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Quality practices of alternative education learning environments as represented in Virginia's Individual Student Alternative Education Plan (ISAEP) program

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QUALITY PRACTICES OF ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS AS REPRESENTED IN VIRGINIA'S INDIVIDUAL STUDENT ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PLAN (ISAEP) PROGRAM

By

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Approved December 14, 2012

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to analyze a prominent alternative education practice in the Commonwealth of Virginia through an analysis of the Virginia Department of Education’s Individual Student Alternative Education Plan (ISAEP) program and the alternative education environment it provides. This was a descriptive study using non-experimental survey research using quantitative and qualitative data to study the phenomena as it exists. Participants included 132 ISAEP program leaders attending the 6th Annual Conference in July, 2012. The study revealed that the ISAEP program is consistent with how alternative education is defined both in Virginia and nationally as it has characteristics similar to those that research informs educators about effective programs. The program blends academics, vocational, career and technical education and training and characteristics such as voluntary enrollment, student-centered individual programming, a functional curriculum with GED completion, and the presence of caring, knowledgeable adults. The program is taught by licensed staff, most of whom hold degrees higher than a Bachelor’s and who hold multiple endorsements. All ten exemplary practices were seen as important and moderately positive relationships were found between program leaders’ perception of exemplary practices and current practices.
for seven of ten practices. A weak relationship was found with the practice of leadership
and current practice. Leadership was seen as the practice that could most positively
impact the quality and effectiveness of the ISAEP program. There was little correlation
between importance and practice with respect to Student Assessment. Collaboration
with Community and Program Evaluation were practices reported to be least evident.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The impact of a student not completing high school extends beyond the student who has dropped out. The individual’s ability to earn a living and the American economy are negatively impacted by a student dropping out of high school. On January 24, 2012, in the State of the Union address, one of the four pillars emphasized by President Obama was K-12 educational policy. Specifically, he urged all states to raise the dropout age to 18, stating, “We also know that when students aren’t allowed to walk away from their education, more of them walk the stage to get their diploma” (Education News, 2012). While this is important, compulsory attendance is not the panacea to the dropout crisis in American schools. It does, however, reflect a goal of wanting all students to achieve success and charges American education with providing supports and alternatives for students that will lead them to program completion with skills to secure jobs and be successful in the global economy.

One way to accomplish this goal is through alternative education. Overall, alternative schools and alternative education programs have effectively kept more students in school until graduation (Aron, 2006). However, ongoing concern about the cost to both individuals and to society of dropping out compels educational researchers to continue to evaluate these programs to find effective strategies. Researchers, policymakers, and educators agree that alternative schools and programs are needed as an option for at-risk students. This at-risk population includes students from low-income families; single-parent families; large urban areas; minorities pregnant or parenting teens; those involved in substance abuse or juvenile delinquent behavior; and students with learning and/or social, emotional and behavioral disabilities. Without alternatives the risk of not completing school is even greater for these
at-risk groups. Their risk is further exacerbated by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation due to the accountability and standards-based requirements (Lehr & Lange, 2003).

As a researcher, I believe the purpose of education is grounded in and built upon an environment that unifies student learning and organizational goals. Education is a collaborative, shared process based on the belief that everyone can learn. It is eclectic, differentiated, and multidimensional and values individual developmental stage and style of learning. Resilience and self-determination are valued, and the goal is to prepare students for productive life in a global world. Alternative education is a part of this system.

In 1982, Kozol highlighted, “the fact that public education must conform to the political self-interest of the nation, city, state” (p. 5). According to Solomon (2003), interest in education grows when there are spare energies and resources to invest. These beliefs may not be the case currently, but interest in education remains. School districts across the United States are required to provide their stakeholders with a quality, standards-based education. The educational and political climate in the 1980’s set the tone, and the standards-based reform movement emerged. The primary reason was public dissatisfaction with the perceived low level of achievement demonstrated by U.S. students. When compared to their counterparts in foreign countries, there was concern that American students were unprepared to function in the information age.

John Dewey’s work with progressive education in the 1930s is liberally described as alternative education today, and by the 1960s alternative schools were common in American public education (Neumann, 1994). The belief that education must be available to all, that individual students learn differently, and the basic conviction that the education system must
provide a continuum of programs has resulted in an increased need to develop programs to address the education of students who are not successful in the traditional public school model. The concept that "one size doesn’t fit all" and that "more of the same" won’t work has been evident in alternative education research (Hartzler & Jones, 2002).

In 1983, *A Nation at Risk*, the report of the National Commission of Excellence in Education, prompted a presidential education summit that set the agenda for education through the year 2000. Many researchers have noted the influence of the standards-based and accountability movements in intensifying the need for alternative or non-traditional educational schools and programs (e.g., Glickman 2001, Farris-Berg & Shroeder, 2003; Lehr & Lang, 2003; Lehr, Tan & Ysseldyke, 2008; Leone & Drakeford, 1999; Raywid, 2001).

The focus of alternative programs was once more about *at-risk students* with a focus on teaching them *how to behave*. Today the accountability movement necessitates that alternatives be about *at-risk schools* with a focus on teaching them *how to learn*. The perception that alternative programs or schools are for bad or troubled students does a disservice to the reality that there is a need for alternatives for all students. Simply put, alternative education is a perspective based on a belief that there are many environments and structures within which learning can occur (Reglin, 1998; Morley, 1991).

Alternative education is just one option along the educational continuum to help students achieve and as part of a continuum of educational programs, alternative schools allow systems to bring equity to students. That is, in order to bring all students to the same end — competence and capability to become productive adults and citizens — alternative schools must be part of the systematic intervention that takes the responsibility to change the
environment so that students can be successful. The educational system acknowledges that students should not all be taught the same way because they don’t learn the same way. The long-standing existence of alternative education reflects the belief that all individuals can learn, but the process is dynamic and not the same for everyone (Conrath, 2001).

Much of the available research of lists of characteristics or “best practices,” has been synthesized by Aron (2003) noting a high degree of overlap and consensus among researchers (e.g., Raywid, 1994; Husted & Cavalluzzo, 2001; Lange & Sletten, 2002; Leone & Drakeford, 1999; Tobin & Sprague, 2000). Additionally, the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network (Reimer & Cash, 2003) provided a review of alternative education, noting that policies and practice should include evaluation of accountability, administrative structure, curriculum and instruction, faculty and staff, facilities and grounds, leadership, student support services, the learning community, funding, and climate.

The International Association for Learning Alternatives (IALA, 2010) reiterated this view. The IALA goal is to lead, promote and support learning alternatives in education, and Morley’s (2006) Framework for Learning Alternatives Environments in Iowa provides programs with an opportunity to examine their practice with what research tells about indicators of quality programming. Morley suggested that a review of alternative education should focus on the environment, to include evaluation of the factors surrounding program philosophy, administration, students, parents/guardians, staff, curriculum and instruction, vocational/technical/career, assessment, personal/social/life skills, community and social services, facilities, and evaluating the program for signs that it is not successful.
In an effort to enhance program quality and develop common principles, the National Alternative Education Association (NAEA) adopted the *Exemplary Practices in Alternative Education: Indicators of Quality Programming* in January 2009. This relatively recently developed, field-tested set of standards was constructed from numerous sources, including past research, successful alternative programs, and the knowledge of experts in the field. The national panel reviewed, modified, and identified ten exemplary practices that are considered essential to quality programming. These practices relate to mission and purpose, leadership, climate and culture, staffing and professional development, curriculum and instruction, student assessment, transitional planning and support, parent/guardian involvement, collaboration, and program evaluation (National Alternative Education Association, 2009).

**Problem Statement**

Consistent with President Obama's 2012 State of the Union address, the Commonwealth of Virginia is one of 21 states that has compulsory attendance until graduation or the age of 18. In Virginia, alternative education is designed to provide learning experiences that "offer educational choices" to meet the student needs of "varying interests and abilities" (Virginia State Department of Education, 1994, p. 13). The primary purposes are for drop-out prevention, to reduce illiteracy, and increase high school completion. Alternative education programs in Virginia fall into one of three categories: regional alternative education programs, locally operated Individual Student Alternative Education Plan (ISAEP) programs, and locally administered alternative educational services.

This study focused on one of these programs, Virginia’s Department of Education (VDOE) Individual Student Alternative Education Plan (ISAEP). Figure 1 describes the programs inputs, activities, and outcomes to illustrate the linkages and sequences between
them and program goals (McLaughlin & Jordan, 1999). This logic model is used to illustrate the program conditions and characteristics of how and for whom this program should work (Harrell, Burt, Hatry, Rossman, Roth & Sabol, 1966).

The ISAEP program was established to address the needs of students, ages 16 to 18 years old, who are unsuccessful in the high school general education public school program. Beginning in December of 1999, the Virginia General Assembly authorized funding to reimburse school division expenditures (Stapleton, 1999). Resources were provided to assist divisions in understanding the ISAEP allocations, application forms, and procedures. Annual support and funding from the Virginia General Assembly for the ISAEP program has remained consistent at $2,247,581 per year since that time.
Figure 1: Individual Student Alternative Education Plan (ISAEP)

**Inputs - Requirements**
- Enrolled in Public Education
- CA 16-18 Years
- At-Risk for Dropping Out
- Not Earning Credits Required for Graduation (At least 1 year behind cohort or on track)
- Voluntary Enrollment
- Initial Principal-Parent-Student Meeting
- Student Evaluation: 7.5 GE or higher standardized reading 85% on each GED Practice Test
- Teacher licensed by VDOE & Prof. Development Provided

**Outputs - ISAEP Development**
- Mandatory Enrollment in a GED Preparation Program
- Career Guidance Counseling
- Career and Technical Education
- Compulsory Attendance
- Procedures for Re-Enrolling in Regular High School Program

**Short-Term Outcomes**
- Ongoing Activities
  - Academic Preparation for GED Test (Minimum 15 hours/month)
  - Work-Based Experience and/or Career/Technical Education (Minimum 10 hours/month)
  - Regular Reports to Students and Parents of Student's Academic & Occupational Program
- Professional Development Provided for Documentation Essentials

**Long-Term Outcomes**
- Exiting the ISAEP
  - OR
  - OR
  - OR
The February, 2003, Revised ISAEP Program Guidelines (DeMary, 2003, March 7) define the program requirements to include career guidance counseling, mandatory enrollment in a GED preparation program or other approved alternative education program, counseling on the economic impact of the failure to complete high school, and provisions for re-enrollment in school. The revised guidelines further define the administrative process required of the ISAEP program to include four major steps. First, an initial principal-parent-student meeting must be held in to assure full parent and student consent. Candidates must be between 16 and 18 years of age, and enrollment is voluntary. Second, a student evaluation/assessment must be completed and include a reading achievement test, GED practices tests, a career and technical education assessment, and options for students that do not qualify for the ISAEP program (Nusbaum, 2007). The ISAEP plan is developed during the third step of the process and finally, the fourth component of the ISAEP program is exiting the program. Students can exit the program in one of three ways. They can be released from compulsory attendance with successful completion of the GED, the career/technical education components, and all of the ISAEP requirements. They can re-enroll in the regular K-12 public school program or another alternative education program that is approved by the local school board. Finally, the least desirable way for students to exit the ISAEP program is to drop out. Whenever a student leaves the ISAEP program, career plans and the consequences of leaving school must be reviewed.

Effective July 2012, in order to complete the ISAEP program the General Assembly passed legislation that requires the ISAEP student to have completed or be enrolled in a CTE program leading toward an industry certification or workplace readiness skills assessment,
and to successfully complete a course in economics and personal finance (2012 ISAEP 6th Annual Conference).

To monitor ISAEP program implementation the Appropriation Act of the 1999 General Assembly and Item 135 of the Appropriation Act, Chapter 3, 2006 Acts of Assembly, required that the Virginia Department of Education Office of Adult, Secondary, and ISAEP Programs submit an ISAEP report each year containing an overview of the program, a synopsis of ISAEPs’ progress, a cost analysis, and data based on a compilation of individual programs’ input. The General Assembly eliminated this requirement in 2009 (Nusbaum, 2012). In these difficult economic times when budgets are scrutinized and millions of dollars have been spent, it is prudent to evaluate programs. There are no research studies that have attempted to determine if the ISAEP program in Virginia school divisions reflects the practices of quality alternative educational programs.

The purpose of this study was to analyze this prominent alternative education practice in the Commonwealth of Virginia through an analysis of Virginia’s Individual Student Alternative Education Plan (ISAEP) program and the alternative education environment it provides. A comparative analysis was made among the ISAEP programs in Virginia’s public school divisions with focus on program characteristics and the NAEA practices. In particular, this study provided formative data and insight for program improvement or replication in other states.

Research Questions
1. What are the characteristics of the ISAEP program from 2001 to 2008?
   a. Number and age of students served
b. Ethnicity of students

c. Program size

d. Reason for enrollment

2. What are the characteristics of the ISAEP program leaders?

a. Job title

b. Level of education

c. Educational certification

d. Number of years working with ISAEP as reported in 2012

3. What is the perceived level of importance of each of the quality practices of alternative education learning environments as represented in the *Exemplary Practices in Alternative Education: Indicators of Quality Programming* as surveyed by the ISAEP program leaders?

4. As evidenced by current reported practice, to what degree does Virginia’s Individual Student Alternative Education Plan (ISAEP) program meet each of the quality practices of alternative education learning environments as represented in the *Exemplary Practices in Alternative Education: Indicators of Quality Programming*?

5. Is there a relationship between the ISAEP program leaders’ perception of importance and the reported current practice of each of the quality practices of alternative education learning environments as represented in the *Exemplary Practices in Alternative Education: Indicators of Quality Programming*?
6. If given the opportunity to change their programs, what factors do the ISAEP program leaders believe could best improve the quality and effectiveness of the ISAEP program?

Significance of the Study

The high economic and social cost of students dropping out of school is well documented, making alternative education an essential part of the educational continuum. The Alliance for Excellent Education (2007) reported that students who complete high school earn more, enjoy more secure lifestyles, and thereby are a greater benefit to society. To reduce the dropout rate, schools must provide programs to meet the needs of all students that will enable them to complete programs and not dropout. Whether in regular high school or alternative schools and programs; recognizing the need for alternative programs and providing them for the at-risk youth creates a “genuine opportunity” to help students “reconnect” to education and improve the chance for students to successfully transition to adulthood (Zweig, 2003).

The stated purpose of this study was to identify the characteristics of the ISAEP program and the importance and implementation of environmental practices within Virginia’s Individual Student Alternative Education Plan program environment. This may, in turn, suggest areas for recognition, improvement, and replication. By surveying and analyzing the program leaders’ appraisal of Virginia’s Individual Student Alternative Education Plan program environment, areas of greater program efficacy can be achieved and successful outcomes obtained.
While there are numerous studies that have described alternative education programs and schools by their characteristics, there are no research studies that have attempted to answer these specific questions in the Commonwealth of Virginia. In fact, little or no research has been conducted to describe and evaluate Virginia’s alternative education programs with emphasis on the Individual Alternative Education Plan program, which is present in school divisions in the Commonwealth, and their relationship to exemplary practices.

This study reviewed Virginia’s alternative education programs with a focus on the Individual Student Alternative Education Plan program. The ISAEP program is one conceptual program that operates under one set of procedures and requirements, and research-based data from this study will be provided to inform decision-making with respect to continued and/or increased funding and highlight the differences among them with respect to knowledge and practice of indicators of quality programming. This comparison and evaluation of the ISAEP program offered in Virginia addresses differences leading to greater quality of future program development and alignment with exemplary practices. Findings will assist Virginia’s efforts to promote high quality alternative education programs for students who are not successful in the traditional educational setting and provide insight into program environment and program needs.

**Definition of Terms**

For the purposes of this study, the following definitions will apply. This list is not meant to be exhaustive, but is meant to be reflective and representative of the language frequently used in relation to the field of alternative education in the Virginia.
Alternative Education – Any form of education within the public school system for students whose educational needs are not being met in the traditional classroom. Programs and services that are offered vary.

At-Risk Students – Students who are viewed as potential school dropouts that have experienced academic failure in the public schools setting for reasons such as students from low-income families, single-parent families, large urban areas, minorities, pregnant or parenting teens, those involved in substance abuse or juvenile delinquent behavior, and students with learning and/or social, emotional and behavioral disabilities.

Dropout – An individual who has left public or private school, has not graduated, and is not currently enrolled in school.

Regional Alternative Education – Programs that involve two or more school divisions working collaboratively to include standards of achievement and behavior; low student-teacher ratio; a plan to transition students back to the regular school; staff development and training; parent participation and support; community outreach; and measurable goals and objectives.

Individual Student Alternative Education Plan (ISAEP) – A Virginia alternative education program for 16 to 18 year old students who are not successful in the regular classroom setting; ISAEP students remain enrolled student in a public school and are still bound by the laws and regulations of the Commonwealth of Virginia.
Limitations, Delimitations and Assumptions

This study and analysis of the Individual Student Alternative Education Plan (ISAEP) is limited to the Commonwealth of Virginia. While quantitative data may be useful for external parties, this study makes no claim of generalization of these findings to other school divisions or programs, including Virginia’s regional alternative education programs or locally administered alternative programs in Virginia.

This study was formative in nature and was limited in that it will analyze only existing ISAEP programs within the Virginia’s school divisions. This study was limited to the Virginia approved ISAEP programs and their leaders. Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007) noted that their participation was voluntary and likely provided a biased sample of the target population, therefore limiting the generalizability of the findings. In some cases, ISAEP program leaders, respondents in this study, perform multiple duties concurrently. This may create conflict or impact responses to the survey instrument.

This study was an attempt to investigate an alternative education program in Virginia and is both descriptive and exploratory in nature. The scope of this study was limited to the current ISAEP programs in operation and the available participants and their experiences in alternative education. Program data available for this study was limited to the ISAEP reports provided to Virginia’s General Assembly from 2001 to 2008. Comparisons between other alternative education programs and conventional, standards-based program were not made. Analysis of the data collected aimed to create meaning. The information was organized, analyzed and presented in a way to bring meaning to the quality practices in alternative education environments as related to Virginia’s ISAEP program. Conclusions about the effectiveness of alternative education are speculative, but communicating and disseminating
these results may lead to additional research into the efficacy of this alternative education program in Virginia in meeting the needs of at-risk students. This study assumed that students who are not successful in a regular educational program can successfully complete program requirements when offered in a different delivery format.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

This literature review focused on what alternative education is, the need for it and how the Commonwealth of Virginia has created alternatives to help students who in their quest to complete their education, are not successful in traditional programs. Through this research, it is clear that alternative education has a place in public education in America. With concerns about the dropout rate and its impact on the development of the American workforce, the U.S. Department of Labor has reviewed alternative education programs and the role of government in these initiatives that connect youth, education and the workplace (Aron, 2006; Ruzzi & Kraemmer, 2006; Martin & Brand, 2006). Researchers have found that students drop out of school because of both individual factors such as disengagement, and institutional factors including the way schools are organized, relationships, and day-to-day practices (Mac Iver & Mac Iver, 2009).

Dropouts can be prevented through combined efforts to address both individual and institutional factors by helping students stay in school, progress in school, and complete school (Mac Iver & Mac Iver, 2009). The Virginia Department of Education has attempted to address both the individual and institutional factors in an effort to help students complete their education so that they are better prepared to successfully transition to adulthood. Alternative approaches to education have always been a part of the development of public education and they come from the basic belief that all individuals can be educated (Young, 1990). That said, how to best provide education has incorporated a vast array of research resulting in new policies, practices, approaches and questions. With the goal of helping them
to succeed, alternative education programs have historically been designed to address the needs of at-risk students and/or students with behaviors that put them at risk for dropping out. A review of the evolution of alternative education reveals both similarities and differences. Early programs were small-scale and reflected innovative approaches; however, the types of alternative education programs have grown and expanded (Raywid, 1994). From the progressive education movement and continuation schools to open education and free schools, alternative education is an evolving part of the educational continuum. To best understand how and what alternative education is in Virginia, this literature review included a review of the history and definitions of alternative education and a review of the purpose and need for alternative education options. A summary of the typology for alternative education programs, their programs environments and characteristics, and a review of the indicators of quality alternative education programs are included. Finally, alternative education programs in the Commonwealth of Virginia are reviewed with an emphasis on the Individual Student Alternative Education Plan program (ISAEP).

