b>A. JFF</b> 14. Integration of research &amp; practice in areas such as assessment, curriculum, teacher competencies &amp; integration of special education services</p>	<p><b>B. EDNet</b> 14. Strong, engaged, continuous &amp; competent leadership</p>	<p><b>C. Urban Institute</b></p>	<p><b>D. Janice M. &amp; Chester W. Dugger</b></p>	<p><b>E. Leone &amp; Drakeford</b></p>	<p><b>F. National Association of State Boards of Education (1996)</b></p>	<p><b>G. Mary Ann Raywid</b></p>	<p><b>H. Walter G. Secada</b></p>	<p><b>I. Camilla A. Lehr &amp; Cheryl M. Lange</b></p>	<p><b>J. Cheryl Lange &amp; Sara J. Sletten</b></p>
<p>15. Training &amp; support for teachers who work with at-risk populations with or without disabilities</p>	<p>15. Stable &amp; diverse funding</p>								
	<p>16. Leverages resources for youth through community connections</p>								







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