

EVALUATING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT WITHIN ALTERNATIVE
EDUCATION SCHOOLS: A COMPARISON OF DISTRICT
SCHOOLS AND CHARTER SCHOOLS IN ARIZONA

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ABSTRACT

EVALUATING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT WITHIN ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION SCHOOLS: A COMPARISON OF DISTRICT SCHOOLS AND CHARTER SCHOOLS IN ARIZONA

CHARLES SANDERS

The purpose of this study was to determine whether students enrolled in Secondary (9-12) alternative educational schools, i.e.- district schools vs. charter schools, demonstrate significant differences in achievement as measured by the 2019 A-F Letter Grade Accountability System, as well as to determine whether district and charter schools differ in enrollment characteristics of their student bodies. This quantitative study took place in Arizona using data provided to the Arizona Department of Education. Data collected were from publicly accessible records representing most of the alternative education school from 13 of Arizona's 15 counties. Survey data were collected from only 128 out of the 164 alternative schools due to lack of data reporting from educational agencies.

Research question one (is there a statistically significant difference in student proficiency scores in secondary alternative public schools and secondary alternative charter schools using the revised 2019 A-F School Letter Grade Business Rules?) consisted of evaluating alternative school A-F rating scores based upon 5 weighted categorical indicators: 1) Academic proficiency at 15%, 2) Growth toward graduation at 30%, 3) English learners (EL) proficiency at 10%, 4) Graduation rates at 10%, and finally 5) College and career readiness for enrollees at 35% as well as available bonus points and assessed if a statistical difference existed between alternative charter and alternative district schools in overall achievement scores and letter grade rankings.

Research question two (what, if any, are the differences in enrollment characteristics, i.e. - demographics including SPED, between alternative district schools and. alternative charter schools?) was developed to address the potential of enrollment selection bias. Data collected were disaggregated by student subgroups, i.e. - ethnicity, income eligibility, EL proficiency, and by students with disabilities and reported using descriptive statistics. This study did not use summations to conclude significance levels of any of the subgroups comparisons. Student body enrollments characteristics were adjusted on a per capita basis as well as a reported with the proportional range of overall student bodies based upon the standard deviations calculated.

Research question three (is there a statistically significant difference in student dropout rates between alternative district schools and alternative charter schools?) evaluated total dropout rates for all student subgroups, i.e.- ethnicity, gender, homelessness status, income eligibility, and student with disabilities. This study examined if a statistical difference existed between alternative charter and alternative district schools in student graduation rates by examining both the subgroup characteristics as well as the aggregate total student body populations. Comparison mean scores were converted to percentiles to reflect the per capita enrollment representation with higher scores indicating higher dropout rates.

Upon evaluation this study concluded that there is a statistical significant difference in the A-F letter grades between alternative district schools and alternative charter schools, with charter schools showing higher final cut scores as well as higher A-F school letter grade rankings. This study also determined that those gains were predominately due to the college and career readiness indicators, and not from increased academic performance, on-track graduation rates, credits earned, EL proficiency, or overall graduation rates. This study also concluded that alternative charter and alternative district schools showed similar student body enrollment

subgroup consistencies, suggesting that there is no inherent enrollment selection bias or overrepresented subgroups in either institution. This study also determined that there was not a statistical difference between alternative district and alternative charter schools and their graduation rates in their overall student populations.

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Chapter One: Introduction

According to the 2010 U.S. Census Bureau report, 16.4% of Arizona households now qualify as falling significantly below the state average for household income; with a reported median earnings of \$26,686.00, far below that State average of \$51,40.00 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Of those households reported, 81.7% of them include at least one household minor above the age of one year old (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). There is a significant correlation between students who live in poverty and the chances of becoming at-risk youth. Poverty, regardless of level, is strongly linked to reduced academic achievement (Lee, 2017). American idealism has often been associated with accolades of social prosperity, and with that prosperity often linked to innovation, optimism, and resolve. Few instruments of societal determination are more pivotal than the spread of educational opportunity in a flourishing society (Genao, 2014a). Though this spirit of educational idealism has fostered prior to the American development of self-governance, the manner in which education is ascribed has often been contentious. Governmental oversight and actions, especially funding, in U.S. education have yielded America with a hodgepodge of expectations and responsibilities divided among local, state, and the federal government. In its relationship to addressing the growing needs of the at-risk student populations, governmental and departmental interventions have undergone several iterations. These interventions first transcended with the development of Title I supplemental funding, the eventual development of alternative education institutions, and the introduction of ‘school choice’ via the introduction of publically-funded charter schools. This study explores the evolutionary growth in at-risk interventions as well as examine the effectiveness of modern-day institutions that continue to address the needs of our at-risk youth.

The Rise of Alternative Schools

Borne from the educational reform movements on the 1960s and 1970s, alternative education schools were developed to address the increasing needs of educating at-risk/ high-risk students while combating the stagnant success of district Title I schools (Carver & Lewis, 2010; Johnson, 2015; Martin & McClure, 1969; Matsudaira, Hosek, & Walsh, 2012). Alternative schools, or alternative education programs, were specially tailored institutions that would offer academic as well as non-academic services to students who were not only at-risk of academic failure, but also, students who may be involved with the juvenile justice system, discipline referrals, teen-parents, drug addictions, and may struggle with behavioral and emotional processes (Carver & Lewis, 2010).

According to researchers Carver and Lewis (2010), it is estimated that there only existed 464 alternative education programs in 1973. As we entered the 21st century this number demonstrated exponential growth with an estimated 644 school districts reporting at least having one alternative education program in 2008 (Carver & Lewis, 2010). Using the working definitions developed by researchers Deeds and DePaoli (2018), alternative education programs can be credited to function one of two ways:

- 1) Programs- which are typically subsets of other, larger schools, and
- 2) Schools- which are independent institutions, generally within the school district and/or charter school.

Using the above qualifiers and terminology, programs and schools now make up 6% of the total high schools nationally (Deeds & DePaoli, 2018); 37% of which are classified as programs that continue to service at-risk students within the structures of existing comprehensive

High schools while the remaining 64% are self-contained independently operating facilities, i.e., schools (Carver & Lewis, 2010; Fedders et al., 2018).

Arizona is inclusive of both programs and schools in their accepted educational offerings for at-risk students; a major discrepancy also exist beyond the physical localities of educating at-risk students (Arizona Department of Education, 2019a). As noted by researchers Deeds and DePaoli (2018) this distinction is important because as per the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires states to hold all public schools accountable, but many institutions classified as programs are not considered schools, and therefore may not be held accountable under ESSA, such as the use of a school report cards or similar public-facing mechanisms from state oversight departments.

What are At-Risk students?

In its earliest inception, “at-risk” was a term coined in higher academia to refer to students to create an operational understanding of students who were ill-equipped to meet proficiency in academic standards (Quinnan, 1997). Important to note at-risk no longer simply refers to limitations imposed on students due to social class or race, but now encompasses more variables that serve as barriers to learning, such as familial hardships, and background, which can inhibit a student from achieving academic success (Garnier, S. et al.1997).

The most rudimentary definition of a student who may be considered at-risk is one that exhibits the following characteristics: 1) Low socio-economic status; 2) From a single parent family; 3) An older sibling dropped out of school; 4) The students themselves changed schools two or more times; 5) Had average grades of ‘C’ or lower from sixth to eighth grade; 6) Repeated a grade (Chen & Kaufman, 1997). Researchers Roueche and Roueche (1993) also advocate that at-risk students also have non-academic challenges, such as, weak self-concept and

unpreparedness for higher-educational accolades and should be included in any analytical service or study of At-Risk youths.

At-risk students not only face academic deficits, but are at a heightened risk for other difficulties such as mental health, poor social skills, and physical health; each of which carries into a adulthood (Freudenberg & Ruglis, 2007; Kaplan, Damphousse, & Kaplan, 1994; Kemple & Snipes, 2000). This study builds upon the operating definition that researchers Bulger and Watson (2006) introduced in defining who is at-risk, which takes into account a student's; 1) Background characteristics; 2) Internal behavior; and, 3) Environmental factors, each of which serve as impediments that extend beyond the confines or limitations of K-12 learning.

What are the Barriers to Success to At-Risk Students?

