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Defining alternative education: a look at one Iowa school

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Defining alternative education: A look at one Iowa school

by

Karen Junko

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
MASTER OF SCIENCE

Major: Education (Special Education)

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This is to certify that the master's thesis of

Karen Lynn Junko

Has met the thesis requirements of Iowa State University
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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Iowa has consistently been considered a leader in education throughout the United States. Despite this high praise, Iowa was facing an alarming rate of dropouts in the 1980s (Morley, 1991). To combat this increase of dropouts, alternative methods of education began to be studied. Educators realized that not all students learn the same way. To meet these differences in learning, alternative education has become a growing phenomenon. Over the past thirty years, alternative education has been successfully provided through multiple means, including magnet schools, charter schools, and schools-within-schools (IAAE website, n.d.b). For the purpose of this study, alternative education refers to those students who are at-risk of dropping out of traditional public schools and need an alternative school environment to continue their education. Alternative education, for this study, does not include parochial and settlement schools, nor those who serve students who are talented and gifted or in need of special education. In the review of literature, there was no mention of schools for the talented and gifted, parochial schools, or settlement schools in the definitions of alternative schools.

The practice of alternative education is not new. There is documentation of some form of alternative education being used since our nation’s beginnings (Morley, 1991). However, it was not until the 1960s and 1970s that the development of alternative schools and programs in the United States began in earnest as a response to Civil Rights issues, the emphasis on values in education, and individualization. In the 1960s, people known as “Romantics” believed students were being schooled, not educated, and that public schools served to confirm social and class distinctions by alienating the poor and unsuccessful (Loflin, 2000). Through the Civil Rights Movement, many non-black citizens realized racial, economic, class, and cultural bias continued in public
schools, leading some citizens to declare the right to set up alternative schools and/or educational methods (Loflin, 2000).

During the 1980s, alternative schools and programs gained momentum and became firmly established in public schools. During this decade, alternative schools and programs were identified as potential solutions to the increasing concerns over dropout rates and at-risk children and youth (Morley, 1991). By 1988, some four million, or nearly 7% of the nation's students were in alternative schools or programs (Loflin, 2000).

The 1990s brought an interest in alternative education that focused on students who were chronically disruptive, suspended, or needed a “change in attitude" (Loflin, 2000). More difficult and disruptive students were being permanently expelled from traditional schools and alternative schools became “dumping grounds" for these problem students (Aron & Zweig, 2003). To support this point, in 1997 the states of Kentucky and Pennsylvania defined the need for alternative schools or programs in terms of discipline and behavior instead of learning (Loflin, 2000).

This change raises the question of what is meant by alternative education and its purpose. For the purpose of this paper, alternative education is a perspective that is based on a belief that there are many ways to become educated, as well as many types of environments and structures within which this education may occur (Morley, 1991). Essentially, alternative education is about meeting the needs of students and recognizing that not all students learn the same way (IAAE, n.d.b). The ultimate purpose of alternative education is to assist individuals in becoming as productive as possible upon entering the community as independent contributors (Morley, 1991).
To this end, many alternative programs and schools have been developed. Unfortunately, there is no precise accounting of alternative schools or programs in the United States, but estimates suggest there are over 20,000 alternative schools and programs in operation nationally (Aron & Zweig, 2003). Part of the difficulty in developing reliable estimates has to do with a lack of common definitions and standards concerning alternative education.

In Iowa, there are ninety-eight alternative schools in seventy-five counties across 294 school districts (Aron & Zweig, 2003). These schools and programs serve over 10,000 students in the state of Iowa. It is obvious that alternative schools and programs have become an important part of the Iowa educational system. Iowans are concerned about how much money should be spent on education and how that money is spent, which raises important questions about alternative education.

The Iowa Association of Alternative Education (IAAE), whose purpose is to focus upon meeting the needs of students, teachers, and administrators through a professional organization dedicated to the improvement of alternative education, programs, and services for students at-risk, developed a system called “A Framework for Learning Alternative Environments in Iowa.” (IAAE, n.d.c). Within this framework, IAAE educators developed quality indicators that list what an alternative education program should look like. At this time, only one Iowa School district has used this Framework to design an alternative school. The proposed study focuses on the extent to which the participants in this school, teachers, students, and the director, perceive that the quality indicators are present and manifested in four specific components (philosophy, student, staff, and curriculum and instruction). This ‘study’ will be a case study of this alternative school. McMillan and Schumacher (2001) state a case study examines a “bounded system” by
employing multiple sources of data found within the setting. For this case study, the bounded system will be Crusade High Alternative School (CHAS) in Morning Sun, IA. This study is exploratory in nature and will take a preliminary look at how four components and their quality indicators manifest themselves at CHAS.
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Because alternative schools are a relatively new approach to addressing the needs of at-risk youth, a number of questions are raised, including how alternative schools affect the educational system, the scope of their reach, and how effective they are in assisting youth who are at-risk (Loflin, 2000). While these questions have not been fully answered in the literature, some of the benefits of alternative schools have been addressed.

Iowa Code, 280.19A, states school districts are required to provide dropouts with alternative programming to assist in completing a high school education (Aron & Zweig, 2003). As a result of this statute, the number of alternative schools and programs has risen from 27 programs in 1984 to 103 programs in 2004 (IAAE, n.d.b). According to Morley (2003), the number of high school dropouts decreased over a ten-year period, up to the year 2000. However, there were slight increases in 2000 and 2001 during which there was decreased support for alternative schools. It appears that alternative schools are helping to keep students in school, complete a high school education, and prepare for entry into work and/or a post secondary educational environment (Morley, 2003). The decline of dropouts in high schools is verified by research-based facts about Iowa’s Alternative Schools and Programs, which stated that between 1984-2004, Iowa experienced a continued decline in high school dropouts, from 5,100 to 3,700 annually (IAAE, n.d.b). This data also shows these graduates enter jobs in communities in all occupation career cluster areas, and these students volunteer in communities to provide needed services by helping the homeless and elderly, rebuilding parks, improving roads, and assisting children to learn.

According to the National Center on Education and the Economy, the United States has no real national system of alternative education that offers out-of-
school youth a second chance (Aron & Zweig, 2003). Instead, states have their own programs that serve only a tiny percentage of this population. There are variations among the states over the number of youth becoming disconnected, or dropping out, from traditional schools. In 1999, there were 1.3 million teens, or 8%, of youth ages 16-19 years who were not attending school and not working, with Iowa, Minnesota, and Nebraska having the lowest numbers of youth not in school and not working. Arkansas and Mississippi had the highest numbers of these youths (Aron & Zweig, 2003). In 2000, Iowa, North Dakota, and Wisconsin had the lowest dropout rates (2.5, 2.7, 2.6, respectively) and Louisiana had the highest dropout rate at 9.2%. While the state of Iowa has some favorable statistics compared to other states, these statistics show there is still a problem with dropouts and/or at-risk youth in Iowa.

According to the Iowa Association of Alternative Education (IAAE), many alternative schools have shown they have the ability to change students in many positive ways where other public school environments failed to meet the specific needs of the students (IAAE, n.d.b). These specific needs include gearing the learning criterion towards the speed and style of the students’ learning, having the teachers do more listening then lecturing, and using smaller class sizes that provide personalized attention. However, according to Morley (1991), the most powerful reason why alternative programs are successful for dropouts, and/or potential dropouts, is that the programs emphasize the desire of the pupil rather than the will of the instructor as the motivational element of learning. The idea that children learn in different ways so teachers should/could teach with different methods started breaking the “one size fits all” mold of the conventional system (Loflin, 2000).
In Iowa, education is very important to our identity and what we stand for when compared to the rest of the nation. Iowans want to maintain high standards, but with an economy that is making educational funds scarce, people are scrutinizing how the funds for education are being spent. Traditional high schools do not work for all students. Should what little money Iowa has to spend on education be spent restructuring our current high schools or establishing more alternative programs?

This dilemma is being addressed around the United States. In May 2003, the Urban Institute held a conference in Washington D.C. and focused on this fundamental question: Should the nation focus on expanding and encouraging the development of high-quality alternative education for the increasing numbers of disconnected youth rather than “fixing” the mainstream educational system so fewer youth become disconnected in the first place (Aron & Zweig, 2003). Those in favor of expanding alternative education see it as a way for youth to stay connected to education because their needs are met, and they are being successful. Those people wanting to “fix” the traditional educational system say the alternative education system prevents youth from (re)connecting to mainstream systems and following more typical developmental pathways.

Right now, almost one-third of Iowa’s alternative schools are partially supported by provisions under Iowa Chapter 257.38-41, which limits schools to only five percent of their youth enrollment being identified at risk as potential dropouts and dropouts (Morley, 2003). Schools are required to provide support services for all at-risk students. Unfortunately, the five percent provision does not generate enough support for all schools to provide alternative schools and programs for all at-risk students. In fact, some school districts report over 40% of their students are at-risk of school failure and are potential dropouts. Furthermore,
the allowable growth under Chapter 257.38-41, of the Iowa Code, reports that one-third of the dropouts are not currently being served (Morley, 2003).

Nationally, there is no comprehensive inventory of alternative schools and no complete count of the number and types of youth attending them. In an attempt to gather statistics, a District Survey of Alternative Schools and Programs, supported by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), included a nationally representative sample of 1,534 public school districts (Aron & Zweig, 2003). An important though limited source of data, the survey found that 39% of public school districts had at least one alternative school program for at-risk students in grades 1-12, representing 10,900 programs in the 2000-01 school year (Aron & Zweig, 2003). The survey results also indicated that there are not enough alternative school and program spaces for the number of youth who require them.

Financially, investing in alternative education does benefit the state of Iowa compared to other long-term potential costs resulting from youth dropping out of school. In a 1990 survey, Dr. James Veale (Morley, 1991), illustrated what dropping out of school costs the youth and the community over a wide range of areas.

Loss of personal income: Dropouts will have a reduction of at least one-third of potential income, or a loss of between $170,000-$340,000 over a lifetime.

Loss in state revenue: Since the student will make less income, he/she will pay fewer taxes to the state.

Increase of welfare burden equals an increase in unemployment rates: Unemployment rate of dropouts is about two times that of graduates.

Increase risk of incarceration: The incarceration rate of dropouts is three to nine times greater than graduates. Also, the cost of providing for
incarcerated dropouts is at least three times greater than if the individual had been educated for one year.

Aron and Zweig (2003) reported that high school dropouts are 72% more likely to be unemployed and earn 27% less than those who graduate from high school.

