Family-School-Community Interventions for Chronically Disruptive Students: An Evaluation of Outcomes in an Alternative School

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Abstract

In the current educational climate, educators are challenged to balance safety issues with compulsory attendance. The presence of violence, weapons, drugs, and alcohol at school disrupts and interferes with the educational process. Those students who interfere with the learning of others may need additional services to enable them to be successful in school. There is evidence to suggest that these students' misbehavior results from unmet physical, emotional, or social needs. Certain types of alternative schools provide psychosocial and educational interventions for these students. However, divergent missions and lack of empirical evaluations have failed to identify effective interventions for students assigned to alternative schools for disciplinary reasons. Accordingly, this study was conducted in an alternative school at which the first author was the school social worker. Specifically, the study examined the following psychosocial variables: self-esteem, depression, locus of control, and life skills using a pre-test and post-test design to measure changes at post-assignment as a way of evaluating the effectiveness of the program. In addition, educational variables, absences, grades, and school status were examined using a simple times series design to study changes and to further evaluate program effectiveness. Participants evidenced statistically significant improvements in self-esteem, life skills, attendance, and grade point average upon successful completion of assignment to

an alternative school. The results suggest the importance of a multisystemic assessment and intervention model in improving the school performance of disruptive youth.

Introduction

Educators, families, and communities are uniting in a common mission: to educate their youth in an increasingly disruptive and violent educational climate. The prevailing educational dilemma of providing safe schools while fostering appropriate learning environments for all students has prompted communities to create alternative forms of education for students whose behaviors interfere with learning. The seeds of the existing trend can be traced back over the past twenty years, when teachers reported that they spent much more time controlling students than teaching (Duke & Perry, 1978). While the concern over student behavior has grown, the pressure has mounted to create more learning options for adolescents—particularly disruptive, violent students. For years, students have been literally "dumped" in alternative schools with little thought either to their return to traditional school or to the alternative program's effectiveness. With the recent wave of school violence, legislators and educators have renewed interest in alternative schools. However, with the emphasis on end of the year testing, accountability, and evidence-based practice, alternative schools can no longer be a "warehouse" for unwanted students. Outcomes are paramount for continued funding. The underlying issue of how educators can reasonably balance safety concerns with mandatory public education remains a challenge.

Many states have responded to the growing numbers of students at risk for social and academic failure by establishing alternative schools. Such schools are usually instituted in response to unique community problems, but the lack of standardization of needs assessments and mission statements dilute efforts to generalize the success of one program to another (Franklin, 1992; Lange & Ysseldyke, 1994). What constitutes acceptable outcomes depends heavily on the mission of the alternative program and the expectations of the community.

The major problem in evaluating alternative educational programs is the selection of acceptable outcomes that demonstrate individual program effectiveness. Interventions and outcomes vary with the type and mission of the alternative school. Educators are interested in two types of outcomes when conducting research on alternative schools, psychosocial and educational. Psychosocial (attitudinal or behavioral) outcomes are the result of a psychosocial assessment. These outcomes consider specific changes in attitudinal or behavioral issues that may impact educational achievement (Aeby, Manning, Thyer, & Carpenter-Aeby, 1999; AEP, 1984; Dupper, 1998; Franklin, McNeil, & Wright, 1991). Educational

outcomes are related to educational achievement, specifically grade point average, attendance, and school status (dropout). To include psychosocial outcomes in educational research presumes the link between these variables and educational achievement. Logically, interventions would be designed to improve client well-being, which could be defined as improvements in psychosocial as well as educational outcomes for students. In this study, an assessment and intervention development strategy was developed: the Family-School Community Collaboration (FSCC) Model (Carpenter-Aeby, 1999). This model recognizes both psychosocial and educational needs for students at risk for academic failure and/or dropout as a result of their behaviors. The FSCC model (discussed in the Methods section) combines family involvement, school investment, and community resources in order to implement appropriate interventions for chronically disruptive students.