**History of Alternative Education**

As part of America’s evolving educational system, alternative education has a long history. Beginning with the mid-to-late 1700’s Thomas Jefferson viewed the educated person as one who combined self-reliance, individuality, self-learning, and civic responsibility. This is an important cornerstone of what we want students to learn in school and what we hope for them to successfully transition to adulthood. Moving on, by the 1840s leaders in education such as Horace Mann posited that common schools would equalize the human condition and “balance the wheel of social machinery” (Glickman, 2001, p. 46). Moving ahead to the forerunner of education today, the progressive movement of the early
1900's led to programs being more student-centered and participatory. Then in the 1960's, public education innovation came about because of criticisms, resulting in increased funding and reform efforts (Friedrich, 1997). The alternative schools of the 1960s and 1970s often attempted to blend academic subjects with personal interests and practical knowledge, and in the late 1970s and 1980s the “fundamental” school emerged (Neumann, 1994). These early educational alternatives resulted in two categories of alternatives: those that fall outside the system, such as private schools, religious schools, or home schools, and those that fall inside the system, such as schools that serve an at-risk or special populations such as teenage parents, potential dropouts, student with disabilities, etc. (Reimer & Cash, 2003).

**Common Schools and Progressive Education.** Newmann (2003) traced the history of public alternative schools from 1967 to 2001. He found that the turbulence of the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s was a period of critical examination of social and economic institutions including education. Though the alternatives to conventional schools, the paradigm for alternative education was shaped, and progressive education reemerged in the 1960s through the 1930s work of John Dewey and humanistic psychology. Dewey was viewed as the architect of progressive education and his views of humanistic education influenced the child-centered pedagogy along with the work of Jean Piaget and Abraham Maslow. Dewey “recognized the importance of individualized and experiential education because all children do not have the same learning styles or skills” and as a result Dewey is considered “the father of the modern alternative education movement” (Reimer & Cash, 2003, p.3).
Free Schools and Open Schools. Along with unprecedented social upheaval in America, the widespread adoption and proliferation of alternative schools arose in the 1960s and 1970s. During this time it was both an era of liberation and possibility, as well as one where the American culture was widely criticizing and examining meanings, beliefs and values. In the 1960s, alternative schools were founded for social and political reasons serving mainly white, middle or upper class students (Reimer & Cash, 2003). By the 1970s the Free Schools movement had emerged out of the civil rights struggle. African American parents established these schools to develop basic literacy skills and reflect their values and beliefs. These schools were often run outside of public education in settings such as churches (Lange & Sletten, 2002).

A parallel movement arising out of this period was Open Schools or open education. Although similar to Dewey’s philosophy and the progressive education movement, it broadened thinking to have teachers assume more of an instructional leadership role and to have students be the cause of their own education through the use of personal interests and context as the focus of inquiry. Choice, autonomy, child-centered, and non-competitive learning characterized this movement which typically fell within public education (Lange & Sletten, 2002).

Continuation Schools and Alternative Education. The proliferation of public alternative schools during the 1970s arose out of reports and publications recommending their development. Their scope began to narrow from one that was progressive and open to one that was conservative and narrows (Young, 1990). There was little research to support the effectiveness of these programs; however, one thing that was clear was that student
attitudes were more positive in alternative settings as opposed to conventional schools (Lehr, et. al., 2008).

Education in America has evolved and in the 1980s and 1990s publications such as *A Nation at Risk* by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, Boyer’s Carnegie Commission report entitled *High School*, and Goodlad’s *A Place Called School* were a few of the documents which led to the reform of “academic excellence” (Neumann, 2003). By the end of the century views about alternative schools were divergent, ranging from favorable to unfavorable depending on the program. School-based management theories gave rise to school restructuring. The establishment of school choice, which significantly impacted the alternative education movement, led alternative education to where it is today – a part of the educational system that is diverse, flexible, and open to creativity. Overall, most alternative school programs have been aimed at secondary level and most often located in urban and suburban areas (Raywid, 1999).

Alternative programs known as “continuation schools” have included centers for students who were pregnant, dropouts, and evening high schools. By the 1980’s the majority of alternative schools were established to address truancy, dropouts, poor performing, disruptive, and/or disinterested students. During these years alternative education was more about at-risk students and focused on teaching them how to behave (Reglin, 1998). The creation of continuation schools was about meeting the needs of these at-risk students. They met the needs of parenting or working students or provided an educational milieu to socially maladjusted students. In the United States, alternative education programs often arose to meet the needs of the student population. California’s continuation schools were one
example where goals included credit recovery, graduation, growth in interpersonal skills, and the development of post-secondary skills to provide an educational alternative to alleviate the dropout problem (Perez, Johnson, & Kirby, 2008).

**Alternative Education Today.** Over the last 40 years, alternative education evolved from the turbulent 60's to educational reform of the 90's to the accountability movement of the 21st century. Today's alternative education is not a new concept. However, it has evolved over the years and appears to be an active, growing part of the public school system in the United States. Like other aspects of education, it is better if it is grounded in research. Alternative education programs have now been compelled to report standards-related data such as attendance rates, number of dropouts, disciplinary statistics, and so forth (Reimer & Cash, 2003).

Overall, alternative schools and alternative education programs have effectively kept more students in school until graduation (Smink & Schargel, 2004). While today's alternative education schools and programs are best described by common characteristics, these schools and programs differ in policy, procedure, definition, and operationalization and the ongoing concern about the cost to both individuals and to society of dropping out compels educational researchers to continue to evaluate programs to find effective strategies (Lange & Sletten, 2002).

**Definitions of Alternative Education**

In this era of accountability, it is important to know what alternative education is; however, while 48 states define alternative education, there is no common definition of what comprises *alternative schools and programs*. There are two characteristics that are
consistently present in these diverse definitions. First, alternative schools and programs are
designed to address the needs of a group not adequately served in the regular program, and
second, alternative schools and programs depart in varying degrees from standard school
organization, programs, and environments (Kleiner, Porch, & Farris, 2002; Lehr, et al.,
2003). These definitions show common themes and similarities. While not prominently
illustrated in the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), alternative education is referenced
as follows:

Alternative education models, either established within a school or separate and apart
from an existing school…are designed to promote drug and violence prevention,
reduce disruptive behavior, reduce the need for repeat suspensions and expulsion,
enable students to meet challenging State academic standards, and enable students to
return to the regular classroom as soon as possible (NCLB, p., 1751).

In 2002, the U.S. Department of Education again defined alternative education as the
following:

a public elementary/secondary school that addresses the needs of student which
typically cannot be met in a regular school and provides nontraditional education
which is not categorized solely as regular education, special education, vocational
education, gifted and talented or magnet school programs (p. 55)

Furthermore, the U.S. Department of Education’s Common Core of Data defined alternative
education as:

a public elementary/secondary school that addresses needs of students that typically
cannot be met in a regular school, provides nontraditional education, serves as an
adjunct to regular school, or falls outside the categories of regular, special education or vocational education. (Lehr & Lange, 2003, p.59)

Morley (1991), a prominent researcher in the Iowa Association of Alternative Education (IAEA), defined alternative education as a baseline for school reorganization and part of the transformation of schools. He noted that alternative education ensures that a student finds a path to his educational goals and that alternative options accommodate cultural pluralism. Morley added that providing choices leads students to productivity and success, and recognizes their individual strengths. It provides options for students who are not successful in the traditional environment and it is seen as a sign of community excellence. Morley stated,

Alternative education is a perspective, not a procedure or program. It is based upon the belief that there are many ways to become educated, as well as many types of environments and structures within which this may occur. Further, it recognizes that all people can be educated and this it is in society’s interest to ensure that all are educated to ....general high school...level. To accomplish this requires that we provide a variety of structures and environments such that each person can find one that is sufficiently comfortable to facilitate progress (p. 8).

Consistent with Dewey’s progressive education movement, it is through alternative education that education recognizes that everyone does not learn the same way and should not be taught the same way or with the same curriculum. To meet the needs of all students, variety and choice must be incorporated into school systems (Morley, 1991).

Research has distinguished between formal and substantive definitions. The formal definition is “an alternative is any school (or administrative unit) within a system of
differentiated schools or units that are available on a choice basis,” while the substantive
definition accepts and supplements the formal definition by adding “chosen by their
students” with a particular educational orientation (Raywid, 2001, p. 191).

Consistent with Morley’s definition, rather than a program, alternative education may
be best viewed as a perspective that says there are different types of structures and different
ways for students to be educated (Reimer & Cash, 2003). To best understand alternative
education programs and schools we must look at their characteristics or environments that
describe them. They are now programs designed for the student at-risk of failure or dropping
out and/or are in response to standards-based reform, accountability, federal special
education law, and polices of choice, zero tolerance, and no social promotion. Key
alternative education definition descriptors are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alternative Education Definition</th>
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<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choice (not assigned)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Purpose and Need for Alternative Education

Alternative education programs have been initiated to fulfill a variety of purposes and
needs. Their adaptability has led to both their durability and lack of complete institutional
alternative programs have attempted to fill needs for certain groups such as minority and poor students who were not succeeding, other alternatives have included innovative programs seeking new ways to educate and provide an answer to juvenile delinquency, dropout prevention, prevention of school violence and a way to increase effectiveness (Raywid, 1999). Alternative programs are needed to accommodate the educational needs of students and in the United States "every student should have the opportunity to learn and to achieve a quality of life they desire based on their educational efforts and achievements" (Reimer & Cash, 2003, p. 5). In the United States education is a fundamental right and alternative education programs allow educators the opportunity to meet the legal responsibility of providing educational access to all students.

Alternative education programs are both a source of disconnection and reconnection from educational institutions (Zweig, 2003). Some alternative programs remove students who are unable to meet academic standards or who are disciplinary problems. Other programs attempt to meet student academic and/or behavioral needs and find a way for them to succeed and connect to education and society. As noted earlier, continuation education programs provide an alternative to students who are credit deficient or that might have to leave the traditional environment for a period of time (Hartzler & Jones, 2002). Overall, the purpose of alternative education is to better meet the needs of students who are unsuccessful in the typical, traditional program (Tewksbury, 2001). That is, these programs are a way for students to successfully complete an educational program.

Researchers, policymakers, and educators agree that alternative schools and programs are needed as an option for at-risk students. This at-risk population includes students from low income or single parent families, large urban areas, minorities, pregnant or parenting,
involved in substance abuse or juvenile delinquent behavior, and students with learning
and/or social, emotional and behavioral disabilities. Without alternatives the risk of not
completing school is even greater for these at risk groups and their risk is further exacerbated
by Bush’s *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) legislation (Lehr & Lange, 2003).

NCLB’s accountability provisions focus the discussion on outcomes with respect to
students educated in alternative programs. Students who attend schools of choice show an
increase in self-esteem, in commitment to school, more positive peer relationships, and an
increase performance (Lehr, et al., 2008). However, critics of alternative programs highlight
issues of concern with generalization from one program to another, a lack of rigor, and little
attention to long-term outcomes.

Clearly there is a need for educational alternatives. In the Commonwealth of
Virginia, alternative education is designed to provide learning experiences that “offer
educational choices” to meet the student needs of “varying interests and abilities” (Virginia
State Department of Education, 1994, p. 13). In Virginia, their primary purpose is for drop­
out prevention and to reduce illiteracy.

**Typology for Alternative Education Programs**

Alternative education programs are one facet of a school division’s comprehensive
program to educate all students (Reimer & Cash, 2003). Table 2 summarizes some of the
types of programs that are focused on providing students with the opportunity to succeed and
complete their education. Designed to provide specialized instruction to students not
enrolled in traditional public schools alternative education programs frequently integrate self­
paced curriculum and behavioral techniques (High School Journal, 2004).
Table 2

*Types of Alternative Schools*

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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Classroom</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Magnet School</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>School-Within-a-School</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Separate Alternative School</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuation School</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Schools of Choice</td>
<td></td>
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<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Last-Chance School</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Remedial Schools</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Schools Without Walls</td>
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<tr>
<td>Residential Schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>Summer Schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>Charter Schools</td>
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</table>

While diversity and choice are stressed, overlapping dimensions are noted in the design and definition of alternative education. These include *who* is served, *where* it operates, *what* it offers, and *how* it is organized and funded (Aron, 2003). Characteristics of *who* the typical alternative education population that is served includes truants, dropouts, students with disabilities, students participating in high-risk behaviors, suspended or expelled
students, students reintegrated from the juvenile justice system, and disconnected youth. (Zweig, 2003) Additionally, pregnant or parenting teens, low achievers, and all "at-risk" youth are often alternative education participants (Aron, 2003). Finally, since initiation of alternative education programs participants have included students from low-income groups and those from diverse ethnic and cultural groups (Bullock & Gable, 2001).

*Where* alternative education programs are located includes resource rooms that might provide additional instruction, such as those that provide study skills and small group instruction. Programs are also provided as pull-out programs such as those in a juvenile detention center or hospital treatment facility. Other programs might be located as a school-within-a-school and alternative education programs may be completely separate or located in self-contained schools (Aron, 2003; Howard, 2003).

*What* types of educational programming and curriculum is provided in the alternative setting includes completing the requirements for a regular high school diploma, completing the requirements of a General Educational Development (GED) diploma, or completing the requirements for occupational and/or skills certification. Often programs are based on individual needs with an emphasis on basic skill acquisition. This can include work/study programs, apprenticeships, and tech-prep programs in collaboration with local community colleges (Aron, 2003).

In her meta-analysis, Friedrich (1997) identified and evaluated 41 evaluation studies that included 36 alternative education programs. Quantitative and qualitative data collection results revealed four categories of alternative programs with enrollment in the first three being voluntary and the last not generally voluntary. These categories are: 1) programs to assist students with special needs (e.g., students who have experienced a life event that
disrupts or threatens to disrupt their education such as pregnancy, substance abuse, etc.), 2) programs providing remedial instruction (e.g., students at least two years behind grade level), 3) programs with a student-based curriculum and an experiential learning instructional approach (e.g., students unable to succeed in the regular classroom), and 4) programs for students referred for disciplinary reasons (e.g., students with disruptive and/or continued behavior problems often as a last resort to expulsion).

Alternative education has also been categorized into three program types. Type I are innovative programs and schools of choice, which seek to make the programs challenging and fulfilling (e.g., magnet programs). Type II programs are last-chance programs where students are sentenced. That is, long-term or short-term programs for students who are chronically disruptive and where the focus is on behavior modification. Type III alternative programs have a remedial focus, which can be academic and/or social/emotional in nature. This third alternative type assumes that the student can return to the mainstream (Raywid, 1994). Raywid (1999) later refined her alternative education typology again using three types, but differentiating them as follows: changing the student (i.e., "last chance" opportunities, can be therapeutic or punitive), changing the school (i.e., innovative curricular and instructional approaches), and changing the educational system (i.e., small schools or schools-within-schools).

A promising typology described by Aron (2003) is one that centers on the educational needs of the student. Specifically, these include programs for students who have fallen "off track" and need short-term intervention with the goal of going back into the regular education or programs for students transitioning to adulthood, such as parenting teens or teens coming out of the juvenile justice system. Finally, this typology includes programs
for older students “substantially off track,” and needing to transition to work, community college, or vocational training, including students with behavioral problems and programs for students who are significantly behind academically to include those with a low reading level, over age, or over grade.

*How* alternative education programs are organized, administered and funded includes state and local education agencies, juvenile justice agencies, charter schools, public schools, private schools, federally funded programs (e.g., Job Corps), and other non-profit and profit companies and agencies. Overall, while there is overlap among program dimensions alternative programs vary in terms of schedules, hours of operation, policies, supervision and administration, academic standards, structure, goals and objectives, parent and/or community involvements, disciplinary policies, and accountability (Aron, 2003).

**Alternative Education Program Environments and Characteristics**

Alternative education programs vary and are generally created individually and are designed to meet the student population needs. A way to best understand them is to look at the research evaluating the *environments* and *characteristics* of effective alternative education programs. While there is not a consistent profile of characteristics, overriding the key elements, characteristics, or best practices of successful alternative programs is the fact that individuals are more productive in environments in which they feel welcome, safe, and valued. Effective alternative education environments provide this concomitant with an atmosphere of respect and where problem behavior is perceived as an opportunity to teach new skills. Other key elements include using functional assessments to determine student strengths and deficits, using a functional curriculum, effective and efficient instruction using positive and direct student-centered instruction, sharing the responsibility for smooth
transition and follow-up, a comprehension continuum of services, and trained staff and resources (Friedrich, 1997; Quinn, Rutherford, & Osher, 1999).

Key attributes for successful programs were summarized and included programs that focus on academics, but are engaging and creative with applicable work- and life-based learning opportunities (Aron, 2006). Characteristics that are commonly found in successful alternative education environments are summarized in Table 3. They include the presence of caring, knowledgeable adults, a sense of community, and a student-centered approach where the resources of youth are viewed, rather than their deficits. Respect, academic and social skill instruction, high academic and behavioral expectations are often found. Academically, a multidimensional curriculum and the integration of academic-, career-, and work-based learning are included. Successful programs are of small size with low student-teacher ratios and they provide support, agency linkage and professional development for their staff. These programs are structured, yet flexible and are chosen or selected by the student and family. They are individualized, structured, yet flexible and involve parents and communities. Finally, successful programs are positive not punitive, staffed with qualified personnel, and developmentally appropriate materials (Aron, 2003; Friedrich, 1997; Husted & Cavalluzzo, 2001; Kerka, 2003; Lange & Sletten, 2002; Leone & Drakeford, 1999; Powell, 2003; Raywid, 1994; Reimer & Cash, 2003; Schargel & Smink, 2001; Tobin & Sprague, 2000).
Table 3

*Research Studies and Program Environments and Characteristics*

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caring, Adult-directed</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sense of Community</td>
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<tr>
<td>Positive/Respect for Youth</td>
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<td>Goals &amp; Expectations</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Student Centered</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher Training</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent/Community Involvement</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low student-Teacher Ratio</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Individualized</td>
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Overall, successful alternative education environments, schools, or programs are summarized to have a sense of community, engaging instruction, and the organizational structure that supports them. They are further described to have a sense of community to include choice. That is, voluntary participation by students and staff; engaging instruction to be student-centered, be interesting and challenging, and finally the organizational structure to involve collaboration, collegiality, and flexibility (Raywid, 1994).
Indicators of Quality Alternative Education Programs

Historically, data collection in alternative education programs has not been consistent or accurate thereby resulting in difficulty in defining or measuring the effectiveness of alternative education programs. However, since most states now have accountability measures for all educational programs, efforts to develop quality standards have been undertaken (Reimer & Cash, 2003). The most recent effort in this area is the 2009 effort of the National Alternative Education Association (NAEA). Through research this national panel identified ten exemplary practices in an “effort to develop a common core of principles” (NAEA, p. 4). Along with each practice the NAEA identified specific indicators of quality programming. As listed in the document the NAEA undertook this work in an effort to accomplish the following:

- Guarantee and promote high quality services
- Develop a common core of principles and technical language
- Promote alternative programs built on exemplary practices
- Evaluate the effectiveness of new and existing programs, and
- Inform policy

As shown in Table 4, while the language varies, the majority of these standards of quality programs overlap and have been part of previous efforts (Reimer & Cash, 2003). It is noted that while some of the previous attempts incorporated other named standards, the indicators or descriptions are incorporated within the NAEA Exemplary Practices.
### Standards of Quality Programs

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mission and Purpose</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X Adamantine Structure/Policies Administration</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X Administration</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climate and Culture</td>
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<tr>
<td>Staffing and Professional Development</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X Faculty and Staff</td>
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<td>Curriculum and Instruction</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Assessment</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X Accountability Measures</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Transitional Planning and Support</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X Vocational/Technical/Career</td>
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<td>Parent/Guardian Involvement</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>Learning Community</td>
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<td>Community and Social Services</td>
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<tr>
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<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Facilities and Grounds</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student Support Services</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Personal/Social/Life Skills</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Funding</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Alternative Education in Virginia

In the Commonwealth of Virginia alternative education is designed to provide learning experiences that "offer educational choices" to meet the student needs of "varying interests and abilities" (Virginia State Department of Education, 1994, p. 13). Their primary purpose is for dropout prevention and to reduce illiteracy. The at-risk population includes students from low income families, single parent families, large urban areas, minorities, pregnant or parenting, students involved in substance abuse or juvenile delinquent behavior, and students with learning and/or social, emotional and behavioral disabilities. Without alternatives the risk of not completing school is even greater for these at risk groups and their risk is further exacerbated by Bush's No Child Left Behind legislation (Lehr & Lange, 2003). In Virginia, students identified as "at-risk" are those who are not successful in meeting the requirements to earn an advanced diploma, standard diploma, modified standard diploma, or special education diploma.