Students who attend compressive schools serving low socioeconomic populations, typically Title I qualifying, see an emphasis on rote memorization, non-inquiry based learning, and more “factory model” styles of learning (Anyon, 2017). This institutional norm in the comprehensive school setting has led to “...an ever-present sense of institutional restraint” (Anyon, 2017, p. 1). Comprehensive schooling is seen as a preparation mechanism for students to transition from learners to contributors in the American middle-class, which is often in direct opposition to the experiences of at-risk youths and therefore, culturally abstract for these students (Evans, 2009).

Student success is often associated with uninhibited participation in the norms and expectations of middle-class learning values. The lower socio-economic status that is indicative of at-risk students often serves as an impediment to successful participation in that comprehensive learning environment and often leads to secondary, non-academic, deficits that impede a student from succeeding (Etherington, 2012).

As researcher Etherington (2012) concludes, since we assess a student's performance in a comprehensive school setting by viewing that success through the middle-class expectation-prism, students, who stem from low socio-economic, or working-class backgrounds who attend comprehensive schools, are seen as rebuking the conceptual notions of hard work and are viewed as having deficiencies and inhibitions in their learning. From this perspective, comprehensive schools can intentionally or unintentionally exclude students and families from successful participation, wrongly concluding that they do not possess the attributes that the school expects, making it difficult for those alienated to participate in a traditional sense (Gillies, 2008; A. Lareau, 2003).

Where are At-Risk Students More Successful?

While the most recent evidence collected by the Arizona Department of Education provides some metrics for analysis, there remains a significant deficit in the research needed to properly address this question, which serves as the primary purpose of this study. In an independent analysis of a multi-state study conducted by researchers Greene et al (2003), it was concluded that 42.3 percent of Arizona charter schools have a specific focus on low-performing students, while only 9.2 percent focused on high-performing students indicating that there is a consistent communal desire for alternative educational facilities. Out of the 14 states surveyed, Arizona had the highest reported number of charter schools that primarily service at-risk youth predominantly operating at the secondary level (9-12) (Milliman, Maranto, & Wood, 2017). This market emphasis of charter school services toward at-risk students tailored to be an alternative educational setting may have contributing factors other than market demands for such services. As researchers Maranto and Gresham (1999) note, "At the high school level, the prohibitive cost of facilities prompts charter schools to focus on marginal and 'at-risk'" (Hess, Maranto, &

Milliman, 2001, p. 393). As alternative education programs/schools become more prevalent in Arizona, either from expansionary charter school offerings or district inclusions of alternative educational campuses, it then becomes important to analyze the efficacy of these settings and to review the accountability metrics applied to both in order to properly determine who is servicing our most vulnerable students the best and achieving the most success with these learners.

Statement of the Problem

The majority of charter schools operating in Arizona for secondary students (9-12) are classified as alternative schools serving at-risk youths with lower student body populations. There is a gap in the current research analyzing performance and growth between district schools and charter schools, in that by not discerning comprehensive schools and alternative schools from the aggregate data analysis between the two; hypothesizing about student performance and growth is ambiguous and needs exploration. Additionally, it is important to note that Arizona employs different accountability metrics to evaluate the efficiency of alternative schools via differing A-F Letter Grade accountability systems, i.e., Traditional (for comprehensive schools) and Alternative Business Rules (Arizona Department of Education Research and Accountability, 2018, 2020a). A detailed comparison analysis between these two accountability systems is explored in greater detail in subsequent sections of this study.

Assigning schools a letter grade ranging from A-F conveys to the public the proficiency of comparable schools yet may be implicitly misleading, as the metrics employed in assigning those letter grades vary significantly between comprehensive and alternative schools. The variances in accountability reporting, i.e., the fundamental weighting and categorical changes in the reporting formula, is the foundation of analysis employed in this research paper; to disaggregate the data reported between district alternative schools and charter alternative

schools, and scrutinizing each by using the Arizona Department of Education 2019 A-F Letter Grade Accountability System for Alternative Schools 9-12 Business Rules (Arizona Department of Education Research and Accountability, 2020b, 2020a). By removing both the district and charter comprehensive schools data from analysis, in conjunction with using the *same A-F Letter Grade Accountability System for Alternative Schools*, this paper answers the question “Is there a difference in alternative school environments that demonstrates better student gains for at-risk youths?”

Conceptual Framework of the Study

As Arizonians continue to demonstrate a growing inclination to utilize charter Schools, with an ever-growing popularity of alternative charter schools, it becomes essential that research is conducted to determine the impact on student growth within alternative environments (Hess et al., 2001). Much of the current research into the efficacy of charter school enrollment and increased student performance has been skewed, as it has traditionally been a comparison of comprehensive district schools with no discerning difference between comprehensive and alternative charter schools. Because the vast majority of secondary charter schools are designated as alternative schools, they utilize different criteria and metrics to measure success (Arizona Department of Education Research and Accountability, 2020a; Greene et al., 2003). One of the major contentions facing charter schools is enrollment selection bias; whereby, a charter school will remove or “counsel out” their lowest performing students (Mills, Renshaw, & Zipin, 2013). Often these students are those who are the most at-risk for dropping out with stifled economic opportunities and future prosperity (Beck, 2004; Bourdieu, 1979; Etherington, 2013; Giddens, 1993).

By minimizing the impact of selection bias during enrollment into charter schools, the research may fall short of addressing the inherent exclusions that exist for lower socio-economic families, as well as special needs that exist for many students who may be thinking of charter schools as an alternative to district school options. Many students never apply to charter schools that cannot 1) Provide transportation, 2) Provide nutritional programs, 3) Accommodate IEPs or other significant learning disabilities (Black, 2015; Fedders et al., 2018). This can lead to systemically different groupings of students when conducting research, with a disproportionate consortium of students being included in the aggregate data for the district alternative schools, and being excluded from the aggregate data collected from their charter school counterparts.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine whether students enrolled in Secondary (9-12) alternative educational schools, i.e.- district schools vs. charter schools, demonstrate significant differences in achievement as measured by the 2019 A-F Letter Grade Accountability System, as well as to determine whether district and charter schools differ in enrollment characteristics of their student bodies. Both comprehensive district schools as well as publically funded charter schools that service Arizona alternative education students utilize a school accountability system that places a larger emphasis on student growth and college and career readiness over proficiency and cohort on-track graduation rates (Arizona Department of Education Research and Accountability, 2020a; 2020b). The Arizona Department of Education requires that schools operating in Arizona submit their accountability reports on an annual basis, and subsequently make available to the public both the self-reported data provided by the schools as well as an overall A-F Letter Grade..

The alternative A-F Letter Grade calculations are similar to the traditional (Comprehensive schools) A-F Letter grade calculations with three key differences: 1) The metric weighted categories as well as their associated indicators are vastly valued differently in the final A-F score calculations, 2) The formulaic denominator values differ when an alternative school does not qualify for all five indicator groups starting at the three indicators metric. (Ex. traditional model uses a denominator value of 70; the alternative model uses a denominator value of 80), and 3) The Cut Scores for the letter grades also shift, giving a boost to the alternative schools letter grade for school grades of A and B. (Ex. traditional Score of A= 100%-83.83%; alternative Score of A= 100%-79.03%). This Cut Score benefit disappears for a schools letter grade of C, D, and F (Ex. traditional Score of C= 70.01%-56.21%; alternative Score of C= 68.13%-57-25%).

Failing Schools

The significance of assigning Arizona Schools Letter grades is cemented in Arizona Revised Statute 15-241.02 which states:

If a school is assigned a letter grade of D [then it must]... within ninety days after receiving notice of the classification, the school district governing board shall develop an improvement plan for the school, submit a copy of the plan to the superintendent of public instruction and the county educational service agency and supervise the implementation of the plan. (p. 01)

Additionally, within 30 days of an improvement plan being submitted the governing board, or in the case of a Charter School, the Charter sponsor, they must hold a public meeting in each school that has been assigned a letter of D or F and present their improvement plan to the public. If a school is assigned a letter grade of D for three consecutive years, then the Arizona Department of Education shall visit the school and perform an audit to confirm the classification data as well as

review the implementation of the schools improvement plan. Once an inspection has been done in the third consecutive year the school will then be assigned a letter grade of F granting the school the ability to appeal the decision (Arizona Revised Statutes, 2020c).