According to Morley (1991), there are four common structural characteristics that alternative schools/programs should incorporate in order to be effective. The first of these characteristics is “smallness”. “Smallness” is better in that it establishes a sense of family and belonging. Second, is concern for the whole student. Alternative schools should aim to be emotionally supportive of students. Personal attention, such as the small class size, teachers serving as counselors and getting involved in the problems of the students, and establishing a family environment are the keys to this success. The third characteristic is a supportive environment. Students need to have space of their own. The environment should be like home rather than a conventional school. The last characteristic is a sense of community. Students and staff work together, or collaborate, to make the school work.

Loflin (2000) also cites characteristics of alternative schools and programs that validate the characteristics mentioned by Morley, including smallness and students and staff working together to make decisions. However, Loflin also includes other characteristics, such as students voluntarily attend alternative schools and the curriculum is designed to fit the needs and interests of the students. The reality of alternative education programs across the country is these programs range from successful, high quality programs committed to meeting students’ needs to “dumping grounds” for “problem youth” whom people want removed from traditional schools and where little learning occurs (Aron & Zweig, 2003).
The Iowa Association of Alternative Education established quality indicators that are based on the Framework for Learning Alternative Environments in Iowa. The framework identifies the essential components necessary for establishing and maintaining quality alternative learning environments and then assists with the development and improvement of these environments (IAAE, n.d.a). The indicators are grouped into twelve components: Philosophy, Administration, Student, Parents/Guardians, Staff, Curriculum and Instruction, Vocational/Technical/Career, Assessment, Personal/Social/Life Skills, Community and Social Services, Facilities, and Signals. There are specific statements for each area that reflect what the alternative environment should practice.

The framework was established through a process of interviews and discussions among alternative educators over a two-and-a-half year period. The results of the discussions were a list of quality indicators. The educators involved in the discussion established the framework/indicators as a program to improve alternative education programs (R.E. Morley, personal communication, July 12, 2004).

At this time, there has been no study to establish reliability and validity of the framework or indicators. According to Morley (personal communication, July 12, 2004), the educators involved in the discussion went outside of Iowa and talked to professionals in alternative education in different states, including Wayne Jennings in Minnesota and Don Glines in California. The educators then used these professionals' comments as a cross-check and/or reference for the framework. Morley also stated that there are no statistics, but if on a basis of consensus, he believes there would be a 90-95% agreement of the list in Iowa, however the agreement rate nationwide is not known.
CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

Alternative education is not a new concept. However, what is meant by alternative education is broad and how alternative education benefits students is rather unclear. The focus of this research is to examine a school program that has been built around the quality indicators developed by the Iowa Association of Alternative Education (IAAE) and to examine whether the people involved in the school program see evidence of these indicators within their school.

For the purpose of this study, the focus was on four of the quality indicators: philosophy, curriculum and instruction, staff, and students. These four indicators were chosen because the researcher felt she would be more successful in finding potential evidence of the indicators. Interviews were conducted with members of the staff and students. Also, these four areas are the backbone of the program. The other indicators are a reflection of these four areas.

The school program used for this research was Crusade High Alternative School. Crusade High Alternative School is part of the Morning Sun Community School District. Crusade High Alternative School was chosen as the subject of this case study because it is the only alternative school that based its program on the IAAE framework and indicators (R.E. Morley, personal communication, July 12, 2004). During the past school year, this alternative school served 71 students in grades 9-12 (Crusade High Alternative School, n.d.a.). The superintendent of the school district was contacted. The researcher was directed by the superintendent to ask the director of Crusade High School for permission to use the school in the study. Permission to use Crusade High Alternative School was given by the director, Deb Vierling, on June 22, 2004 via a telephone conversation. A letter of intent was sent to Ms. Vierling in October, 2004.
The school currently serves 43 students (grades 9-12) and has 3 teachers. These teachers hold secondary licensure and have experience in math, English, science, and social studies. At this time, students with special needs are being served in the school, including students with behavioral disorders and attention deficient hyperactivity disorders. In addition to the four academic areas, students must also earn credits in career education and parenting classes.

Once the Human Subjects Committee at Iowa State University approved the study, arrangements were made with Ms. Vierling, the director, concerning potential participants. In addition to Ms. Vierling, the other two teachers at Crusade High were invited to participate and they both accepted. After speaking with the teachers about the study, a letter of intent was sent to each person explaining the study and its purposes and requesting her participation (See Appendix A) The letter also included a consent form that needed to be signed and returned (See Appendix A).

Upon receipt of the signed consent forms, the teachers were each sent a survey (See Appendix B) at the end of November, 2004. The survey was composed of three parts. The first part consisted of basic demographics. The second part consisted of the four quality indicators from the Framework for Learning Alternatives that were the focus of the study: philosophy, student, staff, and curriculum and instruction. The participants were asked to indicate by marking “yes/no” whether, in their opinion, the behaviors within each area are practiced on a regular basis, and if so, what evidence supported that opinion. Participants were asked to return the survey in a timely manner and all surveys were returned by the middle of December, 2004. The results of the survey were then used to help guide the teacher interviews.
The director selected the students chosen for the study, since she was better acquainted with the potential student participants. During the first on-site visit to CHAS, letters of intent (See Appendix A) along with self-addressed, pre-stamped envelopes were left with the director to give students selected for the study. Before the second on-site visit to CHAS, the researcher received three signed letters. Since the students were under the age of eighteen, their parents/guardians also signed the letter of intent. During the second on-site visit, three more students were selected for the study. These three students were all over the age of eighteen; therefore, only their signature was required on the letter of intent.

Over the winter break, the surveys were reviewed and the researcher compiled interview questions (See Appendix C). When classes resumed in January, the researcher contacted the director and set up a time to make the first on-site visit to Crusade High Alternative School. The first visit was on January 28, 2005. During this visit, the director, who also teaches, and the two teachers were interviewed. Each interview was held individually and held in the director's office. Each interview lasted between 30-45 minutes. During this initial visit, observations were conducted in the classroom focusing on the structure and the interactions between the students and teachers, between the students themselves, and the teachers themselves. At this time, numerous written documents were collected. These documents included the handbook students receive upon entering Crusade High School, a list of courses offered at CHAS, and a list of community resources available to students. The other documents collected included examples of status reports sent home to the parents and then returned to CHAS with comments from the parents, student comments from a demographic survey on whether the students liked CHAS, application for free and reduced price school
meals, the classroom rules/guidelines, the policy for internet and computer use at CHAS, and comments from other professionals who attended and listened to a presentation about CHAS.

At the end of the first on-site visit, a time was arranged with the director for a second on-site visit. At this time, the researcher would give the same survey to the student participants and interview them. The second visit to Crusade High School was on February 25, 2005. Once the students were chosen and had agreed to the study, the survey was read to the students and their answers were recorded. The survey was read to the students in case they had questions or did not understand the wording of the indicators. Upon completing the survey, the students were given a set of five typed questions (See Appendix C). All student participants answered the questions.

During the second visit, an example of a student credit tracking sheet was obtained. This sheet listed the credits the student has earned and those credits the student needs to earn for graduation.

Once all the data had been collected, the results were examined. The demographics of the participants in the study were complied. The researcher then went through each indicator, looked at the evidence presented by the teachers and students, the researcher's observations, cross checked and matched them each other. Next, this researcher went through the collected documents and matched them with the indicators. Lastly, the responses on the student surveys and their questions were reviewed. Triangulation is often used to bring meaning to different kinds of evidence. It is the practice of researchers to use two or more research strategies in a study. Because different data collection strategies have different strengths and weaknesses, research designs that include multiple research strategies tend to be the strongest ones (Esterberg, 2002). Consequently, a
variety of strategies were used to determine if there was any corroboration between the surveys, the interviews, the observation, and the document review.
CHAPTER 4. RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to examine an alternative education program that is based upon the framework set forth by the Iowa Association of Alternative Education (IAAE). Specifically, do the staff and students of Crusade High Alternative School (CHAS) perceive the quality indicators in the components of philosophy, curriculum and instruction staff, and students are present and manifested in their school. To aid in determining this question, data was collected from the staff, students, the researcher’s observations, and printed documents. The results from the data collection will be presented and triangulation noted.

Demographics

Demographic information is given for the setting, which is Crusade High School. These demographics include a brief history of the school, the physical plant, and requirements for attendance and graduation. In addition, demographics are given for the staff members and the students involved in the study.

Setting

Superintendents from Mediapolis, Morning Sun, Wapello, and Winfield-Mt. Union school districts and representatives from Southeastern Community College (SCC) met to discuss students who were not succeeding, or even attending classes, in their school districts (Bobek, 2005). This group of people decided there was a need for an alternative high school to serve these students. Morning Sun (population 836) was chosen as the site for the alternative high school because the town had no high school and it was centrally located between the four districts. Crusade Alternative High School (CHAS) opened in 1996. During the 2004-2005 school year, CHAS piloted the quality indicators set forth in the framework mentioned above. The Iowa Department of Education visited the school in the spring of 2003 and suggested, since CHAS served four different school districts, it
would be best if CHAS did its own comprehensive school improvement plan (CSIP).

According to the Iowa Department of Education (IDE, 2005), CHAS served 43 students during the 2004-2005 school year in grades nine through twelve. The Basic Educational Data Survey (BEDS) shows that during this past school year, there were no students in grade nine, two in grade ten, twelve in grade eleven, and twenty-nine students in grade twelve. According to this same survey, during the 2004-2005 school year, 97.67% of the students were of Caucasian descent and 2.33% of the students were Hispanic. Of the 43 students enrolled at CHAS this past year, 22 were male students (51% of the student population) and 21 were female (49% of the student population). Of the total student population, all of the males were Caucasian, twenty (46.51%) of the females were Caucasian, and one (2.33%) female was Hispanic. This demographic information was gathered so the researchers had a clearer picture of the students served at CHAS.

Crusade High Alternative School is located about one block off of Main Street in Morning Sun, Iowa. Before becoming the site for the school, the storefront building was home to many businesses, including an antique shop and a tanning salon. A group of volunteers renovated the building and transformed it into a modern day one-room school (Bobek, 2005). A bathroom and a single office are the only side rooms in the facility. There are six tables with four chairs at each table at which the students work. One corner of the room contains a couch and a loveseat where the students can sit during break time. One side of the room contains two teachers’ desks and the computer area, where there are four computers for student use. Along the opposite wall there is a small kitchen consisting of a sink, microwave oven, stove, and refrigerator. The students use this kitchen to prepare meals since there is no other food service.
To qualify for enrollment in CHAS, students have to meet certain conditions. Students have to have been dropped from their home high school for at least 45 days or they have to have been referred from their home high school by the administration or counseling office. If students are one or more semesters behind on credit from their home school, they may refer themselves for consideration for enrollment in the program. Also, students must be between the ages of 15 and 20. If these criteria are met, students then fill out an application. Preference is given to students residing in the four districts, Mediapolis, Wapello, Morning Sun, and Winfield-Mt. Union. Lastly, five hours of volunteer community service is required for entrance. The hours must be completed within nine weeks of entrance.