Given the ambiguous contributions of various intervention models in alternative schools, the authors relied on the existing literature to determine effective practice. Five such outcomes have been used in program evaluation for alternative schools over the last twenty years. As a result, these outcomes were incorporated in this study: (1) student characteristics driving the mission and the model (Chavkin, 1993; Gold & Mann, 1984); (2) social work interventions: individual, family, school, community (Adelman & Taylor, 1997; Carpenter-Aeby & Knapper, 1995; Carpenter-Aeby, Salloum, & Aeby, 2001; Franklin & Streeter, 1995; Sedlack, 1997; Weiss & Edwards, 1992); (3) psychosocial outcomes (Cox, Davison & Bynum, 1995; Mizell, 1978; Stathe & Hash, 1979); (4) educational outcomes (Aeby, et al., 1999; Cross & Hunter, 1984; Foley, 1983; Franklin & Streeter, 1991; Macrockie & Jones, 1987); and (5) program mission outcomes (Chalker, 1996; Reilly, 1986). The purpose of this paper was to examine five types of outcomes (student characteristics, social work interventions, psychosocial, educational, and program missions) in an alternative school for chronically disruptive students to determine program effectiveness.

Method

The focus of the current study was an off-campus disciplinary alternative school. Students were assigned to this program as the result of a disciplinary hearing following suspension or expulsion from the home (traditional) school for serious violations of the code of student conduct. The assignment time was limited: less than 45 days, 45 days, 90 days, or 180 days. The assignment depended on the severity of the offense. This section describes the site of the study, participants, outcome measures, research design, analysis, and intervention model used in this study.

Alternative School Site

Originally, this alternative school was established in 1974 to create safer schools by simply removing disruptive students without any intervention. Following a 44% dropout rate in 1993, an infusion of CrossRoads (also known as Cities in Schools or Communities in Schools) funding changed the mission of the alternative school (Aeby, et al., 1999). Significantly, CrossRoads programs recognized the relationship between socio-emotional factors and academic achievement. As a result, in 1994, the community collaborative modified the mission to include dropout prevention and the provision of social services.

Students assigned to the alternative school received both psychosocial and academic services. Individualized academic programs of study were established for each student in an effort maintain students' academic standings. The teachers at the alternative school followed the same curriculum as the home (or referring) school. Each student was allowed to work at his/her own pace while assigned to the alternative school. During this time, students were also required to develop a portfolio of their work. This portfolio was designed to demonstrate the work completed during the assignment (Carpenter-Aeby & Kurtz, 2001).

Participants

Participants included families and students. In effect, both were assigned to the alternative school and expected to participate in the program. Interestingly, during the six years of the program (1994-2000), there was 100% participation of the families. The heavy emphasis on family involvement was essential in the success of the students (Aeby, et al., 1999). The students who were assigned to the alternative school in this study shared several general characteristics. Each was enrolled in the public school system and was between the ages of 10 and 22 in grades four to twelve. Each student had violated the school system's student code of conduct, thereby interfering with the learning process. Prior to assignment by the disciplinary hearing officer, each student was afforded a due process hearing as designated by school board policy. The records of students who completed their assignment during the 1996-1997 school year and participated in both pre- and post-tests for the psychosocial variables served as the data source (N=100).

Outcome Measures

This study incorporated psychosocial and educational outcomes as well as student characteristics, social work interventions, and fulfillment of the mission of

the program. Four measures of student psychosocial functioning were examined at intake and exit: (1) self-esteem using the Rosenburg Self-Esteem Scale—RSE (Rosenberg, 1979), depression using the Depression Self Rating Scale—DSRS (Birleson, 1980, 1981), locus of control using the Nowicki-Strickland Locus of Control Scale—NSLCS (Nowicki & Strickland, 1973), and life skills using the Life Skills Development Scale–Adolescent Form—LSDS-B (Darden, Ginter, & Gazda, 1996). Two measures of educational performance, grade point average (GPA) and attendance, were examined at intake, exit, and 90 days post-assignment. GPAs were calculated on a 0 - 100% scale, with 100% being the highest possible grade. Attendance was calculated by the number of days attended. A third measure of educational performance, school status, was examined 180 days post-assignment. It was defined in three ways: in school, dropped out, or graduated. In addition to psychosocial and educational outcomes, three other aspects were observed: student characteristics, social work interventions, and fulfilling the mission of the alternative school (program mission outcomes).

