

CHAPTER 14

2002 SPECIAL POLICY INITIATIVES

14.1 Introduction

In 2001, the Volusia County School District requested that the Juvenile Justice Educational Enhancement Program (JJEED) conduct the necessary research that would lead to the development of a quality assurance (QA) review system for their two alternative school discipline programs: Riverview in Daytona Beach and Euclid in Deland. In 2002, JJEED began conducting the QA research and the design of a pre and post QA research design that would determine the outcomes of QA upon the two alternative school discipline programs.

The research and best practices literature concerning alternative schools was found to be fragmented and descriptive. Nonetheless, some consensus regarding common “promising practices” across alternative programs was gleaned from the literature. JJEED’s pilot project with the alternative school discipline programs in Volusia County is designed to provide empirical evidence that will validate the promising practices mentioned in the literature and determine the effectiveness of school discipline schools in achieving their goals of successfully returning students to their home schools, decreasing the school districts dropout rate, and intervening in the negative life course of disruptive and at-risk youths. The subsequent QA system, once validated, could be replicated in other alternative school discipline schools throughout Florida.

Another 2002 special policy initiative involved JJEED’s development of a proposal for the development of a Center for Juvenile Justice Education and Training. The center, to be possibly located at Florida A&M University in collaboration with Florida State University, is based upon knowledge that delinquents and at-risk youths are often in need of special and individualized services to overcome their unique behavioral and educational needs and that quality teachers are the most consistent best practice in meeting these needs. The center’s bachelor and master’s level curricula will be drawn in part from JJEED’s research in juvenile justice and alternative education. Education majors at Florida A&M University who are already seeking teacher certification in specific content areas will be able to receive additional certifications and endorsements for the education of at risk and delinquent youths.

This chapter includes six subsequent sections. Section 14.2 provides a brief overview of the history of the alternative education movement. Section 14.3 provides a review of the research on alternative schools. Section 14.4 describes JJEED’s pilot project to implement a QA system and evaluation program design for Volusia County’s two school discipline programs. Section 14.5 describes JJEED’s proposal for the development of a Center for Juvenile Justice Education and Training at Florida A&M University. Section 14.6 provides a summary discussion of the chapter.

14.2 History of Alternative Education

The history of alternative education in America begins in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when Americans of the Progressive Era sought to reform public schools. These reformers aimed to save children from hard labor, delinquency, and the rigidity of public schools, which were thought to be failing in meeting their individual needs. The idea of individualized services based on scientific discovery reemerged in the alternative education movement of the turbulent 1960s. Zero tolerance and tough love initiatives regarding the treatment of juveniles grew in the 1980s and 1990s, and alternative education schools began to serve more and more at-risk students who were placed in alternative programs rather than reserving alternative education as a choice for a more individually tailored education.

Progressive Era

The modern concept of alternative education began in the Progressive Era. The Progressives were social reformers who believed that social services (informed by science) such as schools, the juvenile court, and child welfare agencies could alleviate the problems of society caused by urbanization, immigration, industrialization, and poverty (Blomberg & Lucken, 2000). As Altenbaugh (2003, p. 188) writes, “the goal of Progressive educational reform was to have educational practice be guided by informed and well-trained teachers who would rely on clear theories to bring rationality to classroom practice.”

From its inception, alternative education was used to serve two separate populations of students. Embedded in the philosophy of progressive education is the idea that traditional schools were too rigid and strict, and they did not meet the individual needs of children. Thus, one purpose was to establish control over students by passing compulsory school attendance laws and creating age-based grouping and tracking. A second motivation emerged from the realization that individual children had unique needs that needed to be identified and addressed through individualized lesson plans.

The Progressive Era saw the creation of numerous forms of alternative education. Alternative pedagogies were explored in traditional and vocational schools. Programs emerged, such as that by the leading Progressive Reformer John Dewey’s famous laboratory school at the University of Chicago. “From child labor legislation to compulsory schooling laws, from kindergartens to playgrounds, from widows’ pension provisions to municipal bureaus of child health and hygiene, Progressives sought to insure the proper physical, mental, and moral development of the child” (Rothman, 2002, p. 206).

Alternative schools for academically deficient and behavior problem students also emerged as a result of scientific and child-centered reforms; “the use of scientific measures to explain “individual differences” facilitated the segregation of special needs students” (Altenbaugh, 2003, p. 212). In order to alleviate problems caused by compulsory school attendance in urban areas, special needs students were identified and labeled through testing then separated into special classrooms and schools. In fact, “by 1911 more than one hundred large city

school systems had established special schools and special classes” (Altenbaugh, 2003, p. 212).