A school's Sponsor or Governing Board that receives notice of getting a letter grade of F for a school must, within sixty days, evaluate the needed changes in the existing improvement plan and consider recommendations from a Solutions Team, which is discussed in detail below. A copy of the revisions is then sent to Arizona Department of Education as well as the educational agency that supervises the school to ensure implementation of the plan. Furthermore, the governing board, within thirty days of receiving notice of the F classification, must provide written notification of the classification to each residence in the attendance area of the school. The notice shall explain the improvement plan process and provide information regarding the public meeting (Arizona Revised Statutes, 2020c).

As referenced earlier, a school may be assigned a Solutions Team to aid in assisting that school to increase its benchmark proficiencies and increase its overall school letter grade. As stated by in A.R.S. § 15-241.02 "Any other school, subject to available resources, may be assigned a Solutions Team pursuant to a mutual agreement between the Department of Education or the county education service agency, or both, and the school" (Subsection E). Solutions Teams are comprised of master teachers, fiscal analysts, and curriculum assessment experts who are certified by the Arizona Department of Education as Academic Standards Technicians. The Arizona Department of Education may also hire administrators, principals, and/or teachers who have demonstrated experience in improving academic outcomes in which case these personnel would be considered a part of the Solutions Team. Once a Solution Team is in place it will review the existing improvement plan to assess areas in need of changes such as curricula,

professional development, and/or resource allocations. Afterwards the Solutions Team will present their findings to the school and administrator as well as the superintendent.

Research Questions

Researchers Heppner and Heppner (2004) state that research questions and hypotheses are the, “motor that drives the study” (p. 67). Viewed from this prism, the research questions posed in this paper aimed to address what the current research on the topic of at-risk schooling in Arizona and student achievement in an alternative setting has yet to be adequately examined. The research questions were carefully constructed as to clearly articulate a hypothesis that states the objective of the research study (Heppner & Heppner, 2004). The focus of the research questions was on student achievement within alternative educational settings using the adopted A-F Letter Grade Accountability Business Rules and the differences between alternative district schools and alternative charter schools. This study includes an examination of student demographic qualifications, enrollment, high school completion, and proficiency growth and how district and charter school’s accountability metrics compare. Information was gathered about alternative district schools and alternative charter schools as self-reported to the Arizona Department of Education regarding their respective organizations. The following research questions and hypotheses guided this study.

RQ1: Is there a statistically significant difference in student proficiency scores in secondary alternative district schools and secondary alternative charter schools using the revised 2019 A-F School Letter Grade Business Rules?

H1₀: There is no statistical difference between district alternative schools and charter alternative schools in student proficiency as outlined by the A-F School Letter Grade Business Rules.

H1_A There is a statistical difference between district alternative schools and charter alternative schools in student proficiency as outlined by the A-F School Letter Grade Business Rules.

RQ2: What are the differences in enrollment characteristics, i.e.- demographics including SPED, between district alternative schools and charter alternative schools?

H2₀: There is no statistical difference district public alternative schools and charter alternative schools in enrollment characteristics.

H2_A There is a statistical difference between district alternative schools and charter alternative schools in enrollment characteristics.

RQ3: Is there a statistically significant difference in student dropout rates between district alternative schools and charter alternative schools?

H3₀: There is no statistical differences in student dropout rates between district alternative schools and charter alternative schools.

H3_A There is a statistical differences in student dropout rates between district alternative schools and charter alternative schools.

Significance of the Study

For years, the Arizona Department of Education has exempted alternative schools from receiving annual letter grades along with Arizona Online Instruction Programs (AOIs), K-2, K-3, and “extremely small schools,” which predominately serves as the leading measure of the academic performance of students in Arizona schools (Arizona Department of Education Research and Accountability, 2018). The lack of this transparent accountability means that parents and students are often unaware that their chosen school may be failing them. An insidious result of this exemption carved out for Alternative Schools in previous years has meant that the states often lowest performing students end up in schools with the least amount of public

accountability and subtly the lowest expectations for progress. As authors Altavena and Price (2019) wrote about this phenomena:

For failing schools, the alternative label can help them avoid closure for poor performance. That label also allows the schools to misrepresent themselves as an innovative alternative for unconventional students...(p. 1)

Since 2010, alternative school enrollment has increased nearly 40%, with over 31,000 students in fiscal year 2019 enrolled in a secondary alternative school (Arizona Department of Education Research and Accountability, 2019, 2020e). Of those students, nearly 94% (27,158) attended a charter school with only approximately 4,700 attending a district school. The significance of this transition of student enrollment to alternative schools had led to a substantial allocation of funding for alternative sites, which in Fiscal year 2019 had an annual cost of over \$270,000,00.00, with approximately \$230,000,000.00 being allocated to alternative charter schools with the remaining \$41,539,160.00 going to district schools (Arizona Department of Education, 2020a). It is important to note that the reported data does not include district schools that have elected to convert their alternative schools into programs, which does not report disaggregated data for each site to the Arizona Department of Education. Additionally, these reported numbers do not reflect any supplemental funding a school may receive by participating in an approved Arizona Dropout Recovery Program (DRP), which provides additional assistance to schools who participate.

According to Altavena and Price (2019), as of 2017 only 26% of students who attended a secondary alternative charter school graduated within four years. Adding to this troubling statistic the authors also stated that, "...at a majority of schools that apply for alternative status, graduation rates slip the year after gaining that status...[and] at more than a dozen alternative

high schools, graduation rates were in the single digits” (p. 1). This historical waning of educational services adequately addressing the needs of the most vulnerable students, i.e., the at-risk/high-risk students, coupled with the near two-decade long exemption for alternative school accountability is what led to the creation of a the A-F Letter Grade Alternative Accountability System Business Rules in 2019. This was the driving force behind this research study: To evaluate student achievement and success within Alternative Education Schools by comparing the efficacy of district schools and charter Schools in Arizona who provide those services. In other words, this study wanted to determine who is best helping those whom are in the most in need of it.

Limitations of the Study

Multiple factors affected the data collection used in this research study. Each of these factors represents elements outside of the researcher’s control, and is explored in greater detail below. Chapter Five of this study utilizes these referenced limitations and identifies how future research may be conducted to address these limitations and expand on this study foundational research.

‘Programs’ May Not Self-Report to the Arizona Department of Education

Provisions found in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) can make it more difficult for alternative education programs to be held accountable for their academic progress (Fedders et al., 2018). ESSA does permit States to exclude, for accountability purposes, achievement scores on state assessments of students who do not attend school for a full year. As such, many districts have developed alternative programs which serve as temporary placements for students based upon a referrals ranging from disciplinary to credit recovery concerns, thus the full-year provision may result in excluding those students who have a temporary reassignment to an alternate school site (Fedders et al., 2018). Additionally, because these programs are not

organized as schools student tests scores may be subject to being reported back to their respective home-school rather than being attributed to the alternative school placement (Fedders et al., 2018). Lastly, alternative program schools can be excluded from reporting their achievement results to the Arizona Department of Education, and are not subsequently listed as schools subject to an A-F Letter Grade rating for accountability purposes and can be inadvertently excluded from this studies research.

School-Reporting due to COVID-19 and School Closures

Due to the statewide-schools closures caused by the Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, the Arizona Department of Education, with approval from the State Board of Education, submitted a request to the U.S. Department of Education to waive certain state assessments and accountability for fiscal year 2020 reporting. The U.S. Department of Education granted a waiver in April of 2020 relinquishing the state from its obligatory reporting as required in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 for the following provisions; 1) The requirements to administer all required assessments, 2) Accountability and school identification requirements and 3) Report card provisions related to certain assessments and accountability. Because of this waiver, this study was limited to only analyzing the fiscal year 2019, i.e.-the first-year implementation, of Alternative Schools using the A-F Alternative School Letter Grades Business Rules (Arizona Department of Education, 2020c).

Cannot Conduct A Longitudinal Study

A significant limitation of this study is the lack of multi-year data to complete a longitudinal analysis. This was due to multiple factors: 1) Alternative schools have enjoyed their exempted status of reporting student achievement results to the Arizona Department of Education, 2) The Alternative A-F Letter Grade Business Rules was not put into implementation

until fiscal year 2019, and 3.) Due to the COVID-19 waiver referenced above for statewide accountability reporting and assessments in 2020, only one year of data is available for analysis.

