

PERCEPTIONS OF SUCCESS FACTORS IN RURAL  
K-12 PUBLIC ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAMS

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by

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the dissertation entitled

PERCEPTIONS OF SUCCESS FACTORS IN RURAL K-12 PUBLIC  
ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAMS

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a candidate for the degree of doctor of education,

and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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## DEDICATION

I felt compelled to find a quote to begin this dedication that provided meaning to the journey I have been on for the last four years of my life. Theodore Roosevelt said, “nothing worth having comes easy” and boy is that the truth! Not only for me, but for the sacrifice my family faced on a daily, weekly, and yearly basis as well.

To my husband, Kevin, my rock, my motivator, the love of my life, you endured the brunt of this journey and NEVER complained. You cared for our children, took care of our home, sacrificed time as a couple, and always made things work. I know eight words I will never speak to you ever again, “I need to work on my paper tonight.” I say that with delight!

To my children, Kennedy, Sydney, and Leo. Thank you for doing your part to help your daddy while I was away. To my girls, the goal was to finish this journey before you were in high school. I really cut that one close. I know I have missed activities and family time with you at times, but you always seemed to understand. You have really done your part to make our family flow and in the mean time you have become responsible young ladies. Leo, my goals was for you to never remember this journey. I know there have been many nights you have asked me to put the work away and snuggle. I am so glad I did that when I could.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

1. CQI- Continuous Quality Improvement
2. DESE- Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
3. ESEA- Elementary and Secondary Education Act
4. IDEA- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
5. IEP- Individual Education Program
6. MOSIS- Missouri Student Information System 5. TQM- Total Quality Management
7. MSBA- Missouri School Board Association
8. MSIP 5- Missouri School Improvement Plan 5
9. NCLB- No Child Left Behind
10. PDSA- Plan, Do, Study, Act
11. TQM- Total Quality Management
12. USDE- United States Department of Education

## **ABSTRACT**

Alternative education programs for students in the rural K-12 public school setting are designed to fit the needs of the District due to the learning needs being accommodated through the program. This qualitative case study provided suggestions to rural K-12 public alternative education programs regarding success factors identified by teachers and administrators working in or who have worked in a rural K-12 public alternative education program in Northwest Missouri. The researcher used archival data, interviews with teachers and administrators, and a focus group of administrators to find common themes which were then viewed through the conceptual framework of Continuous Quality Improvement. Results suggest input, teamwork, accountability, good management, and continuous improvement are success factors of rural K-12 public alternative education programs.

Key words: Continuous Quality Improvement, K-12 public alternative education

## **SECTION ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Harrisk (2017) noted perceptions are derived from the interaction between our perception organs and the world. Locke's Causal Theory of Perception suggested the world causes people to form ideas and perceptions about what is experienced (Harrisk, 2017). Alternative education is varied depending on the students being served in the alternative setting. It can be said that teacher belief in alternative education is the driving force and the success of a rural K-12 public alternative education program even though there are a lack of parameters provided for design and evaluation (Lange & Sletten, 2002).

Rural K-12 public school alternative education is predominantly addressed through laws and regulations. Schools are left to define alternative education programming, as well as how student needs will be addressed (Atkins & Bartuska, 2010; De La Ossa, 2005; Lehr & Lange, 2003; Raywid, 2001; Tissington, 2006). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1997 provides guidance to those who determine placement for students who qualify for special education services. IDEA incorporated multiple steps in order to arrive at the need for an alternative education placement; however, the team determining the need for a K-12 alternative setting must meet certain placement criteria (DESE, 2016). Individual Educational Program (IEP) goals must continue to be addressed and the student's services must continue to be provided along with modifications and accommodations (DESE, 2016).

The United States Department of Education (USDE) (2015) discussed the necessity of alternative education practices for students expelled from school, leaving the parameters of a program and the intended outcomes open-ended with a focus on getting the students what they need at that time in his or her education. Further suggestions focus on class-size, leadership, quality of staff, a shared vision between staff and leadership, curriculum, and collaboration between sending schools and community services (USDE, 2015).

### **Statement of the Problem**

#### **Problem of Practice**

When alternative settings in K-12 public schools are not addressed many unsuccessful factors emerge from the literature and are well documented. Wilson (2014) discussed the school-to-prison pipeline and zero tolerance which fuel school failure and can push students to the justice system. According to Lagana-Riordan et al. (2011) students suffer from the effects of dropout. In addition, Wilson (2014) attributed the prison crisis to schools and noted the large number of individuals in prison who did not graduate from high school. Further risk noted by the American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on School Health stated students suspended from school are more likely to be unsupervised at home, live in stressful environments, and may have a need for professional services for mental health (Taras et al., 2003).

When the multiple issues were identified and the result was removal of students from school, it is a necessity to address rural K-12 public alternative education needs for students not successful in the general education setting. With knowledge of the

consequences of removal of students from school and the risks associated with the removal, it has become the administrator's duty to build relationships, provide a school climate that promotes students learning along with high expectations, connect with the home, and provide alternatives to suspension and expulsion (Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011). National level trends, such as grants for the Safe Schools Act, had hoped to provide more safety and security, also provided disservice to students in some cases due to zero tolerance (Wilson, 2014). The Civil Rights Project (2000) (as cited in Christle et al., 2004) reported that increased suspensions did not change behavior. If suspension of students is not changing the student's behaviors, it is the school's duty to provide alternative means for students to achieve success and are given a chance as a productive adult citizen.

Wilson (2014) provided evidence that a negative relationship between suspension and dropout exist. Federal regulations have been established to govern states and school districts. Effective practice implemented in rural K-12 public alternative education programs are provided at the national level. These topics about public alternative education are all accounted for in the literature (Lange, 1998; Lange & Sletten, 2002; Lehr, Lanners, & Lange, 2003; Wilson, 2014). Based on the previous information, there is a lack of investigation into rural K-12 public alternative education program success factors as perceived by administrators and teachers working in rural K-12 public alternative education programs.

## **Existing Gap**

Creswell (2009) discussed examining for deficiencies in the existing literature which applied in this research when focusing on perceptions of rural K-12 public alternative education success from the administrator and teacher perspective. As discussed by Lange and Sletten (2002), alternative education programs are designed to fit each school's individual needs. Consistent assessment data across all rural K-12 public alternative education programs is not available. While laws, regulations, and professional writings address what rural K-12 public alternative education is and how it can be defined by organizations such as the United States Department of Education (USDE), the success factors of rural K-12 public alternative education programs perceived by the administrators and teachers working in the field of rural K-12 public alternative education have not been addressed.

## **Purpose of the Study**

Creswell (2009) stated it is the researcher's intent to add to the literature. In this study the researcher contributed to the literature by capturing success factors of rural K-12 public alternative education based on administrators and teachers who are working or have worked in a rural K-12 public alternative education setting every day. The purpose of this study was to discover perceptions of the success factors of a rural K-12 public alternative program.

## **Research Questions**

The topic of this study is rural K-12 public alternative education programs and the determination of success factors according to administrators and teachers' perceptions

of rural K-12 public alternative programs. There is a gap in the knowledge as to what determines a successful rural K-12 public alternative education program. At this stage in the research, a rural K-12 public alternative education program will be generally defined as any school setting where students are placed outside of the general education option or setting. The overarching research question guiding this study is: What are the success factors of a rural K-12 public alternative education program?

### **Conceptual Framework**

The concept of total quality management (TQM) and its specific component continuous quality improvement (CQI) framework will be the lens to view related literature, as well as emerging themes and data as research is collected and analyzed. W. Edwards Deming encouraged leadership to have a vision and to provide process to support improvement over time (Anderson, Rungtusanatham & Schroeder, 1994).

### **Continuous Quality Improvement**

The work related to CQI defined and highlighted the organizational system and process rather than the individual with a desire to improve the process (Iowa State University, 2015). The Medical University of South Carolina (2015) aligns with Graham (1995), in their utilization of quality management, which has a focus on the organization and how the systems operate in the organization. Furthermore, the State of Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services (2015) published an explicit list of the key elements of CQI: accountability, good management, input, teamwork, and continuous review all used in evaluation of how the organization is operated and its function.

Perhaps Louisiana was influenced by McLaughlin and Kaluzny (2004) as these authors defined CQI as “a structured organizational process for involving personnel in the plan and execution of a continuous flow of improvement to provide quality health care that meets or exceeds expectation” (p. 3). CQI worked to define and highlight the organizational system and process rather than the individual with a desire to improve the processes (Iowa State University, 2015). While with these things considered, the response is not always positive. Harper and Lattuca (2010) discussed a resistance related to the language used in CQI due to the fact it has more of a business feel than an educational feel and satisfaction of students is measured in the process.

McLaughlin and Kaluzny (2004) discussed CQI as a philosophy and method which was later synonymous to Harper and Lattuca’s (2010) research who stated, “under a CQI approach, organizational learning, human resource development, collaboration, and assessment are used to improve the learning process and its outcomes” (p. 507). Successful implementation of CQI in the educational setting demands a cultural change and requires the buy-in of faculty and students, including their willingness to participate in a variety of assessment activities and frequent meetings (Brown & Marshall, 2008, p. 207). Maguad (2003) complimented this statement by calling customers the stakeholders in education. By the implementation of CQI, teacher ownership of the process will promote teacher leadership, accountability, mindset, teamwork, and continued progress review of K-12 public alternative education programs.

## **Total Quality Management**

Total Quality Management (TQM) focused on prevention in the organization. Kanji and Asher (1993) proposed the purpose was to provide everyone a shared desire to think in the organization. Through the achievement of continuous improvement, Deming proposed 14 points which are not seen “to screen out bad products, but to build up knowledge from the production process” (Kanji & Asher, 1993). The 14 points are consistent purpose, new philosophy, cease dependence on inspection, end low price contracts, improve processes, facilitate training, provide leadership, eliminate fear, eliminate barriers, eliminate exhortations, eliminate targets, develop pride in work, encourage education, and commitment to improving quality and product (Kanji & Asher, 1993).

These 14 points proposed by Deming, and noted by Kanji and Asher (1993), are all part of continuous improvement. W. Edwards Deming pushed leadership to have a vision and to provide process to support improvement over time (Anderson, Rungtusanatham & Schroeder, 1994). The process, as supported by Deming, is cyclical and must be continuously reviewed in order to achieve long-term successes. The work of Deming matched transformational leadership in the sense of using motivation to assist people to accomplish their potential to the fullest and to have continuous improvements made towards the vision (Northouse, 2013).

With consideration TQM and CQI, it is important to determine the focus of the study regarding rural K-12 public alternative education programs. As stated previously, the most consistent explicit list of key CQI elements is derived from the State of

Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services (2015) as related to the focus of this study. For the purpose of this study these elements will be referred to as success factors: accountability, good management, input, teamwork, and continuous review all five used in evaluation of how the organization is operated and its function (State of Louisiana, 2015).

### **Design of the Study**

The researcher explored the knowledge gap to discover the success factors of rural K-12 public alternative education programs based on the perceptions of teachers and administrators working in a rural K-12 public alternative setting. This study examined through the use of qualitative methodology as suggested by Merriam (2009) and Creswell (2009). This methodology allowed the researcher to make a contribution to the field, which expanded the literature base of information about the topic (Merriam, 2009, p. 4). Furthermore, Merriam (2009) explained that qualitative methodology has become an accepted method of inquiry for the field of education (p. 7) and provided a real world study for those interested in the topic. The researcher, as stated by Creswell (2009) and Merriam (2009), served as the main data collection person and provided the analysis of what are both referred to as the natural setting (p. 175, p. 17). Basic qualitative research, as defined by Merriam (2009), will be utilized by the researcher because of the interest in the human response component of participant experiences and how they respond to the experiences they have daily (p. 23). Merriam (2009) suggested that basic qualitative research in the field of education is probably the most common form of research used in the field related to practice (p. 23). This qualitative research is a bounded case study due

to the limited amount of people that will be able to provide data about this topic in the research area (Merriam, 2009).

K-12 public alternative education, for the purpose of this research, is defined as any school setting where students are placed outside of the regular general education option or setting. The National Association for Alternative Education has released an exemplary model for program evaluation and effectiveness to be evaluated. However, how do we define success factors of rural K-12 public alternative education programs using these practices?

### **Setting**

This is a bounded case study as presented by Merriam (2009) due to the parameters of the research area. For the purpose of this study rural K-12 public alternative education programs in rural Northwest Missouri served by the Region X Regional Professional Development Center (pseudonym) located at Rural Midwest University (pseudonym) will be the focus. The schools chosen for this study were chosen by the researcher due to what Merriam (2009) called a convenience sample (p. 79). The location of the study will be close to the researcher's employment in rural K-12 education and will inform those in the region, as well as help establish a benchmark of success factors in rural K-12 public alternative education which others can use in their region, county, or state.

### **Participants**

Participants in this study were teachers and present and past administrators from rural K-12 public alternative education programs located in rural Northwest Missouri.

All schools were identified that have a form of rural K-12 public alternative education in their school district, within the boundaries of the Regional Professional Development Center located at rural Midwest University- Region X. Participants were asked to participate from each location if teachers and administrators had served at least two years as a teacher or administrator in the rural K-12 public alternative education program. According to Creswell (2009), it was important in qualitative research to purposefully select participants and it is not necessary to use random sampling (p. 178). Additionally, Creswell (2009) clarified that participant choice should be ones that can inform the researcher about the program and provide information in regards to the research questions (p. 178). Merriam (2009) stated “purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (p. 77).

Participants were chosen if they had at least two years of teaching or administration experience in rural K-12 public alternative education. This requirement of teachers and administrators was determined by the researcher as demonstrating professional experience in the study area. The researcher began by identifying multiple teachers and administrators to interview using experts in the field and directors from Region X. This created a snowball effect by these teachers and administrators identifying additional teachers and administrators to interview. Merriam (2009) stated there is not an answer to what is an acceptable sample size; however, the researcher had ample participants to reach saturation (p. 80).

## **Data Collection Tools**

Data collected during this study was qualitative by use of the person-to-person encounter interview questions to gain the perceptions of teachers working in each rural K-12 public alternative education program for at least two years (Merriam, 2009, p. 88). The interviews were a semi-structured interview. This format provided the researchers the ability to respond to the situation at hand, possible worldview emersions, and new ideas about alternative education based on the interviewees (Merriam, 2009, p. 90).