Research Design

This study used a purposive sample of students assigned to the alternative school during the 1996-1997 school year. To be eligible for the study, students had to complete the program requirements: attend intake and exit interviews, receive social work services, and complete a portfolio of his/her work. The purposive sample allowed the researchers to examine those students who had been assigned to an alternative school and had received services through the FSCC Model. The design for this evaluation study can be represented as:

Psychosocial Variables	$O_1 \, X \, O_2$
Educational Variables	$O_1 \, X \, O_2 \, O_3 \, O_4$

Analysis

In addition to descriptive data, the pre- and post-tests for the psychosocial outcomes (self-esteem, depression, locus of control, and life skills) were analyzed with related sample t-tests. The researchers chose a .025 significance level using the Bonferroni correction for one-tailed directional hypotheses (.05 significance level) and assumed a medium effect size for program evaluation of .45. Thus the power was .94 based on a sample size of 100 participants (Lipsey, 1990, p. 92). The researchers made a slight Bonferroni correction to reduce the possibility of the findings occurring by chance.

The educational outcomes (GPA and attendance) were compared at several

time intervals: intake (pre-test), exit (post-test), 90 school days post-assignment, and 180 school days post-assignment, using paired sample t-tests (pre-assignment versus assignment, pre-assignment versus 90 days post-assignment, and pre-assignment versus 180 days post-assignment). School Status was examined one time at 180 school days post-assignment. It was measured in three categories: in school, dropped out (officially withdrawn from school), and graduated. All data were analyzed using SPSS 8.0 program for Windows.

The Family-School-Community Collaboration Intervention Model (Table 1)

While the state of program evaluation for alternative schools is confusing and contradictory, it is generally agreed that social work services including counseling, therapy, group work, and case management have been credited in some effective programs. However, few outcome studies have combined psychosocial and educational outcomes (Aeby, et al., 1999; Franklin, 1992). Building an intervention model such as the FSCC Model described in this section requires an examination of methods shown to be successful (evidence-based practice) and the recognition of the importance of eliminating psychosocial barriers before addressing educational issues.

The school social worker combined the psychosocial approach and systems theory for intervention development. Incorporating the two theoretical frameworks, the social worker designed an assessment and intervention development model, the Family-School-Community Collaboration Model, shown on page 91 (Carpenter-Aeby, 1999). Framework One, the psychosocial approach, emphasized key assumptions in relationship building and assessment. Therefore, the clinician works in conjunction with the client (in this case the student and his/her family) to create an intervention plan that can be partialized and prioritized. The psychosocial approach allowed families, school staff, and community agencies to work together to assess psychosocial needs, recognize client functioning, and develop an individual success plan (program of study) for each student (Goldstein, 1995, p. 1948).

Framework Two, systems theory, incorporated multiple systems for intervention: individual, peer, family, school, agency, and community (Fine & Carlson, 1992). The FSCC Model provided a multi-systemic framework for psychosocial and educational assessment and intervention development to address the unique social and educational needs of students who had violated the code of student conduct (Carpenter-Aeby & Knapper, 1995). Multiple systems are involved in order to assure sustaining changes within each of the systems: individuals, family,

school, and community (Adelman & Taylor, 1997; Fine & Carlson, 1992; Weiss & Edwards, 1992). Interventions, assessment, and ongoing evaluation were developed to contribute to the overall improvement of the client (student/family) and the effectiveness of the program, consistent with evidence-based practice.

Transition and follow-up services were believed to play an important role in the reduction of school dropout rates when considering alternative schools. Macrockie and Jones (1987) reduced dropout rates by initiating a "re-entry program" to assist in returning to the "home" school. The combination of treatment and the delivery of additional social services may support educational achievement in the prevention of school dropout. Hence, the FSCC Model outlined the three-step transition process for returning to traditional school from alternative school: (1) intake and on-going assessment, (2) intervention development and monitoring, and (3) transition and follow-up. The social worker conducted intake interviews with each student and his/her family to assess educational strengths and barriers in order to facilitate the family-school partnership. In turn, this partnership invited community agencies to share in the collective investment of educating students with the ultimate goal of developing productive community members.

The program of study focused on the temporary, albeit mandatory, assignment. As such, the social worker brokered social services necessary for the student's program of study to maximize academic success. During the assignment to the alternative school, the social worker provided fifteen social work services including individual counseling, group work, family counseling, and staffings on-site at the school (Carpenter-Aeby, et al., 2001). The social worker also trained family members as advocates to network and broker social services and community resources, as well as coordinated the transition and adjustment services from the alternative school to the transition destination (i.e. home school, Youth Detention Center, GED program, night school). Support services were provided during the follow-up period.

Results

Student Characteristics

Of the 100 students, 24 students were assigned for less than 45 days; 49 were assigned for 45 days total; 23 were assigned for 90 days, and 4 were assigned for 180 days. The average student was 15 years old (25%), in the ninth grade (37%), and receiving free or reduced lunch (79%). Students were predominately male (58%) and were of African American (76%) or Euro-American (21%) origin. Twenty-eight percent of the students received special education services.