Researcher Disclosure

The researcher of this study currently works in a secondary alternative district school as a classroom teacher. The school in which the researcher works qualifies as a district program thus is excluded from state accountability reporting and was excluded from this study's research.

Definition of Terms

Accountability: Describes public sector accountability as the process of determining to whom an organization is accountable, and for what (Kettl, 2005, 2015). The Revised 2019 Letter Grade Accountability System for Alternative Schools 9-12 Business Rules formula will be used, i.e.- Proficiency, Growth to Graduation, EL, Graduation Rate, College and Career Readiness, and Bonus (Arizona Department of Education Research and Accountability, 2020a).

Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rates (ACGR): Calculates the percentage of high school freshman who graduate with their respective assigned cohort (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019).

Alternative Education: Schools or programs for students at-risk of educational failure (Carver & Lewis, 2010).

Arizona College and Career Readiness (ACCR): The Board approved standards by the Arizona Department of Education to meet the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requirement to have non-academic indicators of School Quality or Student Success (SQSS) (Arizona Department of Education, 2013).

At-Risk: students who have one or more of the following characteristics: Low socio-economic status; From a single parent family; An older sibling dropped out of school; The students

themselves changed schools two or more times; Had average grades of ‘C’ or lower from sixth to eighth grade; Repeated a grade. Students also have non-academic challenges, such as, weak self-concept and unpreparedness for higher-educational accolades (Bulger & Watson, 2006).

Bureaucratic: Can be a public or private organization consisting of a centralized management structure comprising four features: Hierarchy; Continuity; Impersonality; and Expertise (Barnett & Finnemore, 2004).

Charter School: Charter schools are publicly funded schools that serve as alternatives to traditional public schools. They are not subject to the requirements of article XI, section 1, of the Constitution of Arizona (Arizona Revised Statutes, 2020a).

Credit Recovery: A strategy that encourages at-risk students to re-take a previously failed course required for high school graduation. The strategy was designed to provide a pathway for high school students who have a history of course failure and help them avoid falling further behind in school (U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, & What Works Clearinghouse, 2015). Credit recovery courses may be available online or in alternative settings and can be scheduled at different times to suit the needs of the student (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, & Policy and Program Studies Service, 2018).

Empowerment Scholarships: The Empowerment Scholarship Account (ESA) program is an account administered by The Arizona Department of Education that is funded by state tax dollars to provide educational options for qualified Arizona students. By opting out of the public school system, parents can seek a range of alternative educational services, such as private school or home-based education (Arizona Department of Education, 2020b).

English Language Learners (ELL): A national-origin-minority student who is limited-English-proficient. This term is often preferred over limited-English-proficient (LEP) as it highlights accomplishments rather than deficits (U.S. Department of Education, 2020).

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA): Signed into law December 10, 2015, ESSA is the federal legislation that governs elementary and secondary education in the U.S.. ESSA reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and replaced the prior re-authorization formally known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2020).

General Education Development (GED): Originally, the GED, or General Education Diploma, was introduced in 1942 as a means of providing secondary school credentials to WWII enlistees who enlisted before completing high school (Murnane, 2013). In 1947, states started to allow school dropouts who were not veterans the option of completing a GED program (Heckman, Humphries, & Mader, 2011). By 1974, all states had adopted this practice (Murnane, 2013).

Programs: Typically subsets of other, larger schools (Deeds & DePaoli, 2018)

Public School: Also known as *Traditional Public Schools* means any public institution established for the purposes of offering instruction to pupils in programs for preschool children with disabilities, kindergarten programs or any combination of elementary grades or secondary grades one through twelve. Public schools are organized in "School districts" which are a political subdivision of this state with geographic boundaries organized for the purpose of the administration, support and maintenance of the public schools or an accommodation school (Arizona Revised Statutes, 2020b).

School: An independent institution, generally within the school district and/or charter school. (Deeds & DePaoli, 2018)

School Choice: Also known as *Arizona School Choice* was authorized in 1994 to allow parents in Arizona to select the educational settings of their choice beyond their boundary determined traditional public schools. This can include; ‘Magnet Schools’, ‘Charter Schools’, ‘Homeschooling’, ‘Private Schools’, and ‘Online Learning’ (The Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice, 2016)

School Tuition Organizations (STOs): Authorized by Arizona Revised Statute 43-1603, STOs are established to receive contributions from taxpayers for the purposes of income tax credits under sections 43-1089 and 43-1089.03 and to pay educational scholarships or tuition grants to allow students to attend any qualified school of their parents' choice. To be eligible for certification and retain certification, the school tuition organization: 1) Must allocate at least ninety percent of its annual revenue from contributions made for the purposes of sections 43-1089 and 43-1089.03 for educational scholarships or tuition grants, 2) Shall not limit the availability of educational scholarships or tuition grants to only students of one school, 3) May allow donors to recommend student beneficiaries, but shall not award, designate or reserve scholarships solely on the basis of donor recommendations, and 4) Shall not allow donors to designate student beneficiaries as a condition of any contribution to the organization, or facilitate, encourage or knowingly permit the exchange of beneficiary student designations in violation of section 43-1089, subsection F, section 43-1089.03, subsection F and 43-1089.04, subsection E (Arizona Revised Statutes, 1997) .

Socio-Economic Status (SES): Comprises not just a student’s family income but also the educational attainment, financial security, and subjective perceptions of social status and social class experienced by the student. SES encompass quality of life attributes as well as the

opportunities and privileges afforded to people within society (American Psychological Association, 2017).

Special Education SPED: Specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability, including; 1.) Instruction conducted in the classroom, in the home, in hospitals and institutions, and in other settings; and 2.) Instruction in physical education. Special education includes each of the following, if the services otherwise meet the requirements of paragraph (a) (1) of Sec. 300.39 of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): 1.) Speech-language pathology services, or any other related service, if the service is considered special education rather than a related service under State standards; 2.) Travel training; and 3.) Vocational education (U.S. Department of Education, 1975).

School Quality or Student Success (SQSS): ESSA requires states to include at least one measure of school quality or student success (SQSS) in their accountability systems. This indicator is not defined in the law, although ESSA suggests possible measures and provides some examples: student engagement (e.g., chronic absenteeism); educator engagement; student access to and completion of advanced coursework; postsecondary readiness; or school climate and safety. The SQSS indicator must be a valid, reliable and comparable measure within each state's accountability system. All accountability system indicators, including the measure of SQSS, must be: 1.) Measured annually for all students and for each subgroup statewide. 2.) Able to provide meaningful differentiation between schools. 3.) Where appropriate, based on the long-term goals in the state plan. 4.) Included in state and district report cards (Woods, 2017).

Student Growth: Title I Part A(4)(v)(c) of the Template for the Consolidated State Plan, issued in 2017 by the U.S. Department of Education grants states with latitude as to how they can indicate different methodologies to determine meaningful differentiation of 'success' for alternative

schools regarding achievement (Deeds & DePaoli, 2018). Under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), states can elect to have a ‘single accountability systems’ for reporting achievement to the public. States can also elect to have separate systems of differentiating alternative schools outside of the ESSA state plan. Arizona’s system of accountability for alternative schools places priority on ‘student growth’ using high-stakes assessments rather than just proficiency outcomes since alternative settings often service students who are already behind proficiency targets (Deeds & DePaoli, 2018).

Delimitations

This study analyzed data from fiscal year 2019 representing a culmination of publicly available reports published by the Arizona Department of Education including; FY19 List of Approved Alternative Schools, FY19 Assessment Results, FY19 Dropout Rates, FY19 Demographic Enrollments; AND FY19 A-F Alternative Letter Grades Reporting. Although there were 164 registered alternative schools in Arizona in fiscal year 2019, this study only analyzes 128 of them due to a lack of self-reported data being submitted from 36 of those institutions. Excluded from this research are thirteen district secondary alternative schools and ten charter alternative schools as well as thirteen alternative schools providing educational services in a K-8 environment only.

Summary

Chapter One explores the rise of alternative education and the societal and political movements that fostered the need to address the contentions of at-risk students. Building upon this foundation, this chapter explores how at-risk youths are identified, and the historical impediments and barriers experienced by these students. This chapter also lays out the

conceptual framework in which this study which illustrates the prism in which the research is to be conducted as well as maps out how all relevant variables are relate to each other.