The school day begins at 8:00 a.m. and ends at 4:00 p.m. Students must earn 35 credits to graduate. Students must complete a total of 22 credits in English, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, and Physical Education/Health/Careers. The remaining 13 credits are elective credits and include additional courses in the aforementioned disciplines, in addition to courses in Arts and Crafts, Keyboarding, Parenting, Decisions of Health, and Work Experience.

Students are expected to plan a daily class schedule around their home and work responsibilities. Once a student’s schedule has been determined, that student is expected to attend classes each day. A minimum of 80% attendance is required within the student’s established goals.

Staff

All three staff members of CHAS participated in the study. The staff members are all Caucasian females. Two teachers, one full-time, one part-time, and the director of CHAS staff the facility. The director also teaches in the program. The years of experience for the teachers ranged from 7 to 33 years, and all teachers hold BA degrees; one teacher has a Master’s Degree. Because the work
the students do is individualized, very few lessons are presented to a group of students. Therefore, the teachers and the director have to be somewhat knowledgeable about all subject areas. While the two teachers and the director pitch in and help where needed, they each have their strengths. Teacher 1 focuses more on the health, parenting, career, and science classes. Teacher 2 focuses on English, language arts, and home economic classes, like cooking and sewing. Director/Teacher 3 has a music background and teaches math and social studies.

**Students**

Six students participated in this study. The students consisted of three males and three females. One student was a sophomore, two were juniors, and three were seniors. Three of the students were 18 years of age. The number of semesters the students had been at CHAS ranged from one semester to six semesters.

**Data Collection Instruments**

Data were collected in four different ways: survey, interviews, observation, and review of written documents. Each one of these ways will be discussed briefly.

**Survey**

The researcher designed both the staff and student surveys. CHAS is the only alternative education program that has used the IAAE framework and no research has been conducted on the framework. As a result, it was decided that the two surveys would address only four components and their respective quality indicators. The four components were philosophy, curriculum and instruction, staff, and students. It was the researcher’s belief these four components were the backbone of the program. In addition, the researcher felt she would be more successful in finding potential evidence of these components. It should be noted the other components are a reflection of the four used in this study.
The staff members' survey consisted of a section that asked for demographic information and sections covering the four components: philosophy, curriculum and instruction, staff, and students. The student survey consisted of a demographic section and sections covering three of the components: philosophy, curriculum and instruction, and students. It was felt by the researcher that the students would not be aware of many of the quality indicators related to the staff component, so it was not included in their survey. The surveys can be found in Appendix B.

Each staff member received a copy of the survey through the mail. Staff members filled in the demographic information and identified which quality indicators were present at CHAS and supplied evidence showing that presence. Staff members mailed the completed surveys back to the researcher by the end of December, 2004. All staff members returned their completed survey.

Student participants completed the survey in February of 2005. The survey was read to the students to ensure understanding of the language used in the survey. While students were able to identify the quality indicators, none of them supplied evidence of their presence.

**Interviews**

Each staff member was interviewed, individually, in January of 2005. All interviews were held privately in the director's office. Through the interviews, commonalities were noted in the teachers' answers and comments from the surveys in respect to evidence of the quality indicators. Interview questions can be found in Appendix C. Student participants were asked to respond to five questions (see Appendix C). Commonalities emerged among the students' responses and reinforced data from the survey.
Observation

The researcher made two on-site visits for one day in January and one day in February of 2005. During each of these on-site visits, the researcher took time to observe the staff and students, including interactions between the two groups. Also observed by the researcher were daily classroom activities and the arrangement of the classroom.

Documents

Eleven documents were collected from CHAS. Six of the documents were information students receive upon entering CHAS. Those documents included the CHAS handbook, which was often cited as a source of triangulation for this study. The handbook included the mission statement, entrance requirements, graduation requirements, credit for work experience, attendance policy, and student responsibilities and expected behavior. Besides the handbook, students received information on the courses offered at CHAS, both required and elective; community resources available to the students, such as shelter, counseling, employment, day care, medical assistance, legal services, and social services; an application for free or reduced price meals; a form on what respect means at CHAS and what students need to do to show respect; and the internet and computer use policy at CHAS.

Five additional documents were collected to help with triangulation. Those included a student goal sheet, outlining the classes a student has taken and needs to take; status reports sent home to the parents, presenting positive comments given by the staff about the students and school attendance; parental comments reported on the status reports; student comments from a demographic survey, given by the staff and asking students' opinions about CHAS; and
comments made from educators after they had attended a presentation given by CHAS staff members. Further explanation is given later in this chapter about these documents.

The credit chart is a document that was observed by the researcher. However, since the researcher did not obtain a hard copy, the credit chart is not included in the list of documents. The credit chart is a large poster board that is located near the entry of the building. The credit chart lists all of the enrolled students, the number of credits each student has earned, and the courses in which those credits were earned. The credit chart is mentioned often as a source of observation by the researcher.

Components And Indicators

The remainder of this chapter will discuss each component’s indicators and whether they were ‘visible’ in CHAS. Each subsection will be formatted in the same way. First, the quality indicators related to the component will be listed. Next, data gathered on each quality indicator will be presented. Again, the data was collected through surveys of staff and students, interviews, researcher observations, and supporting documents. Data instruments not listed within a quality indicator signifies that data was not visible for that particular quality indicator and therefore not mentioned in the results. At the end of each subsection, the researcher will indicate whether she feels the data were triangulated. The data were considered triangulated only if all participants who responded to that component agreed the indicator was visible, and the researcher’s observation and at least one document corroborated the evidence. Because the students did not offer evidence on their survey and the researcher formally observed on only one occasion the researcher felt it was necessary to hold the triangulation to this higher standard.
Philosophy

Six quality indicators address the philosophy of the program. Students are central to the philosophy component. This fact can be seen by the indicators that focus on their success. The philosophy quality indicators are:

1. Staff advocates the philosophy that all students can learn; the philosophy statements are documented, published, and clearly visible to and embraced by staff, students, and parents.

2. Student success is central to all management of learning.

3. Philosophy is consistent with district goals and standards.

4. The student is the focus of concern and valued equally or greater than content standards and academic endeavors.

5. The whole student (person, social, emotional, intellectual, work skills, safety, and security) is of major concern.

6. Individuality of learning for each student is recognized and embraced.

Table 1 summarizes the results of the surveys, the researcher’s observation, and the document review.

The results of both the staff and student surveys indicated that the philosophy of the program, that being all students can learn, was documented and shared with everyone. The staff’s evidence included the student handbook and success stories printed in the local newspapers. They also felt that the fact each student had to achieve at least 80% competency on each assignment also was evidence of this philosophy. The students supported this view during their interview. They felt they received the attention they need and could ask any question without being yelled at for doing something wrong. The students felt comfortable and welcomed at CHAS.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Teachers (N=3)</th>
<th>Students (N=6)</th>
<th>Observation (N=1)</th>
<th>Documents (N=11)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>Evidence</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>Evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*1. Staff advocates philosophy</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Handbook 80% competency</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>None presented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*2. Student success</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>One-on-one instruction</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>None presented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. District goals and standards</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Approved by districts</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>None presented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Student focus</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Needs met Community resources</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>None presented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*5. Whole student is of concern</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Access to services Needs met</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>None presented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*6. Individuality of learning</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Work at own pace Curriculum adapted</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>None presented</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Considered triangulated
The researcher also found that this indicator was in evidence during her visits. She observed that the staff members treated each student with respect. In addition, the staff members encouraged the students throughout the day. Finally, the mission statement of the school was printed in the handbook. The mission statement included the phrase “CHAS recognizes that with love, mutual respect, and encouragement, each learner has an equal opportunity to become a successful student, pursue lifelong learning and become a respectable citizen. CHAS accepts this responsibility, to meet the educational and emotional needs of every student and to provide them with an individualized curriculum, which focuses on their goals and abilities” (Crusade High School handbook, p.1).

Evidence of the second quality indicator (student success is central) also was supported by both staff and students. Staff members’ evidence included the 80% competency ‘rule’ explained above, and the use of the Test of Adult Basic Education Skills (TABE) scores to design curriculum and instruction. The staff also cited the one-on-one instruction that was used throughout the day; very seldom, if ever, were students taught in groups. This fact was corroborated by the researcher’s observations. In addition, a credit chart was posted, listing the credits earned by each student, so everyone knew where the student was in the program. Finally, the student handbook states that students must show between 80 and 100% competency on each assignment before they can move on to the next assignment. This way, staff know the students understand the material and do not just pass them along in the curriculum.

While all of the staff members indicated that the third indicator, the philosophy was consistent with the district’s goals and standards, was in evidence, only half of the students concurred with this statement. The other three students were unsure whether this indicator was in evidence. The staff pointed to
the fact that all of the school districts involved with CHAS had approved the curriculum as evidence. In addition, they also indicated that all four districts have some type of wording in their mission statements related to all students having the ability to learn. The researcher found a statement in the student handbook that stated there is a partnership between the four districts, however she did not talk to anyone from these districts.

All of the staff members felt the student was the focus of concern and he/she was valued more than the content standards and academic endeavors. Three of the students agreed with this assessment, while two were unsure. The remaining student did not answer the question. The evidence presented by the staff included the donations given to the school by the community (discussed below), in addition to the community services available to the student. During the staff interviews, one staff member commented that she approached academics like it was *them* (the teacher and student) against the subject, “I act like it’s me and them against the subject, against the book and we’re going to tackle it and we’re going to get it done.” This staff member lets students know that academics are important, but there are a lot more important things in their lives. Another staff member commented that students needed to be told they were not stupid; they just learned something incorrectly, but together they could fix it. The researcher observed a staff member taking a student to an appointment in the community. She also noted that students prepared their own food in the kitchen, much of it being donated by the community. Students are provided with a list of available services in the community to meet their needs.

The fifth indicator, the whole student is of concern, was agreed upon as being visible by staff and student participants. Evidence given by staff members included the students having access to mental/physical health services, having a
on-site homeless liaison, and taking students to appointments. All staff members commented that the school gets donations from churches and businesses, and staff members give presentations in the hope that people will donate. The staff then takes the donations and uses them to meet the needs of the students, such as paying for medical expenses or glasses, in addition to buying groceries for school lunches.

Staff interviews identified further evidence of this indicator. The director commented that she is in the process of opening a homeless shelter for CHAS students so they can have a stable home environment and still be able to go to school. Another teacher talked about the implementation of Career Education Day in August, 2005. The purpose was for the students to gain knowledge about the types of jobs available and what was required for the students to be successful in those jobs. This staff member realized the need to show these students they were valued, know they mattered, and had a right to be at CHAS.