Students were assigned to the alternative school based on thirteen categories of referral. The most frequent reasons for referrals were drugs and/or alcohol (24%), weapons (18%), fighting (18%), violent acts (8%), sexual harassment (6%), insubordination (6%), interference with school personnel (4%), verbal abuse/profanity (4%), and disruptive conduct (2%). Sixty-six percent of the referrals were made as a result of violence or potential violence against others. Additionally, twenty-four percent of the referrals were for drugs and/or alcohol. The remaining ten percent was a combination of habitual offenders, administrative placements, criminal assault, battery, and theft.

Social Work Interventions

Hours of clinical social work services were calculated to describe the characteristics of students assigned to the alternative school and guide intervention development. Descriptive statistics were used to compare the social work services. The summary totals reveal that the 100 participants received approximately 20 hours of social services during their assignments. Participants received at least nine different types of social services. Most notably, all students and families participated in intake (1.10 hours per student) and assessment (2.30 hours per student). Other types of family participation varied: 99% received 2.3 hours related to evaluation; 98% received 2.4 hours of family meetings; 97% received 1.8 hours of family therapy; 89% received 1.21 hours related to exit interviews; 84% received 3.4 hours of individual counseling.

Psychosocial Outcomes

There were positive changes in the measures of self-esteem after completing the alternative educational program. Self-esteem is said to improve as the score increases; therefore, a one-tailed directional hypothesis and a paired sample t-test were used to test statistical significance. These findings indicate that there was a statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-test scores. The paired sample t-test using the mean of the total score revealed a statistically significant difference, (t=2.30, df=99, p=.024, r=.430) shown in Table 2 on page 92.

There were changes in the measures of life skills after students completed the alternative educational program. Scores are said to improve as they increase; therefore, a one-tailed directional hypothesis was used. These findings indicate that there was a statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-test scores. Results from Table 2 show that the paired sample t-test using the mean of the total score revealed a statistically significant difference (t=2.59, df=99, p=.011, r=.671).

One hundred participants were assessed pre- and post-assignment in measures of four psychosocial variables: self-esteem, depression, locus of control, and life skills. In pre- and post-test measures of those variables, statistically significant differences were indicated in self-esteem and life skills. Although pre- and post-measures of depression and locus of control did not reveal statistically significant differences, positive improvements were shown.

Educational Outcomes

With respect to attendance, 68% of the students entered the alternative placement program with over ten days of absences (per semester), which in high school is simple failure. Although the remaining 32% were not technically failing (missing over 20 days for the school year according to school board policy), they had missed vital teaching time and could be considered academically deficient. At each time period (exit, 90 days post-assignment, and 180 days post-assignment) the attendance data drops on students due to transfer to other school systems or programs that do not maintain the same records. Therefore, only a limited comparison can be made based on these numbers.

As with the attendance outcomes, the grade point averages indicated that students had been out of school for at least 10 days and were failing academically. Grade point averages were inspected at three time periods (exit, 90 days post-assignment, and 180 days post-assignment). Students entered the alternative educational program with failing grades (m=61.20 of 100). At the alternative educational program, students were able to establish passing grades (m=76.73), but were not able to sustain passing grades at 90 days post-assignment (m=62.81) or at 180 days post-assignment (m=64.29).

Thirty-four of the 100 students had missing educational data, either attendance and/or grade point averages, at various time intervals for different reasons (for example, transition to another school system, transition to juvenile detention, change of home placement, assignment to a group home). Missing data dilutes any comparisons that could be definitive; however, it does demonstrate that the students were failing when they entered, improved their grades while at the alternative educational program, and dropped below 70% at both the 90- and 180-day post-assignment intervals when they returned to traditional school. Students could improve their academic careers while at the alternative school, but could not sustain their gains in other settings.

School status was examined three times (exit, 90 days post-assignment, and 180 days post-assignment). No students were out of school until 180 days post-assignment. At that time, two students were in jail and not receiving educational services; therefore, they were classified as "dropped out of school."