Organization of the Study

This study examines the efficacy of alternative education in Arizona and to determine if enrollment in alternative district schools vs. alternative charter schools yielded a significantly better outcome for at-risk students. Previously published comparative research studies conducted, which examined student proficiency and growth between these two educational institutions, have not sufficiently taken into consideration that the vast majority of secondary charter schools in Arizona are designated as alternative schools, who now use an alternative accountability metric, i.e.- A-F Alternative Letter Grade Business Rules, to measure and report student achievement. The results of this study may serve to better determine which institutions are better suited to meet the needs of the most vulnerable learners in our society, at-risk youths.

The proceeding chapters in this study are organized as follows. Chapter Two is a wide-ranging review of the existing research and literature on the historical evolution of alternative education, at-risk students, different models of instructions, as well as how accountability has been interpreted and applied. Chapter Three, topics include the research design and specific details of how the study was conducted. The subsequent chapters focus on the actual results of the research conducted which are provided in Chapter Four, followed by an interpretation and recommendations for future research in Chapter Five.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

In 1994, with the change in Arizona Revised State Statutes that allowed for the creation of charter schools, there became an alternative for parents over comprehensive district schools. Since then, Arizona has now become home of the most competitive education markets of any state in the U.S., excluding Washington D.C. (Hess et al., 2001; U.S. Department of Education, 2018). As of 2015-2016, approximately 16% of all public school students were enrolled in a charter school, with one third of Arizona schools operating as charters (Association Arizona Charter Schools, 2015; Powers & Potter, 2018; U.S. Department of Education, 2018). As Arizona's education markets have revealed a charter school increase, so too has Arizona seen a rise in the level of students who do not graduate on-time. In 2015-2016, 22.6% of students did not graduate (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). A growing educational reform movement, the alternative school, has also seen an increase in popularity and seen as a progressively popular option for parents and students (Greene et al., 2003).

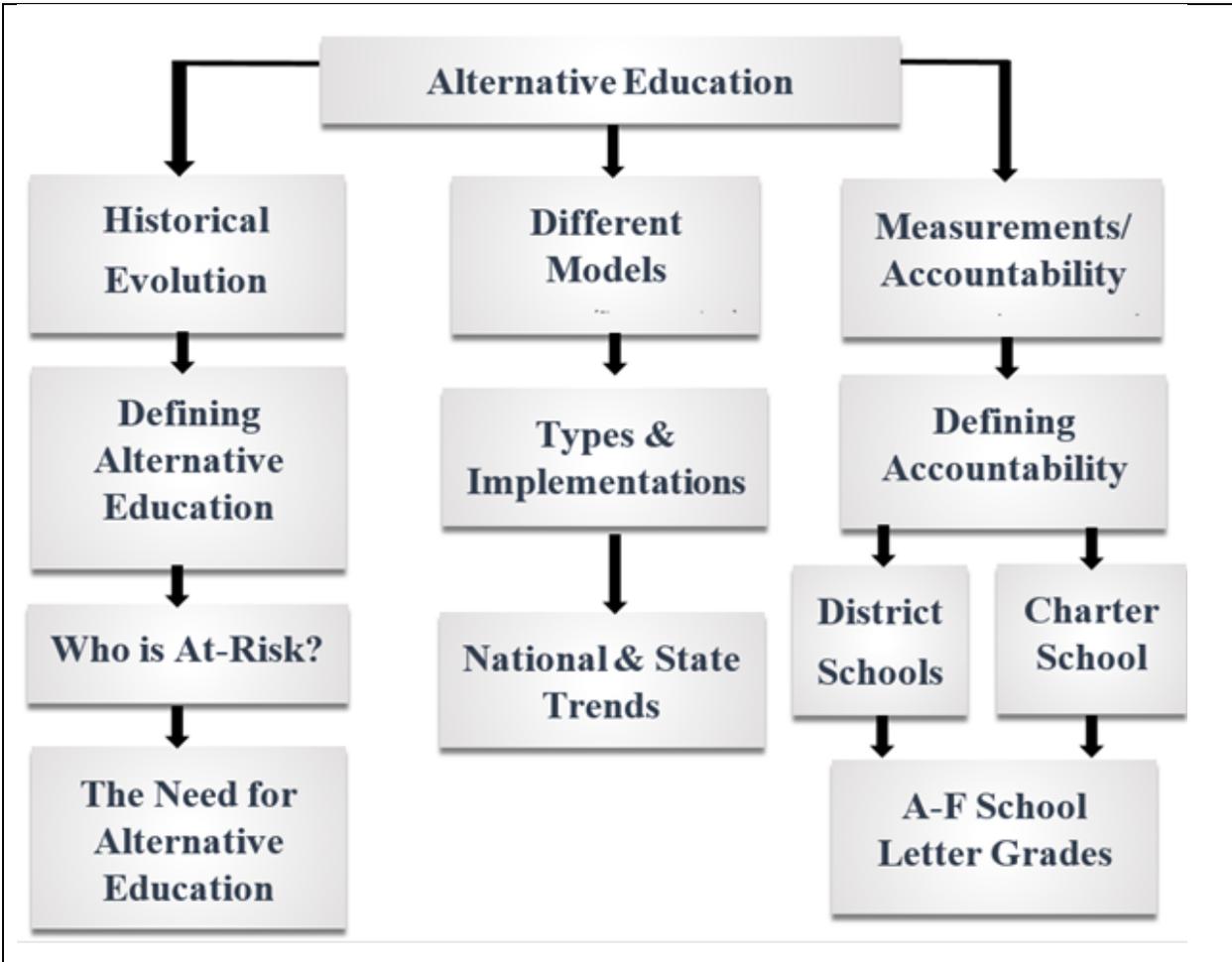
Chapter Two explores the historical background of the Arizona charter school movement, and how political movements inspire a cultural shift in the U.S. to transform bureaucracies to business and citizens into customers (Barzelay, M. Armajani, 1992; Hassel, 1999; F M Hess et al., 2001; Osborne, D & Gaebler, 1992; Osborne & Plastrik, 1997). This chapter will explore how some economic models, born from a *lassie faire* approach to business and governmental oversight stemmed from the 1970s, advocated for in the 1980s, and realized in the 1990s transformed publicly funded education in Arizona (Friedman, 1962; Hartmann, 2010; Reagan, 1981).

This chapter explores what alternative education is, and the growing societal need for alternative education schools/programs. Specifically, this chapter explores how alternative

education is tailored to serve ‘at-risk’ youth and how reformers have sought to broaden what ‘at-risk’ means in the context of education, and the different models practiced in alternative education. 43.3% of Arizona’s charter schools focus on serving ‘at-risk’ students, while 9.2% market to gifted, or high performing students, demonstrating that Arizona not only leads the nation in licensed charter schools, but also leads in the amount of alternative education charter schools in operation (Greene et al., 2003; Milliman et al., 2017). As Arizona has continued to embrace market-place solutions to perceived inefficiencies of public education, so too has the way accountability been defined and applied to all schooling options. This chapter explores how accountability has been defined, prioritized, and communicated to all stakeholders in their respective communities.

Finally, this chapter evaluates the various criticisms of alternative education programs and schools, specifically addressing concerns regarding accountability transference, SPED service accommodations, and how standards have been repositioned regarding administrative practices and student discipline. Given the increasing market growth in alternative education offerings in an increasingly competitive educational market in Arizona, it becomes essential and advantageous to contribute to the academic understanding and analysis of this sensitive segment of our community, which aims to serve the most at-risk and vulnerable. Figure 1 below illustrates visually the manner in which the topics in this Chapter are explored and how each subsection relates to one another.

Figure 1
Literature Map



Source: Figure 1 developed by the author and aligned with the literature review

Historical Background

"In this present crisis, government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem" (Reagan, 1981). Borne from this mantra was a political movement, an effort to reinvent government. This represented a transition from bureaucracy to business, as well as an effort to foster the individual's conversion from citizen to customer (Armajani, Barzelay, M, 1992; Hassel, 1999; Hess et al., 2001; Osborne, D. & Gaebler, 1992;

Osborne & Plastrik, 1997) As researchers Hess, Maranto, and Milliman (2001) note, “This premise has been particularly evident in choice-based efforts to reform education, as policymakers have devoted increasing attention to the idea that markets will improve school effectiveness and responsiveness” (Hassel, 1999, p. 388).