Creswell (2009) stated it is best to have multiple forms of data. For the purpose of this study, data collection came from interviews, a focus group, documents, artifacts, and literature. Merriam (2009) provided justification for using an interview method by stating, “interviews are necessary when we cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them. It is also necessary to interview when we are interested in past events that are impossible to replicate” (p. 88). In addition, Krueger and Casey (2009) stated focus groups work well in determining perceptions (p. 8). Documents and artifacts were examined by the researcher regarding rural K-12 public alternative education programs (Merriam, 2009).

As Fink (2013) recommended an informed consent was provided to the participants with a document about the study in order to help them decide if they want to participate in the research on rural K-12 public alternative education, which in this case was the interviews and focus group (p. 18). The informed consent included a title, name, purpose, procedure to be followed, potential risks and discomforts, potential benefits to the respondent and society, provide participants information that the study is voluntary

and not compensated, confidentiality, participation and withdrawal, and information to contact the researcher (Fink, 2013, p. 18). All sessions were audio-recorded during the interviews and focus group. All requirements of the University of Missouri Institutional Review Board were followed in order to gain proposal approval, informed consent approval, interview questions approval, and ethical data collection.

### **Data Analysis**

Incorporated data analysis suggested by Merriam (2009) and Creswell (2009). Both Creswell (2009) and Merriam (2009) cited Corbin and Strauss, 2007 discussed open coding and axial coding (p. 184; p. 180). However, Creswell (2009) explained the concepts further by writing “these involve generating categories of information open coding, selecting one of the categories and positioning it within a theoretical model axial coding, and then explicating a story from the interconnection of these categories selective coding” (p. 184). The researcher assigned codes in order to construct categories through each interview and the focus group (Merriam, 2009). Each interview and focus group was reviewed and coded quickly after the interview or focus group had occurred. Documents and artifacts were examined and coded by content analysis (Merriam, 2009). As Merriam (2009) suggested, the data must continue to be collected and analyzed throughout the collection period (p. 172). Furthermore, Merriam (2009) suggested data organization happen early in order to keep data manageable and organized as you continuously interview (p. 173).

In order to maximize the strength of the study, Merriam (2009) addressed threats to validity and reliability which can be addressed by paying “careful attention to a study’s

conceptualization and the way in which the data are collected, analyzed, and interpreted, and the way in which the findings are presented” (p. 210). As for reliability, Merriam (2009) suggested it is important to know if the data collected is consistent with the results presented (p. 221). Merriam (2009) then cited Lincoln and Guba (1985) and further explained that “validity, then, must be assessed in terms of something other than reality itself which alluded to the notion of credibility; that is, are the findings credible given the data presented?” (p. 213).

For this study, member checks were used in order to ensure internal validity and credibility (Merriam, 2009). Due to the nature of how data was collected using the interview and focus group format, it is vital for participants to review the researcher’s interpretation and were able to provide feedback about how the researcher interpreted their perspective (Merriam, 2009). Merriam (2009) further explained the need for this is due to the researcher’s need to establish trust with participants and districts for whom data will be collected from and whom results will be shared with. Discovery throughout the study was handled ethically and professionally in order to maintain the trustworthiness of the study (Merriam, 2009, p. 230). In addition, it is also important to address reliability and consistency. Merriam (2009) concurred with Lincoln and Guba (1985) in the use of an audit trail by journaling throughout the data collection process about how categories were created, personal questions that arise, reflections of the interviews, and ideas and decision the researcher gains during the research period (p. 222-223).

Lastly, Merriam (2009) discussed within a qualitative research study, it was important not to formulate generalizations from the data (Merriam, 2009). “In qualitative research, a single case or small, nonrandom, purposeful sample is selected precisely because the researcher wishes to understand the particular in depth, not to find out what is generally true of the many” (Merriam, 2009, p. 224). Generalizations can be left up to the reader to decide how the results apply to those in the reader’s situation, which are created by the researcher’s rich thick descriptions originally used by Gilbert Ryle in 1949 (Merriam, 2009, p. 227). Merriam (2009) aligned with Lincoln and Guba (1985) in the discussion of transferability. The original researcher cannot possibly know where transferability may occur. As cited by Merriam (2009), Lincoln and Guba (1985) made the case for validity, reliability, and descriptive data being very important to future studies in order to make transferability possible (pp. 224-225).

### **Limitations, Delimitations, and Assumptions**

#### **Limitations**

As Creswell (2009) stated, “the researcher keeps a focus on learning and meaning that the participants hold about the program or issue, not the meaning that the researchers bring to the research or writers express in the literature” (p. 175). Personal researcher bias related to the topic of K-12 public alternative education and success measure must be addressed as the researcher has taught in an alternative setting, observed in alternative settings, and has served as an administrator for two K-12 public alternative education programs.

## **Delimitations**

The boundaries of the study where all research and data collection took place was in rural areas served by Region X of the Regional Professional Development Center. There are no urban settings served by Region X. Other parameters of the study include participants who have served in the public alternative education setting for at least two years. Due to these parameters, it is possible the researcher missed out on some considerations of those who have been in the field for less than two years, or those in urban areas.

## **Assumptions**

The researcher may encounter multiple assumptions while working with participants of the research study. The first assumption was trust established in the researcher. It is the hope of the researcher that participants want to contribute to the learning of others and provide truthful informative answers during the study; however, it is possible questions were not answered honestly in an interview format where the researcher is face-to-face with the participant.

The second assumption the researcher made is that everyone working in a public alternative education setting has chosen that line of work. The reality based on the researcher's work in public alternative education, is that some leaders shuffle teachers into alternative education positions to remove them from another situation. The researcher assumed all participants had the desire to work in rural K-12 public alternative education settings, strive to be excellent at his or her position, and have a passion for

assisting students who have chosen a rural K-12 public alternative education path to graduation.

## **Definition of Key Terms**

**Accountability.** Thurlow (2009) defined “accountability as the assignment of responsibility for conducting activities in a certain way or producing specific results.”

**Administrator.** For the purpose of this paper an administrator is defined as a person who provides or has provided oversight to alternative education program.

**Alternative education.** Porowski, O’Conner, and Luo (2014) cited alternative education programs as any program outside of the traditional K-12 setting.

**Compulsory Attendance Law.** Section 167.031, RSMo, “at the age of seven children must enroll and attend regularly attend public, private, parochial, home school or a combination of schools for the full term of the school year” (DESE, 2015).

**Continuous Quality Improvement.** CQI is built on methods using process rather than the individuals. The organization, systems in the organization, and the internal and external customers are the focus. Processes are improved by the use of analyzed data (Iowa State University, 2016).

**Continuous Review.** For the purpose of this paper continuous and review were defined separately. Merriam-Webster (2016) defined continuous as “continuing without stopping, existing without a break or interruption” and review as “an act of carefully looking at or examining the quality or condition of something or someone”. By blending these two definitions continuous review for the purpose of this paper was defined as examining rural K-12 public alternative programs through each process perpetually.

**Good Management.** Koprowski (1981) discussed the necessity to focus on the individuals in the organization to feel worthy and have the freedom to produce within their work.

**Individualized Education Program (IEP).** An IEP is a document that is individually designed for each student with disabilities to provide guidance for the student's educational experience. The IEP is created through collaboration of school staff, parents, and when appropriate students (USDE, 2016).

**Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).** IDEA is a law providing protection and assures students with disabilities are being provided the necessary services to progress through an educational experience (USDE, 2016).

**Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE).** Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education is a result the of Missouri Constitution in 1945 (DESE, 2015).

**Missouri Options.** The Missouri Options program is an alternative to completing the required credits necessary for a student at least 17 years of age and at-risk of dropping out of school in Missouri to receive a diploma (DESE, 2016).

**Missouri School Improvement Plan 5 (MSIP 5).** This document is used for public school accountability. The first year of implementation for MSIP was 1990 and is now in its fifth cycle. The document was used to reference resource and process standards, as well as report data to meet established goals (DESE, 2016).

**Staff Input.** Heathfield (2016) stated "employee involvement is creating an environment in which people have an impact on decisions and actions that affect their

jobs.” Furthermore, Heathfield (2016) explained input is dependent on a leadership style that believes in their employees and their ability to contribute to the success of the organization.

**Student.** Globally, a student is defined as a “person who attends a school, college, or a university” (Merriam-Webster, 2015). The Missouri Department of Education defined the student by compulsory attendance, Section 167.031, RSMo, at the age of seven children must enroll and attend regularly each school year (DESE, 2015).

**Success Factors.** For the purpose of this study and as defined by the State of Louisiana (2015) key elements of CQI will be referred to as success factors in rural K-12 public alternative education programs: accountability, good management, input, teamwork, and continuous review.

**Teamwork.** Gerlach (2016) discussed “teamwork can be defined as a process among partners who share mutual goals and work together to achieve the goals. Teamwork allows people to discuss their work together and as a result grow professionally.”

**Teacher.** Merriam-Webster (2015) defined the role of a teacher as “a person or thing that teaches something; especially: a person whose job is to teach students about certain subjects”. The state of Missouri defined a teacher as someone who holds a baccalaureate degree or higher from a college or university (DESE, 2016).

**Total Quality Management (TQM).** American Society for Quality described TQM as a “management approach to long-term success through customer satisfaction. In

a TQM effort, all members of an organization participate in improving the process, products, services, and the culture in which they work” (ASQ, 2016).

**United States Department of Education (USDE).** This department was founded in 1867 to aid in the collection of data about schools and teaching (USDE, 2015).

### **Significance of the Study**

#### **Scholarship**

The research collected and reviewed at this time comes from the field of education, psychology, and education law. The research studies are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods depending on the focus of the study in relation to rural K-12 alternative education programs. The knowledge gap the researcher addressed is teacher perceptions of what factors determine a successful rural K-12 alternative program. Lange and Sletten (2002) discussed the driving force in alternative education is the teacher’s belief in the program, but state there is a lack of parameters provided for design and evaluation of alternative education programs. All programs differ depending on the needs of the district the rural K-12 public alternative education program serves; however, what determining factors contribute to rural K-12 public alternative education success for students in need of a rural K-12 public alternative education program is yet to be discovered. Student need is the most crucial aspect of providing a rural K-12 alternative education program for students that do not excel in the general education mainstream. This study will add to the body of literature and to the gap in knowledge of these success factors.

## **Practice**

The Missouri School Improvement Plan 5 (MSIP 5) provided Process Standards which include the graduation rate. “The district ensures all students successfully complete high school. The percent of students who complete an educational program that meets the graduation requirements as established by the board meets or exceeds the state standard or demonstrates required improvement” (DESE, 2016). To support these students, teachers must be in tune with student learning styles, be able to support students through returning to the general education track or to graduation, and provide students with support for meeting graduation requirements, as well as success after graduation, whether by attending college or starting a career. This study provided practitioners with noted success factors when building an alternative education program based on teacher perceptions.

## **Summary**

Rural K-12 public alternative education is a direct result of federal regulations driving how states and local schools provide education to all students, as well as a way for schools to provide an education to students other than in the general education setting. The intent of the regulations are good; however, local schools, in some instances, began using alternative education as a way of excluding students (Carroll, 2008; Aull, 2012). Through a qualitative study with the use of basic qualitative methods, the researcher synthesized the data of interviews, focus groups, documents, and artifacts. This data once analyzed was viewed through the lens of TQM, specifically the concept of CQI, as a

conceptual framework to offer a contribution to the literature in rural K-12 public alternative education.

“Progressive organizations give power to the employees as well as invest in their development” (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 149). Through the topic of employee empowerment, Bolman and Deal (2008) noted communication, encouraged autonomy, participation, work redesign, teamwork, promotion of equality, and meaningful work production as the components of a human resource philosophy most aligned to CQI. This study provided a model for school districts or state regions to duplicate in order to inform teachers and administrators of success factors of rural K-12 public alternative education programs based on the perceptions of teachers in rural K-12 public alternative education.

## SECTION TWO

### PRACTITIONER SETTING FOR THE STUDY

The examination of over one hundred years of educational philosophies, movements, and progress in the rural K-12 public general education and rural K-12 public alternative education programs set the stage for this study. Furthermore, rural K-12 public alternative education programs are an integral part of this study and the interest in how these programs are viewed through the organizational structures of the United States Department of Education (USDE) and the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE).

Leadership and organizational analysis provided by Bolman and Deal (2008) demonstrate hierarchy in the organization from the USDE to the local school district. Weber (1946/2005) also provided information on how bureaucracy is alive in the system. All of these structures form the study setting and provide the context for what is desired, success factors to inform collaboration, and instructional practices of rural K-12 public alternative education teachers based on their perceptions.

### **Background**

#### **1800-1900: Formation of Schools**

In 1805, wealthy businessmen formed the New York Public School Society to educate the poor (Applied Research Center, 2016). The focus in this time period was to teach obedience and discipline in order to provide good factory workers (Applied Research Center, 2016). In 1821 the first public high school was opened in Boston, and by 1850 elementary schools had opened in the northern states. Massachusetts, led by

Horace Mann, was the leader in creating a better school system for Americans in 1837 (Applied Research Center, 2016; North, 2016).

Between 1865-1877, the state constitutions were amended to guarantee free public education and public education was brought to the South by African Americans after the Civil War (Historical, 2016). Snyder (1993) noted there was approximately half of the eligible children in attendance at school between 1850 and 1900. Compulsory attendance was required in only in six states at the time and most of those in attendance at school were male students (Education News, 2016). St. Louis was noted as a leader in the Kindergarten movement of 1873 (Education, 2016).

### **1900-2000: Governing Education**

By 1920, high school education became important for the American culture; however, only 30% of 14-17 year-olds had attended high school (Education News, 2016). Brown v. The Board of Education and Plessy v. Ferguson provided for a troubled and uneasy time in public education. The act of desegregation created equal education for all (Education News, 2016).

From 1960 to 1980 there were many monumental movements in public education to provide equal opportunity to students in public education. In 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was passed which created a federal funding source for school districts, which provided additional funding for school districts to rely on rather than just the local funds, Title IX provided legislation on non-discrimination in gender in 1972 for those who were receiving federal funds, and the Americans with Disabilities Act

provided opportunity for students with a disability to receive free appropriate education (Facing History, 2016).