Program Mission Outcomes

One aspect of program evaluation often ignored is the examination of whether the missions of the program were fulfilled. In this case, the program mission could be simplified to three goals: to increase school safety and security, to reduce school dropout, and to provide chronically disruptive students with appropriate social services, community involvement, individualized instruction, and transition to other programs needed to become successful students and productive citizens. The alternative school met the basic criteria for the mission of the program by removing dangerous, violent, and chronically disruptive students from traditional school as evidenced by their reasons for referral (identified above under Student Characteristics). Each was afforded due process and assigned to the alternative school. Once assigned to the program, each student was assessed and provided appropriate social services, community involvement, individualized instruction, and transition to other programs. Two important outcomes were that (1) all participants remained in school for at least 90 days post-assignment (at 180 days post-assignment) and (2) only two of the 100 participants dropped out of school.

Increase School Safety and Security

School safety and security are fundamental concerns for educators and parents today. Therefore, reducing violence and increasing safety in traditional schools by providing alternative programs in an educational setting where violent/disruptive students can be removed from regular schools and receive continuous educational services creates a safer school climate in the traditional school. By removing the violent offenders, the traditional school is a safer, more secure learning environment.

Reduce School Dropout

School retention and dropout prevention are important aspects of the educational system. School status was examined with participant outcome at 180 days post-assignment. Eighty-five students were still in school and 13 had graduated. Only two participants were considered "dropped out" one year after completing the program at the alternative school. This finding is particularly noteworthy because the two students were in jail; thus their educational careers were interrupted. Furthermore, this finding is important when compared to the school district's dropout rate of 44% and the national average of 25% (Aeby, et al., 1999; "Clarke County Dropouts," 1997).

Provide Services for Success

Chronically disruptive students should be provided with appropriate social services, community involvement, individualized instruction, and transition to other programs needed to become successful students and productive citizens. The third part of the mission statement reflects a shift in the educational philosophy of assisting students to become "ready to learn" before expecting them to perform. The alternative school emphasized providing services to enhance a student's educational potential. Subsequently, students participating in this study received clinical social work services during the assignment, the opportunities for individualized instruction, and the occasion for transitions to other programs.

Community involvement was defined as networking, collaborating, or linking community support, resources, and services external to the school system with students assigned to the alternative school. Specific examples of community involvement included coordination of probation visits; linking family, school, and agency communication to adequately assess and place students in appropriate academic settings; reports to court; networking with university-based counseling and mental health counseling; and coordinating the mock trial at the University of Georgia Law School. Community involvement was examined at the intake interview (pre-assignment) by self-report of the students and families regarding the agencies already involved in the students' lives. Students reported that the majority of them (65%) had no community involvement. Of the remaining 35%, 25% were adjudicated when they were assigned to the alternative school, that is, they had probation officers, while 10% were involved with other community agencies (Department of Family and Children Services [DFCS]=4%, Department of Children and Youth Services [DCYS]=3%, and Mental Health=3%). Community involvement at the alternative school was particularly important to maintain or reestablish contact with agencies (such as DFCS, DCYS, Mental Health, or the courts). In doing so, the client and his/her family were able to address related medical/health issues that affect educational performance. At the exit interview, community involvement was revisited by surveying the number of agency contacts and hours of referrals received while attending the program. Thirty-six students received at least one agency contact (m=1.14) during their assignments, while 63% received almost four hours of referrals (m=3.90) during their assignments. Community involvement continued for those who were already involved and increased for those who were not involved prior to their assignments. According to family exit interviews, this increased community involvement seemed to have a positive impact on families because they were not as isolated and hopeless in meeting the needs of their children. One grandmother summarizes many family members' feelings by saying, "I do not feel like I am all by myself any more…I know where to go to get help and it's out there if I can

make myself get it…I have a good kid, but I am old and tired…I get so tired I can't do it alone…Now I know I have folks to help me."

Individualized instruction was an important aspect of the CrossRoads program philosophy. Several characteristics may have supported students' individualized instruction: the structure of the alternative school, the emphasis on individual computer work, smaller class sizes, individual assessment and evaluation, and regular staffing of students. Specifically, assessment, evaluation, staffing, and teacher conference hours were reviewed at the exit interview to determine their contributions to the development of each student's individualized instruction plan and goals. All students received assessment hours (m=2.30 hours) and 99% received evaluation hours (m=2.30 hours) to create a program of study. In addition, 37% of the students received almost two hours of staffing (m=1.90) during their assignments. Twelve percent received more than one hour (m=1.42 hours) of teacher-family conferences designed to develop individualized instruction programs while attending the program. Each student received an individualized instruction plan, meeting the criteria for providing individualized instruction.