Progressives also created the juvenile court and reform schools to manage delinquent and dependent youths. The first juvenile court opened in Cook County Illinois (Chicago) in 1899. Much like the “common school” era, prior to the juvenile court, delinquent and dependent youths were handled at least in theory according to the “common law” principle of responsibility. Progressives sought to change the “common school” system using a more scientific and child-centered approach, while applying a similar individualized focus to the juvenile court. One of the major goals of both the alternative school and juvenile court systems was “individual treatment through scientific social casework,” based on antecedent causes of the child’s behavior (Blomberg & Lucken, 2000, p. 86). Juvenile court and reform school treatment of youths was to be individualized to meet the specific developmental needs of the child; however, as Blomberg and Lucken (2000, p. 89) point out, because of the latitude and autonomy given to the juvenile courts and reform schools, there was great “disparity between the juvenile court’s official goal of individual treatment and the court’s routine practices of youth control.”

The goal of individualized treatment and education was common to both the juvenile court and alternative education. Implementation often fell short of intended goals, however, and local autonomy and inconsistent funding created vast disparity in the implementation of these reform efforts. Progressive reforms, including the juvenile court and alternative education, became surrogate parents for delinquent and dependent children consequently expanding the net of control over the at-risk population (Blomberg & Lucken, 2000). This net widening was a practice that remained unchallenged until the 1960s.

Modern Alternative Education: 1960s and 1970s

Modern alternative education originated in the 1960s in response to a growing discontent with the traditional school system. Influenced by the earlier Progressive Era, modern alternative education sought to reform the traditional school system when, again, its pedagogy was viewed as too rigid and regimental, and not accommodating to the differing needs of individual students and their natural psychological developmental stages. While the Progressive Era aimed to cure the social ills of immigration, urbanization, industrialization, and child welfare, the tumultuous 1960s reforms occurred within the context of civil unrest, race riots, anti-war demonstrations, and a crusade on poverty. The public education system, molders of the future generation, bore the strength of the backlash. In 1965, President Johnson passed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which sought to provide equality education for all students (Ekpenyong, 1987).

Prior to this decade, public schools were often viewed as racist, oppressive, unimaginative, and designed for students who came from more affluent backgrounds (Lange & Sletten, 2002; Ekpenyong, 1987). John Dewey criticized this educational system as archaic for using authoritarian principles of the past in its current ideology and implementation (Ekpenyong, 1987). It became clear that public education prior to the 1960s was not meeting the current

needs of a diverse population of students. A multidimensional approach was needed to replace the institutional instruction of treating and teaching all students in a similar manner.

In harmony with earlier Progressive and 1960s social reformers, modern reformers recognized that each student is unique and has different learning needs. As a result, alternative schools were designed to meet these academic needs through an individualized approach in the classroom. These schools first emerged in the private sector, and their missions depended on their location (Raywid, 1999). In the urban areas, the schools were tailored to meet the needs of disruptive or academically deficient students. Minorities and the poor were often the target population. Set up within the poor communities, these schools were designed to meet the needs of those students seen as being discriminated against within the conventional school system and not receiving equivalent educational services as their upper-class counterparts.

A different version of alternative schools emerged in suburban areas, where alternative education became an innovative development that created unconventional teaching and learning techniques for those who wanted a different option of education, a direct contrast to the drab traditional teaching methods. These types of schools were meant to “rescue children from the alleged boredom, uniformity, and rigidity of the traditional school” (Ekpenyoung, 1987, p. 36). Suburban alternative schools were part of the Open Education Movement, which catered to the needs of those who could afford an alternative to public school. It was not designed to segregate disruptive students or provide remedial instruction for academically deficient students.

Although class differentiation motivated the creation of essentially two different strains of alternative education, the techniques used to reach the varying populations were essentially the same. The underlying theme involved a family atmosphere, informal settings, and autonomy for the students to pursue their educational goals. Individual lesson plans were designed for each student. Close personal relationships with faculty enabled students to feel comfortable and confident in approaching their teachers. Students enjoyed the independence of making their own decisions about the curriculum. The schools were small with a low student to teacher ratio that supported such an informal environment. Little academic tracking or ability grouping was conducted, to methods of the conventional system described as stigmatizing and discriminatory, for those students who were having difficulties within the public educational arena. Alternative education at this point was designed for students who were lost or unable to achieve success in the traditional system (Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 1998; Pridgeon, 1981).