Alternative education policy has been set through the Virginia General Assembly and the Department of Education. The Virginia Department of Education [VDOE] (1994) defined alternative education in their regulations as:

Alternative education means learning experiences that offer educational choices which meet the needs of students with varying interests and abilities. Alternative education offers choices in terms of time, location, staffing, and programs.
Alternative education may include programs for dropout prevention, for employment under the regular supervision of designated school personnel, and for the reduction of illiteracy. Regular programs of general, vocations, or college for gifted or handicapped students are not programs of alternative education. (p. 13)

A further review of the literature found conceptual and operational definitions with the goal "to help students develop academic, work, study, physical, life, social, communication, and employability skills" (Virginia State Department of Education, 1994, p. 7).

Per House Joint Resolution 619 of the General Assembly, the Virginia Department of Education was directed to examine the need for alternative education, to submit a plan with an estimate for funding, and report their findings and recommendations to the General Assembly (VDOE, 1994). In their report to the Governor and General Assembly, the Department of Education found that Virginia's alternative education programs operated for three main purposes: first, to offer educationally "at risk" students another opportunity to remain in school; second, to offer remediation to students whose behavior impeded their ability to remain in the regular classroom setting; and third, the allow for occupational/vocational training. The VDOE report also found that most alternative education programs in Virginia had been in operation for less than six years, were typically housed within an existing high school, operated from 4 to 7 hours per day/5 days per week, and completion was achieved by completing the Tests of General Educational Development (GED), a regular diploma, or returning to the high school program. Most programs used individualized, small group, and/or computer-based instruction with lower student-teacher ratio than typically found in regular education programs. Most programs were small (serving less than 25 students) and students served ranged in age from 13 to 18 years. Most provided
transportation and did not charge fees. Depending on the size of the program, program staff ranged from a full-time administrator or borrowing staff from regular education programs.

Recommendations of the 1994 VDOE study addressed budget considerations and proposed guidelines for the operation of Virginia’s alternative education programs. Additionally, the report included a technical assistance guide containing descriptions of five models of alternative education programs, eight steps to planning alternative education programs, a list of attributes of Virginia’s alternative education programs, and an annotated bibliography.

In January 1997, the Virginia House of Delegates agreed to H.J.R. 492, which directed the Virginia Commission on Youth to study alternative educational programming options for student in the public schools (Virginia House of Delegates, 1997). In response, the 1998 General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Virginia directed the Department of Education to work with the Commission on Youth to study educational services in order to develop guidelines for alternative education by conducting a study on alternative education for suspended and expelled students (Stapleton, 1998). In its first review of the study of alternative education the Commission on Youth recommended to the Board of Education that there be funding for alternative education for 5.6 placements per 1,000 students (Commonwealth of Virginia, 2000). The report and recommendations were sent to the General Assembly where the needs for alternative education program funding, teacher preparation, and the use of technology or instruction were emphasized (Virginia Commission on Youth, 2001).
Alternative education programs in Virginia fall into one of three categories: regional alternative education programs, locally administered alternative educational services, and locally operated Individual Student Alternative Education Plan (ISAEP) programs.

**Virginia’s Regional Alternative Education Programs.** To establish educational options for students who were expelled, long-term suspended, or returning from juvenile correction facilities, the General Assembly established regional alternative education programs in 1993-1994. These regional programs involved two or more school divisions working collaboratively to include intensive, rigorous standards of achievement and behavior; low student-teacher ratio; a plan to transition students back to the regular school; staff development and training; parent participation and support; community outreach; and measurable goals and objectives. Section 22.1-209.1:2 of the Code of Virginia require an annual report on the effectiveness of these regional alternative education programs be given to the Board of Education, Governor, and the General Assembly. However, during the 2010 Virginia Legislative session HB 208 was approved eliminating this report requirement.

According to the last VDOE report for the year 2008-2009, Regional Alternative Education Programs presented to the Virginia Assembly, in 1993-1994 there were four regional programs serving 217 students and in 2008-2009 there were 30 regional programs serving 4,085 students. State funding increased from $1,200,000 in 1993-1994 to $6,717,848 in 2008-2009. Program goals are generally similar; however, there are differences in grade levels served, size, student characteristics, enrollment expectations, educational approaches, priorities, and program resources. Service delivery includes traditional classroom instruction and technology-based instruction. Day, after-school, and evening instruction are used. There
is flexibility with respect to organizational structure, schedules, curriculum, programs, and
discipline. Services often include academic instruction, counseling, social skills training,
career counseling, technology education, conflict resolution, and substance abuse education.
The 30 programs served students from the age of 11 through 21 with 71.16 percent being
male and 28.84 percent being female. The purposes of the regional alternative education
programs include the reduction of the rate of dropouts, to build student self-esteem and
responsibility, to eliminate dangerous behavior or correct dysfunctional behavior, to identify
career interests or secure employment, earn a diploma or General Educational Development
certificate (GED), and to return student to their high school to graduate (Virginia Board of
Education, 2007).

Data obtained from the 2008-2009 regional alternative education programs found that
there was not a standardized selection process, but that there were guidelines and criteria for
admittance. All programs required that parents and students participate in an interview prior
to admission and most viewed admission as a last chance option (VDOE, 1994). Students
enroll or are assigned to a regional alternative education program because they have violated
School Board Policy and received long-term suspensions (e.g., chronic disruptive behavior,
drugs or alcohol, intentional injury, weapons, and/or theft), they are returning from juvenile
correction centers, or school divisions feel they can be best served by the alternative
program.

Services offered to students in regional alternative education programs include
academics such as standard diploma courses, GED preparatory classes, vocational
coursework, independent study, and work-study components. In addition, regional
alternative programs often offer student services, which may include services or courses in conflict resolution, anger management, drug awareness/prevention, career counseling, computer training, mental health, individual tutoring, placement, and/or probation. Evaluation components are in place to assess student performance and the effectiveness of regional alternative education programs. These include traditional letter grading systems (e.g., A, B, C, D, F), nontraditional systems (e.g., portfolios, oral presentations, behavior), or a combination of approaches (Virginia Board of Education, 2009).

Generally, students must meet specific criteria before being able to return to a regular high school and students with Individual Education Plans (IEP) are allowed to enroll in most alternative programs. Discipline policies vary among programs with most having their own discipline system or requiring that students adhere to the rules of the sending school. Most regional programs use behavioral contracts and/or daily or weekly behavior evaluation sheets.

Staff development is a legislative requirement for regional alternative education programs. In 2008-2009 the 30 programs had a total of 272 full time teachers with 92 percent of them being licensed. The average student-to-teacher ratio was 11:1. Support services include school counselors and school psychologists with diverse staff development program needs in the areas of technology, content work, discipline, alternative education practices, conflict management, alcohol and drug abuse, violence, and counseling (Virginia Board of Education, 2009).

**Virginia's Local Alternative Education Programs.** In November of 2006, in cooperation with the Virginia Department of Education, the Virginia Commission on Youth
surveyed all 132 school divisions in order to gain additional information on the divisions’ practices for local alternative educational services to students who were suspended or expelled, in addition to the Virginia’s regional alternative education programs that were previously described. With a response rate of 95%, the survey findings included the following:

- There were 160 locally administered programs or schools serving disciplined students. Forty-six of these programs were located in Fairfax County.
- More than half of the divisions offered disciplined students some form of alternative education.
- Alternative programs included online courses, court educational services, and the opportunity to make-up assignments for short-term suspensions.
- 65 school divisions had access to a regional alternative education program.
- 54 school divisions had both local (local programs include ISAEP) and regional program access.
- 16 school divisions had only local division program access.
- 4 school divisions had no access to alternative education programs.

(VDOE, 2007).

Recommendations from this study were presented to Governor Timothy M. Kaine in April 2008. They included finalizing a Guide on Alternative Educational Options for Suspended and Expelled Youth in the Commonwealth and the dissemination of this guide to all child-serving agencies, and the continued collection of data on locally administered alternative education programs to be submitted biennially to the Virginia General Assembly.
The General Assembly’s Commission on Youth has studied the impact of students long-term suspended and/or expelled and those at risk for dropping out or being truant. Their efforts have resulted in recommendations for legislation, practices, and technical assistance (Cave, 2009).

**Virginia’s Individual Student Alternative Education Plan (ISAEP) Program.**

Another effort by the VDOE to address the needs of students who were unsuccessful in the high school general education public school program began in December of 1999 with the Virginia General Assembly’s authorization of funding to reimburse school division expenditures for students with an Individual Student Alternative Education Plan (ISAEP) (Stapleton, 1999). This was consistent with Virginia School Law § 22.1-254.D of July 1, 1999, which states:

> For a student who is at least 16 years of age, there shall be a meeting of the student, the student’s parents, and the principal or his designee of the school in which the student is enrolled in which an individual student alternative education plan shall be developed in conformity with guidelines prescribed by the Board … (Virginia School Law Deskbook, p. 137)

With Superintendent’s Memo No. 215, Dr. Stapleton, Superintendent of Public Instruction, authorized $2,247,581 to be made available to divisions applying to establish an ISAEP program. Resources were provided to assist divisions in understanding the ISAEP allocations, application forms, and procedures. Support and funding from the Virginia General Assembly for the ISAEP program has remained consistent at $2,247,581 for the past 14 years (Stapleton, 1999, December 3; DeMary, 2000, June 2; DeMary, 2001, May 25;
During an interview on September 25, 2007, Dr. C. Michael Nusbaum, VDOE Specialist for Adult, Secondary, and ISAEP Programs, stated that divisions are awarded an amount of which is tied to the locality's unemployment rate, or a minimum of approximately $7,500. He added that while the funding amount had not changed, division allocations had varied little over the years and yet program size had increased. In follow-up with Dr. Nusbaum, on March 13, 2012 and September 4, 2012, he stated that while the state funding had not changed, the economic downturn has had an effect on local budgets and local funding support for the ISAEP program. As a result, three programs are no longer running and there were currently 128 ISAEP programs in Virginia. In addition, Dr. Nusbaum noted that there were 8 day/residential ISAEP programs and that ISAEP programs are present in the Virginia Department of Corrections. However, the day/residential and Department of Corrections programs are not funded or tracked through the Virginia Department of Education.

To monitor ISAEP program implementation the Appropriation Act of the 1999 General Assembly and Item 135 of the Appropriation Act, Chapter 3, 2006 Acts of Assembly, required that the Virginia Department of Education Division of Technology, Career & Adult Education Department of Education, Office of Adult Education and Literacy Programs submitted an ISAEP report each year containing an overview of the program, a synopsis of ISAEPs' progress, a cost analysis, and data based on a compilation of individual
programs' input. These reports were submitted annually until 2009 when the Virginia General Assembly released the Office of Adult Education and Literacy Programs from providing this report (Nusbaum, 2012).

The ISAEP Program is consistent with Virginia School Law § 22.1-254 “Compulsory attendance required; excuses and waivers; alternative education program attendance; exemptions from article” for any child between the ages of 5-18 (Virginia School Law Deskbook, p. 136). An ISAEP student remains an enrolled student in a public school and is still bound by the laws and regulations of the Commonwealth of Virginia. These include, but are not limited to, attendance, discipline, special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act 2004 (IDEA), services under Section 504, and confidentiality policies. Appropriate accommodations are provided for students with documented disabilities and they may continue to receive special education support while participating in the ISAEP program. However, there are no exemptions to be made to the required scores necessary on the pre-GED testing. Additionally, it is noted that the accommodations provided for students with disabilities in the ISAEP program may not be the same as the allowed accommodations for the GED. Students enrolled in an ISAEP program are students of the public school and are counted in the average daily membership (ADM) of the school division (Nusbaum, 2007).

The February 2003 Revised ISAEP Program Guidelines define the program requirements to include career guidance counseling, mandatory enrollment in a GED preparation program or other approved alternative education program, counseling on the economic impact of the failure to complete high school, and provisions for re-enrollment in
school. The revised guidelines further define the administrative process required of the ISAEP program to include four major steps. First, an initial principal-parent-student meeting must be held in to assure full parent and student consent, disclosure, and understanding of the program and its requirements. At this initial meeting, it is made clear that enrollment in the ISAEP program is voluntary and that attendance and participation in the GED (or alternative) and career/technical education are required components. Candidates must be between 16 and 18 years of age, they must be at least one full year behind in credits compared to their ninth grade cohort, and spend a minimum of 15 hours per week on academic content (GED or other alternative education) and 10 hours per week on career transition education (CTE) (DeMary, 2003, March 7; DeMary, 2006, June 30). It is noted that the ISAEP program is the only approved exception for a student under the age of 18 to take the GED (Nusbaum, 2007).

Second, a student evaluation/assessment must be completed and include a reading achievement test, GED practices tests, a career and technical education assessment, and options for students that do not qualify for the ISAEP program. Students admitted to the ISAEP program must score at or above the 7.5 grade level on a standardized measure of reading achievement and a 410 or higher on each of the five subtests of the Official GED Practice Tests.

The ISAEP plan is developed during the third step of the process. Occurring during a second principal-parent-student meeting, the ISAEP plan should be clearly defined and include measurable academic and career/technical goals, attendance requirements, methods for evaluation of progress, procedures to provide progress reports to parents, and program completion requirements.
During the August 2007 ISAEP Institute, Dr. Nusbaum expanded on components of the plan adding that to help ensure the best possible transition from general education to the ISAEP program the plan should include goals that are written in a way that the student can be held accountable. GED and CTE components, discipline and attendance should also be addressed based on a review of the student’s record. Additionally, a timeline should be established, parent responsibilities be delineated, expectations upon program completion discussed, costs reviewed, (e.g., to take the GED), the existing Individual Education Plan (IEP) or Section 504 Plan incorporated, transportation discussed, and photocopies of the student’s government issued ID, birth certificate, and social security card obtained.

Finally, the fourth component of the ISAEP program is exiting the program. Students can exit the program in one of three ways. They can be released from compulsory attendance with successful completion of the GED, the career/technical education components, and all of the ISAEP requirements. They can re-enroll in the regular K-12 public school program or another alternative education program that is approved by the local school board. The least desirable way for students to exit the ISAEP program is to drop out. Whenever a student leaves the ISAEP program career plans and the consequences of leaving school must be reviewed.

Training for staff administering ISAEP Programs has been held during one or two day institutes in 2001, 2004, 2007, 2008, 2010 and 2012. Additional assistance is available on an individual and as needed basis through the Office of Adult Education and Literacy at the Virginia Department of Education. ISAEP teachers are described as motivated and passionate; however, staff turnover has been high (Nusbaum, 2007, 2012).
During the 2012 Virginia General Assembly session, House Bill 1061 and Senate Bill 489 addressing secondary school graduation requirements were passed. These bills directed the Board of Education to amend § 22.1-253.13:4 (Standard 4. Student achievement and graduation requirements) and § 22.1-254 (Compulsory attendance required; excuses and waivers; alternative education program attendance; exemptions from article), of the Code of Virginia (Richmond Sunlight, 2012, April 10). “These changes require that all students enrolled in ISAEP must also be enrolled in or have completed a Board of Education-approved career and technical education credential, the Virginia Workplace Readiness Skills Assessment (WRSA) and the Economics and Personal Finance (EPF) course. Both the assessment and course must be successfully completed prior to the students’ completion of the ISAEP program” (Nusbaum, 2012).

As described in Superintendent’s Memo #088-11, the Virginia Workplace Readiness Skills Assessment (WRSA) is an online examination “designed to measure current workplace readiness skills” (Wright, 2011, April 1). This is a 100-item multiple choice, 60 minute timed test with a mastery standard of 75%. Accommodations such as an untimed or extended time version, having the test read to the student, or enlarged presentation on the monitor are available as needed for students with disabilities (VDOE, 2012). The economics and personal finance requirement is part of the Standards of Learning (SOL) and is designed to provide students with global skills (i.e., interpret news, understand world’s economies) and personal skills (i.e., economic reasoning, decision making, problem solving (VDOE, 2012).

Due to this regulatory change, the Office of Adult Education and Literacy defined the requirements and developing guidelines through the Virginia Board of Education, and
planning to assist ISAEP teachers and coordinators in the implementation of these changes. Training was held July 10 – 11, 2012 at the ISAEP 6th Annual Conference (Nusbaum, 2012). Participants included program leaders from 123 Virginia school divisions, totaling 137 personnel. In addition, 13 Department of Corrections personnel, one attendee from the Commonwealth Challenge program, and six attendees from day/residential programs were present for a total of 157 program leaders.

Research indicates that successful and effective alternative education programs should be staffed with trained, qualified personnel, and equipped with developmentally appropriate materials that are reflective of the students’ unique learning needs. The vision of such a program must be consistent and articulated among stakeholders and must draw from research-validated practices (Powell, 2003). Alternative schools and programs are needed to address low levels of student engagement, high dropout rates, and achievement gaps (Edwards & Hinds, 2011). This study looked at Virginia’s ISAEP program especially with respect to its alternative education environment and the 2009 NAEA exemplary practices to determine if it reflects the standards of quality alternative education programs.
Chapter 3

Methodology

This study focused on the Virginia’s Department of Education (VDOE) Individual Student Alternative Education Plan (ISAEP). The purpose of this study was to analyze this prominent alternative education practice in the Commonwealth of Virginia through a description of the ISAEP program and the alternative education environment it provides in Virginia’s high schools. A descriptive comparison was made among the ISAEP programs in Virginia’s public school divisions with a focus on the indicators of quality programs provided by the National Alternative Education Association’s (NAEA) Exemplary Practices in Alternative Education: Indicators of Quality Programming that were adopted in January 2009. The methodology and procedures are summarized in this chapter.

Research Questions

1. What are the characteristics of the ISAEP program from 2001 to 2008?
   a. Number and age of students served
   b. Ethnicity of students
   c. Program size
   d. Reason for enrollment

2. What are the characteristics of the ISAEP program leaders?
   a. Job title
   b. Level of education
   c. Educational certification
   d. Number of years working with ISAEP
3. What is the perceived level of importance of each of the quality practices of alternative education learning environments as represented in the *Exemplary Practices in Alternative Education: Indicators of Quality Programming* as surveyed by the ISAEP program leaders?

4. As evidenced by current reported practice, to what degree does Virginia's Individual Student Alternative Education Plan (ISAEP) program meet each of the quality practices of alternative education learning environments as represented in the *Exemplary Practices in Alternative Education: Indicators of Quality Programming*?

5. Is there a relationship between the ISAEP program leaders’ perception of importance and the reported current practice of each of the quality practices of alternative education learning environments as represented in the *Exemplary Practices in Alternative Education: Indicators of Quality Programming*?

6. If given the opportunity to change their programs, what factors do the ISAEP program leaders believe could best improve the quality and effectiveness of the ISAEP program?

**Research Design**

This was a descriptive study. Gall, Gall and Borg (2007) stated, “Descriptive studies have greatly increased our knowledge about what happens in schools” (p. 3). Descriptive research can produce information about education that can impact how the community and/or the policymakers think, and it involves making careful descriptions of educational phenomena as we strive to determine “what is” and understand what “things mean” (p. 300-
Specifically, this study employed a non-experimental research design that studies phenomena as they exist. It provides information as to participant knowledge, opinions, and practice as it relates to the ISAEP program in Virginia. This descriptive study primarily involved research into VDOE documents and the completion of a survey to a sample of participants at one point in time in order to understand the ISAEP program environment. Data were collected from a sample chosen to represent the population to which the data analysis findings can be generalized. This descriptive research design allowed for quantitatively describing the educational phenomena present.