The researcher noted the same observations as seen in quality indicator number four, namely staff returning from taking a student to an appointment and students preparing their lunches with food bought from local community contributions. The student handbook addresses the needs of the students through work skills, safety, and security and the list of community resources offers resources for the emotional, personal, and safety aspects of their lives.

The final quality indicator, individuality of learning, was noted as being visible in the classroom by staff and students. Evidence of practice presented by staff included students being able to work at their own pace, the curriculum adapted to meet the needs of the students, and having the students aware of their individual goals and the credit they earn. These statements were corroborated through the interviews with staff. Students were given the Test of Adult Basic
Education Skills upon entrance to CHAS. The TABES is an evaluation of math and reading skills to ascertain the grade level, which then allows the staff to place each student in the appropriate materials. The results also have allowed the staff to purchase English and grammar textbooks appropriate to student needs. Staff members also commented that classes are individualized for each student.

The researcher observed students working individually on their assignments. Also observed by the researcher was the credit chart posted in the classroom. The credit chart has each student's name and the number of credits they have earned while at CHAS. A student credit sheet was obtained. The credit sheet outlines how many credits a student needs each month to graduate, what credits the student has earned, and what credits the student still needs to earn. The student handbook also discusses how credit is earned.

Of the six quality indicators, four indicators were corroborated as being visible by all the instruments. These four indicators were staff advocating the philosophy, student success, the whole student being of concern, and individuality of learning (numbers 1, 2, 5, and 6). From the survey, staff provided evidence of practice, the students' interview lent credence to the evidence, the researcher was able to observe these indicators, and the documents supported the other data instruments.

The other two quality indicators, district goals and standards and student focus (numbers 3 and 4), were not included with the above indicators because at least one data instrument did not provide corroboration the indicator was present. On each indicator, only three students noted they saw visibility in the classroom of the indicator and with quality indicator number 3, the researcher did not observe any evidence or support.

Curriculum and Instruction
Ten quality indicators address the curriculum and instruction used in the program. The indicators center around delivery of instruction, student concerns, and resources. The indicators are as follows:

1. The needs of students (personal, social, emotional, behavioral, career development, and essential learnings, are addressed in the curriculum.
2. Individualized delivery systems, as well as group learnings, are provided to accommodate different learning abilities.
3. Students are involved identifying personalized learning paths inside and outside the learning environment.
4. Short-range goals are implemented to establish success.
5. Abstract thinking is cultivated to support learning and application of learning principles.
6. Technology is part of the curriculum delivery process.
7. Sufficient material resources are available to allow accomplishment of the standards of learning.
8. Students feel challenged by the curriculum.
9. Students and parents feel the curriculum prepares them for life, careers, and future training in higher levels of education.
10. Business and industry are involved in the development, support, and delivery of curriculum.

Table 2 summarizes the results of the surveys, the researcher observations, and the document review.

Results from the surveys indicate that staff and students agreed the needs of students are addressed in the curriculum. Evidence of practice cited by staff
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Teachers (N=3)</th>
<th>Students (N=6)</th>
<th>Observation (N=1)</th>
<th>Documents (N=11)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>*1. Needs of students addressed in the curriculum</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*2. Individualized delivery systems</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*3. Student involved in identifying personalized learning paths</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*4. Short-range goals essential to success</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*5. Abstract thinking of learning principles</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*6. Technology</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*7. Sufficient resources</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*8. Students challenged by curriculum</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*9. Curriculum prepares for life</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Business and industry involvement</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Considered triangulated
included classes offered in life skills, parenting, career education, and character education. Service learning projects were also mentioned. During the staff interviews, a staff member mentioned the implementation of Career Education Day to draw attention to employment opportunities within the geographical area.

The researcher’s observations concurred with the results of the survey. Students were observed getting assistance with their schoolwork and engaging in their choice of a physical educational activity. Students were also observed being reminded of the school guidelines. Documents collected included the extensive list of courses students may enroll in at CHAS. Also supporting this indicator is the list of community resources that is given to the students. As mentioned before, this includes information on abuse, housing, food, counseling, and medical assistance.

The second quality indicator, individualized and group delivery systems, was agreed as being visible by staff and students. Evidence provided by staff included students working at their own pace and the use of one-on-one and group instruction for teaching lessons. During staff interviews, the staff mentioned again that classes were individualized, however there were group activities in some subjects, such as character education. Staff furthered explained students played games together for physical education credit and go out on outings as a group. One staff member commented that most of the students were visual learners so staff model how things should be done, which allows students to learn by example.

The researcher concurred with information given by the staff and students. The researcher observed the students working at their own pace and in small groups for physical education activities. The student handbook outlines how students earn credit and what CHAS will offer the students to help them succeed.
All staff and students felt students were involved in identifying their personalized learning paths inside and outside the school environment, the third indicator. From the survey, staff mentioned working with students to personalize their educational plan and students taking college courses. During staff interviews, one staff member discussed how students were taken to Southeastern Community College twice a year to learn about SCC’s programs. There is also a partnership between CHAS and SCC. At this time, there are eleven students in a certified nurse’s assistant (CNA) class, in which the students earn dual credit for college and high school. When the students are finished and have passed their exams, the students will be CNA certified.

The researcher did not see a student choosing his/her learning path, however each student has a credit sheet that allows him/her to know what to take to pursue future career/life goals. Because of this credit sheet, the researcher felt the students know what they were suppose to do to fulfill their goals. The student handbook outlines the extracurricular activities, community service hours, and work experience credits from which students can choose. Again, there is the list of required and elective courses students may select.

All staff and student participants saw the fourth indicator, short-range goals, as being a part of the program. Students had monthly goals and their progress was monitored continuously. Other evidence provided by staff included breaking student work down into smaller units. During staff interviews, staff noted that each student had a monthly goal sheet indicating, on average, he/she would earn one to two credits a month. A copy of student monthly goal sheet was obtained. Staff members take the year of graduation and the number of credits needed to graduate, and calculate the number of months before the student could graduate.
This information was included on the credit chart. Staff could then check in with students to see how they were doing with their studies.

Using abstract thinking to support learning is the fifth indicator and all staff and students agreed it was practiced. The evidence offered by staff included adapting courses to the needs of the students, and the fact that staff members attended state and regional conferences for staff development. It was assumed by the researcher, after attending these conferences the staff applied the strategies they learned to the individual needs of the students, which meant they took abstract ideas and made them concrete. It is possible the meaning of the quality indicator was misunderstood by the staff. Unfortunately, the researcher was unable to confirm either possibility with staff members. During staff interviews, all staff members mentioned attending conferences at which they were observers and/or presenters. The researcher observed staff members working with students. The researcher also attended a conference in November, 2004, where two CHAS staff members presented. At this conference, the staff members gave information to other alternative education educators about what CHAS was and how they were incorporating the IAAE framework into their program. By attending meetings and workshops, staff may become aware of new teaching strategies and advancements in learning that they may use for their own students.

Feedback forms from a conference where staff members presented were obtained. At this presentation, staff members shared with educators from Winfield-Mt. Union the philosophy, reasoning, and purpose of CHAS. The staff members may have thought of this as being abstract in its delivery and the presentation and subsequent discussion supported the learning of the participants and of the staff. The feedback staff received from these educators could help them validate or
possibly reevaluate what they are doing at CHAS. Again, this researcher was unable to clarify their thinking.

All staff and students noted that technology was part of the curriculum delivery process. The Internet was used for many purposes in the classroom. Evidence of use included supervised Internet access for research, math and English courses and using the computers to store student records. Technology was a part of the classroom and students were observed using the computers for their schoolwork. The Internet and computer use policy at CHAS was collected by the researcher. Students were given a copy of the form. The Internet form states basic guidelines the students must follow. These guidelines pertain to student use for research projects, word processing or keyboarding classes, signing in and out for computer use, and maintaining computer settings. The students must read, sign, and date the form to show they understand and will adhere to the policy. If there was a violation by the student, immediate disciplinary action was taken.

The seventh indicator, sufficient material resources available, was visibly noticed by staff and students. Staff commented on the survey that all school materials were provided to the students at no cost. Students had their own workbook or textbook. This indicator was corroborated by the researcher. The researcher observed students having and using supplies bought with community donations, including pencils, paper, and calculators.

All staff and student participants noted that students felt challenged by the curriculum, the eighth quality indicator. Staff members reported that core subjects followed a sequence of increasing difficulty. Students could not move to the next level unless they showed at least 80% competency in the skill. Other staff members mentioned that students did struggle with some of their studies and did ask questions when they needed help. The researcher did not make any
observations in relation to this quality indicator nor did any of the documents relate to this indicator.

The next quality indicator, students and parents feel the curriculum prepares them for life outside of high school, was noted by all staff and student participants. Evidence given by staff included parents sending status sheets, with comments, to the staff, and receiving positive feedback from former students. During staff interviews, staff members discussed the partnership with SCC, as mentioned earlier. Staff members also mentioned receiving calls and letters from former students thanking the staff for their help and letting the staff know what was going on in their lives. While interviewing the director/teacher of CHAS, she showed the researcher a pile of cards and letters she had received from former students. The student handbook outlines the expectations for work experience. Students also have a chance to prepare for the future by taking classes in career exploration, cooking, or by becoming dually enrolled in courses through SCC. These opportunities were discussed in the packet students received upon entering CHAS. Copies of status reports, with parental comments, were also obtained. The parental comments were positive and appreciative that their child had a chance for a future.

Business and industry involvement in the development, support, and delivery of curriculum is the last quality indicator. While all staff agreed this indicator was evident, not all student participants agreed. One student participant said this quality indicator was not evident. To support their claim, staff reported that local businesses were active in job shadowing and volunteer work service. During the staff interviews, a staff member discussed the implementation of Career Education Day. The purpose of this project was for people in the community to come to CHAS and talk about their careers and the pathway they took to get there.
They also shared what these students could expect in these fields. Students also job shadowed at care centers, a local garage, an implement company, and an elementary school. Many students have gotten jobs in the local business where they had done a service learning project or job shadowed.

While the researcher did not observe students job shadowing or working at a job, the researcher observed students using supplies bought from community donations in the classroom. The student handbook outlines the job shadowing and work experience the students must complete. The list of community resources is also available for students and informs them of where they can go within the community to receive assistance.

Of the ten quality indicators for curriculum and instruction, six indicators were visible according to the data collection instruments. Those indicators were needs of the student addressed, individualized delivery systems, student involvement in learning paths, abstract thinking, technology, and curriculum prepares students for the future (numbers 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, and 9). All staff and students agreed the indicators were visible in the classroom. Indicators two, three, five, and nine were further supported by staff responses in their interviews. The researcher's observation and documents gave further support to the visibility of these indicators at CHAS.