The Changing Role of Alternative Schools; 1980s and 1990s

By the late 1970s, alternative education was implemented throughout the country. Yet, the purpose of the schools changed as a result of the growing need to decrease the dropout rate and improve student attendance. School districts were pressured through legislative directives to create other options for at-risk students (Pridgeon, 1981). Innovative techniques of the Open School Movement were used, not as a supplemental educational style for those who wanted to learn, but as an alternative for those students who were in danger of never

completing school. Alternative education created a different route from the conventional school for the disruptive, unmanageable, academic failures, and the overall socially maladjusted (Pridegon, 1981). The new goals of alternative education during this decade were to decrease dropout and truancy rates, redirect disruptive students, and re-engage academically deficient students into the learning environment. Many alternative programs were labeled 'last chance' schools, and they became the alternative to expulsion. (Raywid, 1999)

Every state faced the challenge of these at-risk youths. In 1978, Florida passed the Alternative Education Act, which ordered all school districts in the state to provide some form of alternative program for students who were not able to function adequately in the traditional school setting (section 230.2315, F.S.; Pridegon, 1981). The two goals of this legislation were to decrease the incidences of disruptive behavior and decrease the dropout rate. Criteria for choosing which students were eligible for the alternative programs included such behaviors as continuous defiance of the teachers, consistent disruption of school programs, and antagonistic behavior toward others (section 230.04, F.S.).

Dropout rates did not decrease, however, and juvenile delinquency continued to rise. Alternative education of the 1970s was criticized for being merely "conventional classrooms in different locations" (Pridegon, 1981, p. 43). There was no alternative educational programming, just merely a change of environment. Society's response was more legislation for juvenile delinquents aimed at increasing control over at-risk youths.

With a growing disenchantment of 1970s reforms and susceptibility to economic, political, and social influences, alternative schools faced another reform in the next two decades. The 1980s campaign for tough love and zero tolerance was the mantra for conservative platforms throughout the country. Consequently, the use and structure of alternative schools began to change dramatically during the 1980s and 1990s. As school shootings were dramatized by the media, federal and state legislative bodies reacted to delinquency by creating stricter and harsher laws. With the growing number of high school dropouts and the increase of juvenile crime, alternative education was seen as a solution for society to combat these chronic problems. The result is a consistent reform in an education system characterized by many different types of programs. Moreover, different types of alternative schools and programs are intended to meet the needs of a similar population by using similar techniques.

Stricter and stronger control of America's youths meant an increase in alternative education schools whose focus would change the behavior of delinquents. Reforms also focused on a behavioral component that emerged through studies which correlated dropping out of school and juvenile crime. The role of education in a child's life gained even more importance. Due to the increase in zero tolerance legislation and school policies, alternative education and alternative disciplinary schools increased greatly throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

14.3 "Promising Practices" of Alternative Schools

Currently, throughout the country, alternative schools focus upon students who are academically deficient, at risk of dropping out of school, and have histories of disruptive

behavior. Because of local autonomy and a lack of federal and state direction, however, these schools are disparate in their intended goals, purposes, and practices. The literature concerning these alternative schools is equally fragmented and largely focuses on small descriptive studies with few large-scale empirical research studies that could validate best practices. Nonetheless, some anecdotal and consistent “promising practices” can be identified from this prior literature.

Despite her acknowledgement of the lack of empirical research that identifies effective practices for alternative schools, Aronson (1995) lists best practices from the existing literature as focusing on the whole student (personal, emotional, social, and academic development), opportunities for students to build meaningful relationships with teachers and adults, high student expectations, behavior modification in a safe environment, small school and class size, links with other social services, and academic innovation.

Although without good empirical support (Neumann, 1991; Raywid, 1999) to substantiate the best methods to teach such a diverse and disadvantaged population, anecdotal reports identify similar techniques characterized as best practices. According to such reports, the most important strategy for a successful alternative school to follow is a reduction in size. (Saunders & Saunders, 2001; Northwest Regional Education Laboratory, 1998; Paglin & Pager, 1997). Due to the discovery of a positive correlation between dropout rates and school size (May & Copeland, 1998), alternative schools are relatively small. Further, the classes tend to be small with usually no more than 15 students to one teacher.

Furthermore, many alternative school educators adopt the “three legged stool” analogy (Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 1998, 16) as described by the administrator of Mat-Su Alternative School in Alaska. A balance is needed between academic, social, and vocational skills to create a foundation for at-risk students to succeed. Each component is a leg of the stool. Without all three, the stool would be unsteady. All three legs make the stool one of the strongest pieces of furniture. Current alternative education addresses each of these ‘legs’ by implementing the strategies listed below (Edwards & Wilson, 2001; May & Copeland, 1998; Northwest Regional Education Laboratory, 1998; Paglin & Pager, 1997; Saunders & Saunders, 2001).