### **2000-Present: Accountability for Schools**

In 2001, George W. Bush reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) through No Child Left Behind (NCLB). This act held schools accountable for student achievement and continuous progress for all students (Hickok, 2002). By the year 2012, 33 states and Washington D. C. had requested waivers in regards to some requirements of NCLB (Murray, 2012). In 2015, ESEA was reauthorized and became the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). While accountability was the target of NCLB, the ESSA focused on college and career readiness (USDE, 2016).

## **History of the Organization**

### **United States Department of Education**

The USDE was founded in 1867 to aid in the collection of data about schools and teaching (USDE, 2016). The Department was also charged with providing assistance to states when creating schools. To this day, the focus for the USDE is to provide policymakers and teachers with ideas of what works in education (USDE, 2015).

*Figure 1* (see Appendix B for complete chart) demonstrated the hierarchy of how alternative education is governed through funding and practice. The Office of the Secretary funnels down to the Office of the Deputy Secretary and then on to the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education at the federal level.

In examination of *Figure 2* (See Appendix C for complete chart) the figure revealed further the organizational chart of the Office of Elementary and Secondary

Education at the federal level. There are many offices that are attended to at this level in order to provide creation of policy and funding. The Office of Academic Improvement provided the most guidance and possible funding initiatives to rural K-12 public alternative education programs (USDE, 2016).

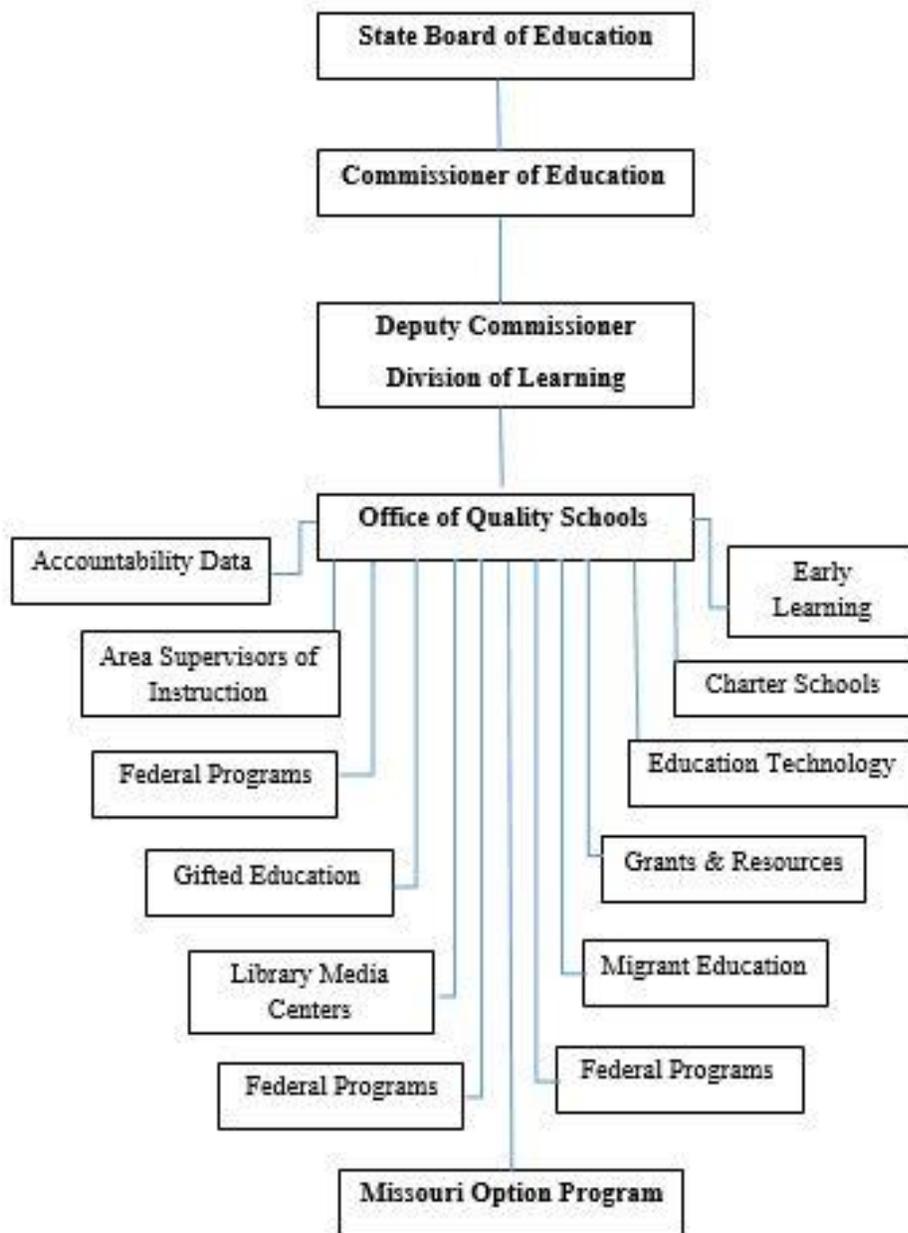
### **Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education**

The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education came into existence as a result of the Missouri Constitution in 1945 which created the positions of the Commissioner's Office and the State Board of Education. Hubert Wheeler was the first Commissioner of Education and served in the position from 1947-1971 (DESE, 2015). DESE also has an organizational chart showing the flow of leadership at the state level. Rural K-12 public alternative education programs are addressed in two different formats in regard to DESE.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1997 provided guidance to those who determine placement for students who qualify for special education services. IDEA incorporated multiple steps in order to arrive at the need for an alternative education placement; however, the team determining the need for a rural K-12 public alternative setting must meet certain placement criteria. Individual Educational Program goals must continue to be addressed and the student's services must continue to be provided along with modifications and accommodations (DESE, 2016). Although rural K-12 public alternative education is on the continuum of services offered through special education, rural K-12 alternative is not listed as a function of special education because not all student who benefit from a rural K-12 alternative education program

qualify for special education. Alternative education programs are listed under the Office of Quality Schools (DESE, 2016).

The first place K-12 public alternative education was noted on the Missouri Department of Elementary Education website is under Missouri Options. *Figure 3* displayed below shows the funnel of where alternative programming for K-12 students is positioned and is supported by the state agency (DESE, 2016). The Office of Quality Schools in Missouri is one of the offices that relays data to the federal level Office of Elementary and Secondary Education. Missouri Options Programming is a branch of this department. On the DESE website the first note of K-12 public alternative education programming is under a hyperlink for the Missouri Alternative Education Network website (DESE, 2016).



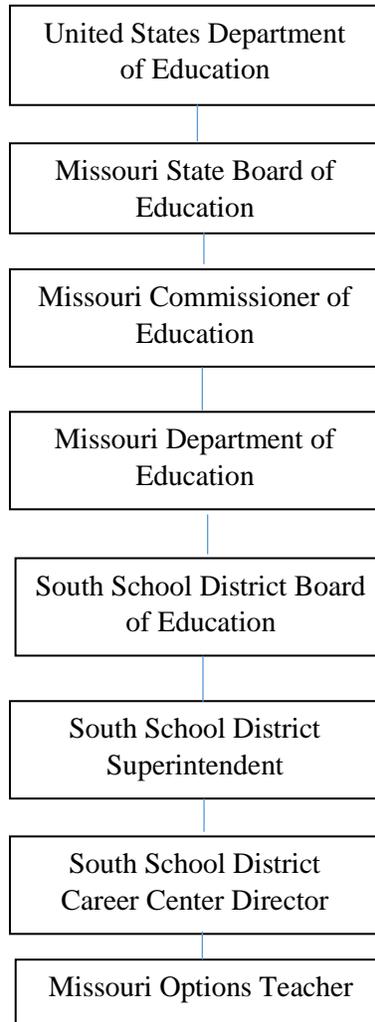
*Figure 3.* Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Office of Quality Schools

K-12 public alternative education programs are linked to the Office of Quality Schools by the Missouri Options Program offered to students who are at least 17 years old

and at least one grade level behind their graduation cohort, or the group of students who started Kindergarten together (DESE, 2015). Missouri Options is an alternative route to graduation for students not successful with the traditional path of four years in high school.

### **Organizational Analysis**

An organizational analysis of rural K-12 public alternative education related to this study is represented by *Figure 4* in the chart below. A *simple hierarchy* presented by Bolman and Deal (2008) can be used to demonstrate how the organization has many members represented that provide the structure for rural K-12 public alternative education programming in Missouri schools, USDE down to rural K-12 public alternative education, in this chart Missouri Options. There are many middle managers of data and information in this chart. One level to the next data and information are reported to the boss, the USDE (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Weber (1946/2005) provided a further examination of how hierarchy fits into bureaucracy when the principals of office hierarchy and levels of graded authority determine office system order. This includes higher offices supervising lower offices. Each of the school districts that participated in this study share a similar type of organizational hierarchy.



*Figure 4.* Organizational structure for rural K-12 public alternative education

### **State Board of Education**

The Missouri State Board of Education leads the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. This Board is comprised of eight citizens appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate (DESE, 2016). Furthermore, these appointed citizens serve an eight-year term and are sanctioned by political party affiliation and county of residence (DESE, 2016).

The Missouri State Board of Education appoints a commissioner; sets policies; defines academic performance standards and assessment requirements for public schools; accredits local schools; establishes assessment requirements; establishes certification requirements; operates the Missouri School for the Blind, Missouri School for the Deaf, and the Missouri School for the Severely Disabled; establishes federal programs and funding; oversees fiscal management; establishes school bus safety; makes recommendations to the Missouri Legislature regarding the annual budget; and oversees vocational rehabilitation and sheltered workshops (DESE, 2016).

### **Commissioner**

One of the major jobs of the Missouri State Board of Education is to appoint the commissioner. The Commissioner's position is to "seek in every way to elevate the standards and efficiency of the instruction given in the public schools of the state" (DESE, 2016). In addition, the financials, administrative services, and learning services are the commissioner's main duties (DESE, 2016).

### **South School District Board of Education**

Missouri school districts have a seven-member elected Board of Education. By policy the Board of Education is charged with oversight of all aspects of the school district (MSBA, 2016). The responsibility of the Board of Education includes adoption of an annual budget, staffing the district adequately, hiring the superintendent, and establishing policy to effectively manage the district (South School District, 2016).

### **South School District Superintendent**

The superintendent is charged with providing direction in the District, presenting the Board of Education with recommendations, serve as the District Chief Executive Officer, and operate the District using rules, policies, and procedures established by the Board of Education (South School District, 2016).

### **South School District Career Center Director/Special Education Director**

The South School District Career Center Director oversees multiple programs and includes students from 15 area school districts. Programs include agriculture, automotive, business, construction, early childhood careers, health sciences, Missouri Options, credit recovery, welding, and adult education (South School District, 2016).

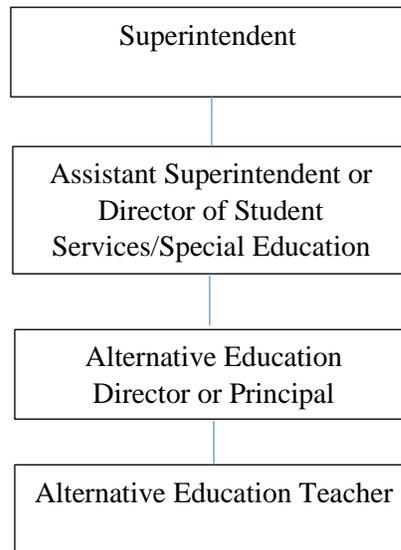
### **Public School Alternative Education Teacher**

Missouri Options, along with credit recovery, are in a flexible classroom. Students work with different programs including the Missouri Options Program, Plato for credit recovery, or instruction in a modified setting (South School District, 2016).

### **Leadership Analysis**

The Office of DESE is a division of the USDE. This division supports many initiatives provided to state education agencies. The Office of Academic Improvement oversees funding related to dropout prevention, literacy support, and school reform. The Office of Quality Schools manages state accreditation for public school districts which directly relates to receiving funds for the many programs provided through the USDE and furthermore, the Office of Academic Improvement (USDE, 2015). Under the Office of Quality Schools, data is also provided to grade schools based on MSIP 5. This relates to

how K-12 public alternative programming operates because graduation, attendance, and assessment scores are impacted by students' performance in these areas (DESE, 2016). The leadership in each of the school districts that participated in this study share a similar type of leadership hierarchy.



*Figure 5.* Decision-making structure for rural K-12 public alternative education

This is then directed down to the local education agencies. Providing a rural K-12 public alternative program is not required, instead it is left to schools to define rural K-12 alternative education programming, as well as how student needs will be addressed (Atkins & Bartuska, 2010; De La Ossa, 2005; Lehr & Lange, 2003; Raywid, 2001; Tissington, 2006). Missouri School Board Association (MSBA) is the provider of policy to multiple school districts throughout Missouri. MSBA Policy DB stated, “The Board designates the superintendent to serve as the budget officer of the district” (MSBA, 2016). There are many different areas in a district that must be part of the budgeting process. Those things that will have the greatest impact or are mandated by state

governance must be provided for first. By staff involvement in the budget process and the inclusion of the leadership team in the process, teams collaborate, manage conflict, build commitment, build relationships, and will be more productive (Northouse, 2013, p. 295-296). DESE provides resource standards and process standards for meeting state achievement standards as leaders plan a budget year (DESE, 2016).

### **Implications for Research in the Practitioner Setting**

Rural K-12 public alternative education programs are designed to fit the need of the school where the rural K-12 public alternative education program functions. Teachers working in rural K-12 public alternative education programs will be able to use the qualitative data gathered to compare program desires and outcomes as to the success factors of public alternative education programs. Administrators will be able to use the data to direct collaboration and instructional practices in a way to drive success in the rural K-12 public alternative setting.

Researchers from other regions in Missouri or other states will be able to replicate the study to determine if success factors are similar for administrators and teachers in other rural K-12 public alternative education programs.