This notion of a market-based approach was brought to the mainstream by prominent American economist, Milton Friedman. Friedman garnered significant prestige and notoriety for his revolutionary ideas on how to transform public institutions, as affirmed in 1976 when the Nobel Prize Committee awarded him a Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences for his research on consumption analysis, monetary history and theory (The Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel, 1976). Transferring Friedman’s economic modeling of consumer-driven decision making to public institutions, researchers Hess et al. (2001) note that school-choice free-market advocates promote an ideology that suggest:

...under a system of school choice parents will collect useful data and use that information to select the appropriate school for their child. Those schools that gain students are expected to flourish, while those that lose students will close. (p. 390)

This systemic modernization of political discourse that stemmed from the Reagan Revolution into the American psyche facilitated an environment that, in the 1990s, led to several states adopting legislation that put into place the idea of publicly funded, privately operated, charter schools (King, 2007). Embracing market principles, as advocated by Friedman, Greenspan, and other Chicago School of Economics graduates, visionaries for this new form of educational infrastructure, envisioned opening schools that could operate free from the constraints of bureaucratic waste and unresponsiveness (Hartmann, 2010; King, 2007). Pioneering advocates for this movement such as Shanker, Kolderie, Reichgott, Junge, and Kelso believed that charter schools, operated financially and legally independent of public school districts, would face fewer

startup costs, barriers, and would incentivize educational modernization across the spectrum (Mulholland, 1996).

Notable arguments of the proponents of this new market-based school choice model included, as researcher King (2007) noted, a claim that:

There would be no limit on the number of schools that could be formed or the types of organizations that could form them. Organizers would also have more than one option available for gaining approval of a charter, and an appeals process would allow recourse if a charter was denied. (p. 731)

In infancy, the charter school movement was seen as still abiding by public institutional restraints as set forth by statute, court precedents, and policy. For instance, as King (2007) writes, “[these schools] ... would not charge tuition, have a religious affiliation, or any selective student admissions” (p. 731). As the Charter school movement gained popularity as an alternative to what was being framed as ‘failure of traditional public schools’, charter schools began to cultivate sentiment into distinct ideologies. According to researcher Garn (1999), there are three distinct ideologies that have manifested in the public psyche and that has contributed to the charter school movement (King, 2007, p. 734).

- 1) The current bureaucratic system of public education stifles educational improvement and innovation and therefore promotes the use of fewer rules and regulations. (p. 734)
- 2) Charter schools use market mechanisms in public education whereby schools must compete for students in order to stay in business. (p. 734)
- 3) Increasing teacher professionalism is the key for improving public education. In this case, the solution would be to give teachers more power to implement decisions that affect student learning in the classroom. (p. 734)

Arizona has the nation's most competitive local educational institutional offerings, largely due to expansive charter school laws (Hess et al. 2001). The Arizona system allows for two state-level boards to issue a total of 50 charters annually and allows a single charter holder to open multiple campuses (Hess et al., 2001). According to researcher King (2007), the Arizona State Legislature's intention was to address two of the three above mentioned ideologies. 1) To create an educational environment that reduced the bureaucracy contained within the public-school system", and 2) [Inject] ...market mechanisms, which according to the policy, allowed for greater accountability. Addressing the second portion of King's claim, it becomes essential to understand how Arizona's 'accountability' is assessed and monitored. According to researchers Chingos and West (2015), Arizona charter school laws are unique, in that they allow for charter schools to operate for fifteen years before being subject to review.

An extensive review of the existing data on whether or not market forces (as represented here by the introduction of charter schools into the educational sphere), actually induce significant responses from district schools indicates that the results have been mixed. While researchers like Borland and Howsend (1992), Dee (1998), and Hoxby (2000) surmise that the existing evidence supports the claim that public school systems will improve their performance and their appeal when market forces are introduced, others claim the results are more uncertain. Others have found that only a minority of public school districts yield positive or constructive responses (Armor & Peiser, 1998; Rofes, 1998; Schneider, Teske, Clark, & Buckley, 2000). Adding to the inconsistency for reported research data collection, others still claim that there is no evidence that supports the assertion that the introduction of charter school competition will increase responses from the surrounding district schools (Hassel, 1999; Hess et al., 2001; K. B. Smith & Meier, 1995; Wells & et al, 1998). From 1994-2006 reached a similar conclusion. In that

analysis, charter schools had no influence on virtually all district input variables, (teachers, salaries, class size, instruction funding) (Milliman et al., 2017).

This *laissez faire* approach has yielded mixed results in practice. As researchers Hess et al. (2001) explained, “[the] research suggests that [public]schools are more likely to follow preexisting practice than to radically alter their routines when pressed to change” (Bryk et al. 1998; Tyack & Cuban, 1995) (As cited in Hess et al., 2001 p. 391). A significant aspect of free-market theory is the principle of money serving as a motivator (Smith, 2003). It is important to note that Arizona state subsidies for education follow student enrollment (Hess et al., 2001, p. 390). Arizona District schools should therefore have a strong incentive to worry about decreased student enrollment as students elect to attend charter schools, as this has a direct negative impact on monies allocated to those districts.

Although the idea that the charter school movement has had an impact on district schools is not unique, the financial motivation is not a universal contention across states. As researchers Hess et al. (2001) writes, “school choice schemes in many other states include ‘hold harmless’ provisions that protect district schools from budgetary losses owing to enrollment losses from competition (Rofes, 1998; Schneider et al., 2000)” (as cited in Hess et al., 2001, p. 390). If one accepts that economic incentives of money acting as a motivator to participate in the charter school movement, then it becomes important to scrutinize what types of charter schools are being licensed in the state of Arizona.

As of 2019, The Arizona Department of Education lists 627 licensed charter schools operating in the state of Arizona (Arizona Department of Education, 2019b). Figure 2 shows the breakdown for how those charter schools are licensed by type, grade-span, and percentile ranking with consideration for traditional (comprehensive) and alternative identification.

Figure 2

Charter Schools by License Type, Grade-Span, and Percentile Ranking with Consideration for Traditional (Comprehensive) vs. Alternative Identification

2019 Charter School Licensing by Grade-Span				
Type of School	Grade-Span	Quantity	Percentage of Total	
Primary	K-8	322	51.36%	
Secondary	9-12	166	26.48%	
Hybrid	K-12	139	22.17%	
Total		627	100%	
2019 Charter School Licensing by Type/ Traditional				
Type of School	Grade-Span	Quantity	Percentage of Traditional	Percentage of Total
Primary	K-8	300	59.88%	47.85%
Secondary	9-12	75	14.97%	11.96%
Hybrid	K-12	126	25.15%	20.10%
Total		501	100%	79.91%
2019 Charter School Licensing by Type/ Alternative				
Type of School	Grade-Span	Quantity	Percentage of Alternative	Percentage of Total
Primary	K-8	22	17.46%	3.50%
Secondary	9-12	91	72.22%	14.58%
Hybrid	K-12	13	10.32%	2.07%
Total		126	100%	20.15%
2019 Charter School Licensing by Type/ Traditional vs. Alternative				
Type of School	Percentage That Are Traditional		Percentage That Are Alternative	
Primary	93.17%		6.83%	
Secondary	45.18%		54.82%	
Hybrid	90.65%		9.35%	
2019 Alternative Education Student Enrollment				
Description		Quantity	Percentile	
Students enrolled Statewide		1,129,530	100%	
Students enrolled in an Alternative school		34,085	3.02%	
All Alternative Schools				
Students enrolled in an Alternative School: Elementary		2,228	6.54%	
Students enrolled in an Alternative School: Secondary		31,857	93.46%	
Secondary Alternative Schools By Type				
Students enrolled in a Secondary Alternative Charter School		27,158	85.25%	
Students enrolled in a Secondary Alternative District School		4,699	14.75%	
Note: 1) For FY2019 there were only 31 reported District Secondary Alternative Schools. 2.) Alternative Education Student Enrollment combines Secondary and Hybrid campuses together as these schools report their data to the Arizona Department of Education for the A-F Letter Grade Accountability. Primary schools are still excluded from self-reporting.				
Sources: Arizona Department of Education Research and Accountability: FY2019 Total Student Enrollment & Arizona Department of Education Research and Accountability: FY2019 List of Approved Alternative Schools				