Participants

The participants of this study were ISAEP program leaders attending the ISAEP 6th Annual Conference on July 11, 2012 who were read the letter of informed consent (Appendix A). These participants reflected a variety of position titles such as teachers, coordinators, administrators, or instructional specialists. Surveys were administered to all ISAEP conference attendees and their responses were anonymous. Participants were identified through the Virginia Department of Education Division of Technology, Career & Adult Education Office of Adult Education and Literacy Programs and/or their local school divisions.

Instrumentation

A survey is one method of data collection to gather information about the knowledge and experiences of a sample or population (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). For this study, a researcher-developed survey was the instrument used to efficiently gather program leaders' characteristics, their perception of the importance of exemplary alternative education
program practices, the current level of implementation of these practices in Virginia’s ISAEP program in their respective programs, and the settings in which they are located.

**Survey of Exemplary Practices.** Research shows that alternative education is a perspective based on a belief that there are many environments and structures within which learning can occur. A review of the literature revealed characteristics commonly found in alternative education programs. Recent efforts have focused on enhancing program quality and developing common practices, principles, and environments leading to better identify indicators of quality programs. The NAEA’s *Exemplary Practices in Alternative Education: Indicators of Quality Programming* (2009) describes each of the ten exemplary practices and provides a list of eight to 17 indicators of quality programming for each practice (Table 5).

Table 5  
*NAEA Practices and Number of Indicators*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAEA Exemplary Practices (2009)</th>
<th>Indicators of Quality Programming</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.0 Mission and Purpose</td>
<td>1.1 – 1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.0 Leadership</td>
<td>2.1 – 2.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.0 Climate and Culture</td>
<td>3.1 – 3.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.0 Staffing and Professional Development</td>
<td>4.1 – 4.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.0 Curriculum and Instruction</td>
<td>5.1 – 5.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.0 Student Assessment</td>
<td>6.1 – 6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.0 Transitional Planning and Support</td>
<td>7.1 – 7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.0 Parent/Guardian Involvement</td>
<td>8.1 – 8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.0 Collaboration with Community</td>
<td>9.1 – 9.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.0 Program Evaluation</td>
<td>10.1 – 10.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For this research the NAEA exemplary practice 9.0 “Collaboration” was referred to as “Collaboration with Community” to more accurately describe how it is defined by the NAEA. To create a valid assessment and ensure construct and content validity a survey matrix was created (Table 6) using the NAEA’s Exemplary Practices in Alternative Education: Indicators of Quality Programming in (National Alternative Education Association, 2009) and with his permission, Dr. Ray Morley’s Checklist of Quality Indicators (Morley, 2007). A purposeful selection of items was completed to reflect indicators for each exemplary practice in the ISAEP program.

An expert panel was assembled to review the NAEA and Morley documents, the matrix, and the survey questions to be used in this study. The expert panel consisted of Dr. Ray Morley, Iowa Association of Alternative Education; Dr. Michael Nusbaum, Specialist, Office of Adult Education & Literacy; and Dr. Michael DiPaola, Chancellor Professor School of Education, College of William and Mary. I made revisions to the survey based on the expert panel recommendations. Survey items were refined to enhance clarity and understanding. A table of specifications illustrates how the final survey contains three to five items for each of the ten NAEA standards (Table 7). The final survey contains a total of 41 items (Appendix B).

Directions and an example item were provided to the participants before beginning the survey. First, participants rated each of 34 items in two different ways using a provided scale. The participant first determined the importance of the program component in alternative education from their perspective, by choosing whether it is Unimportant, Somewhat Important, Important or Very Important. Next, the participants determined the
degree to which the same component is present in their ISAEP program by choosing Never, Very Little, Some, or Quite A Bit (Figure 2). Items 35 through 38 and item 40 were multiple choice items designed to gather data about the program size and characteristics of the program leaders. Item 41 was an open-ended item designed to elicit program leaders' beliefs about what would impact the quality and effectiveness of ISAEP programs. Interested participants were offered the opportunity to receive an electronic copy of the study's results by providing an email address in an envelope separate from the completed surveys.
Alternative Education in Virginia’s ISAEP Program

Table 6

*Survey Matrix*

Morley’s Checklist number (NAEA Indicator number)

**Exemplary Practices in Alternative Education: Indicators of Quality Programming**
(NAEA, 2009)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alternative Learning Environments: A Checklist of Quality Indicators (Morley, 2006)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Philosophy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Parents/Guardians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Curriculum and Instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. Vocational/Technical/Career</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H. Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Personal/Social/Life Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. Community and Social Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K. Facilities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Items = 35
### Table of Specifications - NAEA Exemplary Practice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAEA Exemplary Practice</th>
<th>Survey Items</th>
<th>Item Number In Survey</th>
<th>Total Items In Survey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mission and Purpose</strong></td>
<td>• The program mission/philosophy is visible to stakeholders.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Student success is central in the program.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The mission/purpose is consistent with division goals.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The mission/purpose is consistent with state standards.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leadership</strong></td>
<td>• Policies/procedures are consistently implemented.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The budget allows all standards to be fulfilled.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The program operation complies with state and federal guidelines.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Climate and Culture</strong></td>
<td>• Written rules for behavior exist.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Rules for behavior are consistently applied.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Each student is engaged in determining their ISAEP plan.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Accommodations are made to allow personal success.</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• ISAEP physical facilities are safe and accessible.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Staffing and Professional Development</strong></td>
<td>• Resources are available for teachers to participate in professional development.</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• ISAEP teachers use multiple teaching styles.</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Professional development includes collaborating with community services.</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum and Instruction</td>
<td>The program is in compliance with laws governing students with special needs.</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Individual student plans are used for instructional decisions.</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Technology is embedded in curriculum delivery.</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Assessment</td>
<td>The purpose of assessment is clear.</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The purpose of assessment is communicated to stakeholders.</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Multiple assessment measures are used to guide student learning.</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Multiple assessment measures are used to monitor student progress.</td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitional Planning and Support</td>
<td>There is a consistent process from plan entry to plan exit.</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coordinated supports are provided to ensure transition to post-secondary activity (education, training or employment.)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transition planning includes community agencies.</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent/Guardian Involvement</td>
<td>Parents participate in choosing the ISAEP program.</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parents are involved in problem solving (academic, behavioral, and/or vocational).</td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parents are continuously apprised of their student's progress.</td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration with Community</td>
<td>Community and service agencies are utilized in the ISAEP program.</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ISAEP student planning involves the community service organization or groups.</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students know how to access community support services.</td>
<td>31</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Program Evaluation

- Student outcome data is used to evaluate program success.
- Parents are involved in evaluating the effectiveness of the ISAEP program.
- Staff assess the success and effectiveness of the ISAEP program.

Figure 2

Survey Directions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Importance</th>
<th>Current Practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unimportant</td>
<td>Never</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat Important</td>
<td>Very Little</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important</td>
<td>Some</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Important</td>
<td>Quite A Bit</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Field Test

A field test of the final survey was conducted with five participants. Participants were educators working in the public school setting who were familiar with the ISAEP program, but were not program leaders. These educators were asked to review the survey, give their opinions, and offer their perspectives in order to see if the survey procedures could be
administered as envisioned. Field test participants were asked to review the survey and respond to the following questions:

1. Do you notice any typographical errors or misspelled words in the instrument?
2. Do the items make sense?
3. Is the format of the instrument clear? Does it flow well?
4. Is the vocabulary appropriate for the target respondents?
5. Is the length of the survey appropriate?
6. Are there any items sensitive to possible cultural barriers?
7. Is there anything missing from the survey?
8. Were the directions clear?

Based on the field test participant responses, modifications were made and the survey finalized.

Data Collection

The final version of the survey was administered at the July 11, 2012 Virginia Department of Education ISAEP 6th Annual Conference. Each survey with a pen was distributed during lunch. The survey was introduced by a trained individual with a cover letter stating the purposes of the study and the researcher’s commitment to protect the participant’s anonymity. It was also noted that participation was voluntary and that participants could skip any items that they did not wish to answer, and that they could discontinue their participation at any point. The survey was administered by a trained individual who read the directions aloud and collected the completed surveys. Collected surveys were placed in a sealed envelope and hand-delivered to the researcher. Responses
were transferred to an excel spread sheet to assist with analysis. Upon turning in their survey, participants received a candy bar and raffle ticket. Incentives were then awarded to randomly chosen participants. There were three incentives – a $25.00 iTunes gift card, a $25.00 Visa gift card, and a $25.00 Starbucks gift card.

**Data Analysis**

Quantitative analysis procedures were applied to the data collected. As illustrated in Table 8, descriptive and correlational statistics, and qualitative analysis will be used to organize, summarize and derive meaning from the collected data.

Data for questions one, two, three, and four were reported using descriptive statistics including means, standard deviations, percentages, and frequency counts. Descriptive statistics are used in educational research to organize, summarize, and display obtained data (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and post-hoc Turkey HSD were calculated on the ten groups for question three and the ten groups for question four to discover the significance of differences between the group means.

Data for question five were analyzed using correlational statistics to discover the direction and magnitude of the variables relationship. The Pearson \( r \) was the statistic calculated and both variables are continuous variables.

Data for question six were analyzed with a qualitative analysis using frequency counts and themes (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007).
## Table 8

*Research Questions, Item Type and Number, and Form of Data Analysis*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Item Type</th>
<th>Item Number</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) What are the characteristics of the ISAEP program?</td>
<td>VDOE Data</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Descriptive statistics: percentages, frequency counts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Number and age of students served</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Ethnicity of students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Program size</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Reason for enrollment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) What are the characteristics of the ISAEP program leaders?</td>
<td>Open-ended</td>
<td>Items 36, 37, 38, 39, 40</td>
<td>Descriptive statistics: percentages, frequency counts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Job title</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Level of education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Educational certification</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Number of years working with ISAEP</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) What is the level of importance of each of the quality practices of alternative education learning environments as represented in the <em>Exemplary Practices in Alternative Education: Indicators of Quality Programming</em> as perceived by the ISAEP program leaders?</td>
<td>Scaled</td>
<td>Items 1 - 34</td>
<td>Descriptive statistics: means, standard deviations, percentages, frequency counts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ANOVA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tukey HSD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) As evidenced by current reported practice, to what degree does Virginia’s Individual Student Alternative Education Plan (ISAEP) program meet each of the quality practices of alternative education learning environments as represented in the <em>Exemplary Practices in Alternative Education: Indicators of Quality Programming</em>?</td>
<td>Scaled</td>
<td>Items 1 - 35</td>
<td>Descriptive statistics: means, standard deviations, percentages, frequency counts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ANOVA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tukey HSD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(5) Is there a relationship between the perception of importance and the current practice of each of the quality practices of alternative education learning environments as represented in the *Exemplary Practices in Alternative Education: Indicators of Quality Programming* as reported by the ISAEP program leaders?

(6) If given the opportunity to change their programs, what factors do the ISAEP program leaders believe could best improve the quality and effectiveness of the ISAEP program?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey</th>
<th>Items 1 - 34</th>
<th>Correlational statistics - Pearson r</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open-ended</td>
<td>Item 41</td>
<td>Qualitative content analysis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Generalizability**

While quantitative data obtained from this study may be useful for external parties, this study makes no claim of generalization of these findings to other school divisions or programs, including Virginia’s regional alternative education programs or locally administered alternative programs in Virginia. This study was formative in nature and was limited to informing and improving the existing ISAEP program within the Virginia’s school divisions.

**Ethical Considerations**

Applying ethical safeguards with respect to this research design, which analyzes the environment of the ISAEP program in Virginia, considers utility, propriety, feasibility and accuracy. With respect to utility, this study identified the stakeholders, their selection, and the needs and perspectives of those involved.
This was a quantitative study and as a result there is less meaning making on my part as a researcher. Participants were anonymous so that they would not suffer any repercussions from their responses. The information sought is reflective of needs in education to better understand the development of successful alternative education programs, and it is prudent to evaluate the ongoing expenditure of funds.

Propriety required that this study be designed to address the needs of the target population. Procedures here were conducted in a respectful manner and caused no harm to the stakeholders. The survey was introduced with a cover letter outlining how anonymity of the participating program coordinators was protected and their participation voluntary. This research proposal for this study was approved by the Institutional Review Committee (IRC) of the College of William and Mary on May 19, 2012. As findings are disclosed there may be benefit to individuals as program modification may result from data collected. The results of this study will be sent to all participants who request a copy. Conflict of interest is not indicated at this time, but those involved in the program evaluation should maintain awareness of the possibility.

This study was feasible as it was not disruptive and the information to be obtained is considered practical. Interest groups such as the school board, parents, staff, students, and the community are considered in this research as the ultimate goal of this study will lead to greater successful program completion of high school students, reduce dropout rates, and lead to a workforce better prepared to raise families and contribute to society. This study was not considered costly.
It is incumbent upon me, the researcher, to maintain clear, accurate documentation of data gathered and I am charged with the responsibility to maintain confidentiality and to specifically examine data collected according to the research design. Data was gathered in a valid, reliable, and systematically collected manner so that the analysis and interpretation yields justified, fair conclusions of the alternative education environment in Virginia’s ISAEP program.
Chapter 4

Results

School divisions across the United States have a common goal of wanting all students to achieve success, and American education has been charged with mandates that emphasize standards and accountability. At the same time there is ongoing concern about the cost to both individuals and to society of students dropping out of school. This concern has compelled educational researchers to find effective strategies. Researchers, policymakers, and educators agree that alternative schools and programs are needed as an option for at-risk students. Educators have been given the task of providing educational opportunities and supports for students that will lead them to program completion with skills to secure jobs and be successful in the global economy.

The purpose of this study was to analyze one prominent alternative education practice in the Commonwealth of Virginia through a formative analysis of Virginia’s Individual Student Alternative Education Plan (ISAEP) program and the alternative education environment it provides. This study examined program data and the characteristics of the program leaders, the level of importance and the reported practice as related to each of the quality practices of alternative education learning environments as represented in the Exemplary Practices in Alternative Education: Indicators of Quality Programming, to determine if a relationship exists between the ISAEP program leaders’ perception of importance and the reported current practice, and to determine what factors the ISAEP program leaders believe could best improve the quality and effectiveness of the ISAEP
program. The results obtained from analyzing quantitative and qualitative data pertaining to each of the six research questions are addressed in this chapter.

Data from the 2001 through 2009 annual reports to the General Assembly from the Virginia Department of Education, Office of Adult Education and Literacy Programs, was used to answer research question one, and survey data collected from the ISAEP program leaders on July 11, 2012 during the ISAEP 6th Annual Conference were used to answer questions two through six. Participants included program leaders from 123 Virginia school divisions, totaling 137 local school division personnel. In addition, 13 personnel from the Department of Corrections, one attendee from the Commonwealth Challenge program, and six attendees from day/residential programs were present for a total of 157 program leaders.

**Survey Completion**

As illustrated in Table 9, 132 participants, or 84 percent, of the 157 attendees returned the survey provided. Of the surveys completed, 55 percent of respondents completed all items; 82.5 percent responded to the item both in terms of *Importance* and in terms of *Current Practice* for items 1 through 34; 14.4 percent omitted a random response or two from questions 1 through 34; one participant (<1 percent) omitted items 14-34 under *Importance*, but did respond to those items under *Current Practice*; 3 percent omitted items 1-34 under *Current Practice*, but did respond to those items under *Importance*; 30 percent omitted opened-ended item 39 and/or item 41; and one participant (<1 percent) did not complete page two of the survey. Five surveys were omitted from data analysis. These included the respondent who omitted questions 35 through 41 (page 2); two who had Associate’s degrees and one who was a teacher assistant as they were not licensed teachers; and one who indicated he/she was newly hired with no ISAEP experience. A total of 127
respondents were considered in this study. With respect to each research question, incomplete survey responses were omitted from the specific question’s reported data. Further specification of omitted data can be found with the results of each research question.

Table 9

*Survey Completion*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Completion</th>
<th>Number of Surveys</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Surveys returned</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey completed entirely</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Items 1-34 completed</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Items 1-34 responses omitted for 1-2 items</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 14-34 responses omitted for “Importance”</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Items 1-34 responses omitted for “Current Practice”</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 39 omitted</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 41 omitted</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Items 39 and 41 omitted</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Items 35-41 (page two of survey)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Research Question 1.** *What are the characteristics of the ISAEP program from 2001 to 2008?*

Section 22.1-254 of the Code of Virginia authorizes local school boards to permit fulfillment of compulsory attendance for students aged 16 to 18 years when an Individual Student Alternative Education Plan (ISAEP) program is implemented. During year one for
the ISAEP program (1999-2000) guidelines were established, a funding process established, and program duration was only a few months. Year two (2000-2001) included technical assistance and regional training. The ISAEP program continued technical assistance, site visits, and training with increased emphasis on career and technical education during year three (2001-2002). During year 4 (2002-2003) ISAEP guidelines were revised to reflect changes in GED tests, and new career and technical education benchmarks were included. The following four years (2003-2004, 2004-2005, 2005-2006, 2006-2007) focused on improving and strengthening the career and technical components and increasing awareness among school divisions. During years nine through 13 (2007-2008, 2008-2009, 2009-2010, 2010-2011, and 2011-2012) technical assistance was provided, and monitoring focused on improving program management, assessment and technology support, and training related to changes in graduation requirements (Virginia Department of Education, 2008; Nusbaum, 2012).

Beginning in 2001, Item 141.H.4 of the appropriation act, Chapter 1073, 2000 Acts of the Assembly, required that the Department of Education monitor ISAEP program implementation and required an annual report to the General Assembly (Virginia Department of Education, 2001). These reports were submitted annually through 2008 when the 2009 Virginia General Assembly released the Office of Adult Education and Literacy Programs from providing this report (Nusbaum, 2012). A review of the local program data collected by Virginia Department of Education Reports – Individual Student Alternative Education Plan Program reports from November, 2001, through October, 2008, revealed program information as it pertains to the number and age of students served, the ethnicity of students, program size and the reason for enrollment.
Number and Age of Students Served. As illustrated in Table 10, the ISAEP program reflected continual growth in the number of students each year the data was reported with the exception of 2005-2006 when the definition (terminology) was changed from "enrolled" to "served." When compared to the first full year of program implementation (2000-2001) and the last year these data were reported to the Virginia General Assembly (2007-2008) an 80.4 percent increase was shown in the numbers of students participating in ISAEP programs in Virginia's school divisions.

The ISAEP program was developed for students aged 16 to 18, and school divisions reported students who had qualified for and participated in their ISAEP program. Program demographics have been generally consistent over the years with respect to the age of ISAEP program participants. The data presented in Table 11 reflects that 17-year-olds were most prevalent comprising approximately one half of the program participants.

Table 10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of ISAEP Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000-2001</td>
<td>3,609</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001-2002</td>
<td>4,288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002-2003</td>
<td>4,286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-2004</td>
<td>5,071</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004-2005</td>
<td>6,070</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-2006</td>
<td>5,345</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-2007</td>
<td>6,366</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-2008</td>
<td>6,512</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Each year approximately one third of ISAEP participants were 16-year-olds. The smallest group of ISAEP students was the 18-year-olds. It is noted that 18-year-old students are able to stay in the ISAEP program past the age of 18 depending on their progress and school administrator determination. Increasingly, more students 18 years and older remain in the program in order to complete the program and earn their GED credential. Overall, the data suggests that the number of 16- and 17-year-olds increased, while the number of 18-year-olds decreased from 2004-2005 through 2007-2008.

Table 11
ISAEP Program Students by Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>1,227</td>
<td>1,404</td>
<td>1,205</td>
<td>1,334</td>
<td>2,016</td>
<td>1,735</td>
<td>1,951</td>
<td>2,076</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>1,841</td>
<td>2,189</td>
<td>2,282</td>
<td>2,814</td>
<td>2,853</td>
<td>2,683</td>
<td>3,395</td>
<td>3,422</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18+</td>
<td>541</td>
<td>695</td>
<td>789</td>
<td>923</td>
<td>1,081</td>
<td>927</td>
<td>1,020</td>
<td>1,014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3,609</td>
<td>4,288</td>
<td>4,276</td>
<td>5,071</td>
<td>6,070</td>
<td>5,345</td>
<td>6,366</td>
<td>6,512</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ethnicity of Students. Data on student ethnicity were collected and reported beginning in year four of program implementation. Table 12 shows participation rates based on ethnicity. The greatest increase was seen by “other” ethnicities where an increase of 190.6 percent was reported when year four (2002-2003) was compared to year nine (2007-2008). Hispanic student participation increased 152.6 percent and African American student participation increased 108.9 percent during the same time period. Caucasian student
participation consistently remained the largest group overall, but showed only an increase of 27.7 percent from year four to year nine.