### **Summary**

Rural K-12 public alternative education is at the discretion of each school district. The federal government provided policy and initiatives, which in turn the state agency created various ways to collect data and provide funding for initiatives in schools. Missouri uses Core Data and MOSIS to report required items to the state agency (DESE, 2016). Local school administrators learned to make decisions based on what is best for

the students attending school in the district within the parameters provided to the District. In examination of the parameters local administrators face, it is most often the required items that impact the Missouri School Improvement Plan 5 (MSIP 5) that are chosen to fund first. Follett (1926/2005) discussed the topic of giving orders. When the federal government provides a mandate, it is seen as an easy task handed down; however, in order to truly see change in what is deemed important on MSIP 5, habits of the mind must change. Northouse (2013) discussed the functions of management and leadership. In this realm, more management functions are displayed in the leader as documents are completed and resources are allocated to the programs that are deemed most impactful.

## **SECTION THREE**

### **SCHOLARLY REVIEW FOR THE STUDY**

There is a gap in the research pertaining to what success factors in rural K-12 public alternative education programs are identified by rural K-12 public alternative education program teachers. The research studies cited by Lawrence (2011) on re-integration programs have “indicated links between exclusion and social isolation, youth offending, drug and alcohol misuse, crime, susceptibility to mental health problems” (Hall-Lande et al., 2007) and “reduced cognitive functioning” (Sameroff et al., 1993) as reasons students are not successful (p. 214), but the question posed in this study focuses on success factors in rural K-12 public alternative programs, not the failures attributed to outside factors. For the purpose of this study it is important to view the topic of rural K-12 public alternative education programs as a learning organization through the lens of Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI).

#### **Conceptual Underpinning**

Senge (2006) supported the need to view all organizations which would include rural K-12 public alternative education as a learning organization when he stated organizations cannot have one person learning for the organization and having everyone taking the orders from those who are figures at the top. Bowen et al. (2007) believed the focus of schools as a learning organization changed their ability to buy-in to change initiatives. This need to focus on the school as a learning organization in turn will drive the work to address achievement gaps and other challenges in the education of children and youth.

Furthermore, Bowen et al. (2007) focused on the necessity of feedback throughout the organization at each level in order to provide a successful rural K-12 public alternative education program. Sabah and Orthner (2007) alluded to the need for feedback when they discussed “learning organizations require a sustained effort to continually uncover the current and emerging issues that if left alone will hamper the effectiveness of the school and how it achieves objectives for students” (p. 246). Feedback is important and should be the driving force in the cycle of how they learn and sustain a high-level rural K-12 public alternative education program. The ability to establish a connection between rural K-12 public alternative education and the conceptual framework of Total Quality Management (TQM), specifically the process of CQI, will contribute to the body of research by a provided model and process for teachers to view the work they do for students of rural K-12 public alternative education now and in the future.

Organizations, rural K-12 alternative education programs in this case, must continue to expand and create the future as a team, which Senge (2006) referred to as generative learning. “Learning organizations are possible because, deep down, we are all learners” (p. 17). Senge further discussed a need for generative learning in organizations because it is necessary to continue the life of the organization over time. While Senge shows great support for how organizations can learn together and become learning organizations there is some belief education will not change. Robertson (2014) stated our educational system for the most part is unchanged and will remain in this state in our present structure. In addition, Robertson (2014) cited the current educational structure

will impede our ability to make changes in how we teach and learn (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Schlechty, 2005), “which could be more effective, practical, useful, relevant, meaningful, or any other descriptor one may choose to use” (pp. 340-341) if we changed how the organization operated day to day. Students in rural K-12 public alternative education programs have already been lost in the current system of education and need something different to support the needs of the learner. If rural K-12 public alternative education teachers do not operate as a learning organization with the utilization of CQI, change will not be achieved and rural K-12 public alternative education will continue to be recognized as a reactionary program or event in a student’s educational career.

### **Success Factors**

Kanji and Asher (1993) proposed TQM and CQI provided everyone in an organization the opportunity to share in the organization’s thinking process to achieve continuous improvement. The State of Louisiana (2015) published an explicit list of the key elements in TQM and more specifically CQI, for the purpose of this study these elements will be referred to as success factors: accountability, good management, input, teamwork, and continuous review all used in evaluation of how the organization is operated and its function. Brown and Marshall (2008), with consideration of CQI and the identified success factors, make the process personal to the organization. The authors identify staff buy-in and cultural change as priority in the success of the model.

### **Accountability**

Accountability is a term used in every facet of education, business, and society. With the increase in accountability measures, it is a necessity for all involved to respond

and demonstrate the measurement of success and improvement needed to satisfy the system in which they are working. Senge et al. (2012) supports the changes in the educational system when the authors reference *A Nation at Risk (1983)*, pace of knowledge, worldwide interdependence, economic stress, social uncertainty, technological changes, and frustration with the quality of education. In response to information such as this report, rural K-12 public education, higher education, and business have stepped up to the challenge. Higher education system's accreditation processes use CQI; however, the authors express a disconnect when trying to implement CQI into the planning process stating periodic reviews "do not provide a steady flow of information to aid in curricular decision-making" (Harper & Lattuce, 2010, p. 507).

Classroom accountability of the teachers and administrators who work in rural K-12 public alternative education programs can be identified as two-fold. The focus on accountability related to test scores and other variables scored on MSIP 5 as determined by DESE and the USDE provide one design for accountability of teachers. Stipek (2006) discussed how accountability of teachers should also be dependent on the relationships formed with students around nonacademic needs of each learner. It is important to address the social and emotional needs of learners in order for the students to demonstrate at a high level of performance (Stipek, 2006). "Schools should take particular care to promote good relationships with the students who are most at risk academically" (Stipek, 2006, p. 48).

## **Good Management**

Management is a term used today more in the business world than in education. Good management is addressed more as the function of leadership in rural K-12 education. Senge et al. (2012) described control in a managed system as dysfunctional. The difference in business and schools are the product. Schools cannot change product or return a defective part when working with all students. Management in schools must address how to support students no matter the situation they come from, how much exposure the student has had to pre-kindergarten skills, or the deficits discovered later in the student's educational career. Based on this thought, "the support of faculty in their continual efforts to improve instruction so that each student may achieve at higher levels is the mission of all professional development at the P-12 and higher education level" (Edmonds, 2007, p. 232), which is necessary and just especially for students who have already failed in the general education population and are part of a rural K-12 public alternative education program.

Good management within the CQI process in education is represented as a function of leadership, more specifically shared leadership. Nappi (2014) discussed student and school success depends on the shared leadership. Administrators have to acknowledge and accept the value of sharing leadership with teachers. Northouse (2013) discussed how leadership by one has moved to a model of group leadership where expertise in the topic emerges, and then is transferred to the next expert as needed to fulfill the needs of the team in every situation.

## **Staff Input**

With support in the learning organization from the administration and team members, teachers will experience personal mastery in teaching and leading. Maguad (2003) supported staff input as a CQI component by considering the teacher as a servant-leader (p. 412), and further the author added the teacher is the cheerleader and coach in the CQI process who promotes an environment of critical thinking and on-going dialogue, questioning, research, and evaluation (Maguad, 2003, p.413). This is a model that will provide students in a K-12 alternative education program the support they need to become a productive learner in the classroom.

When considering how staff input in the CQI process is directly related to servant leadership, Northouse (2013) noted empowerment as a servant leadership behavior. When staff are allowed to make decisions and share in the leadership of the team, it builds confidence and empowerment in teachers to handle difficult situations that may arise (Northouse, 2013).

## **Teamwork**

The process of CQI is focused around teamwork and is lended to not only working within a system, but more importantly, working as the system collaboratively. “A school or community that hopes to live by learning needs a common shared vision process” (Senge et al., 2012, p. 18). In a discussion of commitment and improvement in teacher education quality improvement, Edmonds (2007) stated “collaboration promotes conversation about the best available research utilized in teaching, learning, and leadership” (p. 233).

In addition, it is a must to have “dialogue and skillful discussion, small groups of people transform their collective thinking, learning to mobilize their energies and action to achieve common goals and draw forth an intelligence and ability greater than the sum of individual members’ talents” (Senge et al., 2012, p. 19). Maguad (2003) concurs with Senge et al. (2012) when he discussed students evaluating themselves, as well as classmates and students being assessed through discussion rather than traditional homework quality. This is supportive of the type of learning organization students in K-12 public alternative education programs need in order to experience success or a second chance at education (Lange, 1998). Most of the time, students in rural K-12 public alternative education programs failed in the traditional educational system (Lange, 1998). The ability to implement a teamwork concept for learning organizations can only provide a greater support for our most fragile learners.

Team effectiveness and performance are noted by clear goals, results-driven structure, competent team members, unified commitment, collaborative climate, standard of excellence, external support and recognition, and principled leadership (Northouse, 2013). Leaders committed to the team provide autonomy, teams thrive, and they use their talents to achieve goals (Northouse, 2013). Levi (2014) suggested perspectives of a team and group interactions are more important than the expertise of team members because of new viewpoints that arise from the team discussion.

### **Continuous Progress Review**

Systems thinking served as the Fifth Discipline because it “is the cornerstone of how a learning organizations think about their world” (Senge, 2006, p. 91). This mind

shift led those in the organization to see interrelationships versus linear cause and effect and processes rather than a point in time (Senge, 2006). There is always something a learning organization can improve. Members of learning organizations never quit learning. In addition, “systems thinking associated with feedback in order to build and recognize reoccurring structures” (Senge, 2006, p. 95) must occur in the learning organization.

Senge et al. (2012) stated, “the student is the one person who sees the whole picture: all the classes, the challenges on the playground and streets, all the stress at home, the multiple conflicting messages from media- the total environment” (p. 106). With this point being made, it is essential to consider where students fit into the learning organization. It is important to find what parts of CQI facilitate inclusion of students. Senge et al. (2012) have come to believe students will drive the change in schools as they move to learning organizations.

“Though simple in concept, the feedback loop overturns deeply ingrained ideas- such as causality” (Senge, 2006, p. 99). Both in the teamwork of teachers and the participation of students in the learning organization feedback is key for success. Senge (2006) described two types of feedback, reinforcement and balance (p. 102). Both are important when viewing the two types of feedback through the lens of CQI.

Reinforced feedback is described as feedback that amplifies growth in the organization (Senge, 2006). The growth from this feedback can have a positive or negative effect on the organization; however, “seeing the system often allows you to influence how it works” (Senge, 2006, p. 103). Senge et al. (2012) suggested changes in

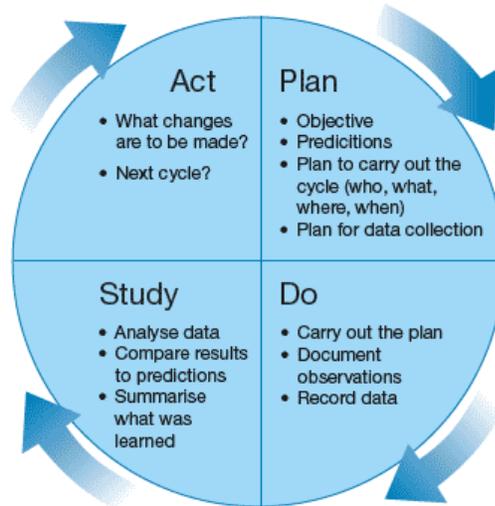
the learning organization must be explicitly communicated in order to promote the desired behaviors.

Senge (2006) explained balance feedback as the status quo of feedback.

Furthermore, Senge (2006) explained “leaders who attempt organizational change often find themselves unwittingly caught in balance processes” (p. 111) and the leaders must be cognizant as “balance processes are always in operation to reduce a gap between what is desired and what exists” (p. 112). Both types of feedback are important to the cycle of CQI.

### **Continuous Quality Improvement**

CQI was built on methods using process rather than the individuals. The organization, systems in the organization, and the internal and external customers are the focus. Processes are improved by the use of analyzed data (Iowa State University, 2016). There are several models used within the theory of CQI that have enhanced educational settings. A study conducted by Hord (1997) revealed that models similar to Deming’s Plan, Do, Study, Act (PDSA) method coupled with learning organizations, such as the Professional Learning Community model, provided an education environment which helped develop ownership, accountability within teams, supportive leadership, positive response to students, and a continuous sense of reflection and review of the process.



*Figure 6.* PDSA Template (rtfd.esl.pt, 2017)

As shown in *Figure 6*, the PDSA model is comprised of four elements that when used in schools promote continuous improvement. First, the Plan component provides teams the ability to pick an objective for improvement. Second, the Do portion of the cycle is when teams are working to meet the objective and the action takes place. Third, the Study section is when the team analyzes the data gathered from the objective. Finally, the Act element pairs reflection and future planning. In *Figure 6* the arrows show this process a continuous cycle in nature.

There was a gap in the literature of a consistently recommended model or tool that is used to guide educators who work in K-12 public alternative education programs. PDSA is a model most predominately used in business and health care (Hord, 1997), but could be transferred to support teachers in the creation of a foundation for establishing success factors for all students in K-12 public alternative education programs.

## **Alternative Education Programs**

Senge et. al (2006) discussed the educational systems founded during the industrial world as the “one-size-fits-all educational system of the 1900’s” (p.21). Influential change by the 1950’s showed “half of the eighteen year olds in industrialized nations expected to graduate secondary school” (Senge, 2006, p. 21). Senge et. al (2006) is quick to point out the major changes in the educational system since his original publication.

A description of K-12 alternative education by Aron (2006) described the program as a lesser quality than the traditional K-12 schools, yet programs are looked to for being innovative and creative in motivating and educating disengaged students. Porowski, O’Conner, and Luo (2014) cited alternative education programs as any program outside of the traditional K-12 setting. Individual states or school districts are provided autonomy in definition and determination of the features of their alternative education programs (Lehr, Lanners, & Lange, 2003).

### **History of Alternative Education**

#### **1800-1900: Parental Choice**

Before 1830, education was up to parental choice usually rooting in religious and private education, home schooling, and apprenticeships (Quaqua Society, 2016). Quaqua (2016) discussed John Dewey’s approach to allow students to break free from the social norms they were born. In 1867 Brigham Young fought against free schools the same year when the United States Office of Education was created (Quaqua, 2016).

### **1900-2000: Focus on Disadvantages and Failing Students**

Around 1960 alternative education was a topic around disadvantaged and failing students. The conversation evolved into alternative schools inside public school systems and alternative schools outside public school systems (Lange & Sletten, 2002). These schools existed to educate the student by the need. The needs of the students ranged from continued education while pregnant to community-based learning opportunities. Lange and Sletten (2002) further report these once open schools became more focused on students demonstrating low achievement.