1. Academic skills are taught through individualized lesson plans. Students make decisions involving their curriculum and work at their own pace; however, most alternative programs follow the same course work as taught in conventional schools. Teachers participate in training workshops, which focus on the “active teaching model” (May & Copeland, 1998, p. 12). They learn the individualized approach and ways to encourage students’ enthusiasm and participation in the classroom.
2. Social skills are addressed through friendships with the faculty, which are established through close personal relationships and a family atmosphere. Small class size allows for individual instruction and problem solving, creating a supportive environment (Lange & Sletten, 2002). Teachers become mentors, role models, and counselors. A comfortable bond is established where the students feel that the teachers care. This atmosphere provides for a sense of attachment and social belonging that

seems to be missing in the at-risk students' lives; students tend to thrive in an environment that they feel supports them. Additionally, female students appear to benefit a great deal from interactions with adult female role models (May & Copeland, 1998). Counseling is also available to address personal and social problems. Often, parents are encouraged to participate.

3. Vocational skills are addressed through the creation of relationships with community members. Some schools have internships, and frequently part of the academic day may be in the field. Career screening is also utilized, and students benefit from vocational training that is directed to long-term economic gains.

4. Finally, another best practice concerns the faculty's autonomy. Aside from budgetary and structural concerns, staff should have control over decisions involving the "courses offered, instructional methods, evaluation standards, choice of course texts, and permissible student behavior" (Lange, 1998, p. 17). Such autonomy strengthens the faculty's commitment to the school, one of the most important features that ensure an alternative school success.

The following table lists best practices compiled from several different sources (Lange & Sletten, 2002; William T. Grant Foundation, 2002; Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 1995; National Research Council, 2002). It is important to note that much of the literature defines these best practices as characteristics of successful programs since they have not been empirically tested. Table 14.1 follows the categorical organization used by Southwest Educational Developmental Laboratory, which divides the best practices by school organization, culture, and curriculum and instruction.

Table 14.1: Best Practices As Identified in Research Literature

	School Organization
School size	Smaller schools help create a sense of community between teachers, students, and parents.
Small class size	10 to 1, no more than 15 students to 1 teacher
Separation	Situated in a different location from the traditional school
Autonomy	Students need to be able to make decisions about their curriculum as well as the overall function of the school. Teachers must also have a degree of freedom in an informal environment.
Outside Involvement	The integration of family school and community efforts. Parent and community involvement. The involvement of social service programs as needed. Opportunities for vocational training in the community. The use of mentors, role models, and advocates to assist students with a successful transition back to their home schools.
Faculty autonomy	Staff should have control over decisions involving curriculum, instruction, and student behavior.
Staff qualifications	Faculty and support staff should be highly qualified to work with at-risk students and be certified in the area they are teaching
	School Culture / Behavior Components
Informal environment	Caring relationship between the students and their teachers appears to be one of the greatest indicators of success.
Sense of community	Students as well as teachers need to feel invested in the school.
Physical and psychological safety and structure	This is promoted by clear and consistent rules, expectations, disciplinary practices, and boundaries. The use of positive social norms.
Counseling services	Counseling services should be available for students to address personal and social problems.
Supportive relationships and opportunities to belong	Opportunities for students to develop meaningful relationships with adults. Opportunities to participate in school activities and decision-making. Youth-based empowerment strategies.
	Curriculum and Instruction
Innovation	Flexibility in teaching strategies which include: peer tutoring, team teaching, cooperative learning Curriculum must also be flexible and tailored to the students' individual needs.
Balanced curriculum	Alternative schools must address social, vocational, and emotional needs, as well as academic.
Individualized lessons	Academic skills are taught through individualized lessons. Students make decisions involving their curriculum. Students are able to work at their own pace.
Opportunities for skill building	Opportunities for students to enhance their social, physical, academic, and vocational skills