Table 12

**ISAEP Program Students by Ethnicity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>3,120</td>
<td>3,550</td>
<td>3,927</td>
<td>3,498</td>
<td>3,961</td>
<td>3,987</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>942</td>
<td>1,268</td>
<td>1,785</td>
<td>1,428</td>
<td>1,901</td>
<td>1,968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>298</td>
<td>331</td>
<td>393</td>
<td>432</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>4,276</td>
<td>5,072</td>
<td>6,070</td>
<td>5,345</td>
<td>6,366</td>
<td>6,512</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Data not reported

**Program Size.** Most ISAEP programs serve a small number of students (Table 13). The number of enrolled ISAEP student in Virginia’s programs in 2000-2001 ranged from 1 student to 221 students with 41 percent of programs having served less than 10 students and 93 percent of programs serving less than 100 students. In 2001-2003, ISAEP programs ranged from 1 student to 222 students with 28 percent of programs having served less than 10 students and 91 percent of programs serving less than 100 students. This pattern continued to
2007-2008 where the ISAEP programs ranged from 1 student to 573 students with 21 percent of the programs serving less than 10 students and 89 percent of the programs serving less than 100 students.

Table 13

ISAEP Program Size

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Students in ISAEP Program</th>
<th>Number of Programs (Percent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>≤10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000-01</td>
<td>55(41%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001-02</td>
<td>25(28%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002-03</td>
<td>50(37%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-04</td>
<td>31(26%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004-05</td>
<td>28(23%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-06</td>
<td>37(29%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-07</td>
<td>28(22%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-08</td>
<td>27(21%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reason for Enrollment. The Virginia Department of Education reports note that students enrolled in the ISAEP Program for four major reasons (Virginia Department of Education, 2008). These include academic challenges, disciplinary issues, being overage (students one year or more behind their entering student cohort), and other reasons. As shown in Table 14 data on these reasons for enrollment was only reported for three
years (2005-2006, 2006-2007, and 2007-2008). A consistent picture is shown by this data. In each year the greatest percentage of students are enrolled in the ISAEP program due to academic challenges with 78.8 percent in 2005-2006, 53.8 percent in 2006-2007, and 44.7 percent in 2007-2008. Disciplinary issues are also fairly consistent with 12.8 percent in 2005-2006, 14.5 percent in 2006-2007, and 14.3 percent in 2007-2008. An increase is demonstrated with respect to students being overage as the reason for enrollment with 5.3 percent in 2005-2006, 19.9 percent in 2006-2007, and 27.7 percent in 2007-2008. Also demonstrating an increase were the other reasons for enrollment being 2.9 percent in 2005-2006, 11.7 percent in 2006-2007, and 13.1 percent in 2007-2008. Overall, academic challenges are the most prevalent reason for enrollment in the ISAEP program.

Table 14

Reason for Enrollment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Challenges</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>4,215</td>
<td>3,430</td>
<td>2,914</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disciplinary Issues</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>686</td>
<td>924</td>
<td>935</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overage</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>1,267</td>
<td>1,809</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>745</td>
<td>854</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>5,345</td>
<td>6,366</td>
<td>6,512</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Data not reported

Summary of Research Question 1. Overall, the ISAEP program has been operational for 13 years and data was reported to the General Assembly through 2008.
Characteristics of the ISAEP program include data that reveals increased student participation by over 80 percent from 2000-2001 to 2007-2008. The program serves students aged 16 to 18 years of age and approximately half of participating students were 17-year-olds and approximately one third were 16-year-olds. Eighteen year olds and older were the smallest group ranging from 14.99 to 18.45 percent of participating students. Six years of reported data on student ethnicity finds fairly consistent data with 61 to 72 percent of students being Caucasian, 22 to 30 percent African American, 4 to 6 percent Hispanic, and 1 percent of other ethnicity. The data reviewed found that the vast majority (89 to 93 percent) of ISAEP programs serve less than 100 students per year. The data also revealed that while programs serving less than 10 students was the largest reported group during 2001-2002 (41 percent), this size group was never that large again. Subsequent years, with one exception (2002-2003), ranged from 21 to 28 percent suggesting that while program size increased, few programs exceed 100 students. Data on reasons for enrollment was only available for three years, however, it clearly showed that academic challenges are the most prevalent reason for enrollment, followed by disciplinary issues, being overage, and other reasons. A greater increase was shown in ISAEP students enrolling because they were overage than other enrollment reasons. While data on reasons for enrollment is limited, the reviewed data indicated that the ISAEP program is one that has grown in size and diversity.

**Research Question 2. What are the characteristics of the ISAEP program leaders?**
ISAEP program leaders are determined at the local school division level. According to Dr. Nusbaum (2012) the only requirement by the Virginia Department of Education is that the program leader be licensed in the K-12 environment.

**Job Title.** As shown in Table 15 ISAEP leaders were asked to mark all of their job titles that applied including the option of writing in their title under “Other.” Twenty-one of the 127 respondents (16.5 percent) identified themselves as having two job titles. These respondents predominantly identified a combination of teacher and program coordinator or program coordinator and administrator. One respondent identified three job titles and one self-identified as having four job titles. Table 16 summarizes the “Other” job title supplied by the ISAEP programs leaders with the most frequent being school, career or vocational counselor.

Table 15

*Job Title*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Responses Count</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>28.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Coordinator</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>29.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>43.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>17.31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 16

*Other Job Titles*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job Title</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administrative Assistant</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselor (School, Career, Vocational)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director of Special Programs</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director of Student Services</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOE, State Operated Programs</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Specialist</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ed. Assessment Coordinator</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitator</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring Specialist</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Jail Coordinator</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Ed Supervisor/Coordinator</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Coordinator</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Level of Education.** ISAEP program leaders were asked to identify all degrees earned (Table 17). It is noted that 15.7 percent of the respondents chose more than one degree and 10.2 percent of the respondents identified themselves as having a Bachelor’s degree. However, 81.9 percent of the ISAEP program leaders chose only one response that was higher than a Bachelor’s indicating that more than likely they also held other lower degrees that they did not identify. Under “Other,” in addition to identifying their degree one respondent indicated that they had a Postmaster certificate and another indicated that they
Alternative Education in Virginia’s ISAEP Program

held an Adult Ed. certification. Overall, the data indicates that the majority of ISAEP program leaders (89.8 percent) hold degrees higher than a Bachelor’s.

Table 17

Degrees Earned

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Multiple degrees indicated</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s only</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s only</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>58.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Specialist only</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctorate only</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Educational Certification. Overall, 59.1 percent of ISAEP programs leaders hold more than one endorsement as shown in Table 18. Of the 127 survey respondents 119 (93.7 percent) indicated that they are licensed to teach in Virginia. Three of the eight respondents indicating they were not licensed to “teach,” but were licensed as school counselors and the other five were in administrative roles. Those holding teaching and/or administrative endorsements reflect a variety of content and specialty areas (Table 19) with 46.45 percent holding endorsements in administration/supervision, 41 percent holding endorsement in an area of secondary education (e.g., English, History, Government, etc.), and 23.6 percent being endorsed in one or more areas of special education (e.g., learning disabilities, emotional disabilities, intellectual disabilities, etc.).
Table 18

*Number of Endorsements*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Endorsement Areas</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None or omitted</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>33.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>33.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 19

*Educational Endorsements*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Endorsement</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administration/Supervision/Principal</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>46.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary Education</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>40.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>23.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business/Marketing</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary Education</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Counseling</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superintendent</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational/Technical</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and PE</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading/Literacy</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline</td>
<td>Years</td>
<td>ISAEP Credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Driver’s Education</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Childhood</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Language</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer Science</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Media</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English as a Second Language (ESL)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gifted</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Psychology</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visiting Teacher</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Number of Years Working with ISAEP as Reported in 2012.** As reported by 2012 ISAEP program leaders with 126 of 127 survey participants responding, a fairly even distribution was revealed across the time frames measured with respect to the length of time that they had worked with the ISAEP program as illustrated in Table 20. When combined, however, almost half of the respondents (45.2 percent) have worked with the ISAEP program for three years or less and 39.7 percent have worked with the program for four to 10 years. Only 15.1 percent of the respondents have worked with the program for more than ten years. This indicates that a good portion of the staff working with this program is not highly experienced.
Table 20

ISAEP Program Experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Working with ISAEP</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 1 year</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>19.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 to 3 years</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>25.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 to 6 years</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>20.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 to 10 years</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>19.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 10 years</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary of Research Question 2. Data obtained about the characteristics of the ISAEP program leaders in 2012 revealed that the majority of respondents identified themselves as administrators, program coordinators or teachers. A variety of other job titles were also provided revealing a diverse group of program leaders. Overall, ISAEP program leaders (89.8 percent) hold degrees higher than a Bachelor's and that the vast majority (93.8 percent) are licensed in the state of Virginia. Responses regarding licensure find that the respondents hold endorsements in many diverse areas with the highest concentrations being in administration/supervision, secondary education, and special education. Over half (59.5 percent) hold more than one area of endorsement. With respect to experience within the ISAEP program a fairly even distribution was revealed across the time frames measured with 45.2 percent having worked with the ISAEP program for three years or less and 39.7 percent have worked with the program for four to 10 years. The majority ISAEP program leaders meet VDOE requirements to be licensed teachers (93.7 percent). Based on survey responses most have experiences within administration (e.g., principals, assistant principals,
coordinators, etc.), secondary (e.g., biology, government, algebra, etc.), and special education (e.g., learning disabilities, emotional disabilities, intellectual disabilities, etc.), which indicates a level of training consistent with the population being served. Consistent with Dr. Nusbaum’s report that staff turnover is high as 19.8 percent of respondent reported working in the ISAEP program for less than a year.

Research Question 3. What is the perceived level of importance of each of the quality practices of alternative education learning environments as represented in the Exemplary Practices in Alternative Education: Indicators of Quality Programming as surveyed by the ISAEP program leaders?

The National Alternative Education Association (NAEA) adopted the *Exemplary Practices in Alternative Education: Indicators of Quality Programming* in January 2009. This relatively recently developed, field-tested set of standards was constructed from numerous sources, including past research, successful alternative programs, and the knowledge of experts in the field. Through research the national panel reviewed, modified, and identified ten exemplary practices that are considered essential to quality programming in alternative education. The ten exemplary practices are identified as Mission and Purpose, Leadership, Climate and Culture, Staffing and Professional Development, Curriculum and Instruction, Student Assessment, Transitional Planning and Support, Parent/Guardian Involvement, Collaboration with Community, and Program Evaluation. One of the goals of the NEAE was that the document be used “to evaluate the effectiveness of new and existing programs” (National Alternative Education Association, 2009, p. 5).
The survey administered utilized a purposeful sampling of items from the 2009 NAEA *Exemplary Practices in Alternative Education: Indicators of Quality Programming*. Frequency counts, means, and standard deviations of the survey participant ratings of the importance of survey items 1 through 34 can be found in Appendix C. Relationships of items 1 through 34 can be found in Appendix D. To obtain complete data sets for each practice, respondents who omitted a response to any items within the cluster of items for that practice were omitted from calculation for that practice. As shown in Table 21, the mean of all ten Exemplary practices fell between *Important* and *Very Important* (mean range 3.11 to 3.66).

To compare the outcome data between the ten groups a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was calculated (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). There was a significant effect among the group at the p<.05 level for the ten groups [F (9, 4042), p = .000). These findings indicated that there were significant differences among the ten groups and the differences are likely to be true differences, not random ones (Table 22).
Table 21

*ISAEP Leaders’ Perceived Importance and the Exemplary Practices in Alternative Education: Indicators of Quality Programming*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Items</th>
<th>Exemplary Practice</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Unimportant</td>
<td>Somewhat Important</td>
<td>Important</td>
<td>Very Important</td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-4</td>
<td>Mission and Purpose</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>3.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-7</td>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>3.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8-12</td>
<td>Climate and Culture</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>383</td>
<td>3.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13-15</td>
<td>Staffing and Professional Development</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>3.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-18</td>
<td>Curriculum and Instruction</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>3.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19-22</td>
<td>Student Assessment</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>3.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23-25</td>
<td>Transitional Planning and Support</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>3.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-28</td>
<td>Parent/Guardian Involvement</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>3.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29-31</td>
<td>Collaboration with Community</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>3.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32-34</td>
<td>Program Evaluation</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>3.21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tukey’s honestly significant difference (HSD) test was calculated to know whether any two groups within the study were similar or different. In using this statistical calculation the groups were all of similar size. As Table 23 illustrates the practice of Leadership is significantly (p<.05) higher than Staffing and Professional Development, Student Assessment, Transitional Planning and Support, Parent/Guardian Involvement, Collaboration, and Program Evaluation indicating that the ratings were significantly different. The difference between Leadership and Climate and Culture and Curriculum and Instruction was not significant, indicating that the ratings between these practices were similar.

ISAEP Leaders’ rating on the importance of the exemplary practice of Climate and Culture was also reflective of significant differences (p<.05) with Transitional Planning and Support, Parent/Guardian Involvement, Collaboration and Program Evaluation. Significant
differences with the practices of Staffing and Professional Development, Curriculum and Instruction, Student Assessment, Mission and Purpose and Leadership were not found.

Leaders' ratings on the exemplary practices of Collaboration and Program Evaluation were found to be significantly (p<.05) different with every other practice, but were not significantly different from each other.
Table 23

Post Hoc Tukey’s HSD- P values ISAEP Leaders’ Perceived Importance and the Exemplary Practices in Alternative Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exemplary Practice</th>
<th>Mission and Purpose M=3.54 SD=0.63</th>
<th>Leadership Purpose M=3.66 SD=0.58</th>
<th>Climate and Culture M=3.60 SD=0.57</th>
<th>Staffing and Professional Development M=3.47 SD=0.69</th>
<th>Curriculum and Instruction M=3.59 SD=0.62</th>
<th>Student Assessment M=3.48 SD=0.62</th>
<th>Transitional Planning and Support M=3.45 SD=0.65</th>
<th>Parent/Guardian Involvement M=3.41 SD=0.67</th>
<th>Collaboration with Community M=3.11 SD=0.73</th>
<th>Program Evaluation M=3.21 SD=0.75</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mission and Purpose Leadership</td>
<td>P = 0.15</td>
<td>P = 0.94</td>
<td>P = 0.08</td>
<td>P = 0.31</td>
<td>P = 0.12</td>
<td>P = 0.00*</td>
<td>P = 0.00*</td>
<td>P = 0.00*</td>
<td>P = 0.00*</td>
<td>P = 0.00*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose Leadership</td>
<td>SD=0.63</td>
<td>SD=0.58</td>
<td>SD=0.57</td>
<td>SD=0.69</td>
<td>SD=0.62</td>
<td>SD=0.62</td>
<td>SD=0.62</td>
<td>SD=0.62</td>
<td>SD=0.62</td>
<td>SD=0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climate and Culture</td>
<td>SD=0.63</td>
<td>SD=0.58</td>
<td>SD=0.57</td>
<td>SD=0.69</td>
<td>SD=0.62</td>
<td>SD=0.62</td>
<td>SD=0.62</td>
<td>SD=0.62</td>
<td>SD=0.62</td>
<td>SD=0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staffing and Professional Development</td>
<td>SD=0.63</td>
<td>SD=0.58</td>
<td>SD=0.57</td>
<td>SD=0.69</td>
<td>SD=0.62</td>
<td>SD=0.62</td>
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<td>SD=0.62</td>
<td>SD=0.62</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum and Instruction</td>
<td>SD=0.63</td>
<td>SD=0.58</td>
<td>SD=0.57</td>
<td>SD=0.69</td>
<td>SD=0.62</td>
<td>SD=0.62</td>
<td>SD=0.62</td>
<td>SD=0.62</td>
<td>SD=0.62</td>
<td>SD=0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Assessment</td>
<td>SD=0.63</td>
<td>SD=0.58</td>
<td>SD=0.57</td>
<td>SD=0.69</td>
<td>SD=0.62</td>
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<td>SD=0.62</td>
<td>SD=0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitional Planning and Support</td>
<td>SD=0.63</td>
<td>SD=0.58</td>
<td>SD=0.57</td>
<td>SD=0.69</td>
<td>SD=0.62</td>
<td>SD=0.62</td>
<td>SD=0.62</td>
<td>SD=0.62</td>
<td>SD=0.62</td>
<td>SD=0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent/Guardian Involvement</td>
<td>SD=0.63</td>
<td>SD=0.58</td>
<td>SD=0.57</td>
<td>SD=0.69</td>
<td>SD=0.62</td>
<td>SD=0.62</td>
<td>SD=0.62</td>
<td>SD=0.62</td>
<td>SD=0.62</td>
<td>SD=0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration with Community</td>
<td>SD=0.63</td>
<td>SD=0.58</td>
<td>SD=0.57</td>
<td>SD=0.69</td>
<td>SD=0.62</td>
<td>SD=0.62</td>
<td>SD=0.62</td>
<td>SD=0.62</td>
<td>SD=0.62</td>
<td>SD=0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Evaluation</td>
<td>SD=0.63</td>
<td>SD=0.58</td>
<td>SD=0.57</td>
<td>SD=0.69</td>
<td>SD=0.62</td>
<td>SD=0.62</td>
<td>SD=0.62</td>
<td>SD=0.62</td>
<td>SD=0.62</td>
<td>SD=0.62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*significant
In terms of importance, Leadership was the practice seen as most important as respondents rated it the highest (mean = 3.66). As described by the NAEA (2009), the practice of Leadership includes commitment and implementation of the program’s mission. It incorporates a collaborative approach, high expectations, program monitoring, and sufficient resources.

This practice included the following survey items:

- Policies/procedures are consistently implemented.
- The budget allows all standards to be fulfilled.
- The program operation complies with state and federal guidelines.

Climate and Culture (mean = 3.60), Curriculum and Instruction (Mean = 3.59), and Mission and Purpose (mean = 3.54) were the next highest practices rated in importance. Climate and Culture is described as the practice that promotes positive, collegial relationships among stakeholders. This practice included the following survey items:

- Written rules for behavior exist.
- Rules for behavior are consistently applied.
- Each student is engaged in determining their ISAEP plan.
- Accommodations are made to allow personal success.
- ISAEP physical facilities are safe and accessible.

Curriculum and Instruction in an exemplary program uses research based curriculum and teaching methods to meet student academic, behavioral, transitional and vocational needs. This practice included the following survey items:

- The program is in compliance with laws governing students with special needs.
• Individual student plans are used for instructional decisions.
• Technology is embedded in curriculum delivery.

In alternative education the NAEA describes Mission and Purpose as the practice that drives the program operation to promote success, identify the population to be served and involves high expectations. This practice included the following survey items:

• The program mission/philosophy is visible to stakeholders.
• Student success is central in the program.
• The mission/purpose is consistent with division goals.
• The mission/purpose is consistent with state standards.

Slightly lower in terms of importance were the practices of Student Assessment (mean = 3.48), Staffing and Professional Development (mean = 3.47, Transitional Planning and Support (mean = 3.45), and Parent/Guardian Involvement (mean = 3.41). Student Assessment includes all achievement measures used to monitor progress and measure outcomes at the student level. The following survey items were included:

• The purpose of assessment is clear.
• The purpose of assessment is communicated to stakeholders.
• Multiple assessment measures are used to guide student learning.
• Multiple assessment measures are used to monitor student progress.

The exemplary practice of Staffing and Professional development in alternative education incorporates staff trained in research based methods to meet student learning needs. It includes written professional development plans with the goal of improving student outcomes and program quality. These survey items were included:

• Resources are available for teachers to participate in professional development.
• ISAEP teachers use multiple teaching styles.
• Professional development includes collaborating with community services.