### **2000-Present: Current Practice Related to Rural K-12 Alternative Education**

The system used in the state of Missouri to collect and track data requested by the United States Department of Education (USDE) is the Missouri Student Information System (MOSIS) (DESE, 2016). The federal government's, state funding agents, expectation is compliance in order for states and schools to receive the financial backing needed to run necessary programs for students in schools. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2015) website provides a quick description of the Federal Financial Management Section and its responsibilities related to disbursing grant funds under No Child Left Behind. Furthermore, DESE provides school officials with technical and regulatory assistance which includes desk monitoring and onsite reviews for districts on a three-year cycle (DESE, 2016). K-12 public alternative education fits into the DESE data collection system when schools are reporting discipline, special education data, assessment results, graduation rates, and dropout numbers due to the information collected for the Missouri School Improvement Program 5 (MSIP 5);

however, K-12 public alternative education is not addressed specifically, nor is there a federal funding stream dedicated to K-12 public alternative education for the operation of the program. K-12 public alternative education is listed under the Office of Quality Schools (DESE, 2016).

The local definition for the purposes of this paper follow the guidelines established by Missouri attendance laws; however, the K-12 public alternative education students' definition will be a student in attendance at "a public elementary/secondary school that address needs of students that typically cannot be met in a regular school or falls outside the categories of regular, special education or vocational education" (Lehr & Lange, 2003, p.59).

#### **National Association for Alternative Education- Exemplary Model**

The exemplary model was established by the National Association for Alternative Education (2017) and provided guidance for practice in alternative education. The most recent document was developed in 2014 and provided program evaluation and standards of quality. The exemplary practices were identified as vision and mission, leadership, climate and culture, staffing and professional development, curriculum and instruction, student assessment, transition planning and support, parent/guardian involvement, collaboration, program evaluation, school counseling, school social work, digital and virtual learning, policies and procedures, and nontraditional education plan (National, 2017).

## **Hierarchy**

At the national level rural K-12 public alternative education programs are governed by the USDE's Office of the Secretary under the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (2015). The oversight of rural K-12 public alternative education programs are then funneled to the state level agency, DESE under the Office of Quality Schools (2015). Although rural K-12 public alternative education programs take on many forms and serve students in many ways, rural K-12 public alternative education programs are recognized under Missouri Options Programs, which serve as an alternative route to earning a high school diploma.

## **Procedures for Missouri Options Program Entry**

DESE (2016) provided a Missouri Option Program and HiSet Testing Guide for schools who provide the Missouri Option Program as an alternative route to graduation for students that qualify. Within the guidelines, there is a sample program agreement provided for the schools and students. First, the agreement suggested is to be reviewed with the student and the parent before entry into the program. The student has to work or volunteer and maintain status as a student.

## **Summary**

According to Thompson (2013), support at the teacher level is where students experience success in safety, have support, and connect with their environments. Cogshall, Osher, and Colombi (2013) further added it is teacher attitude and expectations that positively influence student success. In addition, Roche (2013) cited Berliner (2009) in the author's contribution that "research indicates non-school factors

play as great if not a greater role than teaching or curriculum in a child's success at school, especially in primary school" (p. 663). This research study focused on teacher perceptions of success factors in rural K-12 public alternative education programs. This is why it is important to view rural K-12 public alternative education programs as a learning organization through the lens of TQM, and more specifically CQI, supported by systems thinking, because "when people in organizations focus only on their position, they have little sense of responsibility for the results produced when all positions interact" (Senge, 2006, p. 35). There is a need for districts and the people who work in the district to see how all positions work together. Senge (2006) refers to this as "a shift of mind" and the "discipline for seeing wholes" (p. 90). The focus of future research will garner the view rural K-12 public alternative education teachers have about their programs individually and how it will operate as an organization and within the district as an organization.

The interconnectedness needed to move an organization through CQI takes vision and a continuous cycle of improvement. Shaker and Schechter (2013) stated "skilled systems thinkers consider any system as a whole rather than as a mere collection of details, understand the system beyond its subsystems and parts, and recognize how each subsystem and each component function as part of the entire system" (p. 775). In order to understand the system as a whole, the parts of CQI must be identified, aligned, and strengthened in the concepts of CQI. "Organizations work the way they work because of the ways that people think" (Senge et al., 2012, p. 42).

## **SECTION FOUR**

### **CONTRIBUTION TO PRACTICE**

Who: Attendees of the National Alternative Education Association Conference

When: 2018 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference on Alternative Education, proposal submitted by August 1, 2017

How: Through a presentation at the 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference on Alternative Education in Dallas, Texas. The presentation will be given by the researcher along with a visual presentation.

#### **Type of Document**

Document type will be a visual presentation that will be presented at the 2018 24<sup>rd</sup> Annual Conference on Alternative Education. The visual presentation will inform the audience of perceptions of success factors in rural K-12 alternative education programs. Upon request the full report can be made available.

#### **Rationale for this Contribution Type**

The National Alternative Education Association is the only national association that exists for the purpose of serving the needs of educators who work with students educated through alternative education options. This nationwide professional association serves educators who have interest in sharing research and practices that work with students who benefit from alternative education options. The National Alternative Education Association's vision is to provide outstanding, innovative, and professional services to education personnel both nationally and internationally to enhance programs, promote academic excellence, develop self-discipline, and create life-long learners in a multifaceted, diverse society. I have attended this conference as a Director of Student Services alongside the teachers in the program I oversaw at the time. There is an amazing number of people who benefit when this group of professionals network.

## Slide Show with Notes

# PERCEPTIONS OF SUCCESS FACTORS IN RURAL K-12 ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAMS

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Welcome and introduction to the presentation

## INTRODUCTION

- It can be said that teacher belief in alternative education is the driving force and the success of a rural K-12 public alternative education program even though there are a lack of parameters provided for design and evaluation (Lange & Sletten, 2002).



As the researcher I had the desire to find out what teachers and administrators believed to be the success factors of their rural alternative education programs.

# PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

- The purpose of this study was to discover perceptions of success factors of a rural K-12 public alternative education program.
- How?
  - Through the contribution of administrators and teachers working or those who have worked in rural K-12 public alternative education settings on a daily basis.
- Research Question?
  - What are the success factors of a rural K-12 public alternative education program?

# CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

- Total Quality Management (TQM), more specifically, the component Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI).



- The most consistent explicit list of key CQI elements is derived from the State of Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services (2015) as related to the focus of this study. For the purpose of this study these elements will be referred to as success factors: accountability, good management, input, teamwork, and continuous review all five used in evaluation of how the organization is operated and its function (State of Louisiana, 2015).

Cycle of continuous improvement is necessary to operate any system.

## QUESTIONS GUIDING THIS STUDY

- What is your perception of a rural K-12 alternative education programs?
- How do you plan for student success of those you have placed in a rural K-12 alternative setting?
- How are you supported or how do/did you support teachers in the rural K-12 alternative education setting?
- What accountability measures are in place for the students in the rural K-12 alternative setting?
- What accountability measures are in place for the teachers in the K-12 alternative setting?
- How do you provide input as a teacher or take input from the teachers in the alternative education setting?
- What does collaboration look like in the alternative setting?
- How do you evaluate your program for continuous improvement?

Explanation why these questions were decided on for the study.

## DESIGN OF THE STUDY

- Exploration of the knowledge gap of success factors in rural K-12 public alternative education programs through the perceptions of teachers and administrators working in rural K-12 public alternative education programs.

## DETAILS OF THE STUDY

- **Qualitative Research**
  - This methodology allowed the researcher to make a contribution to the field, which expanded the literature base of information about the topic (Merriam, 2009, p. 4).
  - Merriam (2009) explained that qualitative methodology has become an accepted method of inquiry for the field of education (p. 7) and provided a real world study for those interested in the topic.
- **Case Study**
  - This is a bounded case study as presented by Merriam (2009) due to the parameters of the research area.
  - For the purpose of this study rural K-12 public alternative education programs in rural Northwest Missouri served by the Region X Regional Professional Development Center (pseudonym) located at Rural Midwest University (pseudonym) will be the focus.
  - The schools chosen for this study were chosen by the researcher due to what Merriam (2009) called a convenience sample (p. 79).
- **Researcher**
  - The location of the study will be close to the researcher's employment in rural K-12 education and will inform those in the region, as well as help establish a benchmark of success factors in rural K-12 public alternative education which others can use in their region, county, or state.

## DETAILS OF THE STUDY

- **Limitations**
  - As Creswell (2009) stated, "the researcher keeps a focus on learning and meaning that the participants hold about the program or issue, not the meaning that the researchers bring to the research or writers express in the literature" (p. 175).
  - Personal researcher bias
- **Delimitations**
  - Study boundaries
  - Participant parameters
- **Assumptions**
  - Participant trust
  - Participant buy-in

Delimitations- Region X RPDC/ Participants- must have two years of service in alternative education/ Assumptions- truthful answers/ program buy-in for staff

## LEADERSHIP ANALYSIS

- The Office of Academic Improvement oversees funding related to dropout prevention, literacy support, and school reform.
- The Office of Quality Schools manages state accreditation for public school districts which directly relates to receiving funds for the many programs provided through the USDE and furthermore, the Office of Academic Improvement (USDE, 2015).
- Under the Office of Quality Schools, data is also provided to grade schools based on MSIP 5. This relates to how K-12 public alternative programming operates because graduation, attendance, and assessment scores are impacted by students' performance in these areas (DESE, 2016).
- Providing a rural K-12 public alternative program is not required, instead it is left to schools to define rural K-12 alternative education programming, as well as how student needs will be addressed (Atkins & Bartuska, 2010; De La Ossa, 2005; Lehr & Lange, 2003; Raywid, 2001; Tissington, 2006).



## WHAT DO THE SCHOLARS SAY?

- The research studies cited by Lawrence (2011) on re-integration programs have “indicated links between exclusion and social isolation, youth offending, drug and alcohol misuse, crime, susceptibility to mental health problems” (Hall-Lande et al., 2007) and “reduced cognitive functioning” (Sameroff et al., 1993) as reasons students are not successful (p. 214).
- However, the question posed in this study focuses on success factors in rural K-12 public alternative programs, not the failures attributed to outside factors.
- There is a gap in the literature addressing the how programs can promote success in re-integration programs.



## CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

- Senge (2006) supported the need to view all organizations which would include rural K-12 public alternative education as a learning organization when he stated organizations cannot have one person learning for the organization and having everyone taking the orders from those who are figures at the top.
- Bowen et al. (2007) believed the focus of schools as a learning organization changed their ability to buy-in to change initiatives.
- Sabah and Orthner (2007) alluded to the need for feedback when they discussed "learning organizations require a sustained effort to continually uncover the current and emerging issues that if left alone will hamper the effectiveness of the school and how it achieves objectives for students" (p. 246).
- Robertson (2014) stated our educational system for the most part is unchanged and will remain in this state in our present structure. In addition, Robertson (2014) cited the current educational structure will impede our ability to make changes in how we teach and learn (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Schlechty, 2005), "which could be more effective, practical, useful, relevant, meaningful, or any other descriptor one may choose to use" (pp. 340-341) if we changed how the organization operated day to day.

## SUCCESS FACTORS

- Kanji and Asher (1993) proposed TQM and CQI provided everyone in an organization the opportunity to share in the organization's thinking process to achieve continuous improvement.

There cannot be generalizations concluded from the following data collection. This was based on one case study with a small sample of participants teaching/leading in rural alternative education.

## KEY FINDINGS- INPUT

- Administration accessible and visible
- Relationship building with students and staff
- Daily on-going collaboration
- Specific high quality professional development

"We meet every day at 2:00. So, we get to kind of talk together about what we think will work for each student and I do feel like my ideas are valued here." (Teacher Participant 6)

"I am not afraid to try something, so they can say whatever the heck they want." Also this participant noted large amounts of time brainstorming with staff. (Administrator Participant D)

"Because we're really small, I talk to my two teachers all of the time." (Administrator Participant C)

"we try very hard each summer to try and find workshops that meet what we do." (Teacher Participant 7)

I had the opportunity to interview administration and teachers from the same programs which provided a good picture of what input looked like for them on both sides.

## KEY FINDINGS- GOOD MANAGEMENT

- Program meets the needs of the student
- Includes the sending/home school in planning for the student
- Entry criteria established and followed
- Small settings necessary

"Most of their school career has been focused on what they can't do which kind of perpetuates that cycle of lack of success for them, and so we really focus when we brought them in on what their needs were, but then also what were their strengths so that they could feel some success and build on that." (Administrator Participant A)

"Our classes are smaller and they have a lot more individual attention." (Teacher Participant 3)

Meeting the individual needs of the student was repeated most often in the interviews and focus group. Administrators were most vocal about program criteria.

## KEY FINDINGS- ACCOUNTABILITY

- Teachers are following the same teacher evaluation system as teachers outside of the alternative setting
- Student growth plans
- Program data collection
- Elementary Level- Focused on behavior
- High School Level- Focused on attendance and persistence to graduation



Missouri provides the criteria for teacher evaluation. Many participants had multiple years of experience and talked about the changes in accountability for programs in regards job change.

## KEY FINDINGS- TEAMWORK

- Collaboration was noted as daily if not more often
- Relationships with staff
- Accountable to each other

"I always feel like I'm accountable to, obviously, my coworkers here. If I'm not doing my job, it makes their jobs harder." (Teacher Participant 6)



I got to interview multiple people from the same programs, so relationships and collaboration were discussed in length, as well as their accountability to each other.

## KEY FINDINGS- CONTINUOUS REVIEW

- Programs- noted as evaluated on a daily basis for instructional changes
- Design of the program at the high school level- noted an evolution of program changes from behavior intervention to persistence to graduation and attendance
- Design of the program at the elementary level- noted to focus on behavioral changes and re-entry into the regular education setting

"I would say persistence to graduation and attendance are probably the big indicators." (Administrator Participant 2)

"I think we are constantly changing. You know, I said I've worked for three years, and the school I work at now looks different than the school I worked at in the beginning, just because needs change in our district and with our students, we change to meet with that. So, I guess I would just say we're really fluid and super flexible, and we are ready to change at any given moment just based on, again, need." (Teacher Participant 6)

Program design was noted by high school teachers. Teachers discussed the necessary for daily review and preparing for the next day.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATORS WORKING IN RURAL K-12 ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAMS

- Input was identified by teachers and administrators as a necessity for program success either through professional development needs, program development, or the daily operations.
- Meeting the needs of students through program development, accessibility and visibility of the administration are determined as the success factor of good management, as well as small class-size.
- Teamwork was shown through the success factor of input when collaboration is noted as a key to program success, program development noted under the success factor of good management, and in how teachers feel accountable to those who work in the program, and to the sending/home schools as students move from one program to the other.