The other four quality indicators, short-range goals, resources, students challenged by the curriculum, and business involvement (numbers 4, 7, 8, and 10), had evidence of practice, but were not supported by all of the data instruments. All staff and students (except one student for quality indicator number ten) agreed there was evidence of practice for these four quality indicators. However, the researcher did not observe nor were documents collected that provided evidence.
Staff

There are ten quality indicators that address staff members. These quality indicators focused on meeting and maintaining licensure requirements, teaching methods, and collaboration. As mentioned before, students did not respond to this area of the survey. The indicators are as follows:

1. Staff freely chose to teach within the learning alternative.
2. Teachers, administrators, counselors, and support staff meet local and state requirements.
3. Emphasis on the process of learning is implemented as the means to create the primary motivation to want to learn.
4. The self-assessments are guided by written criteria.
5. Staff meets as a team to review the learning alternative/s and share responsibility to establish maximum quality.
6. Each staff member participates in staff development for self-improvement.
7. Teacher/student ratios do not exceed 1/12 based on total students served and total teachers available.
8. Staff members reflect a holistic perspective of care for students, including personal, social, emotional, intellectual, and safety/security elements.
9. Staff perceives themselves as equal in the implementation of the learning alternative/s.
10. Teaching by example/modeling is practiced to establish commitment to learning.

Table 3 summarizes the results of the surveys, the researcher observations, and the document review.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Teacher (N=3)</th>
<th>Students* (N=6)</th>
<th>Observation (N=1)</th>
<th>Documents (N=11)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Staff willingly participate</td>
<td>3 Willingly participate</td>
<td>1 Staff enjoy their work and working together</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. State licensure requirements met</td>
<td>3 Earning certification Staff development</td>
<td>1 Teacher license in office</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>**3. Emphasis on the process of learning</td>
<td>2 One-on-one Earn at least 80% on work</td>
<td>1 Environment is friendly and caring</td>
<td>1 Student handbook</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Self-assessments</td>
<td>2 Formulated and given in May, “05</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Staff meets to review learning and responsibilities</td>
<td>3 Meets regularly Work as a team</td>
<td>1 Discussion of students and procedures Carrying out responsibilities</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Staff participate in staff development for self-improvement</td>
<td>3 Participate in variety of conferences</td>
<td>1 Attended conference where staff presented</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Teacher to student ratio does not exceed 1/12</td>
<td>3 Two full-time, one part-time teachers 20-30 students</td>
<td>1 Three teachers, one aide Between 20-25 students</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>**8. Reflection of holistic perspective</td>
<td>3 Basic needs met Programs available</td>
<td>1 Student taken to appointment Students treated kindly</td>
<td>2 Student handbook List of community resources</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Equality in implementation of learning</td>
<td>3 Compliment each other Discuss decisions</td>
<td>1 Work together to monitor and assist students</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Teach by modeling established</td>
<td>3 Awareness of appropriate behavior Ask advice</td>
<td>1 Interactions are friendly and respectful</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Students did not respond to this set of quality indicators  
** Partially met triangulation criteria  
*** Considered triangulated
The first indicator, staff freely chose to teach at CHAS, was seen as being visible by staff members. Evidence given by staff members included the staff remaining at CHAS for a number of years and the fact they willingly continue to teach in the program. During the staff interviews, one staff member commented, “I walk in the door and I just knew this is where I belonged and there was never a doubt in my mind.” Another staff member said she loved what she was doing and would not be at CHAS if she did not love it. The researcher observed staff enjoying their work and appearing to like each other and working well together.

Staff meeting local and state licensure requirements was supported by all staff members. All staff had teaching degrees. The director/teacher at CHAS had a Master’s Degree, and one staff member was getting further certification in special education. Staff also worked on getting staff development credit. The researcher observed the director/teacher’s credentials hanging on the wall during her interview. The third indicator emphasizes the process of learning as a means to create motivation to learn. Two staff members agreed this indicator was visible, while the third staff member did not respond. The evidence provided by staff included students working one-one one with staff, students having to show at least 80% competency before moving on to the next level, and staff teaching students the way the students learned best. In an interview with a staff member, she stated at traditional schools students passed with a grade of D. However, at CHAS students had to get between 80-100% correct before students could move on in the book. According to the staff, the standards at CHAS were not lower than teachers in traditional schools. The researcher noted both environments and staff presented an air of friendliness and caring. As mentioned before, the student handbook states students mush show 80-100% competency in order to continue.
Self-assessments guided by written criteria is the fourth quality indicator and, of all the indicators, the weakest one to support. Two staff members felt this indicator was visible while one staff member did not agree. At the time of this study, there were no self-assessments. The two staff members may have agreed because they were in the process of designing a self-assessment, which was to have been administered in May of 2005. Consequently, the researcher was unable to observe or collect anything pertaining to the self-assessment.

All staff members noted the staff meets as a team to review procedures and share responsibilities. Staff members mentioned meeting regularly to discuss student concerns and to divide projects that needed to be completed. During staff interviews, the director/teacher mentioned that staff met about every third day. All staff members commented that everyone goes above and beyond what they need to do. Staff members get along and there was no backstabbing. The researcher concurred with these comments. Staff were observed discussing students and procedures informally when the need arose. Staff members were also observed carrying out classrooms responsibilities and helping out when needed.

The sixth quality indicator states each staff member participates in staff development for self-improvement and was supported by all staff members. The evidence provided by staff included the fact they participate in a variety of regional and state conferences. Staff members learned new techniques to bring back to the classroom by attending these conferences. They also did presentations to inform other educators about CHAS. While the researcher did not observe this indicator on the two on-site visits, the researcher did have an opportunity to attend a presentation by staff members at a conference on alternative education in November of 2004. Collected by the researcher were feedback forms from educators who had listened to a presentation by CHAS staff members, which
indicated that they were doing what they could to help define alternative education and to educate people on the importance of schools like CHAS.

Staff members noted the teacher/student ratios did not exceed the 1 to 12 ratio indicated in the Framework. Staff indicated on the survey there were two full-time teachers, one part-time teacher, and a teacher's aide at CHAS. Because of the students' personal lives and their schedules, there were, on average, between 20-30 students at CHAS each day. It was observed by the researcher that there were three teachers and a teacher's aide and between 20-25 students throughout each day, which is within the designated ratio.

Reflecting a holistic perspective of care for the students is the eighth quality indicator and is strongly corroborated through the data instruments. Evidence given by staff included working with students to make sure basic needs were met, listening to the concerns of the students, and providing social service programs. During staff interviews, staff members mentioned taking students to dental, visual, and medical appointments to make sure their basic needs were being met. Staff realized that many of these students had obstacles and troubles in their lives. One staff member recounted a story of a teacher, from a different school, who referred to her students as pond scum. This staff member confronted the aforementioned teacher and explained these "kids" think he meant it, at which time the teacher apologized. Even though the staff component was not included on the student survey, the responses from the student interviews reinforced this quality indicator. One student commented that the students could develop a personal relationship with the teachers, making the students less timid and more open. Other student comments included the teachers were more friendly, helped students when they needed it, did not let students quit or give up, and communicated with the students.
The researcher's observations and document review also corroborated this quality indicator. The researcher noted that all aspects of the students' lives were of concern to the staff. The researcher observed a staff member returning from transporting a student to an appointment the student would have otherwise been unable to attend. Also observed were staff members listening to the concerns of the students and responding to the students in kind, caring voices. Staff were also able to joke around with the students. As stated before, the list of community resources supplied information to the students for needed help or support. The student handbook discussed acceptable student behavior and disciplinary actions for not following these acceptable behaviors.

The ninth quality indicator, like quality indicator number three, looks at the staff and how they perceive themselves as equals. All staff members supported this indicator as being visible. One piece of evidence noted was staff complimented each other's weak points and discussed major decisions about the program. As mentioned before, staff met regularly to discuss the students and other program issues, and staff members do whatever they can to insure CHAS runs smoothly and efficiently. As noted before, the researcher observed staff members helping each other monitor and assist students whenever needed.

The last quality indicator, teaching by example/modeling, was supported by all staff members. Staff members provided ample evidence on the survey. Students were aware of what staff expected as appropriate behavior for success. Students asked staff for their advice and opinions and, it is believed by staff, the students respected staff members for their moral integrity. During staff interviews, it was discussed that staff model how things should be done so students could learn by example. It was observed by the researcher that interactions between staff
and students were friendly and respectful. For this indicator, there were no documents that provided evidence of support.

Of the ten quality indicators for staff, only one indicator was visible according to all the data instruments. This indicator stated there was a reflection of a holistic perspective (number 8). As mentioned above, the student participants did not respond to this part of the survey. One staff member did not mark she agreed with indicator number three, which states the emphasis is on the process of learning, but she did supply evidence of practice on the survey. All other data instruments provided visibility of evidence without question.

The eight quality indicators that did not have evidence supporting their visibility included staff chose to teach, meeting state licensure requirements, self-assessments, review of learning and responsibilities, participation in staff development, teacher/student ratio, equality in implementation, and teach by modeling (numbers 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, and 10). For most of these indicators, there were no documents that could serve as evidence. For the most part, staff provided evidence of practice and the researcher was able to observe the practice of the indicators, except for indicator number four. This is the weakest quality indicator. Only two staff members agreed to evidence of practice and that was because the self-assessment of the teachers would be given in May of 2005. Neither the researcher's observation nor the documents collected lent support to this indicator.

Students

Nine quality indicators address the students of the program, the last component examined in this study. The quality indicators focused mostly on students feeling a sense of belonging, of having a plan for success and taking
responsibility for that success, and of owning their behavior. The indicators are as follows:

1. Each student and parent choose to participate in the learning environment.
2. Students are responsible for their own learning.
3. Each student participates in reviewing and shaping the learning environment and activities of the school.
4. Each student feels he/she belongs.
5. Students have a plan for success.
6. Students review their personalized plans on a regular basis with guidance from the staff.
7. Students are personally informed and continuously monitor their credits earned.
8. Each student experiences success in his/her learning on a regular basis.
9. Discipline is viewed as a means to self-improvement and learning acceptable behavior.

Table 4 summarizes the results of the survey, the observations of the researcher, and the document review.