Transitional Planning and Support is the practice that facilitates students’ movement from traditional education, to alternative education, and then into the workforce or further education. The following survey items were included:

• There is a consistent process from plan entry to plan exit.
• Coordinated supports are provided to ensure transition to post-secondary activity (education, training or employment.)
• Transition planning includes community agencies.

The exemplary practice of Parent/Guardian Involvement includes parent/guardians as partners to support student learning and success. The following survey items were included:

• Parents participate in choosing the ISAEP program.
• Parents are involved in problem solving (academic, behavioral, and/or vocational).
• Parents are continuously apprised of their student’s progress.

In terms of importance, Program Evaluation (mean = 3.21) and Collaboration with Community (mean = 3.11) were the lowest rated practices. In alternative education Program Evaluation refers to data collection and analysis for continuous improvement. The following survey items were included:

• Student outcome data is used to evaluate program success.
• Parents are involved in evaluating the effectiveness of the ISAEP program.
• Staff assess the success and effectiveness of the ISAEP program.

The NAEA (2009) describes the practice of Collaboration with Community to be one which incorporates partnerships and opportunities for service learning and career investigations. The following survey items were included:
• Community service agencies are utilized in the ISAEP program.

• ISAEP student planning involves the community service organizations and groups.

• Students know how to access community support services.

Summary of Research Question 3. In summary, the data obtained from the administered survey indicated that ISAEP program leaders rate all ten exemplary practices to be Important or Very Important. Of the ten practices, Leadership was the highest rated practice (mean = 3.66) and Collaboration with Community the lowest rated practice (mean = 3.11). This suggests that the ISAEP program leaders consider important or very important all of the practices that the NAEA has identified as essential to quality programming in alternative education. In terms of ISAEP program leaders’ ratings of importance, the difference between the groups was found to be significant. The practice of Leadership revealed significantly higher ratings than six practices and the practice of Collaboration with Community was significantly higher than four practices. The exemplary practices of Collaboration with Community and Program Evaluation were found to be significantly different with every other practice, but were not significantly different from each other.

Research Question 4. As evidenced by current reported practice, to what degree does Virginia’s Individual Student Alternative Education Plan (ISAEP) program meet each of the quality practices of alternative education learning environments as represented in the Exemplary Practices in Alternative Education: Indicators of Quality Programming?

Frequency counts, means, and standard deviations of the survey participant ratings of the current practice of survey items 1 through 34 can be found in Appendix E. Relationships of items 1 through 34 can be found in Appendix D. To obtain complete data sets for each
practice, respondents who omitted a response to any items within the cluster of items for that practice were omitted from calculation for that practice.

As shown in Table 24, the mean of the ten Exemplary practices was variable with ratings falling between *Very Little* and *Quite A Bit* (mean range 2.71 to 3.50). To

Table 24

| ISAEP Leaders' Current Practice and the Exemplary Practices in Alternative Education: Indicators of Quality Programming |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Survey Items | Exemplary Practice | Frequency | Count |
| | | Never | Very Little | Some | Quite A Bit | Mean | Standard Deviation |
| 1-4 | Mission and Purpose | 5 | 27 | 162 | 282 | 3.50 | 0.67 |
| 5-7 | Leadership | 6 | 39 | 145 | 164 | 3.32 | 0.74 |
| 8-12 | Climate and Culture | 7 | 39 | 217 | 337 | 3.47 | 0.67 |
| 13-15 | Staffing and Professional Development | 9 | 67 | 152 | 126 | 3.12 | 0.80 |
| 16-18 | Curriculum and Instruction | 5 | 38 | 118 | 200 | 3.43 | 0.73 |
| 19-22 | Student Assessment | 6 | 73 | 187 | 210 | 3.26 | 0.76 |
| 23-25 | Transitional Planning and Support | 6 | 74 | 162 | 109 | 3.07 | 0.77 |
| 26-28 | Parent/Guardian Involvement | 15 | 69 | 131 | 145 | 3.13 | 0.86 |
| 29-31 | Collaboration | 22 | 123 | 144 | 65 | 2.71 | 0.84 |
| 32-34 | Program Evaluation | 34 | 79 | 132 | 115 | 2.91 | 0.95 |
compare the outcome data between the ten groups a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was calculated (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). There was a significant effect among the group at the p<.05 level for the ten groups [F (9, 4042), p = .000]. These findings indicated that there were significant differences among the ten groups and the differences are likely to be true differences, not random ones (Table 25).

Table 25


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sign.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>236.942</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>26.327</td>
<td>44.122</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>2411.813</td>
<td>4042</td>
<td>.597</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>26.48.755</td>
<td>4051</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tukey’s honestly significant difference (HSD) test was calculated to know whether any two groups within the study were similar or different. In using this statistical calculation the groups were all of similar size. With respect to the program leaders’ current practice, survey participants rated the exemplary practice of Mission and Purpose highest with the rating falling between Some and Quite A Bit (mean = 3.50). This practice included the following survey items:

- The program mission/philosophy is visible to all stakeholders.
- Student success is central in the program.
- The mission/purpose is consistent with state standards.
• Policies/procedures are consistently implemented.

As the survey items reflect, the NAEA (2009) defines Mission and Purpose as the practice in which all stakeholders share in the program development and implementation with the goal of student success. As Table 26 illustrates the practice of Mission and Purpose was significantly higher (p < .05) than the practices of Leadership, Staffing and Professional Development, Student Assessment, Transitional Planning and Support, Parent/Guardian Involvement, Collaboration with Community, and Program Evaluation.

The exemplary practices of Climate and Culture (mean = 3.47), Curriculum and Instruction (mean = 3.43), Leadership (mean = 3.32), Student Assessment (mean = 3.26), Parent/Guardian Involvement (mean = 3.13), Staffing and Professional Development (mean = 3.12), and Transitional Planning and Support (mean = 3.07) all were rated between Some and Quite A Bit. As reported before Climate and Culture promotes positive, collegial relationships among stakeholders and includes the following survey items:

• Written rules for behavior exist.
• Rules for behavior are consistently applied.
• Each student is engaged in determining their ISAEP plan.
• Accommodations are made to allow personal success.
• ISAEP physical facilities are safe and accessible.

Participants ratings on the exemplary practice of Climate and Culture was significantly higher (p < .05) than Staffing and Professional Development, Student Assessment, Transitional Planning and Support, Parent/Guardian Involvement, Collaboration with Community, and Program Evaluation.
Participants’ rated the practice of Leadership as being significantly higher \( (p<.05) \) than five of ten practices (with respect to its presence in their ISAEP programs. These included Staffing and Professional Development, Transitional Planning and Support, Parent/Guardian Involvement, Collaboration with Community, and Program Evaluation. Leadership includes commitment and implementation of the program’s mission. It incorporates a collaborative approach, high expectations, program monitoring, and sufficient resources. It included the following survey items:

- Policies/procedures are consistently implemented.
- The budget allows all standards to be fulfilled.
- The program operation complies with state and federal guidelines.

Student Assessment was significantly higher \( (p<.05) \) than Transitional Planning and Support, Collaboration with Community and Program Evaluation. It includes all achievement measures used to monitor progress and measure outcomes at the student level. The following survey items were included:

- The purpose of assessment is clear.
- The purpose of assessment is communicated to stakeholders.
- Multiple assessment measures are used to guide student learning.
- Multiple assessment measures are used to monitor student progress.

Program Evaluation \((\text{mean} = 2.91)\) was significantly lower \( (p<.05) \) than eight of ten practices and Collaboration with Community \((\text{mean} = 2.71)\) was significantly lower \( (p<.05) \) nine of ten exemplary practices. There were the lowest rated exemplary practices with respect to the ISAEP program leaders’ rating of their current practices. Program leaders rated these practices between *Very Little* and *Some*. As reported before, Program Evaluation
refers to data collection and analysis for continuous improvement and included these survey items:

- Student outcome data is used to evaluate program success.
- Parents are involved in evaluating the effectiveness of the ISAEP program.
- Staff assess the success and effectiveness of the ISAEP program.

The NAEA (2009) describes the practice of Collaboration with Community to be one which incorporates partnerships and opportunities for service learning and career investigations and included these survey items:

- Community service agencies are utilized in the ISAEP program.
- ISAEP student planning involves the community service organizations and groups.
- Students know how to access community support services.
Table 26

*Post Hoc Tukey’s HSD- P Values* ISAEP Leaders’ Current Practice and the Exemplary Practices in Alternative Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exemplary Practice</th>
<th>Mission and Purpose</th>
<th>Leadership Climate and Culture</th>
<th>Staffing and Professional Development</th>
<th>Curriculum and Instruction</th>
<th>Student Assessment</th>
<th>Transitional Planning and Support</th>
<th>Parent/Guardian Involvement</th>
<th>Collaboration with Community</th>
<th>Program Evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mission and Purpose Leadership</td>
<td>M=3.50 SD=0.67</td>
<td>P = 0.03*</td>
<td>P = 1.00</td>
<td>P = 0.00*</td>
<td>P = 0.92</td>
<td>P = 0.00*</td>
<td>P = 0.00*</td>
<td>P = 0.00*</td>
<td>P = 0.00*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climate and Culture Staffing and Professional Development</td>
<td>M=3.12 SD=0.80</td>
<td>P = 0.00*</td>
<td>P = 1.00</td>
<td>P = 0.00*</td>
<td>P = 0.17</td>
<td>P = 1.00</td>
<td>P = 1.00</td>
<td>P = 0.00*</td>
<td>P = 0.02*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum and Instruction</td>
<td>M=3.43 SD=0.73</td>
<td>P = 0.08</td>
<td>P = 0.00*</td>
<td>P = 0.00*</td>
<td>P = 0.00*</td>
<td>P = 0.00*</td>
<td>P = 0.00*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Assessment</td>
<td>M=3.26 SD=0.76</td>
<td>P = 0.01*</td>
<td>P = 0.31</td>
<td>P = 0.00*</td>
<td>P = 0.19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitional Planning and Support</td>
<td>M=3.07 SD=0.77</td>
<td>P = 0.98</td>
<td>P = 0.00*</td>
<td>P = 0.01*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent/Guardian Involvement</td>
<td>M=2.71 SD=0.84</td>
<td></td>
<td>P = 0.02*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration with Community</td>
<td>M=2.91 SD=0.95</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Evaluation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*significant
Summary of Research Question 4. Current reported practice of ISAEP program leaders found the exemplary practice of Mission and Purpose to be most evident in their current practice rating it between Some and Quite A Bit. Seven other practices (Leadership, Climate and Culture, Staffing and Professional Development, Curriculum and Instruction, Student Assessment, Transitional Planning and Support, and Parent/Guardian Involvement) fell within this rating range. Least evident in current practice and falling between Very Little and Some were the practices of Collaboration in Community and Program Evaluation. These data indicate that ISAEP program leaders gave the highest ratings on the practice of Mission and Purpose. In terms of ISAEP program leaders’ ratings of their practice in their ISAEP programs, the difference between the groups was found to be significant. Rating of the practice of Mission and Purpose reflected significant difference in seven of ten practices and Climate and Culture had significant differences in six of ten practices. The practice of Program Evaluation found significant differences in eight of ten practices and Collaboration in Community in nine of ten practices.
Research Question 5. Is there a relationship between the ISAEP program leaders’ perception of importance and the reported current practice of each of the quality practices of alternative education learning environments as represented in the Exemplary Practices in Alternative Education: Indicators of Quality Programming?

Pearson $r$ was the statistic calculated to measure the relationship of each group of survey items representing each of the ten exemplary practices. To obtain complete data sets for each practice, respondents who omitted a response to any items of “importance” or “current practice” within the cluster of items for that practice were omitted from calculation for that practice. This calculation is appropriate for this data as both variables are scale (equal size intervals between numbers used), neither distribution is highly skewed (assumption of normality of distribution) and the relationship between the two variables is not curvi-linear. Pearson $r$ can range in values from -1 to +1 and the further $r$ is from zero, the stronger the correlation. Pearson $r$ values of less than 0.3 are considered to be of weak relationship, 0.3 to 0.7 is considered to be a moderate relationship and those greater than 0.7 is considered to be a strong relationship. Values of 0 indicate no relationship (Kelley, 2011).

One hundred twenty seven ISAEP program leaders were surveyed about the ten exemplary practices and 117 to 120 paired responses were utilized to calculate the relationship between importance and current practice. This calculation revealed a positive relationship between items of perceived importance ($M = 3.11$ to $3.66$, $SD = 0.73$ to $0.58$) and current practice ($M = 2.71$ to $3.50$, $SD = 0.84$ to $0.67$) within the same group of exemplary practice items (Table 27).
The Pearson $r$ data analysis revealed a moderate positive correlation on the following eight exemplary practices: Program Evaluation ($r=0.48$), Student Assessment ($r=0.43$), Collaboration with Community ($r=0.39$), Mission and Purpose ($r=0.39$), Parent/Guardian Involvement ($r=0.39$), Staffing and Professional Development ($r=0.37$), Curriculum and Instruction ($r=0.34$), Climate and Culture ($r=0.33$). Program leaders who reported a level of importance of these practices in an alternative education program determined that they were moderately as prevalent in their current ISAEP program.

Two of the ten exemplary practices revealed weak positive relationships. These practices were Leadership ($r=0.28$) and Transitional Planning and Support ($r=0.28$). Program leaders who reported a level of importance of these practices did not report that they were as prevalent in their current ISAEP program.

**Summary of Research Question 5.** Overall, the data collected demonstrated a moderately positive relationship between program leaders' perception of the exemplary practices and their current practice with respect to eight of the ten practices. These practices are Program Evaluation, Student Assessment, Collaboration with Community, Mission and Purpose, Parent/Guardian Involvement, Staffing and Professional Development, Curriculum and Instruction, Climate and Culture. Weak positive relationships were found between the exemplary practices of Leadership and Transitional Planning and Support.
Table 27

*Relationship between the ISAEP Leaders’ Perception of Importance and the Current Practice of Each of the Quality Practices*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Items</th>
<th>Exemplary Practice</th>
<th>Importance</th>
<th></th>
<th>Practice</th>
<th></th>
<th>Pearson r</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-4</td>
<td>Mission and Purpose</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>0.00*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-7</td>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.00*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8-12</td>
<td>Climate and Culture</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.00*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13-15</td>
<td>Staffing and Professional Development</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>0.00*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-18</td>
<td>Curriculum and Instruction</td>
<td>3.59</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.00*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19-22</td>
<td>Student Assessment</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>0.00*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23-25</td>
<td>Transitional Planning and Support</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>3.07</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.00*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-28</td>
<td>Parent/Guardian Involvement</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>0.00*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29-31</td>
<td>Collaboration with Community</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>0.00*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32-34</td>
<td>Program Evaluation</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.00*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*significant
Research Question 6. If given the opportunity to change their programs, what factors do the ISAEP program leaders believe could best improve the quality and effectiveness of the ISAEP program?

ISAEP program leaders were asked to list “three wishes” to improve program quality and effectiveness. Of the 127 participants, 89 (70.08 percent) wrote at least one wish, 75 participants wrote at least two wishes (59.06 percent), and 50 participants wrote three wishes (39.37 percent). Thirty-eight survey participants (29.92 percent) did not respond to the question. A total of 215 wishes were written by program leaders. Of these responses, three were not included in the coding as they reflected that that respondent could not respond because they were new to the program (e.g., “Just started the program—don’t know yet,” and “Have not had the opportunity to implement ISAEP in my program yet—here for the exposure”) or did not reflect a wish (e.g., “All good”). A total of 212 wishes were sorted and a complete sorted list can be found in Appendix F. As shown in Table 28, the responses were sorted using the ten 2009 NAEA Exemplary Practices as categories. A second level of sorting was completed within the four of the ten categories.

Exemplary Practice 1.0: Mission and Purpose. The NAEA (2009) identified this practice as the one which “drives that overall operation” of the alternative education program. It includes thirteen indicators of quality programming that incorporate the involvement of all stakeholders in the development, implementation, direction, and maintenance of the mission and purpose of the program. Indicators include clear articulation, documentation, population identification, and student success being central to the mission
Table 28

*Sorted ISAEP Leaders' Wishes to Improve Program Quality and Effectiveness*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exemplary Practice Category</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
<th>Response Total</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mission and Purpose</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>36.32</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>36</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedures</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climate and Culture</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>9.90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilities</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Staffing and Professional Development</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>16.04</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staffing</td>
<td>24</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum and Instruction</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>10.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materials</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CTE</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Assessment</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitional Planning and Support</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent/Guardian Involvement</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration with Community</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Evaluation</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and purpose of the program. Ten of the ISAEP leaders’ responses (4.72 percent) were identified as being reflective of this practice. The included wishes such as “ISAEP teachers dedicated to mission of program and not to $ as second” and “Clear mission to all stakeholders.”

**Exemplary Practice 2.0: Leadership.** The practice of Leadership is described as one which has “bureaucratic autonomy” and “operational flexibility” to implement the program’s mission. This exemplary practice uses a collaborative approach, shared decision-making, high expectations, and monitoring of program quality. Thirteen indicators are delineated which include program oversight; provision of sufficient resources; and program leadership and administrators who collaboratively engage stakeholders, and ensure that the program operation aligns with state and local policies and standard operating procedures. Overall, program leaders identified the greatest number of wishes in the practice of Leadership with 77 of 212 responses (36.32 percent) falling within this practice. These responses were further sorted into the following three categories:

- **Resources** – 36 of 77 responses (46.75 percent) fell in the area of resources with the majority reflecting that they wished for more funding for the ISAEP program. A few added that that wanted greater access to materials and one wished for transportation to be provided.

- **Time** – 8 of 77 responses (10.39 percent) reflected program leaders’ desire for the program to be longer (e.g., “Full day program – currently have an evening program”) or to have “More time to work with students.”
• Procedures – 21 of 77 responses (27.27 percent) reflected a desire for greater collaboration (e.g., “More involvement in student admission” and “More teacher involvement when decisions are made about our program”) and following the standard operating procedures for the ISAEP program (e.g., “Adhere to admission guidelines to ISAEP” and “Proper screening of potential students to ensure success”).

• Knowledge – 12 of 77 responses (15.58 percent) by ISAEP program leaders were ones that reflected the aspect of Leadership which focused on knowledge of the ISAEP program including that administrators be experienced and competent in the operation of the ISAEP program. These responses included “Administrators are informed of program requirements” and “Admin in division understand program.” Program leaders also expressed a desire to “Know more” and to have the new requirements clarified.

**Exemplary Practice 3.0: Climate and Culture.** This practice is described as one which promotes collegial relationships among stakeholders to support connections including a positive atmosphere with clear expectations for learning and conduct. Ten indicators of quality programming are identified and include efficient delivery of services; a safe and well-maintained environment; and high expectations, understanding and sensitivity with respect to academic, behavioral, and cultural needs. Twenty-one responses (9.90 percent) were identified as falling within this practice and were further sorted into the following categories:

• Communication – six of 21 responses (28.57 percent) were responses that reflected the program leaders’ desire to connect with others about the needs of
the program and their students. These included “A desire by administrators to work with students who are already a challenge” and a wish that “People would listen.”

- Relationships – nine of 21 responses (42.86 percent) reflected program leaders’ wishes for understanding and positive student reinforcement. These included responses such as “More cooperation/support from administrations & teachers” and “Student Incentives.”

- Facilities – six of 21 responses (28.57 percent) reflected program leaders’ desire for an improved environment. They included “Larger space for the program” and “Physical plant improvement.”

**Exemplary Practice 4.0: Staffing and Professional Development.** Quality alternative education programs are staffed with “effective, innovative, and qualified individuals” who are trained and who receive professional development to meet their needs in order to implement “research based and best practices.” The NAEA identifies twelve indicators of quality programming for this exemplary practice that includes the program having a sufficient number of staff, staff using multiple teaching styles, and staff having professional development opportunities. Overall, 34 of 212 responses (16.04 percent) fell within this practice and were further sorted into the following categories:

- Staffing – 24 of 34 responses (70.59 percent) provided responses that reflected wishes for increased staff, many identifying specific areas of need (e.g., math, science, reading, special education). Respondents expressed a desire for assistance from other school staff (e.g., counselors) and a wish for more staff
to be able to provide more assistance to students. Responses included “A teacher for each core class,” “Be able to staff the program with a strong instructional paraprofessional to provide more one on one assistance,” and “A life-coach mentor of ISAEP student.”