Teachers and administrators can see through the key findings what is working for the K-12 public alternative education programs in rural Northwest Missouri.

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATORS WORKING IN RURAL K-12 ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAMS**

- Under the success factor of accountability all teachers are evaluated the same with Missouri criteria; however, the accountability noted by teachers was to each other in the program, the relationships they had with each other, and to the program.
- The success factor continuous improvement addressed the evolution of programs from behavior changing to graduation completion programs. However, teachers and administrators noted program success was determined by the ability to evaluate on a daily basis for instructional changes.

## **TEMPLATE FOR K-12 RURAL ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAM SUCCESS**

- Hire staff who show qualities of flexibility and the ability to build relationships with students who have failed in the general education setting.
- Provide the staff access to a visible and supportive administrator.
- Develop procedures regarding sending/home schools and alternative programs for communication and transition.
- Develop procedures regarding program development for each student in the program.
- Provide daily collaboration for alternative education staff members.
- Create a mission to support and continuously improve the program as needed.

## SECTION FIVE

### CONTRIBUTION TO SCHOLARSHIP

#### Target Journal

The target journal for publication is the *Teacher Education Quarterly*. This journal is a publication of the California Council on teacher education and focuses on practice and research in teacher education.

#### Rationale for this Target

The *Teacher Education Quarterly* publishes original research that significantly impacts teacher education. Selection of manuscripts for publication is based on a double-blind peer review process. The vision of the *Teacher Education Quarterly* is to link research and practice. It is my hope the research presented will arm teachers working in K-12 alternative education programs with information to make their program better.

#### Outline for Proposed Contents

Title Page  
Abstract  
Introduction of the Problem  
    Purpose of the study  
    Research question  
    Conceptual framework  
Methods  
Findings  
Implications for practitioners  
References

#### Plan for Submission

Who: ScholarOne Manuscripts.  
When: September 2017  
How: The manuscript will be submitted electronically to <http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/ijem>. This allows the author to see the progress of review of the manuscript in real time.

## **SUCCESS FACTORS IN RURAL ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAMS**

Erin Oligschlaeger received her Doctorate in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis from the University of Missouri- Columbia.

## **SUCCESS FACTORS IN RURAL ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAMS**

### **Abstract**

Alternative education for students in the K-12 public school settings are designed to fit the needs of the District due to the nature of the student's learning needs being accommodated through the program. This qualitative case study provides rural K-12 public alternative education programs with success factors identified by teachers and administrators working in or who have worked in Region X in Northwest Missouri. The researcher used archival data, interviews with teachers and administrators, and a focus group of administrators to find common themes which were then viewed through the conceptual framework of Continuous Quality Improvement.

**Keywords:** Continuous Quality Improvement, Rural K-12 Public Alternative Education, Success Factors

Rural K-12 public school alternative education is predominantly addressed through laws and regulations. Schools are left to define alternative education programming, as well as how student needs will be addressed (Atkins & Bartuska, 2010; De La Ossa, 2005; Lehr & Lange, 2003; Raywid, 2001; Tissington, 2006). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1997 provides guidance to those who determine placement for students who qualify for special education services. IDEA incorporated multiple steps in order to arrive at the need for an alternative education placement; however, the team determining the need for a rural K-12 alternative setting must meet certain placement criteria (DESE, 2016). Individual Educational Program (IEP) goals must continue to be addressed and the student's services must continue to be provided along with modifications and accommodations (DESE, 2016).

The United States Department of Education (USDE) (2015) discussed the necessity of alternative education practices for students expelled from school, leaving the

parameters of a program and the intended outcomes open-ended with a focus on getting the students what they need at that time in his or her education. Further suggestions focus on class-size, leadership, quality of staff, a shared vision between staff and leadership, curriculum, and collaboration between sending schools and community services (USDE, 2015).

### **Introduction of the Problem**

Wilson (2014) discussed the school-to-prison pipeline and zero tolerance which fuel school failure and can push students to the justice system. According to Lagana-Riordan et al. (2011) students suffer from the effects of dropout. In addition, Wilson (2014) attributed the prison crisis to schools and noted the large number of individuals in prison who did not graduate from high school. Further risk noted by the American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on School Health stated students suspended from school are more likely to be unsupervised at home, live in stressful environments, and may have a need for professional services for mental health (Taras et al., 2003).

When the multiple issues were identified and the result was removal of students from school, it is a necessity to address rural K-12 public alternative education needs for students not successful in the general education setting. With knowledge of the consequences of removal of students from school and the risks associated with the removal, it has become the administrator's duty to build relationships, provide a school climate that promotes students learning along with high expectations, connect with the home, and provide alternatives to suspension and expulsion (Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011). National level trends, such as grants for the Safe Schools Act, had hoped to

provide more safety and security, also provided disservice to students in some cases due to zero tolerance (Wilson, 2014). The Civil Rights Project (2000) (as cited in Christle et al., 2004) reported that increased suspensions did not change behavior. If suspension of students is not changing the student's behaviors, it is the school's duty to provide alternative means for students to achieve success and are given a chance as a productive adult citizen.

Wilson (2014) provided evidence that a relationship between suspension and dropout exist. Federal regulations have been established to govern states and school districts. Effective practice implemented in rural K-12 public alternative education programs are provided at the national level. These topics about public alternative education are all accounted for in the literature (Lange, 1998; Lange & Sletten, 2002; Lehr, Lanners, & Lange, 2003; Wilson, 2014). Based on the previous information, there is a lack of investigation into rural K-12 public alternative education program success factors as perceived by administrators and teachers working in rural K-12 public alternative education programs.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Creswell (2009) stated it is the researcher's intent to add to the literature. In this study the researcher contributed to the literature by capturing success factors of rural K-12 public alternative education based on administrators and teachers who are working or have worked in a rural K-12 public alternative education setting every day. The purpose of this study was to discover perceptions of the success factors of a rural K-12 public alternative program.

## **Research Questions**

The topic of this study is rural K- 12 public alternative education programs and the determination of success factors according to administrators and teachers' perceptions of rural K-12 public alternative programs. There is a gap in the knowledge as to what determines a successful rural K-12 public alternative education program. At this stage in the research, a rural K-12 public alternative education program will be generally defined as any school setting where students are placed outside of the general education option or setting. The overarching research question guiding this study is: What are the success factors of a rural K-12 public alternative education program?

## **Conceptual Framework**

The concept of total quality management (TQM) and its specific component continuous quality improvement (CQI) framework will be the lens to view related literature, as well as emerging themes and data as research is collected and analyzed. W. Edwards Deming encouraged leadership to have a vision and to provide process to support improvement over time (Anderson, Rungtusanatham & Schroeder, 1994).

### **Continuous Quality Improvement**

The work related to CQI defined and highlighted the organizational system and process rather than the individual with a desire to improve the process (Iowa State University, 2015). The Medical University of South Carolina (2015) aligns with Graham (1995), in their utilization of quality management, which has a focus on the organization and how the systems operate in the organization. Furthermore, the State of Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services (2015) published an explicit list

of the key elements of CQI: accountability, good management, input, teamwork, and continuous review all used in evaluation of how the organization is operated and its function.

Perhaps Louisiana was influenced by McLaughlin and Kaluzny (2004) as these authors defined CQI as “a structured organizational process for involving personnel in the plan and execution of a continuous flow of improvement to provide quality health care that meets or exceeds expectation” (p. 3). CQI worked to define and highlight the organizational system and process rather than the individual with a desire to improve the processes (Iowa State University, 2015). While with these things considered, the response is not always positive. Harper and Lattuca (2010) discussed a resistance related to the language used in CQI due to the fact it has more of a business feel than an educational feel and satisfaction of students is measured in the process.

McLaughlin and Kaluzny (2004) discussed CQI as a philosophy and method which was later synonymous to Harper and Lattuca’s (2010) research who stated, “under a CQI approach, organizational learning, human resource development, collaboration, and assessment are used to improve the learning process and its outcomes” (p. 507). Successful implementation of CQI in the educational setting demands a cultural change and requires the buy-in of faculty and students, including their willingness to participate in a variety of assessment activities and frequent meetings (Brown & Marshall, 2008, p. 207). Maguad (2003) complimented this statement by calling customers the stakeholders in education. By the implementation of CQI, teacher ownership of the process will

promote teacher leadership, accountability, mindset, teamwork, and continued progress review of K-12 public alternative education programs.

### **Total Quality Management**

Total Quality Management (TQM) focused on prevention in the organization. Kanji and Asher (1993) proposed the purpose was to provide everyone a shared desire to think in the organization. In the necessity of achieving continuous improvement, Deming proposed 14 points which are not seen “to screen out bad products, but to build up knowledge from the production process” (Kanji & Asher, 1993). The 14 points are consistent purpose, new philosophy, cease dependence on inspection, end low price contracts, improve processes, facilitate training, provide leadership, eliminate fear, eliminate barriers, eliminate exhortations, eliminate targets, develop pride in work, encourage education, and commitment to improving quality and product (Kanji & Asher, 1993).

These 14 points proposed by Deming, and noted by Kanji and Asher (1993), are all part of continuous improvement. W. Edwards Deming pushed leadership to have a vision and to provide process to support improvement over time (Anderson, Rungtusanatham & Schroeder, 1994). The process, as supported by Deming, is cyclical and must be continuously reviewed in order to achieve long-term successes. The work of Deming matched transformational leadership in the sense of using motivation to assist people to accomplish their potential to the fullest and to have continuous improvements made towards the vision (Northouse, 2013).

Taking this research into consideration, it is important to determine the focus of the study regarding rural K-12 public alternative education programs. As stated previously, the most consistent explicit list of key CQI elements is derived from the State of Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services (2015) as related to the focus of this study. For the purpose of this study these elements will be referred to as success factors: accountability, good management, input, teamwork, and continuous review all five used in evaluation of how the organization is operated and its function (State of Louisiana, 2015).

### **Methods**

The researcher explored the knowledge gap to discover the success factors of rural K-12 public alternative education programs based on the perceptions of teachers and administrators working in a rural K-12 public alternative setting. This study examined success factors of K-12 rural alternative education through the use of qualitative methodology as suggested by Merriam (2009) and Creswell (2009). This methodology allowed the researcher to make a contribution to the field, which expanded the literature base of information about the topic (Merriam, 2009, p. 4). Furthermore, Merriam (2009) explained that qualitative methodology has become an accepted method of inquiry for the field of education (p. 7) and provided a real world study for those interested in the topic. The researcher, as stated by Creswell (2009) and Merriam (2009), served as the main data collection person and provided the analysis of what are both referred to as the natural setting (p. 175, p. 17). Basic qualitative research, as defined by Merriam (2009), was utilized by the researcher because of the interest in the human response component of

participant experiences and how they respond to the experiences they have daily (p. 23). Merriam (2009) suggested that basic qualitative research in the field of education is probably the most common form of research used in the field related to practice (p. 23). This qualitative research is a bounded case study due to the limited amount of people that will be able to provide data about this topic in the research area (Merriam, 2009).

K-12 public alternative education, for the purpose of this research, is defined as any school setting where students are placed outside of the regular general education option or setting. The National Association for Alternative Education has released an exemplary model for program evaluation and effectiveness to be evaluated. However, how do we define success factors of rural K-12 public alternative education programs using these practices?

### **Setting**

This is a bounded case study as presented by Merriam (2009) due to the parameters of the research area. For the purpose of this study rural K-12 public alternative education programs in rural Northwest Missouri served by the Region X Regional Professional Development Center (pseudonym) located at Rural Midwest University (pseudonym) will be the focus. The schools chosen for this study were chosen by the researcher due to what Merriam (2009) called a convenience sample (p. 79). The location of the study will be close to the researcher's employment in rural K-12 education and will inform those in the region, as well as help establish a benchmark of success factors in rural K-12 public alternative education which others can use in their region, county, or state.

## **Participants**

Participants in this study will be teachers and present and past administrators from rural K-12 public alternative education programs located in rural Northwest Missouri. All schools will be identified that have a form of rural K-12 public alternative education in their school district, within the boundaries of the Regional Professional Development Center located at rural Midwest University- Region X. Participants were asked to participate from each location if teachers and administrators had served at least two years as a teacher or administrator in the rural K-12 public alternative education program. According to Creswell (2009), it is important in qualitative research to purposefully select participants and it is not necessary to use random sampling (p. 178). Additionally, Creswell (2009) clarified that participant choice should be ones that can inform the researcher about the program and provide information in regards to the research questions (p. 178). Merriam (2009) stated “purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (p. 77).

Participants that had at least two years of teaching or administration experience in rural K-12 public alternative education because these teachers and administrators would not be new to the profession and would have experience working with students in the alternative setting. The researcher began by identifying multiple teachers and administrators to interview using experts in the field and directors from Region X. This created a snowball effect by these teachers and administrators identifying additional teachers and administrators to interview; however, Merriam (2009) stated there is not an

answer to what is an acceptable sample size, but the researcher had ample participants to reach saturation (p. 80).

### **Data Collection Tools**

Data collected during this study was purely qualitative by use of the person-to-person encounter interview questions to gain the perceptions of teachers working in each rural K-12 public alternative education program for at least two years (Merriam, 2009, p. 88). The interviews were a semi-structured interview. This format provided the researchers the ability to respond to the situation at hand, possible worldview emersions, and new ideas about alternative education based on the interviewees (Merriam, 2009, p. 90).

Creswell (2009) stated it is best to have multiple forms of data. For the purpose of this study, data collection came from interviews, a focus group, documents, artifacts, and literature. Merriam (2009) provided justification for using an interview method by stating, “interviews are necessary when we cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them. It is also necessary to interview when we are interested in past events that are impossible to replicate” (p. 88). In addition, Krueger and Casey (2009) stated focus groups work well in determining perceptions (p. 8). Documents and artifacts were examined by the researcher regarding rural K-12 public alternative education programs (Merriam, 2009).