All staff members and students felt that each student freely chose to attend CHAS. Evidence given by staff included that parents were required to sign the application in order for their son/daughter to attend (only if student was under the age of 18) and upon enrollment, parents were invited to participate in an orientation conference in order for them to become familiar with CHAS. During the staff interviews, it was commented that staff started sending out status reports, which were like report cards, and these reports were filled with positive comments.
### Table 4: Summary Response to Quality Indicators for Student

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Teacher (N=3)</th>
<th>Students (N=6)</th>
<th>Observation (N=1)</th>
<th>Documents (N=11)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>Evidence</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>Evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*1. Student and parent choose to participate</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Parents sign application</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>None presented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Attend conference</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*2. Students responsible for own learning</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Students determine attendance</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>None presented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Monthly goals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*3. Participation in reviewing and shaping environment</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Students give input on various things</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>None presented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*4. Students feel sense of belonging</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Positive feedback</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>None presented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Addressed by first name</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Plan for success</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Monitor monthly credit goals</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>None presented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Review personalized plans regularly</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Plans evaluated</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>None presented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Adjustments made to plan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Students are informed and monitor credits</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Plans reviewed</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>None presented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Credit chart</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Certificates</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Experience success regularly</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Personal recognition</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>None presented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Verbal praise</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*9. Discipline</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Sign form to follow guidelines</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>None presented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Students given rewards</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Considered triangulated
from the teachers. The status reports were sent home with a place left for the parents to write comments and send back to CHAS. Responses from the student interviews concur with the staff's perception. Students came to CHAS for a variety of reasons. Some were behind on their credits, some had dropped out of their home school, or some saw CHAS as a last resort to make something of themselves. If they had not gone to CHAS, most felt they would have been high school drop-outs with no education and working at dead end jobs.

While the researcher did not observe a new student being enrolled, it was obvious to the researcher by the students' actions and demeanors that they liked being at school and met the program's expectations. The student handbook explained that an application had to be filled out in order to attend CHAS. No one was forced to go to this school.

The second quality indicator, students being responsible for their own learning, was perceived by all staff members and students as being present. Evidence provided by staff included students being responsible for their attendance and for setting monthly goals. It was mentioned during staff interviews that students signed themselves in and out everyday to track their attendance. Staff checked the attendance every day and kept a record so that they could go back and check if needed. Attendance was flexible; some students had jobs and had to attend school around their work schedule. Some students had transportation issues and had to attend school around those conflicts as well.

The researcher observed students signing themselves in and out of school. The student handbook also outlined the attendance policy and included the policy for earning credit. The goal sheet allowed students to know what they had to do each month to complete their credits and how many credits they had already earned. The student was responsible for monitoring their credits and staying on track for
graduation.

Each student participating in reviewing and shaping of the learning environment was perceived as being present by all participants. Evidence of this indicator included students giving input on physical education activities and voting on the school colors. Students also helped plan annual school activities, such as the Thanksgiving dinner when community members were invited to dine with them. The researcher's observations concurred with the evidence given by staff. It was observed by the researcher that students were able to choose their own physical education activities. She also observed a student listening to music, with headphones, while doing his schoolwork. While some courses were required, students were able to choose some elective courses to help them with their future aspirations.

A feeling of belonging, the fourth quality indicator, was perceived as being present by staff and students. Staff members stated they addressed students by their first names, students discussed personal matters, and students received positive feedback, both verbally and in writing. During the student interviews, the responses from the students showed they felt they belonged because they related to the teachers, they received the help they needed, they saw that others had faith in them, and they were able to get their work done without being pressured.

The researcher's observations and documents collected concurred with the data from the staff and students. The researcher observed the students moving around the classroom with ease and with a feeling of belonging. The researcher did not observe any name-calling or put downs from or toward the students. The mission statement in the student handbook stated students should be treated with love and encouragement and they had the opportunity to be successful. Copies of students comments from a demographic survey were also obtained. The
comments centered on whether students liked CHAS and the reason for their response. Some of the comments revealed that students felt CHAS gave them a second chance to graduate from high school.

The next quality indicator, students have a plan for success, was also supported by staff and students as being visible in the classroom. Evidence provided included students consistently monitored their monthly credit goals, and students chose their electives based upon their career goals. During the staff interviews, staff went over the process used to complete a student credit goal sheet. Staff calculate the number of credits needed per month for students so they are able to graduate in a timely, but realistic manner. A student’s credit sheet supported this evidence. This credit sheet included the student’s monthly credit goals, the classes the student had taken, and the classes the student needed to take to graduate.

Students review their personalized plans on a regular basis with guidance from staff was perceived by all participants as being visible. Evidence offered by staff included evaluating the student’s plan for progress upon credit completion by the student. At this time adjustments can be made based upon feedback from the student. While the researcher did not see a student reviewing his/her plan with a staff member, the credit chart was posted in the classroom so students could continually check on their progress and make changes, if necessary.

The seventh quality indicator, students are personally informed and continuously monitor their credits, was perceived by staff and students as being present. Staff members responded that student plans were reviewed as credit was earned and the credit chart was posted and updated when needed, as were student transcripts. Staff also mentioned that students were given certificates upon
earning credit. The researcher was not able to view any student transcripts, but as mentioned before, the credit chart was posted for all to see.

While all staff members felt each student experiences success in his/her learning on a regular basis, not all of the student participants agreed. One student participant responded that he/she was unsure whether this quality indicator was met, unfortunately, without supplying a reason. The evidence offered by the staff included students received personal recognition and rewards were given for credit earned. Verbal praise was used often to inform students of how they were performing. The staff interviews also corroborated this indicator. Staff mentioned there was a student of the month award. Students were also rewarded for doing their work and earning their credits. The researcher noted that students were often given positive verbal encouragement throughout the day.

The last quality indicator, discipline is viewed as a means to self-improvement and learning acceptable behavior, was supported by staff and students. Staff members reported that students sign a form stating they would follow the guidelines of CHAS. Students were given rewards for appropriate behavior. As stated above, students were rewarded for doing their work and earning their credits.

Through the researcher's observations, it appears the environment at CHAS is in order. Students seem to know the routine and what is expected of them. While the researcher did not observe staff instructing students in the area of discipline, the character education class taught at CHAS would most likely cover this area. The researcher observed a student being asked by a staff member to quiet down; the student complied with the request. Discipline was also discussed in the student handbook and the form on respect. The handbook outlined the disciplinary actions for the students to follow and consequences if they were not followed.
Students were given a copy of ‘Respect’. This form listed the appropriate and expected behaviors and actions of students while attending CHAS.

Of the nine quality indicators for students, five indicators showed visibility in all data instruments. These indicators were student and parents choosing to participate, students were responsible for student learning, students participated in reviewing environments, students felt they belong, and discipline (numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, and 9). All of these indicators were visible, not only through the survey, researcher observation, and documents, but through either staff and/or student interviews.

The four indicators that were not evidenced through all the data instruments were students having a plan for success, personalized plans being reviewed regularly, students monitor credits, and experience success regularly (numbers 5, 6, 7, and 8). All staff and student participants agreed on evidence of practice for all indicators except for one student who did not see evidence of practice in quality indicator number eight. The primary reason these indicators were not triangulated was because of the researcher’s observation or the documents collected that did not provide evidence.

**Summary**

At first glance, it appears that the indicators of the four components were in evidence according to the data collection instruments used in this study. However, upon a closer look less than half (46%) of the total number of indicators were considered triangulated by the data (16 out of 35). The percentage of indicators corroborated for each component is as follows: Philosophy – 67% (4 out of 6), Curriculum and Instruction – 60% (6 out of 10), Staff – 10% (1 out of 10), and Students – 56% (5 out of 9). One of the indicators under Staff was partially triangulated.
CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to determine whether an alternative education program, Crusade High Alternative School, was indeed using the framework established by Iowa Association of Alternative Education (IAAE). This study focused on the extent to which the participants of this school, staff, students, and the director, perceived the quality indicators were present and manifested in four specific components (philosophy, curriculum and instruction, staff, and student). The observation of and documents collected by the researcher were also used to verify the presence of these quality indicators.

To determine triangulation, the researcher examined the results of the four data instruments: survey, interviews, researcher observation, and document review. The researcher felt the staff would perceive that most, if not all, the indicators would be found as being in evidence through the survey and/or interviews. Therefore, the researcher relied on the student survey responses, the researcher's observations, and the document review to support triangulation of an indicator. If any one of those three data instruments did not concur, then the indicator was not triangulated. This 'all or nothing' approach was taken due to the limited number of participants in the study.

After having the staff and student participants complete the survey, interviewing the staff individually, observing the classroom setting, and collecting documents, the researcher was able to get an evolving and somewhat comprehensive view of this school program. Is Crusade High Alternative School (CHAS) meeting the quality indicators set forth in the framework in the areas of philosophy, curriculum and instruction, staff, and students? According to the director and staff of CHAS, yes it is. Staff found evidence of practices for all the quality indicators in all four areas. Many of their evidence of practice examples
overlapped each other and, to an extent, gave credibility to each other. The only major disagreement between staff members was in the area of staff and the quality indicator dealing with self-assessment. At the time of this study, self-assessments had not been done, but a self-assessment had been designed and was to be completed at the end of the 2004-2005 school year.

According to the student participants of CHAS, the answer is also yes. The survey was read to the students because some of the wording of the quality indicators was difficult to understand. Some of the students did have questions and the researcher had to explain what some quality indicators meant. Well over half of the students answers' were in agreement that CHAS meets the given quality indicator. However, there were areas of disagreement in the students' answers. Many of these “disagreements” involved students marking “unsure”. The answer “unsure” may have been marked because a student did not know what was meant by that quality indicator and was too embarrassed to ask, or perhaps the student had not been there long enough to “witness” a particular quality indicator. Unfortunately, even though the students were encouraged to do so, none of them offered any evidence of practice for any of the quality indicators; therefore we do not know why “unsure” was marked.

According to the researcher, for the most part, the answer would be yes. The researcher based this conclusion upon the interviews with staff and students, her own observations, and from collected documents. On the first on-site visit, the researcher interviewed each staff member. From these interviews, it was quite evident the staff cared very much for the students in all areas of their lives. As each staff member recounted an example of a quality indicator or told a story about a student and his/her situation, the passion she had for her work and the compassion she had for her students was evident in her words and body
language. All staff members spoke about anxiety, frustration, anger, tears, hope, and laughter. The student responses to their given questions reflected a desire to be at CHAS, a sense of belonging to the school, and a wish to be successful with their futures.

The staff's caring nature also was observed in interactions with the students. The researcher did not observe on either on-site visit staff members raising their voices in anger or impatience. Students were not spoken to negatively, but with kindness and with respect. There were a couple of students who had not been to school for awhile and when staff members saw them, each student was greeted enthusiastically, and staff stated they were happy to see them.

Students worked at their own pace with materials donated or bought for them to use. When a student had a question, there was a staff member there to help. Students were able to come and go when they needed to by signing themselves in and out of the building. When it was time for lunch, students did not have to worry about bringing their own lunch, but were able to prepare food stocked in the kitchen area.