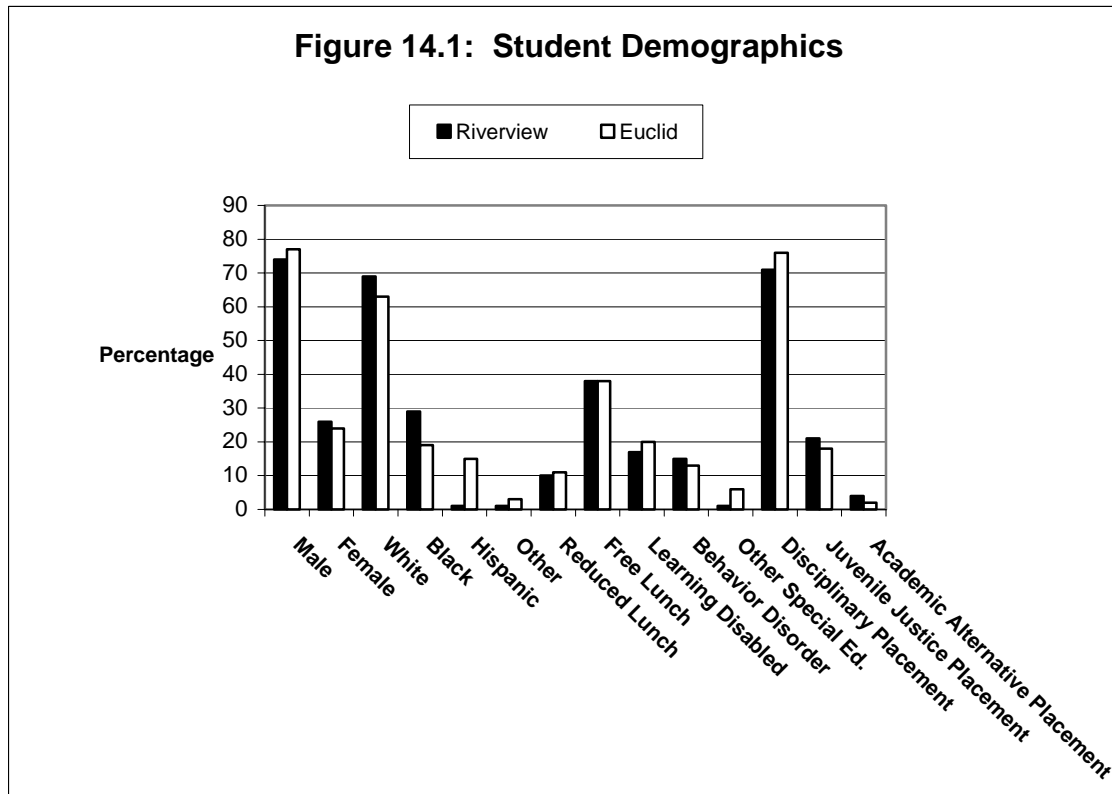
Nonetheless, because of the paucity of empirical research, the effectiveness of the schools to prevent students from dropping out of school, engaging in further delinquent acts, or falling further behind in academic performance remains in question.

14.4: Volusia County Pilot Project

Florida's school system serves an extremely diverse student population, and every medium to large sized school district in Florida currently operates separate alternative school discipline programs. An estimate of alternative schools generated from the Department of Education's (DOE's) master school identification list includes 162 schools and programs that serve, delinquent, academically deficient, teen parents, or other identified at-risk students.

As stated previously, during 2001 the Volusia County School District requested that JJEEP implement a QA review system for their alternative school discipline programs. In fall 2002, after several meetings with the school district, DOE approved the project, and JJEEP staff began conducting preliminary site visits to Volusia County's two alternative school disciplinary schools, namely Riverview and Euclid.

Riverview and Euclid schools, respectively located in Daytona and Deland, serve middle and high school students as an alternative to expulsion with the mandatory and limited length of stay being one semester. Based on DOE student data, Euclid served 136 students and Riverview 144 students for fiscal year 2000/2001. The figure on student demographics demonstrates that the population served in both schools would be considered at risk. Approximately 35% of the youths served by these schools are minority students and close to 50% of the students are eligible for a free or reduced lunch indicating a population with a low socioeconomic status. Not surprisingly, close to 40% of the students receive special education services, four times greater than the average public school, which is generally estimated at eight to ten percent of the population. Almost all of the students have been placed in the schools due to school discipline problems or involvement in the juvenile justice system. The schools' student demographics are provided below in Figure 14.1.



JJEEP’s alternative school discipline program research is multiphased. Initial research was focused upon understanding the goals and practices of these programs that target at-risk students. Subsequent research was conducted to develop preliminary QA review standards for the education and behavior components of these educational programs that reflect best practices. Future research will involve application of the QA review standards and pre and post outcome assessments to determine if the effectiveness of these programs is improving as a result of ongoing QA reviews guided by best practices research. It is anticipated that an exemplary alternative school discipline program model will result from this research that can be replicated throughout Florida.

Phase One: Initial Field Research and the Development of QA Standards

Phase one included visiting the Riverview and Euclid Schools four times during the fall 2002.f During these visits, JJEEP staff met with school administrators, support staff, and members of the faculty. The site visits conducted in the Fall 2002 revealed that the schools operated with the main goal of providing an alternative learning environment for Volusia School District’s disruptive students. While the schools incorporated and utilized many of the best practices mentioned in the previous section, some impediments were identified when implementing some of these best practices.