As Fink (2013) recommended an informed consent would be provided to the participants with a document about the study in order to help them decide if they want to participate in the research on rural K-12 public alternative education, which in this case is

the interview and focus group (p. 18). The informed consent included a title, name, purpose, procedure to be followed, potential risks and discomforts, potential benefits to the respondent and society, provide participants information that the study is voluntary and not compensated, confidentiality, participation and withdrawal, and information to contact the researcher (Fink, 2013, p. 18). In addition, all sessions were audio-recorded during the interviews and focus group. All requirements of the University of Missouri Institutional Review Board were followed in order to gain proposal approval, informed consent approval, interview questions approval, and ethical data collection.

### **Data Analysis**

Incorporated data analysis suggested by Merriam (2009) and Creswell (2009). Both Creswell (2009) and Merriam (2009) cited Corbin and Strauss, 2007 discussed open coding and axial coding (p. 184; p. 180). However, Creswell (2009) explained the concepts further by writing “these involve generating categories of information open coding, selecting one of the categories and positioning it within a theoretical model axial coding, and then explicating a story from the interconnection of these categories selective coding” (p. 184). The researcher assigned codes in order to construct categories through each interview and the focus group (Merriam, 2009). Each interview and focus group was reviewed and coded quickly after the interview or focus group had occurred. Documents and artifacts were examined and coded by content analysis (Merriam, 2009). As Merriam (2009) suggested, the data must continue to be collected and analyzed throughout the collection period (p. 172). Furthermore, Merriam (2009) suggested data

organization happen early in order to keep data manageable and organized as you continuously interview (p. 173).

In order to maximize the strength of the study, Merriam (2009) addressed threats to validity and reliability which can be addressed by paying “careful attention to a study’s conceptualization and the way in which the data are collected, analyzed, and interpreted, and the way in which the findings are presented” (p. 210). As for the reliability factor, Merriam (2009) suggested it is important to know if the data collected is consistent with the results presented (p. 221). Merriam (2009) then cited Lincoln and Guba (1985) and further explained that “validity, then, must be assessed in terms of something other than reality itself which alluded to the notion of credibility; that is, are the findings credible given the data presented?” (p. 213).

For this study, member checks were used in order to ensure internal validity and credibility (Merriam, 2009). Due to the nature of how data will be collected using the interview and focus group format, it is vital for participants to review the researcher’s interpretation and be able to provide feedback about how the researcher interpreted their perspective (Merriam, 2009). Merriam (2009) further explained the need for this is due to the researcher’s need to establish trust with participants and districts for whom data will be collected from and whom results will be shared with. Discovery throughout the study was handled ethically and professionally in order to maintain the trustworthiness of the study (Merriam, 2009, p. 230). In addition, it is also important to address reliability and consistency. Merriam (2009) concurred with Lincoln and Guba (1985) in the use of an audit trail by journaling throughout the data collection process about how categories

were created, personal questions that arise, reflections of the interviews, and ideas and decision the researcher gains during the research period (p. 222-223).

Lastly, Merriam (2009) discussed within a qualitative research study, it is important not to formulate generalizations from the data (Merriam, 2009). “In qualitative research, a single case or small, nonrandom, purposeful sample is selected precisely because the researcher wishes to understand the particular in depth, not to find out what is generally true of the many” (Merriam, 2009, p. 224). Generalizations can be left up to the reader to decide how the results apply to those in the reader’s situation, which are created by the researcher’s rich thick descriptions originally used by Gilbert Ryle in 1949 (Merriam, 2009, p. 227). Merriam (2009) aligned with Lincoln and Guba (1985) in the discussion of transferability. The original researcher cannot possibly know where transferability may occur. As cited by Merriam (2009), Lincoln and Guba (1985) made the case for validity, reliability, and descriptive data being very important to future studies in order to make transferability possible (pp. 224-225).

### **Limitations, Delimitations, and Assumptions**

#### **Limitations**

As Creswell (2009) stated, “the researcher keeps a focus on learning and meaning that the participants hold about the program or issue, not the meaning that the researchers bring to the research or writers express in the literature” (p. 175). Personal researcher bias related to the topic of K-12 public alternative education and success measure must be addressed as the researcher has taught in an alternative setting, observed in alternative

settings, and has served as an administrator for two K-12 public alternative education programs.

### **Delimitations**

The boundaries of the study where all research and data collection took place was in rural areas served by Region X of the Regional Professional Development Center. There are no urban settings served by Region X. Other parameters of the study include participants who have served in the public alternative education setting for at least two years. Due to these parameters, it is possible the researcher missed out on some considerations of those who have been in the field for less than two years or from urban areas.

### **Assumptions**

The researcher may encounter multiple assumptions while working with participants of the research study. The first assumption was trust established in the researcher. It is the hope of the researcher that participants want to contribute to the learning of others and provide truthful informative answers during the study; however, it is possible questions were not answered honestly in an interview format where the researcher is face-to-face with the participant.

The second assumption the researcher made is that everyone working in a public alternative education setting has chosen that line of work. The reality based on the researcher's work in public alternative education, is that some leaders shuffle teachers into alternative education positions to remove them from another situation. The researcher assumed all participants had the desire to work in rural K-12 public alternative

education settings, strive to be excellent at his or her position, and have a passion for assisting students who have chosen a rural K-12 public alternative education path to graduation.

### **Findings**

There were nineteen findings that emerged through archival data, interviews, and the focus group which were identified as a contribution to success factors of rural K-12 public alternative education programs. These are not be generalized to all regions of the state of Missouri or other states, but were identified as common responses of the teachers and administrators interviewed in this case study and demonstrate what these participants have found in a successful rural K-12 public alternative education program. These findings were viewed through the lens of Continuous Quality Improvement and more specifically the identified success factors of input, good management, accountability, teamwork, and continuous review.

### **Input**

Respondents noted administration accessibility and visibility, relationship building with students and staff, daily on-going collaboration, and specific high quality professional development geared to their program needs were necessary and were areas teachers provided input on for program success. Teacher Participant 6 said, “We meet every day at 2:00. So, we get to kind of talk together about what we think will work for each student and I do feel like my ideas are valued here.” Teacher Participant 2 said,

I don't think that's any different than anywhere else. Now, an administrator is going to do what they think is best for the situation, just like they should, but your opportunity to give feedback, to give your opinion, is always heard.

During the focus group, the administrators who participated weighed in on taking input from staff at their alternative education programs. It was noted by teacher participants that they were able to provide timely input to their leaders and their leaders were receptive of the input they provided. Administrator Participant A stated,

They may fail, but, they are already failing, that's why they are here was our approach, which I think opened up the freedom of them to really give ideas and put things out there, and in those solution-focused meetings if somebody was struggling with something then to throw this out there. Well, did you think about trying this, or what happens if we don't teach that, or why don't we teach this?

Administrator Participant D followed up with, "I am not afraid to try something, so they can say whatever the heck they want." Also this participant noted large amounts of time brainstorming with staff. Administrator Participant C noted, "Because we're really small, I talk to my two teachers all of the time." Teacher Participant 7 provided input on professional development, "we try very hard each summer to try and find workshops that meet what we do."

### **Good Management**

Respondents noted program success was dependent on meeting the needs of individual students, including the sending/home school in planning for the student, an established entry criteria, and small settings were key. These functions fit the success

factor of good management. Teacher Participant 1 stated, “A few years ago we kind of restructured what would send a kid to program, and so I got to be a part of building that system.” Administrator Participant B discussed working with the sending/home school not in day-to-day operations, but in decisions about students and programming. Furthermore, “we do a plan the day they arrive here on how they’re going to get back...when they get ready to leave we start devising a plan on how they’re going to be successful in their home school.

Administrator Participant A stated,

Most of their school career has been focused on what they can’t do which kind of perpetuates that cycle of lack of success for them, and so we really focus when we brought them in on what their needs were, but then also what were their strengths so that they could feel some success and build on that.

Administrator Participant 1 noted, “We see what the student needs, and then we give them what they need not what they want.” Teacher Participant 3 said, “Our classes are smaller and they have a lot more individual attention.”

### **Accountability**

Respondents noted in Missouri all teachers are held accountable through the teacher evaluation process provided to districts as all other teachers in the district. Program evaluations, student growth plans, and program data collection were noted as additional accountability measures in place for their programs. One interesting finding was respondents working in a high school setting addressed attendance and persistence to graduation as the program goal, and elementary respondents focused on behavior goals.

## **Teamwork**

Through the interview process, multiple participants were from the same program. Findings of collaboration daily, relationships, and feeling accountable to each other were noted and viewed through the success factor of teamwork. Teacher Participant 6 stated, “I always feel like I’m accountable to, obviously, my coworkers here. If I’m not doing my job, it makes their jobs harder.”

## **Continuous Review**

The last findings identified through this study were daily instructional changes as the program was evaluated. This continuous review was seen by participants as a daily function. In addition to this finding, design of the program at high school and elementary were seen as continually evolving. The high school participants noted the evolution of the program had changed from behavior intervention to persistence to graduation and attendance. Administrator Participant 2 stated, “I would say persistence to graduation and attendance are probably the big indicators.” Administrator Participant C and D echoed each other when they both shared using a Board of Education evaluation which shared the same data as Administrator Participant 2, but expanded further to include return to sending/home school data, program numbers, and if the program is valuable. The elementary level participants noted a focus on behavior changes and re-entry into the regular education setting. Teacher Participant 6 stated,

I think we are constantly changing. You know, I said I’ve worked for three years, and the school I work at now looks different than the school I worked at in the beginning, just because needs change in our district and with our students, we

change to meet with that. So, I guess I would just say we're really fluid and super flexible, and we are ready to change at any given moment just based on, again, need.

### **Implications for Practitioners**

Through the participant interviews, focus group, and archival data it can be recommended to practitioners in the field of rural K-12 public alternative education programs to focus on the success factors identified through this research; input, teamwork, accountability, good management, and continuous improvement. Input was identified by teachers and administrators as a necessity for program success either through professional development needs, program development, or the daily operations. Meeting the needs of students through program development, accessibility and visibility of the administration are determined as the success factor of good management, as well as small class-size. Teamwork was shown through the success factor of input when collaboration is noted as a key to program success, program development noted under the success factor of good management, and in how teachers feel accountable to those who work in the program, and to the sending/home schools as students move from one program to the other. Under the success factor of accountability all teachers are evaluated the same with Missouri criteria; however, the accountability noted by teachers was to each other in the program, the relationships they had with each other, and to the program. Finally, the success factor continuous improvement addressed the evolution of programs from behavior changing to graduation completion programs. However,

teachers and administrators noted program success was determined by the ability to evaluate on a daily basis for instructional changes.

In conclusion, this case study had a small sample size of teachers and administrators associated with rural K-12 public alternative education programs; however, the participants contributed to the learning of Region X through their perceptions of alternative education by the reality of their daily work. Based on the findings and implications for rural K-12 public alternative education programs, the following practices are success factors and should be implemented in each program: A program design that meets the specific needs of each student who attends the program, collaboration between teachers in the program, collaboration between the alternative education program and the sending/home school, access to and support from an administrator, the ability to continuously improve the program as needed, administrators and educators that are flexible and have the ability to build relationships with students who have failed in the general education setting. There is a need for further research in the area of success factors of rural K-12 public alternative education programs to help build a basis for successful programs in all regions and states.

### **Template for K-12 Alternative Education Success**

Based on the findings, recommendations, and program success the researcher has experienced as a teacher and administrator in K-12 public alternative education programs the following template was designed for success factors in program development. This template will provide a foundation for school districts looking for a successful implementation of a K-12 rural public alternative education program.

- Hire staff who show qualities of flexibility and the ability to build relationships with students who have failed in the general education setting.
- Provide the staff access to a visible and supportive administrator.
- Develop procedures regarding sending/home schools and alternative programs for communication and transition.
- Develop procedures regarding program development for each student in the program.
- Provide daily collaboration for alternative education staff members.
- Create a mission to support and continuously improve the program as needed.

Incorporating of these six implementation suggestions will provide a program from infancy that is streamlined and standardized in program development and ultimately success in the alternative education program.

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## **SECTION SIX**

### **SCHOLARLY PRACTITIONER REFLECTION**

Leadership theory and practice, as well as content and context of leadership were the focus of the doctoral program. As a student, gaining knowledge and insight through these themes made me a better learner and leader. This program was a dream and a desire I had for myself as a learner and leader in K-12 education. Being able to further prepare myself for my career by arming myself with scholarship and the intimate cohort style of learning made the program one that I will always remember and share with those who seek further education.

#### **Dissertation Influencing Education Leadership**

##### **Leadership Theory and Practice**

As I reflect on leadership practice and theory through the dissertation process, Northouse (2013) presents on many aspects of leadership situations, as well as traits and styles of leadership that have and will be encountered throughout leadership and scholarship. In addition to making connections to transformational leadership, it is necessary to address the approaches of traits, skills, and style when reflecting and moving forward in the practice of leadership. This is important to address because it helps a leader continue to develop in leadership through scholarship.

##### **Transformational Leadership**

As I reflect about my leadership and how it aligns to the different aspects of transformational leadership, I feel I am mostly leading by the individualized consideration factor (Northouse, 2013). As I further connect to transformational

leadership, Northouse (2013) aligns this practice with inspirational motivation. We are sharing a vision and building a culture of what that we work hard for students. I want to continue to learn and grow in my leadership and attribute that to the variety of scholars this program presented to us as learners.

## **Dissertation Influencing Scholarship**

### **Content and Context of Learning**

As an adult learner, I see myself as highly motivated and one that seeks knowledge and know-how to make myself and those around me better every day. Merriam and Bierema (2014) reference a publication about motivation and learning (Houle's 1961, *The Inquiring Mind*) which I connected with, the goal-oriented learner (p. 151). The description was somewhat accurate in how I see myself, "goal-oriented learners engage in learning as a means to attaining another goal" (p. 151). It is further explained as usually being extrinsically motivated; however, I feel like I am highly intrinsically motivated as well. As I connect this to my Strengths Quest identified qualities of having focus, futuristic, and achiever, I see that I have a large pull from intrinsic and extrinsic motivation depending on the situation and what I am learning.