Based on the individualized assessments and evaluations, students were recommended for placement in programs which met their psychosocial and educational needs. Students were able to transition to other programs that fit their needs at a particular time. These programs included the Youth Detention Center, the psycho-educational program, night school, the GED program, and other school systems. Academic transition and adjustment were inspected using psychosocial and educational measures. The examination supported the belief that the assignment to the alternative school improved well-being and yielded statistically significant differences in pre- and post-test measures of self-esteem (t=2.3), life skills (t=2.59), attendance (t=5.14), and grades (t=8.10) at exit from the program.

Discussion

The educational outcomes found in this study support two previous findings in the literature. First, educational outcomes (attendance and grades) improved significantly in the alternative educational setting but declined when students returned to traditional school (Aeby, et al., 1999; Franklin, 1992; Raywid, 1994). Second, this study suggests that, while enrolled in the alternative school, students had higher levels of attendance than prior to and after leaving the program, and they earned passing grades that were significantly higher than at pre-test and follow-up (Reilly, 1986). These findings support claims that student achievement increases at alternative educational programs due to onsite social services, smaller classes, and counseling teachers (Aeby, et al., 1999; Franklin, 1992). Interestingly, students

improved attendance and grade point averages but could not sustain the improvements following exit from the program. Considering grade point averages, students improved their school performances, particularly grade point averages, but not enough to pass except at the alternative educational program.

Two points may be made. First, the findings in this study seem to suggest that the Family-School-Collaboration Model was a promising intervention for students assigned to an alternative educational program. It utilized interventions and strategies not found in traditional schools, such as intensive social services, smaller classes, lower teacher-student ratio, more individualized attention, and community resources and support. These seem to contribute to increased attendance and academic performance. While students tended to increase their academic functioning at an alternative educational program, once they returned to the traditional school with the same environment, problems, stressors, and demands, the students seemed to regress to the patterns of coping that resulted in assignment to the alternative educational program in the first place. Systems theory would support the assumption that if only one system changes (the student in this case), the individual would be unlikely to sustain changes once returned to an unchanged system. In other words, all systems must accommodate, support, and reinforce changes in order to sustain them (Fine & Carlson, 1992; Weiss & Edwards, 1992).

Many of the students assigned to the alternative educational program in this study entered the program having been frequently absent from school (attendance determined by number of days present, m= 71.04 days out of 90) and with failing grade point averages (m=61.20). Indeed, an alternative educator stated, in words which echo this program, "Our students have been pushed ahead at some point in their schooling because someone didn't want to stop and educate them. So from that point on, they are streamed [or tracked] so that no one seriously expects them to learn anymore" (as cited in Gagne, 1996, p. 310).

In program evaluation, statistical significance may not be practically or clinically meaningful. Royse and Thyer (1996) suggest two additional questions to determine meaningful change: (1) Are the clients better off because of the intervention? and (2) Were there real changes? The psychosocial outcomes found in the study showed both statistical and clinical significance in self-esteem and life skills. These outcomes support the predominant findings of the literature. Those findings may also support the indication that the clients were better off because of the interventions and there were real changes for two of the four psychosocial outcomes.

Two educational outcomes in this study (attendance and grade point averages) supported the previous literature that claimed students could show significant improvements in an alternative educational program, but could not sustain them beyond that setting. The third educational outcome, school status, showed that

even after one year (180 school days), all except two students were still in school somewhere. In this case, the two students were in jail rather than having voluntarily dropped out. Being in school gave students more supervision and the opportunity to learn; these students were better off than if they were out of school or in jail.

In a perfect world, Plato proposed that guardians rear children instead of families. To Plato, the state was more egalitarian than the family-centered system, which failed to protect some children from parental neglect. Of course, these safeguards must be weighed against the nurturing of a potentially more personal system, the family. Areen (1973) suggested that "Schools can perhaps be that intermediate 'community' but only if individual families can share with the state the responsibility of shaping them" (p. 190). Alternative schools with strong parental and community involvement offer that intermediate community with their personalized, nurturing educational settings. Alternative schools do not need to be dark warehouses or daycare centers to merely accommodate potentially unsafe, violent, or disruptive students. On the contrary, alternative schools may be centers of light and hope to change the educational process for those students who need time to learn or time to settle down or time to reorganize and regroup. They should be educational settings where students may restart their educational careers, a type of educational bankruptcy court where students and families bottom out of the educational system. At an alternative school, they could get reorganized to start again without being marginalized, stigmatized, or penalized. The achievement of this goal will require funding, community commitment to spend the money to educate all students (particularly troubled students), the dedication of teachers, parents, and social workers, and be driven by needs and based on effective program evaluation. Also, adding school social workers and reducing their caseloads to meet the changing, demanding, intensive, increasingly disruptive student population may improve traditional schools.