- Professional Development – 10 of 34 responses (29.41 percent) provided responses that reflected a desire for increased training to include “Hands on workshop,” “In-service or conference on “Best Practices in Delivery of the ISAEP in small/private settings,” “More on the job training opportunities,” and “Funded site visits.”

Exemplary Practice 5.0: Curriculum and Instruction. The Curriculum and Instruction practice is one that incorporates high academic, behavioral, life skill and transitional expectations including engaging research based curricula and the use of instructional strategies designed to meet student need. This practice identifies 17 indicators of quality programming that include competent staff, individualized learning plan, embedded technology, and the integration of career and technical education (CTE). ISAEP program leaders provided 23 responses (10.85 percent) including wishes for a “Project based learning focus” and an “Established instructional curriculum for the state which include online education and other resources.” Responses were further sorted into the following categories:

- Materials - six of 23 responses (26.09 percent) reflected ISAEP program leaders’ wishes for “More effective pre-GED materials” and “More materials for practice.”
• CTE – seven of 23 responses (30.43 percent) were reflective of the respondents’ desire to have “More available CTE programs” and a “Stronger CTE component.”
• Technology – eight of 23 responses (34.78 percent) reflected the ISAEP leaders’ desire for “Improved technology” and “Computer programs that are relevant to the 2014 tests.”

**Exemplary Practice 6.0: Student Assessment.** The exemplary practice of Student Assessment is described as one that includes “screening, progress monitoring, diagnostic and outcome-based measurements” to measure achievement and identify learner needs. Eight indicators of quality programming are provided which incorporate data-driven accountability, the purpose of assessment, the use of multiple assessments, and the use of assessments to inform the student’s learning plan. Fifteen of 212 responses (7.08 percent) were sorted into this practice. Responses included ISAEP program leaders’ wishes “To become a GED testing center” and for GED “Testing credit that does not expire.” Four wishes reflected the respondents’ desire for increased opportunities for students to test for the GED as a way to improve program quality and effectiveness.

**Exemplary Practice 7.0: Transitional Planning and Support.** The exemplary practice of Transitional Planning and Support in alternative education programs include criteria and procedures for students to move from traditional education to alternative education and then on to their next education or the workforce setting. Seven indicators of quality programming are provided and include the use of a committee to ensure placement is appropriate, the use of a formal transition process, and connection with community agencies
and support services. Fourteen of 212 responses (6.60 percent) were identified. They included wishes such as “Directly provide training/support for GED students,” “Have more transitions for our GED graduates to transition to college & jobs,” and “Devise a plan for more school to work coordination” as things that would improve program quality and effectiveness.

**Exemplary Practice 8.0: Parent/Guardian Involvement.** This exemplary practice is one that involves parents/guardians and provides them with training and support so they are partners in student success. Eight indicators of quality programming are identified. These include communicate with parent/guardians and their involvement and participation in the educational plan. It also includes privacy and timely procedures to address grievances. Overall, eight of 212 responses (3.77 percent) were identified as ISAEP wishes for program improvement. Responses reflected a wish for “Parental involvement,” “Parent participation,” or a “Wish for more parents to be interested in their child’s well-being, education, and future.”

**Exemplary Practice 9.0: Collaboration with Community.** Collaboration with Community is described in alternative education environments as a practice that establishes “authentic partnerships with community resources.” Twelve indicators of quality programming are provided by the NAEA and include collaboration with community partners (e.g., service organizations, cultural groups, faith-bases representatives, businesses) to integrate service learning, life skills, and links to the program, home and community. Ten of 212 responses (4.72 percent) reflected ISAEP program leaders’ wishes to improve program
quality and effectiveness. These included wishes for “More community support,” More community involvement,” and “More help w/mental health issues regarding our students.”

Exemplary Practice 10.0: Program Evaluation. The exemplary practice of Program Evaluation in effective alternative education environments is one that utilizes data collection analysis for program improvement. Eight indicators of quality programming are identified. For program improvement they include regular program evaluation; student outcome data; and stakeholder surveys. ISAEP program leaders did not identify any wishes in this practice that would improved program quality or effectiveness.

Summary Research Question 6. If given the opportunity to change their programs to improve the quality and effectiveness of the ISAEP program, program leaders most identified wishes that fell within the practice of Leadership (36.32 percent). Within this exemplary practice leaders identified wishes for increased resources (money or materials); increased time with students or longer time for their programs; improvements to ISAEP program procedures; and increased knowledge for themselves and for the administrators that work with their programs.

Staffing and Professional Development (16.04 percent) was the practice that reflected the second greatest area of wishes for ISAEP programs leaders. Respondents wished for additional staff to provide targeted instruction and more individualized student assistance. With respect to professional development they expressed a desire for workshops, in-service, and site visits.

The third and fourth greatest areas ISAEP program leaders felt would improve their program quality and effectiveness was within the practices of Curriculum and Instruction
(10.85 percent) and Climate and Culture (9.90 percent). Leaders expressed instructional wishes with respect to materials, CTE opportunities, and the technology that is embedded within their program.

Five other practices were less represented in the ISAEP program leaders’ wishes for improved program quality and effectiveness. These included Student Assessment (7.08 percent), Transitional Planning and Support (6.60 percent), Mission and Purpose (4.72 percent), Collaboration with Community (4.72 percent), and Parent/Guardian Involvement (3.77 percent).

The exemplary practice of Program Evaluation was not represented in any ISAEP program leaders’ wish for improved program quality and effectiveness.
Chapter 5

Conclusions

The quantitative and qualitative data presented in the preceding chapter provided information for data analysis pertaining to the six evaluation questions leading to increased knowledge and understanding of the Virginia Department of Education’s ISAEP program. This chapter will discuss these findings in the context of the NAEA’s Exemplary Practices in Alternative Education: Indicators of Quality Programming and the six evaluation questions. This study will concluded with implications for practice, implications of policy, and implications for future research.

Study Summary

Alternative education is one way to provide learning experiences that “offer educational choices” to meet the student needs to prevent drop-outs, to reduce illiteracy, and increase high school completion. This study focused on the Virginia’s Department of Education (VDOE) Individual Student Alternative Education Plan (ISAEP) program. Beginning in December, 1999, the ISAEP program was established by the Virginia General Assembly to address the needs of students, ages 16 to 18 years old, who are unsuccessful in the high school general education public school program. This study examined existing VDOE data and utilized a researcher-developed survey to gather program leaders’ characteristics, their knowledge of the importance of exemplary alternative education program practices, the current level of implementation of these practices in Virginia’s ISAEP programs, and their input to improve the quality and effectiveness of the program. Quantitative and qualitative analysis was completed using descriptive and relational
statistics. This study included existing VDOE data and responses from 132 ISAEP program leaders from 123 Virginia school divisions attending the ISAEP 6th Annual Conference on July 11, 2012 in Roanoke, Virginia.

Question one was answered quantitatively using descriptive statistics through data from the 2001 through 2009 annual reports to the General Assembly from the Virginia Department of Education, Office of Adult Education and Literacy Programs. Question two was answered quantitatively using descriptive statistics from the data obtained from the survey instrument. Questions three and four were answered descriptively using descriptive statistics and a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). Question five was answered quantitatively using a Pearson $r$ to determine how program leaders' perception of importance and current practice in the ISAEP program were related. Question six was answered qualitatively through an open-ended item designed to elicit what program leaders believe would impact the quality and effectiveness of ISAEP programs.

**Discussion of Findings**

Data from this study was obtained at an annual conference which had a positive impact on the response rate. A total of 127 survey responses were used to answer research questions two through six. Having a good response rate is important for all research. However, for this study which examined a specific alternative education program located in Virginia it becomes more important as the impact of a student not completing high school is more far reaching than just on the student who has dropped out of school. The individual’s ability to earn a living and the American economy are negatively impacted by a student not completing their education. Alternative education is one way to accomplish the goal of
keeping students in school to complete programs and gain skills to better prepare them to be productive adults. Overall, alternative schools and alternative education programs have effectively kept more students in school until graduation (Aron, 2006). Concern about the cost of dropping out to both individuals and to society of dropping out compels educational researchers to continue to evaluate these programs to find effective strategies that will lead to students’ completing their education.

In an effort to strengthen the quality of alternative education programs throughout the United States, The National Alternative Education Association (NAEA) developed the Exemplary Practices in Alternative Education: Indicators of Quality Development (2009), Based on research of alternative education programs and the knowledge of educators in the field of alternative education, the ten practices were an “effort to develop a common core of principles” (p, 4) that were considered to be a necessary part of quality alternative education programs. This study utilized this document as a framework to compare the Individual Student Alternative Education Plan (ISAEP) program in Virginia. I acknowledge that this is how data was operationalized in this study and that the provided descriptions may not be consistent with other practices in alternative education,

**Exemplary Practice 1.0: Mission and Purpose.** The NAEA describes this practice as the one that guides the overall program operation. Its development is shared by stakeholders and it includes the purpose of the program, the identification of the student population and the expectations for success. With respect to the ISAEP program, my research finds evidence that the development of the mission and purpose was completed at the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) when in December 1999 the VDOE was authorized to establish the program and funding was provided through the General Assembly
to reimburse local school divisions who opted to apply for and establish a program. The target population was identified, program requirements specified, and short and long terms outcomes delineated (Figure 1). This has resulted in program consistency throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia. Currently 128 of 132 school divisions are operating ISAEP programs that have been developed from one conceptual program and one set of procedures and requirements. This is a positive aspect of the ISAEP program, as data examined in research question one finds that the program has generally increased in size while the level of VDOE funding has not changed. The increase in student participants suggests that school divisions in Virginia have found the ISAEP program to be a worthwhile option for students. In research question three study participants rated the importance of the practice of Mission and Purpose to be the third highest practice falling midway between Important and Very Important and in question four participants rated this practice to be the highest of the ten practices in terms of it being part of their current ISAEP programs. This study found that Program Leaders report that Mission and Purpose is a current practice in their programs and that its prevalence is significant when compared to the other practices. There was a moderately positive correlation between participants rating of this practice’s importance and current practice in the ISAEP program. In question six participants provided their input as to what would improve their program’s quality and effectiveness. A small proportion (4.72 percent) of their responses fell within Mission and Purpose suggesting that what guides the ISAEP program is acceptable as conceptualized. Student success and program completion is the goal of the ISAEP program. This is consistent with this exemplary practice.

**Exemplary Practice 2.0: Leadership.** As a NAEA practice, Leadership is the on-site implementation of the program using a collaborative approach, shared decision-making,
high expectations and monitoring of program quality. Leadership includes procedures consistent with the mission and purpose; the allocation of resources to support the program; low student-teacher ratios; and a shared vision. Data from the research questions examined in this study found that while most ISAEP programs served a small number of students, data on student-teacher ratios was not clear. Survey participants identified Leadership as the practice they viewed as most important. This rating was a significant difference when compared to most other practices. Leadership was the fourth rated practice in terms of its presence in the current practice, falling between Some and Quite a Bit. A weak positive relationship was found between participants rating of importance and prevalence in their ISAEP programs when it comes to the practice of Leadership. Their concerns related to Leadership were further demonstrated by the number of wishes they expressed which fell in this area (36.32 percent). Participants expressed that their program’s quality and effectiveness could be improved with greater resources – most notably funding. They also wished for increased time with students or for the program itself to be longer. Finally, program leaders expressed wishes that related to the shared vision, knowledge and procedures involved in the ISAEP program. This suggests that the ISAEP program would benefit from greater collaboration at the division level. Administrators, teachers, and other staff should work together to continuously monitor their program’s quality and implementation as it is operationalized at the division level.

Exemplary Practice 3.0: Climate and Culture. The practice of Climate and Culture is described as one which promotes positive, collegial relationships between staff, student, and parents/guardians. Academic and behavioral expectations are established and practices provide feedback and support leading to student success. The NAEA includes
facilities, written behavioral rules/expectations, and short and long term goals to address stakeholder needs as part of the Climate and Culture. ISAEP program leaders rated this practice second only to Leadership in terms of its level of importance. It also received the second highest rating with respect to its prevalence in the program leaders' current programs resulting in a moderately positive correlation between importance and practice. The prevalence of this practice was significant when compared to other practices. Almost ten percent of the ISAEP program leaders' wishes to improve the quality and effectiveness of their programs fell within this practice. Participants expressed a desire to communicate with others about the needs of their students, to develop better relationships, provide student incentives, and to improve the facilities in which their program is housed. Study findings again suggest that increased collaboration among stakeholders would be of benefit to ISAEP programs.

**Exemplary Practice 4.0: Staffing and Professional Development.** In quality alternative education programs this NAEA practice includes trained staff who use research based teaching techniques and who have written staff development plans with the goal of improving program quality and student outcomes. This practice incorporates sufficient numbers of teaching and non-teaching staff and the uses of different professional development approaches. Research question two looked specifically at the ISAEP program leaders. While it is unclear as to whether the participants were "teaching" or "non-teaching," they were clearly staff who were involved with the ISAEP program. Data suggests that staff working with the ISAEP program are a diverse, educated group who most often identify themselves as teachers, program coordinators or administrators. The VDOE requires only that the ISAEP teachers be licensed in the K-12 environment and data revealed that the vast
majority are. The majority of endorsements are held in administration/supervision, secondary education. This is consistent with a group of knowledgeable staff with knowledge of and experience with the ISAEP student population. This study finds that a good portion of the ISAEP program leaders are not highly experienced, as 44.6 percent have worked with the program for three years or less. This is consistent with VDOE’s report of high staff turnover (Nusbaum, 2012). Other study data found the practice of Staffing and Professional Development to be rated between Important and Very Important in terms of the participants’ view of the importance of this practice. This practice was rated by program leaders to be seventh out of ten with respect to it’s prevalence in their ISAEP program and a moderately positive correlation between importance and practice was found. However, participants expressed wishes related to this practice, second only to Leadership, as this appears to be a practice that ISAEP program leaders believe could improve the quality and effectiveness of their programs. Responses focused on the wish for additional staff with specific content area skills (e.g., math or special education) and a desire for more staff to provide more individualized instructional assistance to the students. Given the VDOE requirement that the ISAEP teacher only be “licensed” results in the likelihood of staff working with students on academic skills they may not be proficient in. For example, a teacher licensed in the area of Government may struggle to effectively provide instruction in the areas of math required for students to pass the math section of the GED. ISAEP programs need to continuously evaluate student needs in relation to staff skills in order to monitor program quality and to give students the instructional support they need. With respect to professional development ISAEP program leaders expressed a desire for workshops, in-service, and site visits. One of the basic requirements of the ISAEP program is for professional development to be provided.
The VDOE acknowledges that this has not been provided on a consistent basis, but does note that they are available to provide support as needed. Given these findings, additional professional development should be considered. As a diverse group, ISAEP program leaders reflect a significant amount of education and knowledge. While their years of experience may not be within the ISAEP program, they appear to be a great resource who could benefit from professional development in the area of alternative education and who could bring to the alternative education their knowledge and experience.

Exemplary Practice 5.0 Curriculum and Instruction. The NAEA describes this practice as one that promotes high expectations and engaging, research-based curricula. It includes staff that meets state standards, compliance with special education needs, an individualized learning plan, embedded technology, and opportunities for career and technical education (CTE). Basic requirements of the ISAEP program include the development of the GED preparation; CDE options; the completion of a VDOE course in Economics and Personal Finance; and accommodations for documented disabilities. ISAEP program leaders rated this practice as third of ten both in terms of importance and in terms of its prevalence in their current programs, resulting in a moderately positive correlation. The practice of Curriculum and Instruction was the third highest in terms of program leaders’ wishes to improve quality and effectiveness. They identified wishes in the areas of materials, CTE, and technology. While the GED is the curriculum leading to program completion, ISAEP program leaders appear to want more and effective materials, greater CTE options, and improved technology. This finding should be considered by the VDOE.
Exemplary Practice 6.0: Student Assessment. This NAEA practice includes a continuum of assessments and procedures to achieve short term and long term achievement goals. It includes both formative and summative assessments and the continuous identification of learner needs. The ISAEP program requires an initial student evaluation and that the potential students meet identified criteria before being enrolled in the program. A review of the VDOE data in research question one found that the majority of students enrolled in the ISAEP because of the academic challenges they encountered in the traditional education environment. This practice was rated by ISAEP leaders as fifth out of ten in terms of both importance and prevalence in their ISAEP programs resulting in a moderately positive correlation. Students in the ISAEP program work toward GED completion and as this assessment are already established few wishes to improve program quality and effectiveness were expressed in this practice. As there are limited GED testing centers, study participants expressed a desire to become testing centers. They also expressed wishes such as for testing credit not to expire or to be able to test more frequently. This is not likely as the GED is under the control of the GED Testing Service, an outside agency, not the VDOE or the local school divisions.

Exemplary Practice 7.0: Transitional Planning and Support. The NAEA describes this practice in an alternative education program that includes criteria and procedures for students to move from traditional education to alternative education and then on to their next education or the workforce setting. ISAEP program leaders rated it sixth out of the ten in terms of importance and seventh out of ten in terms of prevalence in their programs resulting in a weak positive correlation. ISAEP leaders did not express many wishes in this practice that would improve their program’s quality and effectiveness. While
CTE is a required component of the ISAEP program, there is no evidence of emphasis on post-secondary transition. To make the ISAEP program more robust, post-secondary transition and support needs more emphasis. Education is more than just program completion. It must include equipping young adults with the knowledge and skills to move to the next phase of their lives.

**Exemplary Practice 8.0: Parent/Guardian Involvement.** In an alternative education program the NAEA describes Parent/Guardian Involvement to be a practice that involves parent/guardians and provides them with training and support so that are partners in their students’ success. This practice includes involving them with respect to communication, decision-making, and problem solving. It also ensures privacy and grievance procedures. The ISAEP program involves parents in the decision-making process right from the beginning and the program requires that parents receive regular reports on students’ academic and CTE progress. Study participants rated this practice as eighth of ten in terms of importance and seventh of ten in terms of prevalence in their program resulting in a moderately positive correlation. Program leaders expressed only eight of 212 wishes in this area with the focus being on involvement and participation. Increased involvement of parents/guardians in students’ ISAEP programs could lead to better outcomes overall and efforts to improve this practice should be considered.

**Exemplary Practice 9.0: Collaboration with Community.** The NAEA describes the practice of Collaboration in alternative education environments as one that establishes “authentic partnerships with community resources.” It includes collaboration with community partners to integrate links between the program, home and community. While
they still considered this practice to be important, the ISAEP program leaders rated this practice as the lowest overall. They also rated it to be the least prevalent in their program with the average falling between *Very Little* and *Some*. Both these rating differences were significant when compared to the other exemplary practice and a moderately positive correlation was found between importance and practice. Simply put, study respondents see less importance in Collaboration as it is defined by the NAEA. This was further evidenced by their few responses to research question six. They provided only ten responses that fell within this practice to include wishes for support and involvement from the community. One specifically asked for help with mental health issues. Overall, as educators we are charged with helping students to not only complete their education, but to equip them with skills to be productive citizens. Collaboration with Community, as defined by the NAEA, means being able to transition and connect with community supports. This is not as evident in the ISAEP program, but it should be part of the education we provide for our at-risk students.

**Exemplary Practice 10.0: Program Evaluation.** The NAEA describes the exemplary practice of Program Evaluation as one that utilizes data collection analysis for program improvement. For program improvement Program Evaluation should include regular program evaluation; student outcome data; and stakeholder surveys. Upon its implementation the ISAEP program was charged with supplying data to the Virginia General Assembly. However, the VDOE was released from this obligation in 2009. While study participants saw this as practice as important and present in their current programs, it was rated ninth of the ten practices in terms of both importance and prevalence resulting in the highest, moderately positive correlation obtained. These ratings were significant differences. However, no survey participant expressed a wish to improve their program’s quality or
effectiveness that fell within this practice. While "evaluation" is not often perceived positively, it would be in the ISAEP program's best interest to systematically gather data to improve and support their program. Data indicates that in 1999 $2,247,581 was allotted by the Virginia Assembly for use by Virginia's public school divisions for the ISAEP program. Although the number of students has increased, the amount allocated has remained the same annually. Table 29 illustrates that the program has been cost effective over time. This information in conjunction with gathering program evaluation data could be used to justify providing additional funds and supports that are needed to improve program quality and program outcomes.