As I reflected further about adult learning, I began to make connections with myself as a learner and Knowles work cited by Merriam and Bierema (2014) on andragogy and assumptions about the learning of adults (p. 46). As a learner my experiences are important and mold me in my learning as a leader. I also see that new situations I am faced with may be different in nature, but the learning I have experienced in the past can help me formulate a solution due to my experiences. Merriam and

Bierema (2014) solidify this thought on experience when they state “adults are who they are largely due to their accumulated life experiences, rejecting or ignoring their experiences is threatening” (p. 50).

The second connection I made to experiences, is that this program has provided multiple ways for each of us to challenge ourselves through examining our experiences, sharing our experiences, and meeting a large group of professionals with multiple experiences through the cohort model. This keeps me from being “dogmatic or close-minded about learning something new” (Merriam & Beirema, 2014, p. 50). As I use my personal learning style of who I am as a learner, I can then reflect on who I am as a leader among those I work with on a daily basis. I believe in surrounding myself with those who are contributing members of the group. Not that everyone has to have the same ideas, but I want to have ideas challenged and as a team be able to take all that we have learned to make a good decision for student learning. Gill (2010) supports this idea by stating “if given the opportunity and direction, teams make better decisions than individuals” (p.75). This direction is also the vision, Gill (2010) discussed vision as the clarity of the direction and purpose for groups of learners.

### **Conclusion**

Looking again at how my strengths are defined for me as a leader focus, futuristic, and achiever are dominate for me; therefore, having a vision and direction are very important to how I operate in life. With this being said, Preskill and Brookfield (2009) address the need for openness in leadership, “leaders who are open have learned to stop talking and start listening to what others have to say” (p. 21). This can be a bit

challenging at times due to my need for focus and achievement, but in order fulfill my strength of being futuristic, it is important to be open to others. “When we practice openness, we try to hold in temporary abeyance our own assumptions and preconceptions so that we can consider fully what others want to contribute” (Preskill & Brookfield, 2009, p. 21).

## **Appendix A**

### **Interview and Focus Group Questions**

Introduction Questions:

Tell me about your educational preparation including your work in alternative education?

Research Questions:

What is your perception of a rural K-12 alternative education programs?

How do you plan for student success of those you have placed in a rural K-12 alternative setting?

How are you supported or how do/did you support teachers in the rural K-12 alternative education setting?

What accountability measures are in place for the students in the rural K-12 alternative setting?

What accountability measures are in place for the teachers in the K-12 alternative setting?

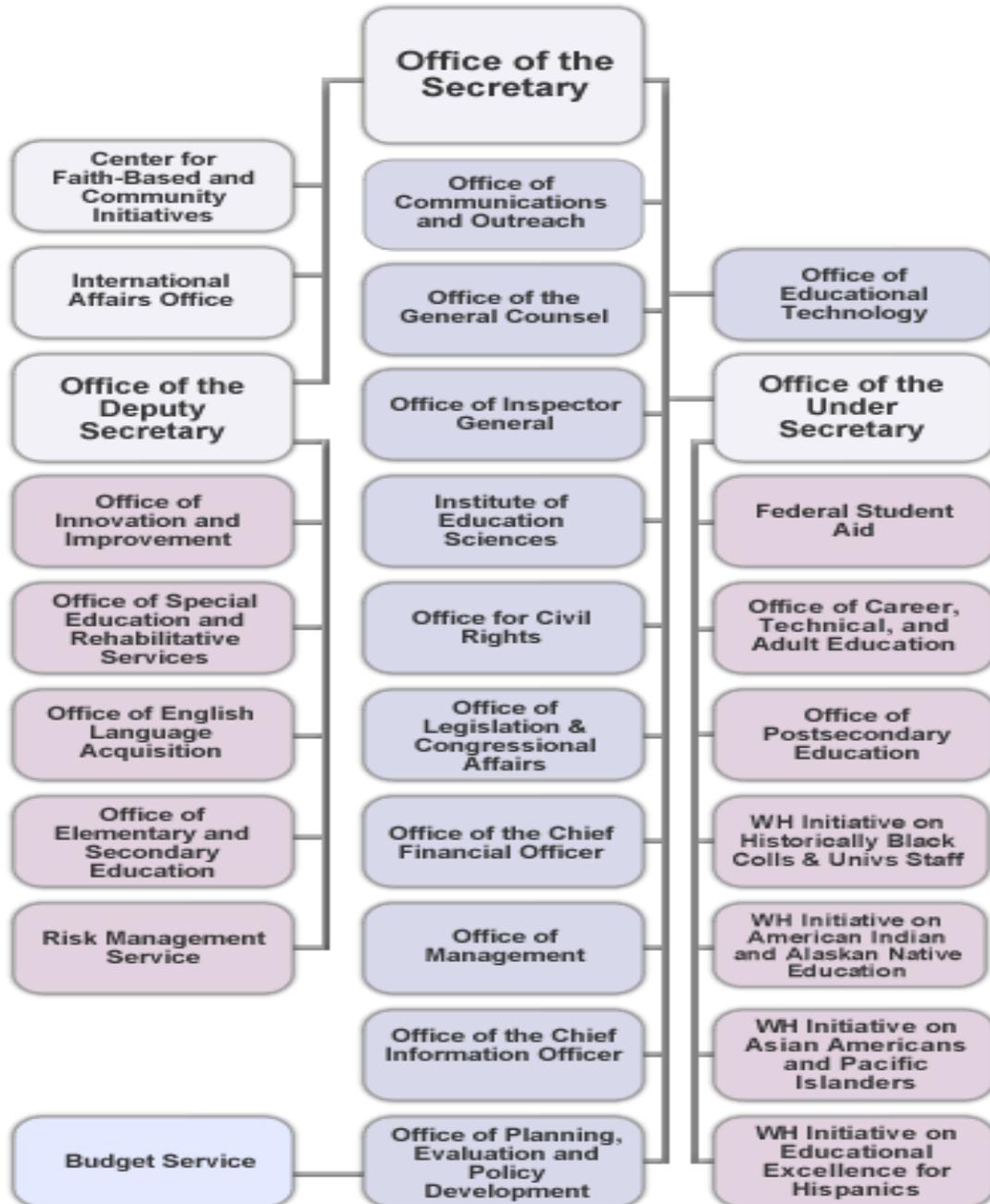
How do you provide input as a teacher or take input from the teachers in the alternative education setting?

What does collaboration look like in the alternative setting?

How do you evaluate your program for continuous improvement?

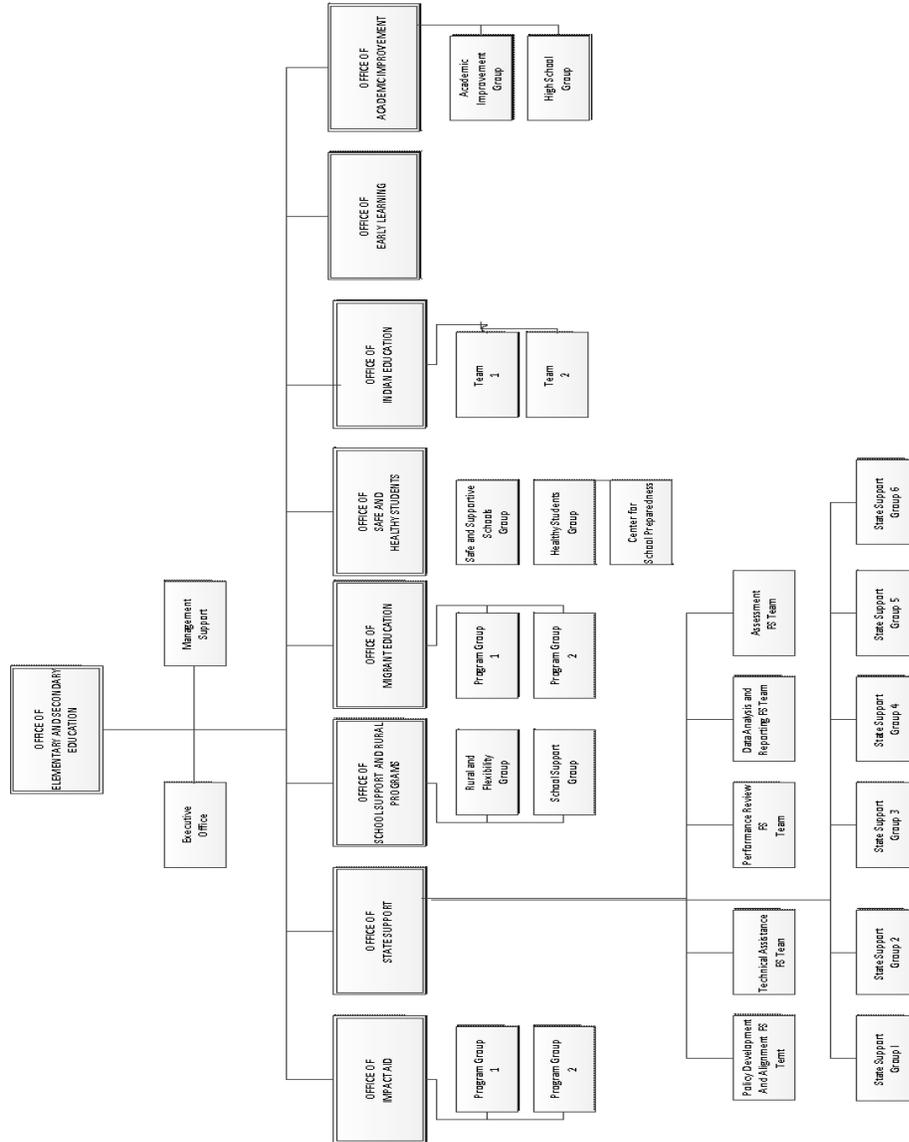
## Appendix B

*Figure 1. United States Department of Education Office of the Secretary*



## Appendix C

Figure 2. United States Department of Education Office of Elementary and Secondary Education



## Appendix D

### CASE STUDY INFORMED CONSENT

**Case Study:**

I will research the perceptions of success factors of rural K-12 public alternative education programs.

**Principal investigator:**

Erin Oligschlaeger

**Institute:**

Northwest Missouri State University  
University of Missouri Columbia

**Introduction:**

While laws, regulations, and professional writing address what rural K-12 public alternative education is and how it can be defined by organizations such as the United States Department of Education (USDE), the success factors of rural K-12 public alternative education programs perceived by the administrators and teachers work in the field of rural K-12 public alternative education have not been addressed.

**Background information:**

When the multiple issues were identified and the result was removal of students from school, it is a necessity to address rural K-12 public alternative education needs for students not successful in the general education setting. With knowledge of the consequences of removal of students from school and the risks associated with the removal, it has become the administrator's duty to build relationships, provide a school climate that promotes students learning along with high expectations, connect with the home, and provide alternatives to suspension and expulsion (Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011). National level trends, such as grants for the Safe Schools Act, had hope to provide more safety and security also provided disservice to students in some cases (Wilson, 2014). The Civil Rights Project (2000) (as cited in Christle et al., 2004) reported that increased suspensions did not change behavior. If suspension of students is not changing behaviors, it is the school's duty to provide alternative means for students to achieve success and have a chance as a productive adult citizen.

**Purpose of this research study:**

In this study the researcher will contribute to the literature by capturing success factors of rural K-12 public alternative education based solely on administrators and teachers who are working or have worked in a rural K-12 public alternative education setting. The purpose of this study is to discover perceptions of the success factors of a rural K-12 public alternative program.

**Procedure:**

Participants will either participate in a one-on-one interview or in a focus group setting with the researcher. There will be a series of questions presented to the participants by the researcher that facilitates a discussion of their experience with rural K-12 public alternative education programs. Participants answers will be recorded and used by the researcher to determine success factors based on the perceptions.

**Possible risks or benefits:**

There is no risk involved in this study except your valuable time. This research has the potential of having an impact on rural K-12 public alternative education programs.

**Right of refusal to participate and withdrawal:**

You are free to choose to participate in the study. You may also withdraw any time from the study. You may also refuse to answer some or all the questions if you do not feel comfortable with the questions.

**Confidentiality:**

Any information you provide will remain confidential. Nobody except the principal investigators will have an access to it. Your name and identity will also not be disclosed at any time.

**Available sources of information:**

If you have any further questions you may contact Dr. Carole Edmonds (cake@nwmissouri.edu), the researcher's advisor.

**AUTHORIZATION:**

I have read and understand this consent form, and I volunteer to participate in this research study. I understand that I will receive a copy of this form. I voluntarily choose to participate, but I understand that my consent does not take away any legal rights in the case of negligence or other legal fault of anyone who is involved in this study. I further understand that nothing in this consent form is intended to replace any applicable Federal, state, or local laws.

If you have any further questions I can answer, please contact me.

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*You may also contact the Campus Institutional Review Board if you have questions about your rights, concerns, complaints, or comments as a research participant. You can contact the Campus Institutional Review Board directly by telephone or email to voice or solicit any concern, questions, input, or complaints about the research study.*

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## VITA

The author of this study, Erin Oligschlaeger, has been in K-12 public education for 15 years. Throughout her life Erin had an interest in working with students with special needs. While in college she was placed in an alternative program setting for a class practicum experience and it quickly became an aspiration of hers to assist students who were not on a traditional path to graduation.

After graduation from Avila University with Bachelors in Special Education, Erin's first teaching assignment was at the Park Hill School District as a teacher for students with disabilities who had been expelled from school. Erin worked for three additional years as a teacher in special education before the completion of her Masters of Arts in Educational Administration from the University of Missouri- Kansas City. She took a position as assistant principal at the Eldon School District and was promoted to principal the following year.

After completion of her Educational Specialist in Educational Administration from the University of Missouri- Kansas City Erin worked for the Marshall Public Schools and Excelsior Springs 40 School in the role of Director of Student Services. In Marshall, one of the many facets of her position was to oversee the operations of the K-12 public alternative education program and in Excelsior Springs she developed and implemented a K-12 public alternative education program to support students who needed a different learning environment to be successful. During this time Erin began the Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis Educational Doctorate with Cohort Nine

through the University of Missouri Statewide Cooperative Program. Currently Erin serves the Albany R-III School District as Superintendent of Schools.