In conclusion, this study offers three important applications to school social work practice. First, the findings support and confirm what Franklin (1992) and other researchers have found with regard to multisystemic intervention (Aeby, et al., 1999; Gagne, 1996; Raywid, 1984; Reilly & Reilly, 1983; Weiss & Edwards, 1992). Specifically, alternative schools using a multisystemic assessment and intervention model such as the FSCC Model seem to create an environment in which students can survive and, perhaps, even thrive both psychosocially and educationally. Students experienced increased self-esteem and enhanced life skills as well as improved educational performance. This is especially noteworthy given the spectacularly unsuccessful school histories of students referred to the alternative school. Second, the findings confirm that these students continue to need additional assistance even after they have successfully completed their assignments at the alternative schools. The findings highlight the need for long-term care rather

than simple cure. Therefore, the alternative school becomes one of a series of integral interventions woven together rather than a single intervention. Third, the findings support and confirm the alternative school as a viable intervention for dropout prevention. Alternative schools hold the possibility of being complete centers of learning, expert in skills, bold in innovations, flexible in programming, excellent in staffing, compassionate in timing, humane in disciplining, courageous in tenacity, and dedicated to being part of the overall solution. Only in this way can alternative schools truly contribute to the development of responsible, productive, and educated citizens.

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Table 1. *The Family-School-Community Collaboration Model of Assessment and Intervention Development* (Carpenter-Aeby, 1999)
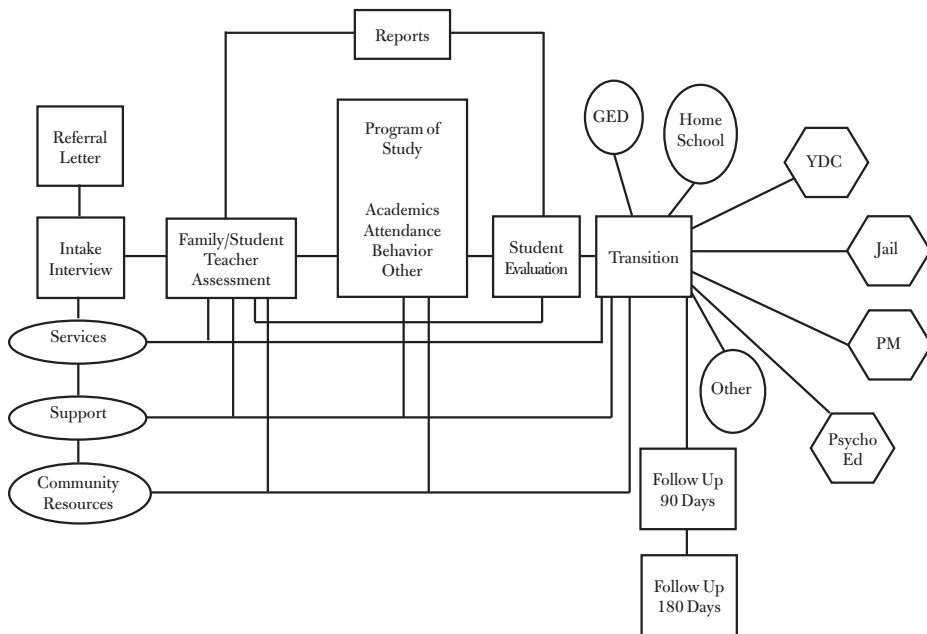
Table 2. Psychosocial and Academic Variables (N=100)

Variable	M	SD	t	p	r
Psychosocial					
Self-Esteem					
Pretests	7.77	2.09			
			2.30	.024	.430
Posttests	8.25	1.77			
Life Skills					
Pretests	194.40	24.42			
			2.59	.011	.671
Posttests	199.46	23.66			
Educational					
GPA at Exit					
Pretests	61.20	20.77			
			8.10	.000	.459
Posttests	76.73	12.51			
Attendance at Exit					
Pretests	71.04	12.72			
			5.14	.000	.322
Posttests	78.19	10.13			