The researcher's conclusion from the interviews and observations is subjective, but the documents collected are more objective. The student handbook clearly states the philosophy of CHAS and the expectations for behavior, discipline, and earning credit. The list of community resources is extensive and appears to be a valuable tool for these students. The parental comments on the status reports are positive, and it is encouraging to see parents involved with their child's education. The student goal sheet clearly states the credits the student needs to earn each month and the classes needed to be taken by the student. The researcher was not able to see some documents, like transcripts, due to
confidentiality, but it would not be unreasonable to assume they are there and kept current. It should be noted the reason for a quality indicator not being triangulated was that either the researcher did not observe anything that provided evidence of its presence or support was not found in any of the documents reviewed for the study.

The literature states that alternative schools help keep students in school, complete a high school education, and prepare students for entry into work and/or post secondary educational environments. It is the belief of the researcher that CHAS does this. One of the questions asked of the students was where they would be if CHAS was not available. The students answered they would not have an education, they would have dropped out of school, and/or working a dead end job. As stated before in the survey by Veale (Morley, 1991), dropping out of school costs youth and communities far more than investing in alternative education. CHAS and other alternative schools give students another chance to get their high school diploma. The curriculum at CHAS also demonstrates that students learn and become prepared for work and post secondary education by requiring them to earn job shadowing and work experience credit and providing them with the opportunity to dual enroll for credit at Southeastern Community College.

Staff and student comments also reflect the same belief of IAAE: alternative schools have the ability to change students in positive ways where public school environments failed (IAAE n.d.b.) Allowing students to work at their own pace, having teachers who listen to the needs of the students, and providing smaller class sizes really made a difference to these students. Morley (1991) also discussed the four common structural characteristics alternative schools should incorporate to be effective: smallness, concern for the whole student, a supportive environment, and a sense of community. All four of these characteristics were
identified through staff and student comments, the surveys, the researcher’s observations, and collected documents.

That is not to say that CHAS meets every quality indicator equally. CHAS is stronger in some areas than others. It should be noted that there are twelve components of the framework; this study only examined four. However, this study is a start and the researcher hopes further studies will be conducted on CHAS and other alternative schools in Iowa.

This researcher has some suggestions for future studies. First, more information should be learned from the students. It was this researcher’s original intention to talk to the students in a round-table interview session. Due to unforeseen events, this did not happen, and the researcher had to give the student participants prewritten questions to answer. Engaging the students in a discussion could yield rich information and, perhaps, give a better sense of how the students feel about CHAS. It also would be beneficial if the students provided evidence of practice on the survey. Seeing what the students think is happening, or not happening, would give stronger credibility to the quality indicators.

Another source of student input would be talking to former students of CHAS and getting feedback from these students on the benefits of the program. Did CHAS prepare them for a career and/or further education? Are they working in a job they enjoy? Is their life better because they went to CHAS? Staff members did state they hear from former students, however no formal follow-up of graduates is conducted. Perhaps the staff at CHAS could formulate a survey to send to former students concerning where they are and what they are doing at this time.

Two other suggestions concern the staff self-assessment and on-site observations. First, the staff self-assessment was to be implemented at the end of the 2004-2005 school year. It will be important to look at this assessment and
gather information on how the staff perceive they are doing in meeting the needs of the students, their job requirements, and the quality indicators set forth in the framework. Secondly, the two on-site observations made by the researcher were made on the same day of the week. While this may be good for consistency, the researcher observed the same routines and activities on both visits and missed other routines and activities that are held on other days. For example, observing the enrollment process of a student or observing a student job shadowing could bring greater credibility to the quality indicators.

It should be stated there are several limitations, which may have impacted the results of this study. The first set of limitations are in regard to the student participants. A small number of students participated in this study; only about 14% (6/43) of the student body were actually involved in the study. Instead of using a random sample of students, the director of CHAS selected and asked students to participate. The selection criteria was the student’s physical presence in the building on the day the researcher visited. Students do not have a set schedule and are not there on an every day basis. As a result, the director felt it was better to see who was in school the day of the researcher’s visit. Lastly, the students had limited participation in the study. The students responded to three of the four components examined in this study, they did not offer evidence of practice for the quality indicators, and interviews were not conducted with the students. Instead, the students responded to pre-written questions given to them by the researcher. Each of these should be considered when looking at the results of the study.

It was not surprising that staff found all quality indicators visible and provided evidence pf practice. This fact needs to be kept in mind as they do have a vested interest in the results of this study. The number of visits and observations is also a limitation. The two on-site visits were conducted on the same day of the
week, just during different months. Lastly, there is no comparison group. A similar alternative education program was not readily available to be used as a control group.

Maintaining strong ethics is important when conducting a study and this researcher would be remiss in not recognizing this fact. It should be mentioned this researcher has experience in and is knowledgeable about alternative education. The researcher has worked in an alternative school setting for the past nine years and is strongly believes that alternative education is needed and should be supported. The staff participants in this study knew about the researcher's background in alternative education and therefore may have reacted differently to the researcher then they would have to someone with little or no experience in or knowledge about alternative education.

The names of the staff and student participants were not used in this study. However, the actual name of the school was used. Permission to use Crusade High Alternative School was given by the director. Staff and students are proud of their school and wish to share their achievements and the program model with others. The findings of this study will be shared with the staff and students of CHAS. A report will be given to them. This report will not be an evaluation of the staff, students, or the school, but it will offer possible recommendations and feedback to help staff gather data on present and future processes and to make CHAS be the most effective school it can be.

Doing this study has brought a new awareness to the researcher and that is being a researcher is hard work. The process of conducting research is time consuming, frustrating, and, at times, confusing. However, designing and conducting research is also satisfying and a great sense of accomplishment is felt when the process comes to an end. Through this process the researcher has
learned to be flexible. Daily life does not stop and unforeseen events happen. The researcher quickly learned that maintaining a full-time job and trying to meet deadlines is difficult. Therefore, one has to be patient, organized, and adaptable. One cannot control responses from individuals, sickness, or the weather.

Knowing what the researcher knows now, she has a better idea of what to expect and anticipate with the research process. In fact, if this study would be attempted again, different approaches would be taken. First of all, the organization of data would be different. The researcher was not sure what to expect or to look for when complying the survey, interview questions, observations, and document collection. The researcher would now more closely align the data instruments to accomplish a more focused viewpoint. Secondly, the researcher learned there should have been one more on-site visit. There were follow-up questions the researcher would have like to go over with staff. Also, the researcher would like to speak to the student participants again and have them supply evidence of practice from the survey. Lastly, the researcher learned distance is important in the research process. CHAS is some distance from the researcher's home and it was hard to visit the program. It took time to send the required letters and surveys to the staff and to receive them in return. However, through these trials and tribulations, the researcher has become a better researcher. The researcher feels she is more intuitive, insightful, and has a better understanding of the research process.

Earlier in this thesis, the question of whether money should be invested in alternative education was proposed. In the survey by Dr. Veale, it was shown that investing in alternative education would save taxpayers and communities money in the long run by keeping students from dropping out of school. It appears from the student interviews that having the opportunity to attend CHAS has kept some students from becoming dropouts. If this is the case, then CHAS seems to be
successful in keeping students in school and saving the community money in the long run. Data should be continually gathered to show whether CHAS maintains its success and whether it does, in fact, save the participating school districts and communities money in the long run.

There are several questions the researcher has as a result of the study. The importance of academics is discussed often by the staff, stressing students must show at least 80% competency in a subject before moving to the next level. However, what does “80% competency” mean? One of the quality indicators for philosophy is meeting the districts’ standards and benchmarks, but what are the standards and benchmarks? This program serves four school districts, but it is unclear what standards and benchmarks are in place for these students. How do the standards and benchmarks relate to the 80% competency level? Do students have to get at least an 80% on some summative assessment at the end of each unit/course/benchmark before he/she moves on to the next unit/course/benchmark?

Additional research needs to be conducted on the efficacy of the model used at CHAS. Students’ grades should be included in the study in relationship to the stated competency level. Student assessments and how these assessments are viewed or applied to No Child Left Behind should be examined. Is No Child Left Behind a factor in alternative education? If so, how does No Child Left Behind impact alternative education?

As stated before, alternative education is not new; some form of alternative education has been in existence for many years. Trying to define alternative education is new and, therefore the results of this study are the first of their kind. While this is exciting and a positive step forward in alternative education, it is difficult to compare these results with anything else. Since the literature is scarce
and nothing like this has been done, people may question the reliability of these results, and rightly so. Perhaps this study will encourage others to take a hard look at alternative education and what the state of Iowa means by alternative education. Hopefully, the framework and quality indicators, established by IAAE, will be incorporated into current and future alternative education programs.
APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORMS

Deb Vierling
Crusade High Alternative School
507 S Church ST
Morning Sun, IA 52640

Dear Ms. Vierling:

This letter is to explain my intent to use Crusade High Alternative School in my thesis per your verbal agreement on June 22 via a telephone conversation with myself. As I explained, I am a graduate student at Iowa State University working on my thesis. I am also a teacher at the Rosedale Shelter in Ames, IA, where I work with at-risk students. Consequently, I have a high interest in alternative education and have focused my thesis on alternative education.

Dr. Raymond Morley told me that your alternative school is based upon the Iowa Framework in Alternative Education and quality indicators. The purpose of my study is to examine the extent to which the participants in your school, teachers, students, and yourself, perceive that the quality indicators are present and manifested in four specific areas (philosophy, student, staff, and curriculum and instruction). I have designed a survey using the quality indicators in the four areas and would like two teacher, two students, and you to complete. After the survey has been returned, I would like to conduct interviews on site with the people who completed the survey. In addition to the interviews, I would also like to observe in classrooms and to spend time in the school. Finally, I would like to have access to printed material concerning the program. These might include the mission statement of the school, public relation materials, the student handbook, and the faculty handbook.

I will be in contact within the next three weeks to discuss possible participants. I look forward to meeting you and seeing your school program. Thank you for agreeing to be part of my thesis.

Sincerely,

Karen Junko
Dear Teacher:

I am currently a graduate student at Iowa State University. I would like to invite you to participate in a research study on alternative education. The study will focus on Crusade High Alternative School, where you are employed. The purpose of the study is to examine the extent to which you perceive the quality indicators upon which Crusade High Alternative School is based are present and manifested in specific areas.

As a participant in this study, you will be asked to complete a survey and to be interviewed by the researcher. The interviews will be done at the school, during the school day. With your consent, the interviews will be tape recorded to ensure the accuracy of the information obtained. Your real name will not be used at any time. You will be given the opportunity to read and edit what has been written prior to the completion of my Master’s thesis.

Should you choose, you may withdraw from the study at any time. If you have questions, please feel free to contact me at 515.232.7436.