The Need for Alternative Education

American economist Victor R. Fuchs (2011) famously articulated a model of economic emphasis and practice that he called, the “service economy.” From this, Fuchs believed that the global economy had been undergoing a transformation in the years following WWII, whereby conversions from predominantly manufacturing-based economic jobs were being structurally changed to an informational dominant service-based workforce (Fuchs, 2011). The evolution from a manufacturing accentuated workforce, to a service-based one, represents a reliance on a knowledge-based labor force, where education then becomes integral to one’s life opportunities. (Brown, Lauder, & Ashton, 2011). As researcher Etherington (2012) suggest, “Individuals must maintain and often increase the market value of their knowledge, skills, and credentials if they wish to obtain jobs that offer good a standard of living” (p. 2). Education therefore is the investment made by individuals to achieve success. As researchers Lucey and Reay (2002) point out: “The notion of ‘investment’ is inherently attached to middle-class values and beliefs, as an orientation toward working-class values and beliefs is not ‘relevant to education’” (p. 327). When individuals achieve success in today’s modern society, it is regarded as a result of their ability to make the right choices. “Those individuals who do not succeed are deemed to have failed to strategically make use of the opportunities presented under modernity (Beck, 2004; Giddens, 1993)” (As cited in Etherington, 2012, p. 2). The U.S., under the guise of embracing an economic transition to a service-based economy, has placed a premium on an individualized sense of responsibility for educational successes, and, as researcher Etherington (2012) writes, “... demands individuals take advantage of educational expansion to secure a prosperous future” (p. 2).

Scholars have argued that asserting that educational investment is an extension of an individualized calculation of a strategic risk-taking exercise overlooks that many individuals cannot so easily remove themselves from antagonistic situations (Etherington, 2012). Bourdieu (1979) furthered the defining qualities of ‘situations’ by more broadly speaking of “habitus”, in which he defines as, “system of durable, transposable dispositions which functions as the generative basis of structured, objectively unified practices” (Bourdieu, 1979, p. vii). Expanding on the considerations articulated by Bourdieu, that an individual internalizes from their external familiarities, researcher Etherington (2012) stated:

This means that an individual’s social location provides him or her with certain dispositions toward the world. Individuals internalize the culture of the group to which they belong, and this acts as a basis for all subsequent behavior in addition to shaping one’s identity. (p. 2)

A student’s educational attainment typically replicates that of the sphere in which the student exists, and serves as an important predictor of educational success (Lambert, Zeman, Allen, & Bussiere, 2004). Researcher Etherington (2012) notes, “working-class students are at a higher risk of dropping out from high school and not attending university or college” (p. 9). Accepting the advocated free-market principles, “This can have tremendous implications in terms of earning potential and risk of unemployment given the demands of today’s job market.” (Etherington, 2012, p. 1).

Unintentional as they may be to our collective consciousness, barriers such as the “Hidden Curriculum” found within the educational realm, social-class limitations of opportunity, and the different alignment of parent/teacher involvement, as it relates to confidence, all contribute to how class distinctions are shaped and reshaped in modern society (Anyon, 2017).

The idea of the “Hidden Curriculum” can best be examined by relating it to a familiar colloquial idea regarding racism, “[That is the effect of]...subtle racism of lowered expectations”(Logue, 2017, p. 213). The idea that an “expectation” is communicated to the lower-classes in education help solidify the economic role expectations for that segment is real. (Anyon, 2017). Students who attend schools serving low socioeconomic populations see an emphasis on rote memorization, non-inquiry based learning, and more “factory model” styles of learning (Anyon, 2017). As researcher Evans (2017), articulates, “This is particularly evident in the school system, where working-class culture remains largely absent” (p. 344). While the highly rigid sense of individualized ownership over one’s education and opportunities is still a largely modern fundamental, it follows that low socio-economic student’s experience, “...an ever-present sense of institutional restraint” (Lareau, 2003, p. 213).

Student success is largely exacerbated by their socio-economic status (Etherington, 2012). As seen through the lens of individualism, providing students who do not entirely fit the mold of middle-class expectations becomes the antithesis to a market-based model of educational service. As researcher Etherington (2012), concluded: “Limited access to resources ultimately inhibits the development of socially valued skills, and working-class families are often held responsible by policy-makers and schools alike” (p. 3).

As researchers Schramm-Pate, Jeffries, and D’Amico (2006) conclude, the assessing of a student’s performance in a comprehensive school setting is then largely based on “...‘middle-class cultural values’ and the ‘backgrounds, values, standards, linguistic codes, and worldview of middle-class children are often more alike to those of teachers” (p. 49). When students, who stem from low socio-economic, or working-class backgrounds, attend middle-class comprehensive schools, they can potentially be condemned as rebuking the notion of hard work (Etherington,

2012). In this way, the school system can exclude students and families, concluding that they do not possess the attributes that teachers and administrators expect, making it difficult for those alienated to participate in a traditional sense (Gillies, 2008; Lareau, 2003).

When researching student success, and how the needs of lower socio-economic families can be more appropriately served, researchers Chappell, O’Conner, Withington, and Stegelin (2015), have concluded that:

Because Family Engagement emerged as the most significant factor and families have an indelible impact on both the performance and the behavior of their children, districts should examine current practices related to family engagement. (p. 14)

Expanding on this, researchers Chappell et al, (2015), suggest that schools should implement systems to identify students whose internal academic struggles are manifested by external modalities by suggesting that, “[An] early warning system will include specified early warning indicators on attendance, suspensions, course failure[s],...and low scores on statewide...assessments” (p. 15). Beyond just establishing early warning systems, Chappell et al., also advocate that educational ‘treatment centers’ (i.e., alternative education schools/programs) do the following:

- 1) Define treatment as a planned, individualized program of educational, medical, psychological, or rehabilitative procedures, experiences, and activities.” (p. 16)
- 2) Develop attendance policies with the intent to change behavior, not to punish. (p. 16)
- 3) Reconsider the use of zero-tolerance policies such as suspensions for truancy and instead consider less severe consequences. (p. 16)

What is Alternative Education?

Alternative education programs have increasingly become more widespread. It is worth examining why such programs have gained notoriety and have become an increasingly popular option for students and parents. Alternative education programs represent educational reform that is tailored to serve at-risk students (Carver & Lewis, 2010). Aside from risk of academic failure, at-risk students are also associated with an increase in a student's engagement with the justice system (Fine et al., 2018). "The school-to-prison pipeline is a well-documented phenomenon in which an adolescent's negative school experiences contribute to delinquency risk (Curtis, 2013; Kim et al., 2010; Skiba et al. 2011). As students increase their contact with the justice system, they see a significant reduction in the odds of completing high school or enrolling in a post-secondary institution (Bernburg & Krohn, 2003; Hjalmarsson, 2008; Kirk & Sampson, 2010; Sweeten, 2006).

Alternative education Programs are seen, in part, as a means to keep youth engaged in school and to increase their academic success (Cox, 1999; Tobin & Sprague, 2000). As researchers Fine et al. (2018) note: "Youthful offenders may be enrolled into alternative schools, which are designed for youth who have difficulty conforming to the expectations of traditional schools" (p. 1327). Customarily, public alternative education programs are positioned as temporary, or credit recovery type institutions whereby students are only assigned to them for a prescribed amount of time, or until that student "catches up" to their graduating cohort, and then are transitioned back to a comprehensive campus, whereas charter school alternative education programs are often advertised as a permanent placement option. Research has indicated that school instability, or transitioning between schools, is often associated with poorer school

performance for students (Fine et al., 2018; Grigg, 2012; Kleiner, Porch, Farris, & Greene, 2002; South, Haynie, & Bose, 2007; Vanderhaar, Munoz, & Petrosoko, 2014).

Researchers, in general, agree that students who are enrolled into alternative school programs fare better than their peers who drop-out (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2003; Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2005; Morrison et al., 2001). Researchers Cox, Davidson, and Bynum (1995), upon completing a meta-analysis, suggest that alternative education programs have a positive effect on school and academic performance. Further research sought to identify why this phenomena occurred, and according to researchers Fine et al. (2018):

When youth in alternative schools feel that their teachers are fair, flexible, caring, and respectful, they engage in fewer antisocial behaviors and report educational expectations similar to youth in traditional schools (Quinn, Poirier, Faller, Gable, & Toelson, 2006).