As per best practices, the schools were small and maintained low student to teacher ratios ranging from 10 to 15 students per teacher. Behavior expectations were made clear to students and parents, and they appeared to be consistently enforced with both negative and

positive consequences. Both schools used individualized, self-paced instruction where students were provided access to a computer lab and individual lessons for core academic courses. It was not determined, however, whether the individualized style of instruction was based on student interest or merely repeated drilling of basic skills. Many other best practices were mentioned in the literature for the two schools but these practices were not consistently used.

Since the schools served students from across the county, bus schedules were difficult to organize, and some students spent several hours each morning and afternoon on the bus. This made the school day short, and there was no time for extra curricular activities, vocational courses, or electives. The schools served the students temporarily with a mandated and limited length of stay of one semester, and there were no student advocates, mentors, community resources, or protocol to assist students when returning to their respective home schools where they were often labeled as troublemakers.

Based on discussions that occurred during the site visits and a review of school literature including their school improvement plans, faculty and student handbooks, and policies and procedures, JJEEP, with input from Volusia staff, began developing a draft of QA standards for alternative education school discipline programs. The current draft of the QA standards is based on JJEEP's juvenile justice educational QA standards with modifications made to fit the goals of the school discipline programs and the best practices literature cited in the previous section. Most notably among the additions is a standard entitled "Program Behavioral Supports." Because the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), the agency generally responsible for reviewing behavior, school safety, and treatment in the juvenile justice schools, is not involved in this pilot project, it was necessary for JJEEP to add a standard that reviewed school behavioral supports.

The QA standards for alternative school discipline programs are divided into the four standard areas of Transition, Service Delivery, Program Behavioral Supports, and Administration. The first standard, transition, is designed to review the schools' processes for successfully transitioning youths into the alternative school and back into their home schools after they have successfully completed the program. Transition ensures that (1) students are properly enrolled so they may progress toward a high school diploma or its equivalent, (2) assessments are conducted at entry and utilized to diagnose students' academic and vocational strengths, weaknesses, and interests in order to individually address the needs of the students, (3) individual academic plans (IAPs) for non-exceptional student education (non-ESE) students and individual educational plans (IEPs) for students in ESE programs are completed so that all students receive individualized instruction and services, (4) students are making progress toward their educational goals and that instructional objectives remain relevant to the students' changing needs and interests as they progress during their lengths of stay, (5) students receive assistance in setting realistic goals and making appropriate decisions about their futures, and (6) the school assists students with reentry into school and/or work settings and transmits educational exit portfolios to appropriate personnel at the students' next educational placements.

Service delivery activities ensure that students are provided with educational opportunities that will best prepare them for a successful reentry into their home school. The service delivery standard ensures that (1) students have the opportunity to receive an education that is appropriate to their future educational plans and allows them to progress toward a high school diploma or its equivalent, (2) students have the opportunity to obtain the skills necessary to secure employment in an area of their interest and to become productive members of society, (3) students with identified deficiencies in reading receive specific and appropriate instruction aimed at increasing their reading proficiency, (5) instruction addresses each student's needs, goals, and learning styles to stimulate ongoing student participation and interest, (4) equal access to education is provided for all students, regardless of functional ability, disability, or behavioral characteristics, and (6) students maintain a regular school attendance, which enables ongoing and consistent educational services.

The program behavioral supports standard ensures (1) a safe and healthy environment that facilitates positive student and group interactions and decreases unsafe or confrontational student or group interactions, (2) clear limits, consistent expectations, continuity, sufficient control, predictability, and age appropriate monitoring and supervision, (3) skill building opportunities for students to develop confidence in their abilities to effectively master their environment, (4) school policies and practices that address the integration of family, school, and community, and (5) opportunities to positively interact and belong with their student peers and provide opportunities for effective adult relationships. (National Research Council, 2002).

Administrative activities should ensure that students are provided with instructional personnel, services, and materials necessary to successfully accomplish their goals. The administration standard ensures that (1) instructional personnel and educational staff are well informed about the school's purpose, policies, expected student outcomes, and school improvement initiatives, (2) the most qualified instructional personnel are employed to educate at-risk students, (3) instructional personnel are provided continuing education that will enhance the quality of services provided to at-risk students, (4) ongoing program improvement through self-evaluation and planning is promoted, (5) funding provides high-quality educational services, and (6) accurate student data are reported to identify various student and school outcomes.

Both schools' faculty and other Volusia County School Administrators will review these standards during two meetings with JJEEP in January 2003. Using faculty and administrators input, the standards will be revised before they are implemented. Once consensus on the standards is reached—phase two—implementation of the QA process will begin in Summer 2003.