Table 29
ISAEP Cost per Student

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of ISAEP Students</th>
<th>Cost Per Student</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000-2001</td>
<td>3,609</td>
<td>$622.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001-2002</td>
<td>4,288</td>
<td>$524.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002-2003</td>
<td>4,286</td>
<td>$524.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-2004</td>
<td>5,071</td>
<td>$443.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004-2005</td>
<td>6,070</td>
<td>$370.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-2006</td>
<td>5,345</td>
<td>$420.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-2007</td>
<td>6,366</td>
<td>$342.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-2008</td>
<td>6,512</td>
<td>$345.14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In summary, the preceding findings from this study reveals characteristics of Virginia's ISAEP program and program leaders that are consistent with research findings in alternative education. Data regarding the 2009 NAEA research-based Exemplary Practices has been presented in terms of these characteristics and the ISAEP leaders' perception of importance of these practices, the presence in their ISAEP programs, and their wishes to improve program quality and effectiveness.
Implications for Practice

The following study conclusions reflect overall implications for practice in the ISAEP program:

- The ISAEP program is consistent with how alternative education is defined nationally and within Virginia.
- The ISAEP program is consistent with VDOE standards and that student success is consistent with the mission and purpose of the program.
- Characteristics of the alternative education environment provided within the ISAEP program are similar to what research informs educators about effective programs.
- The ISAEP program blends academics with vocational, career and technical educational training.
- This study finds that the ISAEP program reflects characteristics to include choice by the student, student-centered individualized programming, a functional curriculum, parent involvement, and the presence of caring, knowledgeable adults. The ISAEP program requires voluntary enrollment, principal-parent-student meetings, student evaluation, and is taught by licensed teachers.
- This study found the program leaders are most often administrators, program coordinators, or teachers who hold degrees higher than a Bachelor’s.
- Over half of the ISAEP program leaders hold more than one educational endorsement with the highest endorsements being in administration/supervision, secondary education, and special education.
• Data indicated that ISAEP program leaders saw all ten exemplary practices as important with ratings falling between Important and Very Important. There are statistically significant differences between the group findings.

• Data indicate that ISAEP program leaders found eight of the exemplary practices to be evident in their programs between Some and Quite a Bit.

• Data reveals a moderately positive relationship between program leaders’ perception of the exemplary practices and their current practice with respect to eight of the ten practices. The practices were the following: Program Evaluation, Student Assessment, Collaboration with Community, Mission and Purpose, Staffing and Professional Development, Transitional Planning and Support, Curriculum and Instruction, and Climate and Culture.

• Two practices, Collaboration with Community and Program Evaluation, were found to fall between Very Little and Some. There are statistically significant differences between the group findings.

• While program leaders rated Leadership as the most important overall findings were reflective of a weak relationship with current practice.

• While other models separated resources and time, the NAEA included resources and time as aspects of Leadership. As a result Leadership was a practice that stood out in terms of the level of importance as rated by the respondents. It was also the practice that program leaders identified as have the greatest ability to impact the quality and effectiveness of their program. Program leaders felt that with increased resources in money, materials or staffing, collaboration,
administrative support, and time for student participation the ISAEP program would be more effective.

- Study data indicated that program leaders see the practice of Collaboration with Community as both the least important exemplary practice and the least evident in their current practice. Development of opportunities for community relationships and partnerships is suggested by the data.

- Student Assessment found a very weak positive correlation indicating almost no correlation between importance and practice with respect to the frequent use of multiple assessments and the use of assessment to inform students and parents/guardians of progress. Further evaluation of student assessment measures currently used is suggested by the data.

- Collaboration with Community and Program Evaluation were the two practices rated by program leaders as being the least evident in current ISAEP programs. Additionally, program leaders did not identify wishes related to these two practices to improve program quality or effectiveness.

**Implications for Policy**

The following study conclusions reflect overall implications for policy with respect to the ISAEP program:

- Education in the Commonwealth of Virginia must incorporate choice for students to meet students’ educational needs. Not all students learn in the same way and state policy must reflect a variety of educational models to meet the needs and interests of Virginia’s students.
• Communication and collaboration among ISAEP stakeholders is recommended. It should include continual site-based decision making to assess and improve program quality.

• Data on long-term outcomes and program evaluation for program improvement should be gathered leading to additional funding and support for the ISAEP program.

• Within the ISAEP program encourage program autonomy so that stakeholders – students, parents/guardians, administrators and teachers – have ongoing input into the program.

**Implications for Future Research**

The following study conclusions reflect overall implications for future research in the ISAEP program:

• With respect to this study’s instrumentation, in addition to existing VDOE data, this study utilized a researcher-developed survey to collect data from ISAEP program leaders. While an expert panel reviewed the survey providing input and small field test was conducted, a pilot study was not completed. The pilot study, a small scale preliminary investigation using the instrument would have been of value to correct flaws (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007). In evaluating the 132 completed surveys this researcher would revise survey question 37 from “What degrees have you earned?” to “What is your highest degree earned?” Only 19 of 132 respondents marked multiple degrees, while 96 of 132 respondents marked just one degree and it was higher than a Bachelor’s. This indicates that the question as worded was unclear.
• In terms of study participants the survey was completed by ISAEP program leaders attending the 6th Annual ISAEP Conference. As the conference occurred in July 2012, ISAEP staff might not have been under contact and divisions might have sent other personnel (e.g., principals, counselors, program coordinators, etc.) who were contracted to work during the summer months. It is unclear whether the conference attendees were the administrators overseeing the ISAEP program in their school division, if they were the identified staff working directly with the ISAEP students, or if they were sent to the conference to get the information for the division. While this was an ideal opportunity to obtain a good response rate and receive state-wide input, this researcher would add a question to the survey to more directly identify respondents' role and relationship to the ISAEP program.

• Data on student teacher ratios in the ISAEP program needs to be more clearly gathered.

• Student data on the completion rates (i.e., GED) and post-secondary outcomes would be beneficial for continued and increasing support of the ISAEP program.

• It is clear that the ISAEP program has been a cost-effective program from the VDOE perspective. However, it is unclear as to what the per pupil costs have been at the local division level. Further research would provide this data to inform stakeholders.

Conclusions

Overall, in the United States education is a fundamental right and alternative education programs allow educators the opportunity to meet the legal responsibility of
providing educational access to all students. Alternative education programs have a level of adaptability and are often created to meet the needs of the population. At the direction of the General Assembly the Virginia Department of Education created the ISAEP program to meet the needs to students at-risk for dropping-out with the goal of assisting students to complete their education. The ISAEP program is consistent with John Dewey's recognition of "individualized and experiential education because all children do not have the same learning style or skills" (Reimer & Cash, 2003, p.3).

This study was conducted to review and analyze Virginia's Individual Student Alternative Education Plan (ISAEP) program. The ISAEP program is present in 128 Virginia public school divisions who receive funding from the Virginia Department of Education. This descriptive study made a cross-case comparative analysis with a focus on program characteristics and the NAEA exemplary practices. Alternative education is part of the continuum of education that brings equity to all students. While there is no consistent definition of an alternative program and what components must be present, we do know that not all students learn in the same environment or in the same way. There is a high economic and social cost to students not completing their education and alternative education programs provide an opportunity to prevent students from dropping out of school. The findings of this study reveal that the ISAEP program is one such program. Students aged 16 to 18 years of age who are not successful in the regular program and are at-risk for dropping out because of academic difficulties, behavior issues, or being overage have found successful program completion through this program. The ISAEP program creates a real opportunity for students to transition to adulthood.
Appendices

Appendix A Informed Consent Letter

July 2012

Dear ISAEP Teacher/Coordinators,

I am requesting your participation in my research study on the quality practices in alternative education environments. This survey is part of a doctoral dissertation with the College of William and Mary School of Education by Doris Feltman. The survey provided to you during this conference contains questions related to quality practices in alternative education as represented in the Individual Student Alternative Education Plan (ISAEP) program. There are also brief questions related to characteristics of ISAEP teachers/coordinators and your wishes to improve the program. I would appreciate your participation in this study and estimate that the completion of this survey will take approximately ten to fifteen minutes.

This study has been approved by the College of William and Mary Education Internal Review Committee (EDIRC). Your participation in this study is voluntary. I do not anticipate any risk in your participation in this study. You may skip any question you do not feel comfortable answering. Although you may not receive direct benefit from participation, others may benefit from the knowledge obtained in this research.

By completing and returning the survey, it will serve to indicate that you have read this information about this study and, thereby serves as your consent to participate in this study. Your participation is anonymous. After completing the survey please place it in the envelope marked “Surveys”. The surveys are not coded and therefore, data will not be associated with an individual. Only group statistics will be reported for the study. Upon placing the completed survey in the envelope you will receive a ticket. Drawings will be held during the next conference break and randomly chosen participants will receive a $25.00 iTunes gift card, a $25.00 Visa gift card, and/or a $25.00 Starbucks gift card. If you wish to receive an electronic copy of the study findings, please provide an email address on the form provided and place it in the envelope marked “Findings.”

If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research participant that have not been answered or if you wish to report any concerns about the study, you may contact Doris Feltman (757-617-1514), the dissertation chair, Dr. James Stronge (757-221-2339) and/or the College of William and Mary Education Internal Review Committee (EDIRC) (757-221-2358).

You may also contact me using the contact information below. Thank you for your time and participation.

Sincerely,

Doris R. Feltman, Ed.S.

drfelt@email.wm.edu
# Appendix B Survey of ISAEP – Alternative Education Environments in Virginia

**Directions:** Please consider each statement in two parts. *First*, determine the importance of a particular component in an alternative education program. *Second*, determine the degree to which that component is a current practice in your ISAEP program. You will mark each statement twice.

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**EXAMPLE:** The program has clear rules/expectations.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

2. Student success is central in the program.

3. The program has clearly defined roles.

4. The mission/purpose is consistent with state standards.

5. The program has a comprehensive curriculum.

6. The budget allows all standards to be fulfilled.

7. The program has a range of instructional strategies.

8. Written rules for behavior exist.

9. Facilities are safe and secure.

10. Each student is engaged in determining their ISAEP plan.

11. Professional development for the staff is provided.

12. Facilities are safe and accessible.
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<td>14. ISAEP teachers use multiple teaching styles.</td>
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<td>16. The program is in compliance with laws governing students with special needs.</td>
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<td>18. Technology is embedded in curriculum delivery.</td>
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<td>20. The purpose of assessment is communicated to stakeholders.</td>
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<td>22. Multiple assessment measures are used to monitor student progress.</td>
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<td>24. Coordinated supports are provided to ensure transition to post-secondary activity (education, training or employment).</td>
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<td>26. Parents participate in choosing the ISAEP program.</td>
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<td>28. Parents are continually apprised of their student's progress.</td>
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<td>30. ISAEP student planning involves the community service organizations or groups.</td>
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32. Student outcome data is used to evaluate program success.

34. Staff assess the effectiveness of the ISAEP program.

35. How many students participated in your ISAEP program last year?

- Less than 5
- 6 to 10
- 11 to 15
- More than 16

36. What is your job title?

- Teacher
- Program Coordinator
- Administrator
- Other (please describe)

37. What degrees have you earned? (mark all that apply)

- Bachelor’s
- Master’s
- Educational Specialist
- Doctorate
- Other (please describe)

38. Are you licensed to teach in Virginia? do you hold?

- Yes
- No


- 
- 
- 

40. How long have you worked with the ISAEP program?

- Less than 1 year
- 1 to 3 years
- 4 to 6 years
- 7 to 10 years
41. If you had three wishes to improve the quality and effectiveness of your program, what would they be?

1. _______________________________________________________________________________________________________

2. _______________________________________________________________________________________________________

3. _______________________________________________________________________________________________________

Thank you! If you wish to receive a copy of this study's findings, please provide an email address on the attached and place it in the separate envelope.
## Appendix C ISAEP Program Leaders’ Ratings – Importance

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### Appendix D ISAEP Program Leaders' Ratings – Importance and Current Practice

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### Appendix E ISAEP Program Leaders’ Ratings – Current Practice

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Appendix F ISAEP Program Leaders’ Wishes Sorted

Mission and Purpose

- Consistent policies & procedures
- The conference we are attending is in response to state edict that was poorly conceived and communicated
- More face-to-face with others in county to disseminate info
- ISAEP teachers dedicated to mission of program and not to $ as second
- More county administrative exposure
- To better inform the school system concerning the importance of the program
- Kids that want to be in the program
- Access the students more effective
- State regulations & laws & statutes to be communicated proactively
- Clear mission to all stakeholders

Leadership

- Resources
  - More money to pay more teachers & order more resource
  - Funding – additional
  - More funding
  - More funds for program support
  - More funding
  - Funding for more CTE trainings during ISAEP classes
  - More funding
  - Money – the new standards and test prices are going to be a handicap to most of my students
  - Money
  - Increased budget
  - Additional funds
  - More money
  - More money available through grant process
Money & resources to be effective & efficient
- More funding
- More materials
- More $
- More funding for CTE
- To purchase more materials
- Money - buying new materials is going to be hard to finance
- Money
- Increased funding for individual certifications in career areas of interest
- More funding
- Budget to cover all expenses
- Provide transportation
- Easier access to materials
- More money

- **Time**
  - Increased time and resources to visit alternative education sites, respective high schools & students in IASEP on regular (weekly) basis
  - Time slots
  - Full day program - currently have an evening program
  - More time to work with students
  - Hours open
  - Longer hours with student
  - Summer component
  - All day program

- **Procedures**
  - Planned & set guidelines for our program
  - Overall consistency in the steps to programs - having all hands on deck being knowledgeable of process so it was more fluid
  - More specific requirements regarding attendance
  - More involvement in student admission
  - More teacher involvement when decisions are made about our program
  - Less resistance from high schools re: student’s desire to return
  - Implementation of ISAEP program
  - Less students at one time
  - Having more students in the program
  - Adhere to admission guidelines to ISAEP
  - All schools allowing graduation with his/her class
  - All students participating with graduation
  - More involvement with the admission proves into the program
  - Proper screening of potential students to ensure success
• Establish comprehensive system/process/guidelines & program for H.S. transition that incl. HS admin/guid/tchrs/Alt.
• More legitimate referrals from home school counselors for increased enrollment of appropriate candidates
• More time to meet with and counsel new students before they come to take pre-tests to enter program
• Early identification of ISAEP candidates
• Forced student participation & accountability few options to confuse already confused teens
• Fewer students in ISAEP, more in standard diplomas
• For people to follow the rules

• Knowledge
  • Administrators are informed of program requirements
  • For all stakeholders (teachers, admin, guidance, SB personnel etc.) to be informed and Knowledgeable of ISAEP
  • Educate Administrators in the division
  • Administrators understanding the program
  • Admin in division understand program
  • Everyone on the same page
  • More information on ISAEP from DOE to private schools
  • Different management structure
  • I would like new requirements to be clarified
  • Training for administrators at the building regarding the specifics of program
  • Know more
  • Better guidance counselor buy in/understanding

Climate and Culture

• Communication
  • Time to educate the faculty about the program
  • Inform more stakeholders of the program and its goals
  • People would listen
  • A desire by administration to work with students who are already a challenge
  • An openness to working with special needs students
  • Communication

• Relationships
  • Better relation with school administrators
  • Administrators supporting the program
  • Admin supported program
  • Better relations with school administrators at city level
  • More cooperation/support from administrators & teachers
  • More administrative support and cooperation
- **Facilities**
  - Larger space for the program
  - Better facilities
  - Physical plant improvement
  - A separate building
  - Additional facilities & technology
  - Better facilities w/up-to-date technology, access & space to house all programs & deliver outreach services

**Staffing and Professional Development**

- **Staffing**
  - Create a coordinator position
  - Additional instructors for math & science
  - Our teacher has other teaching responsibilities – so to be able to have a full time ISAEP teacher would be a wish
  - Allocating quality effective teachers
  - An additional person, spec. ed. Certified, if possible, to be present in the classroom
  - To employ more teachers
  - More involvement from the high school guidance department
  - Another teacher
  - A teacher for each core class
  - Staff
  - A life-coach mentor of ISAEP student
  - More math teachers involved in teaching math
  - Be able to staff the program with a strong instructional paraprofessional to provide more one on one assistance
  - Organization to the program by having dedicated coordinator
  - More staff consistency. School system staff on availability after all other positions filled resulting in high turnover
  - Career counselor
  - More than 1 teacher available to assist student with preparation for tests
  - More reading teachers involved in the process
  - Keep my program separate from my other 2 programs that I run
  - More assistance in classroom (instructional assistance)
  - Full time teacher/coordinator to address academic and vocational needs more effectively
  - Better guidance SPED communication re: goals
  - Larger budget to hire more staff
  - An aide position to provide more individual attention to student
• **Professional Development**
  o More training with teachers
  o More support and consultation, professional development
  o Hands on workshop
  o Region, ISAEP & GED professional development opportunities for teachers
  o In-service or conference on “Best Practices in Delivery of the ISAEP” in small/private settings
  o I would like more professional development
  o More on the job training opportunities
  o More staff/professional development training
  o Funded site visits
  o Staff training on alternative education and at-risk student population

**Curriculum and Instruction**

• Established instructional curriculum for the state which include online education and other resources
• Project based learning focus
• **Materials**
  o Specific course materials
  o Better direct teaching and training materials
  o More effective pre-GED materials
  o A pre-GED program implemented
  o More GED materials
  o More materials for practice
• **CTE**
  o More certificate/technology courses offered
  o More available CTE programs
  o Make sure CTE component is incorporated
  o Better materials for CTE component to reinforce workplace readiness and more technology classes available to my students
  o Stronger CTE component
  o Have various alternative for students unable to work; other options to meet needs efficiently
  o More CTE options
• **Technology**
  o Computer assisted programs
  o Computer programs that are relevant to the 2014 tests
  o Technology
  o A higher tech. oriented room to program services – i.e., computers, interactive materials, labs
  o Improved computer program
  o More software capabilities and better computers, ours are old
  o Improved technology
  o Improved technology
Student Assessment

- Allowing sped accommodations for pretesting
- More practice tests
- Ability to be a testing center
- Allowing more opportunities for students to take actual GES test (i.e., test more than 1x per month)
- Computerized testing
- Additional changes for ISAEP student to take the GED test more than 3x’s to graduate
- Computerized testing
- Clearer assessment guidelines
- Access to more on-line, free GED practice software
- Keep testing based on critical thinking skills
- To become a GED testing center
- Testing credit that does not expire
- Testing credit that does not expire
- More opportunities for GED testing in our area
- Not base the test on a for profit test company like Pearson/VUE. Making money should not be the goal of the GED test

Transitional Planning and Support

- Directly provide training/support for GED students
- Helping students find employment locally
- More student-counselor interaction and preparation for career assessment and development
- More practical work experience for students
- Access to vocational training
- Career tech course & program opportunities
- Internship & work experiences
- Students have access to career counselors
- Have more transitions for our GED graduates to transition to college & jobs
- Add workplace experiences to help with transition to post-secondary experiences
- 2 of my students could not take the GED due to no valid ID despite the fact that I helped their mother obtain birth certificates
- Richer career tech/workforce plan
- Transition services including job placement
- Devise a plan for more school to work coordination
**Parent/Guardian Involvement**

- More parental involvement
- Getting more families with resources
- More help & support from the home these students are coming from
- Wish for more parents to be interested in their child’s well-being, education, and future
- More parental involvement/interest
- More parental involvement
- Parental involvement
- Parent participation

**Collaboration**

- More community support
- More info on community resources
- Coordination/support of other agencies
- Coordinate services & delivery more closely with ABE
- More community involvement
- More exposure to community
- Vocational partner
- More community-based opportunities for our student in job training and internship opportunities
- More help w/mental health issues regarding our students
- Include community service training experience

**Program Evaluation** – no wishes were expressed in this area

**Omitted responses**

- Just started program – don’t know yet
- Have not have the opportunity to implement ISAEP in my program yet – here for exposure
- All good
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