Sincerely,

Karen Junko

I do / do not give permission to participate in the above study.

Participant ____________________________________________________________

Date ______________________

Please return the bottom portion of this letter to me in the enclosed, addressed stamped envelope.

Thank you.
Dear Student and Parent/Guardian:

I am a graduate student at Iowa State University, and I would like to invite you to participate in a research study on alternative education. The study will focus on Crusade High Alternative School, where you are a student. Crusade High Alternative School was based on a series of quality indicators that the Iowa Association of Alternative Education developed. The purpose of the study is to examine whether or not a subset of these indicators are evident to you as a student.

As a participant in this study, you will be asked to complete a survey and to participate in a focus group. I will administer the survey to you and the other student participants so that I can answer any questions you might have concerning it. The survey asks questions about the philosophy of the program, the curriculum, and how you feel about the program. After the survey has been completed, I will conduct a focus group where I will ask the group additional questions about the program you are in and your feelings about it. All activities related to this study will be done at the school, during the school day. With your consent, the focus group will be tape recorded to ensure the accuracy of the information obtained. Your real name will not be used at any time. You will be given the opportunity to read and edit what has been written prior to the completion of my Master’s thesis.

Should you choose, you may withdraw from the study at any time. If you or your parents/guardians have questions, please feel free to contact me at 515.232.7436.

Sincerely,

Karen Junko
I do / do not give permission to participate in the above study.

Student Signature

I do / do not give permission for my son / daughter to participate in the above study.

Parent/Guardian Signature (if under 18 years of age)

Date

Please return this portion of this letter to me in the enclosed, addressed stamped envelope.

Thank you.
Participant Survey – An Alternative School Case Study

Part I: Demographics

1. Gender (Check one): _____ Male _____ Female

2. Ethnicity (optional) (Check one):
   ____ Caucasian _____ Hispanic _____ Native American
   ____ African American _____ Asian _____ Other (Specify)____

3. Current Position (Check one):
   ____ Administrator _____ Teacher Subject taught ____________
   _____ Staff _____ Student

   If you marked “administrator”, “teacher”, or “staff” go to questions #4. If you marked
   “student”, go to question #6.

4. Years of experience in education: ____________

5. Level of education (Check one):
   ____ AA _____ BA/BS _____ MA/MS _____ PhD
   _____ Other (Specify)____

6. Year in school (Students only) (Check one)
   ____ Freshman _____ Sophomore _____ Junior _____ Senior

7. Number of semesters at Crusade High Alternative School (including the current semester) ____________
Part II: Quality Indicators

The comprehensive framework of Crusade High Alternative School adheres to the Quality Indicators designed by the Iowa Association of Alternative Education. In this part of the survey, mark “yes” or “no” if, in your opinion, the procedure is practiced at Crusade High Alternative School. In the second column, list evidence of this practice that can be observed.

All participants complete the “Curriculum and Instruction” and “Philosophy sections. Only teachers complete the “Staff” section and only students complete the “Student” section. In the second column, list evidence that can be observed.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Philosophy</th>
<th>Present Practice</th>
<th>Evidence of Practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Staff advocates the philosophy that all students can learn. Statements of philosophy are documented, published, and clearly visible to and embraced by staff, students, and parents.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Not sure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Student success is central to all management of learning.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Not sure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Philosophy is consistent with district goals and standards.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Not sure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The student is the focus of concern and valued equally or greater than content standards and academic endeavors.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Not sure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The whole student (personal, social, emotional, intellectual, work skills, safety, and security) is of concern, not just academic endeavors.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Not sure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Individuality of learning for each student is recognized and embraced.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Not sure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum and Instruction</td>
<td>Present Practice</td>
<td>Evidence of Practice</td>
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<tr>
<td>----------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. The needs of students related to personal, social, emotional, behavioral, career development, and essential learnings are addressed in the curriculum.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>No</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Not sure</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Individualized delivery systems are provided as well as group learnings to accommodate different learning styles, speeds, and abilities.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>No</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Not sure</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Students are involved identifying personalized learning paths available inside and outside the immediate learning environment allowing them to take advantage of all possible paths.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>No</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Not sure</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Short-range goals are implemented to establish success for students, which is essential to future success.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not sure</td>
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<td>5. Abstract thinking is cultivated to support learning and application of learning principles.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>No</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Not sure</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Technology is part of the curriculum delivery process allowing programmed learning, immediate feedback systems, maximum monitoring of individual progress and needs, and adjustments to personal choice, needs, and learning capacity.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>No</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Not sure</td>
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<td>7. Sufficient material resources are available to allow accomplishment of the standards of learning.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>No</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Not sure</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Students feel challenged by the curriculum.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>No</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Not sure</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Students and parents feel the curriculum prepares them for life, careers, and future training in higher levels of education.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>No</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Not sure</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Business and industry are involved in the development, support, and delivery of curriculum.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>No</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Not sure</td>
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<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>Present Practice</td>
<td>Evidence of Practice</td>
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<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Staff freely chooses to teach within the learning alternative.</td>
<td>_____ Yes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>_____ No</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>_____ Not sure</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Teachers, administrators, counselors, and support staff meet local and state licensure requirements.</td>
<td>_____ Yes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>_____ No</td>
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<td></td>
<td>_____ Not sure</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Emphasis on the process of learning is valued, embraced, and implemented as the means to creating the primary motivation to want to learn.</td>
<td>_____ Yes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>_____ No</td>
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<td></td>
<td>_____ Not sure</td>
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<td>4. The self-assessments are guided by written criteria.</td>
<td>_____ Yes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>_____ No</td>
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<td></td>
<td>_____ Not sure</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Staff meets as a team to review the learning alternative/s and share responsibility to establish maximum quality.</td>
<td>_____ Yes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>_____ No</td>
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<td></td>
<td>_____ Not sure</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Each staff member participates in staff development for self-improvement.</td>
<td>_____ Yes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>_____ No</td>
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<td></td>
<td>_____ Not sure</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Teacher/student ratios do not exceed 1/12 based on total students served and total teachers available.</td>
<td>_____ Yes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>_____ No</td>
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<td></td>
<td>_____ Not sure</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Staff members reflect a holistic perspective of care for students including personal, social, emotional, intellectual, life success, and safety/security elements.</td>
<td>_____ Yes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>_____ No</td>
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<td></td>
<td>_____ Not sure</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Staff perceives themselves as equal in the implementation of the learning alternative/s allowing open sharing and decision-making.</td>
<td>_____ Yes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>_____ No</td>
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<td></td>
<td>_____ Not sure</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Teaching by example/modeling is practiced to establish commitment to learning.</td>
<td>_____ Yes</td>
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<td>_____ No</td>
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<td></td>
<td>_____ Not sure</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Student</strong></td>
<td><strong>Present Practice</strong></td>
<td><strong>Evidence of Practice</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Each student and parent chooses to participate in the learning alternative/s.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Not sure</td>
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<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Not sure</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Students are responsible for their own learning, including attendance, work completion, and timelines for completion.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Not sure</td>
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<td></td>
<td>No</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Not sure</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Each student participates in reviewing and shaping the learning environment and activities of the school.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Not sure</td>
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<td>No</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Not sure</td>
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<td>4. Each student feels he/she belongs.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Not sure</td>
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<td></td>
<td>No</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Not sure</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Students have a plan for success.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Not sure</td>
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<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Not sure</td>
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<td>6. Students review their personalized plans on a regular basis with guidance from the staff.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Not sure</td>
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<td>No</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Not sure</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Students are personally informed and continuously monitor their credits earned with regard to personal goals/completion/graduation.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Not sure</td>
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<td></td>
<td>No</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Not sure</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Each student experiences success in his/her learning on a regular basis.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Not sure</td>
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<td>No</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Not sure</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Discipline is viewed as means to self-improvement and learning acceptable behavior.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Not sure</td>
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<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Not sure</td>
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</table>
APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Prepared interview questions for the director/teacher, teachers, and students.

Questions for the director:
1. How was Crusade High Alternative School (CHAS) established?
2. What brought you to CHAS?
3. The philosophy states students knew they are more important than academics. How do students know this?
4. What are your teaching styles and how do they fit in at CHAS?
5. What are student status sheets?
6. What businesses are involved that students work with through CHAS?
7. What qualities do you look for in the teachers you hire?
8. How does the staff collaborate?
9. What are your strengths for contributing balance and equality to CHAS?
10. How do you know students respect you?
11. Tell me about the students enrolled at CHAS.
12. Is there any typical "pace of study" for the students?
13. How do you feel Crusade High Alternative School did last year in serving its students?

Questions for the teachers:
1. What brought you to Crusade High Alternative School?
2. How is Crusade High Alternative School different than the other schools in which you’ve taught?
3. What kind of group activities do the students participate in?
4. What is TABE and how does that help with purchases?
5. What is your teaching techniques/strategies?
6. How is student progress monitored?
7. What strengths do you contribute to the team?
8. How do you know students respect you?
9. Do you ever feel uncomfortable helping students with personal issues?
10. What kind of awards do students earn?
11. How do you feel CHAS did last year in serving its students?

Questions for the students:

1. Before being at CHAS, what school did you attend and what was school like for you?
2. What brought you to CHAS?
3. How is CHAS different then the other school/s you have attended?
4. If CHAS were not here, where would you be with your education today?
5. Why (or why not) is an alternative school setting better than a traditional school setting?
APPENDIX D

DOCUMENTS

List of documents collected and reviewed concerning Crusade High School.

1. Student handbook
2. School courses offered at CHAS
3. Community resources
4. Application for free and reduced lunches
5. Respect guidelines
6. Internet and computer use policy
7. Student credit goal sheet
8. Status reports
9. Parental comments from status reports
10. Student comments from demographic survey
11. Feedback responses from staff presentation
REFERENCES CITED


http://greatschools.net


ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There are many people I would like to thank for assisting me in this process. First, I would like to thank Dr. Raymond Morley for sharing his expertise on alternative education and leading me to Crusade High Alternative School. Secondly, none of this would have been possible without the kindness, openness, and graciousness of the staff and students at Crusade High Alternative School, especially, Deb, Kelsey, Linda, and the six student participants. Their willingness to allow me access and insight into their program was greatly appreciated.

Next, I would like to thank Dr. Patricia Carlson for her immense assistance and input on this long journey. Her efforts in guiding this process and help in organizing this paper are immeasurable. To Dr. Geoffrey Abelson and Dr. Joanne Marshall, thank you for your assistance in agreeing to be a part of my committee.

Lastly, to my cheerleaders, my family and friends, who have learned more about alternative education than they may have wanted to. You've listened to my fears, doubts, and frustrations. Thank you for your patience, your support, and your faith in my capabilities.