Phase Two: Implementation of the QA Process

Following a pre-test QA review, it is planned that in the Fall 2003, JJEEP staff will conduct full QA reviews of both Riverview and Euclid schools. Each standard's indicators will be rated using the methodology described below: The QA review process will use multiple data sources to evaluate the quality of educational services. Information about educational

performance will be gathered by JJEEP reviewers through (1) policy, document, and student and teacher file reviews; (2) interviews with school administrators, support personnel, teachers, and students; and (3) observations of educational activities and services. Indicator ratings are then based on substantiated information using these multiple sources to verify program practices. Ultimately, in determining specific QA review scores, reviewers must consider the preponderance of evidence, which documents that the intent of the indicator in question is being met. These determinations are made in relation to the multiple sources of data that reviewers collect and review during the QA review. Moreover, there are those occasions when reviewers will document that a particular process guideline is not being met, but the overall intent of the indicator is being achieved. In such instances, the reviewer will determine the numerical QA score in relation to all the indicator's performance evidence not just in relation to one particular process guideline that is not being met.

After the first QA reviews of Riverview and Euclid are conducted, JJEEP will provide the results to Volusia County administrators and school staff. Any indicators or areas found to be deficient and/or in need of improvement will be addressed through recommendations for process improvements. Major deficiencies may require school administrators to develop corrective action plans with follow-up technical assistance provided by JJEEP staff. When the first year of QA reviews are completed, the QA standards will be revised to accommodate new research results, input from school staff, and gained experience.

The QA reviews, subsequent recommendations and follow-up, and revision of standards will continue annually and the schools' results will be continuously analyzed to provide JJEEP, Volusia County administrators, and DOE with effective results on program improvements. Ultimately, in order to effectively evaluate the schools' success, student outcomes must be measured. Therefore, the school outcome evaluation research described in the next sections will be used to guide the QA process.

Phase Three: Pre- and Post-Outcome Assessments

Using DOE and Volusia County student data, JJEEP will measure Riverview's and Euclid's student outcomes. These outcomes will include academic gains acquired in the program (i.e., credits earned, pupil progression, and entry and exit academic assessment test scores), successful return to home school, eventual graduation from high school, subsequent employment, and prevention of delinquency. Students who attend Riverview and Euclid will be tracked longitudinally for several years until they age out of adolescence. This information will be reviewed and reported annually, eventually using multiple cohorts of students as years progress.

The research will not only be used to determine student outcomes, but it will also include analysis of particular types of students, including age, race, socioeconomic status, gender, learning disabilities, mental disabilities, behavior disorders, and prior delinquency. This type of research will assist in determining what works best in alternative school discipline programs for particular students. As student results are analyzed in relation to these demographics, best practices for particular students can be determined and validated.

Additionally, this information will be used to validate the QA process and standards. JJEEP will evaluate the student outcomes listed above using three years of DOE and school district student data prior to the development and intervention of the QA process. These years include 1999-2000, 2000-2001, and 2001-2002. The introduction of the QA process and first reviews will take place late in fiscal year 2002-2003. JJEEP will then apply the same longitudinal research design to subsequent years after the introduction of QA in order to determine the effects of QA and the schools implementation of identified best practices embedded in the QA standards on student outcomes.

14.5: University Center for Juvenile Justice Education and Training

As discussed in Chapter 5, research consistently demonstrates that a disproportionate number of delinquent and at-risk youths are in need of special education services. In fact, a report by the Civil Rights Project at Harvard University and the Institute on Race and Justice at the Northeastern University (2002) states that 70% of incarcerated youths suffer from various learning disabilities that interfere with their academic abilities. This problem extends further than simply that of incarcerated youths. The majority of court-involved and other at-risk youths in both public schools and alternative education programs suffer from a variety of learning disabilities that are often detrimental to their overall academic performance and behavior, often leading to suspensions, expulsions, and grade retention. Because delinquent and at-risk youths have such low academic performance, they often have more limited positive career and life course prospects.

This population of youths, therefore, poses a variety of challenges for schools. The schools not only must deal with the academic challenges, but they also face problems with inadequate or dysfunctional behavioral and social skills. These students are often three or more years behind their age-grade levels in academic skills such as reading, writing, and math. Moreover, these youths are characterized by poor organizational skills, differing learning styles, lack of goal orientations, poor anger management, general sense of helplessness, physical and verbal aggressiveness, numerous emotional and mental health related problems, poor impulse control, low self-esteem, general distrustfulness of others, etc. In sum, an ever-increasing proportion of our youthful populations are indeed on very negative life course trajectories with few positive life course prospects. Research has shown, however, that there are intervening factors that may change this negative path. Specifically, studies have demonstrated that students receiving quality education and appropriate behavioral supports do have the capacity to positively alter and improve the life course trajectories of both deep-end delinquent and other at-risk youths.

JJEEP's research specifically has demonstrated that the receipt of quality education in a supportive and structured setting can lead to significant academic and social gains for this population. Repeatedly, JJEEP has found that a key component to such quality juvenile justice and alternative school discipline education programs is the use of certified teachers who are teaching in their specified areas of professional certification. Throughout the United States, however, certified teachers are a scarce commodity for both juvenile justice and alternative education programs as well as for all K-12 schools. As the juvenile justice and

alternative education programs face particular challenges with their population, the successful implementation of quality education becomes that much more complex. Unfortunately, therefore, it is not simply a lack of certified teachers that leads to problems for these programs but also the fact that there are no university educational curricula targeted at specifically training certified teachers to possess appropriate behavior intervention skills of use with the unique needs of this population.

In order to be able to meet both the academic and social-behavioral needs of this unique population, specialized university training and preparation for teachers is imperative. In response, JJEEP is working to establish the Center for the Education of Delinquent and At-risk youths to be established at Florida A&M University in collaboration with Florida State University. The two universities will actively collaborate on the curriculum design, implementation, and ongoing evaluation of the Center's operations. Moreover, JJEEP will work with both Florida A&M University and DOE in the development of integrated best education and problem adolescent behavior intervention practices. The development of this design will involve working closely with Florida A&M University's College of Education and other appropriate social science departments within the university. Pedagogy and structured and supervised field placement will be integral components of the Center's curriculum.

The start date of the Center is targeted for the fall semester 2003. At that time, students will begin their integrated education and adolescent behavior intervention training. Students who complete the undergraduate program will graduate with both a bachelor's degree and professional certification in such academic areas as reading, English, science, math, or social studies. In addition to teaching certification, the Center's graduates will have participated in a core curriculum that focuses on the features of positive youth development and appropriate behavior intervention strategies. Working with DOE, the Center will develop a certification and/or endorsement for teaching delinquent and at-risk youths. The Center will continuously refine and change its curriculum and programming according to the ongoing research findings on best education and behavior modification for delinquent and at-risk youths.

14.6 Summary Discussion

Although the main focus of alternative education, namely individualized treatment and smaller school and class size has remained largely consistent since the Progressive Era, alternative schools have evolved in response to political, social, and economic needs of states and local school districts, mainly serving as a place where disruptive students are removed temporarily from public school's mainstream. The disparity that exists in the types and purposes of alternative schools across the country makes it difficult to identify empirically based best practices for alternative schools serving at-risk populations; however, several common approaches emerge from the literature. Individualized services and instruction based on diagnosing individual student strengths and weaknesses; small schools and class settings; the offering of vocational and social skills courses; the use of community resources, including mentors and advocates; and the use of highly qualified and dedicated teachers stand out as the most common best practices. Nonetheless, most of the prior literature is anecdotal or descriptive, and examines only a small number of programs or students.

There is consensus that more empirically based research is needed to measure the effectiveness of alternative schools serving at-risk populations. Many researchers agree that such evidence is virtually nonexistent (Raywid, 1999; Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 1998). “In order to fully examine the effect of alternative schools on student achievement and retention in alternative schools, more large-scale review and standardized assessments may be necessary” (Lange & Sletten, 2002, p. 22).

JJEEP’s pilot project with two Volusia County alternative schools is designed to develop a QA process that will effectively evaluate alternative schools’ implementation of identified best practices. Additionally, the pre- and post- outcome research design employed by JJEEP will provide empirical validation of the QA process and subsequent best practices. When the QA process has been validated and specific educational practices are identified to successfully assist at-risk students with reintegration to their home schools and subsequent positive community outcomes, the QA process for various types of alternative schools can be replicated throughout Florida in an effort to reduce the state’s school dropout rate.

By recognizing that quality teachers are the foundation of any educational program, JJEEP, in collaboration with the DOE, will assist in the implementation of the Center for Juvenile Justice Education and Training at Florida A&M University in collaboration with Florida State University. JJEEP’s role in the Center will be to assist in curriculum development and refinement and the ongoing evaluation of the Center’s operations and outcomes. Ultimately, it is envisioned that the Center will be an ongoing educational and training experiment in providing future teachers with state-of-the-art best practices for effectively confronting the dual academic and social skills and behavior deficiencies of delinquent and at-risk youths.