(As cited in Fine et al., 2018, pp. 1,327–1,328)

When also taking into consideration students who were in contact with the justice system i.e., at-risk, further analysis indicated that students enrolled with continued-enrollment in comprehensive schools generally reported more negative academic outcomes. Negative examples would be more school-misconduct, cheating more on homework, cheating more on tests, skipping class or school more often, and receiving worse grades (Fine et al., 2018).

Overall, the research indicates that youth that attend alternative education schools generally fare better academically than if they were still contained in comprehensive school settings (Fine et al., 2018, p. 1340). This assertion is further supported by previous research and findings that demonstrates that students who enroll in alternative schools often see overall positive effects on school performance (Cox, 1999; Cox et al., 1995; Kemple & Snipes, 2000). Coupling these findings to work in conjunction with the previous research linking school

performance to justice-system involved youth, Fine et al. (2018), found that: “Enrollment in alternative schools may be advantageous for justice-system-involved youth if are judging based solely on these metrics of academic performance” (p. 1,340).

The overall research also indicates that transitioning students between Alternative school institutions and Comprehensive schools may actually be more negatively impactful then keeping them consistently enrolled in an alternative education program (Fine et al., 2018).

Dropout Rates/ Trends

From 1900 to 1970, the graduation rate of teenagers rose from a mere 6% to 80%, with the latter half of the twentieth century demonstrating that the dropout rate stagnated; however, the evidence shows that between 2000 and 2010, the rates suddenly and substantially increased again (Murnane, 2013). As researcher Murnane (2013) notes, “...High school graduation rates are likely to be especially low in states experiencing significant in-migration of students” (p. 378). Multiple variables must be taken into consideration when assessing the validity of statistical dropout rates. As Murnane (2013), one such variable observed:

The Achilles heel in developing accurate estimates of high school graduation rates from state longitudinal databases is the classification of students who disappear from one public high school and do not enroll in another public high school in the same state.

States must rely on reports from high schools to classify these students. In the absence of expensive monitoring, schools have strong incentives to classify students who leave prior to graduation as ‘transfers’. (p. 379)

Another significant variable, and contested practice, is whether or not to count GED recipients as graduates for reporting purposes (Murnane, 2013). Originally, the GED, or General

Education Diploma, was introduced in 1942 as a means of providing secondary school credentials to WWII enlistees who enlisted before completing high school (Murnane, 2013). In 1947, states started to allow school dropouts who were not veterans, the option of completing a GED program (Heckman et al., 2011). By 1974, all states had adopted this practice (Murnane, 2013).

Whether to count GED recipients as high school graduates has been controversial for a variety of reasons. According to researcher Murnane (2013),

- 1) [The] average labor market outcomes for GED recipients are much closer to those of dropouts without this credential than those of conventional high school graduates (p. 380).
- 2) The number of GED recipients increased rapidly during the 1990s. In 2011, 433,990 Americans passed the GED examinations, a figure equal to 12 percent of all high school credentials issued that year (p. 380).
- 3) [S.E.S.] youth are particularly likely to earn the GED credential instead of a conventional high school diploma (p. 380).

Researchers Chapman et al. (2011), correctly point out that computational analysis of dropout rates is skewed when GED participation is factored in. For instance:

The NCES [National Center for Education Statistics] counts GED recipients as high school completers in its estimates of the status completion rate. It does not include GED recipients as high school graduates in its estimates of the averaged freshman graduation rate for public school students. This is one reason that estimates of the status completion rate (89.8 percent for those aged 18 to 24 in 2009) are considerably higher than estimate of the AFGR [Average Freshman Graduation Rate] (75.5 percent for the 2008-09 school year) (p. 381)

From a market-based perspective, advocates and economists, using a rigid individualist framework, typically focus on the factors that motivate a student's choice to dropout: The cost and benefits weighed equally in deciding to remain in school or not (Murnane, 2013). If the choices students are confronted with is examined from a psychological perspective, researchers advocate for alternative considerations, notably the attraction of risk-taking during the early teenage years (Steinberg, 2010). Researchers contend that for many youth, the decision to drop-out of school is a process rather than an explicit decision (Alexander, Entwisle, & Horsey, 1997; Lyche, 2010; Rumberger, 2011). Researchers have articulated how the process starts for most teenagers: irregular attendance to the realization that the obstacles to graduation are overwhelming (Alexander et al., 1997; Lyche, 2010; Rumberger, 2011).

There has been a plethora of literature that aims to seek commonalities of the backgrounds of students who tend to drop-out of school, and as researcher Murnane (2013) analysis concluded, the correlations are consistent with previous considerations regarding non-academic factors associated with at-risk students:

- Low family income,
- Low educational levels of parents,
- Living in a single-parent household,
- Minority group status, and gender.

The free-market advocates as well as educational reform advocates agree on the significance of offering these students an alternative education option for completing high school, as opposed to receiving a GED or dropping out entirely. As researcher Oreopoulos (2009) concluded, when a student who completes an additional year of schooling, this "...lowers the probability of subsequent unemployment by 2.2 percentage points and increases weekly

earning by up to 10.8 percent...” (p. 394). Alternative education programs are a considerably positive option for students as opposed to pursuing a GED. Research has shown overwhelmingly that GED recipients do not fare as well in the labor market as compared to high school graduates. (Cameron & Heckman, 1993; Heckman & LaFontaine, 2006; Murnane, Willett, & Tyler, 2000). This is largely due to what researchers Heckman and Rubinstein (2001) refer to “mixed signal” to employers. Murnane (2013) further describes the “mixed signal” affect:

[A GED indicates] to potential employers that the recipient has mastered basic cognitive skills but is unlikely to have the socioemotional skills that result in the regular attendance and punctuality that employer’s value. (p. 406)

Sponsoring alternative education programs as alternatives to dropping out or receiving a GED is not only beneficial for the students, but also the communities in which they live (Genao, 2014b). Observed by researcher Nield and Balfanze (2006):

[communities] ...with high dropout rates have ‘fewer economic development opportunities, acquire less tax revenue, and experience high social service costs, more crime, less civic participation, and higher levels of concentrated and inter-generational poverty. (p. 3)

High school drop-outs are statistically higher recipients of taxpayer funded welfare programs and public health services, and typically have a higher crime and incarceration rate than those who graduate from high school (Genao, 2014). Overall, researchers Levin, Belfield, Muennig, and Rouse (2007) estimate that over the course of a student’s lifetime, each high school drop-out costs the taxpayer about \$209,000 in associated expenses. What has been a consistent reprieve to these trends, according to researchers Dianda (2008) & Genao (2014), is the introduction and sustainment of alternative education programs. “[These] programs have been proven to help

decrease the dropout rate, reverse the student failure rate, and stem the onset of student disengagement” (p. 433).

Different Models

Various models have been prescribed to address the growing need for alternative education for at-risk students. Most alternative schools or programs can be categorized into three different types of environments, each with unique criteria and regimental policies to address the needs of the community.

- Type I alternative schools/programs, or “restructured schools”, virtually always reflect administrative departures from traditional novelties (Hawley, 1991). Researcher Raywid (1994), describes these schools as they, “seek to make school challenging and fulfilling for all involved” (p. 27).
- Type II alternative schools/programs are usually assigned to by a higher authority, and are seen as “last chance” schools prior to expulsion. Researcher Raywid (1994), describes these schools as “soft jails,” and they have nothing to do with options or choice (p. 27).
- Type III alternative schools/programs are for students who are seen as needing remediation, or help with social/emotion needs, or both. Researcher Raywid (1994), notes, “The assumption is that after successful treatment students can return to mainstream programs.” (p. 27)

Most alternative schools or programs can assign the majority of their actions of one of these three options. Research indicates that Type II programs yield the fewest positive benefits for enrolled students (Raywid, 1994). In a study conducted in Florida, analyzing 58,000 compulsory assignments to Type II schools, revealed virtually no difference in student drop-out rates, referral rates, suspensions, or school expulsions (Office of Planning and Budgeting, 1981).

As researcher Raywid (1994) states, “Type II programs contributed nothing toward resolving the problems they were launched to solve” (p. 28).

Research suggest that Type III alternative schools/programs show improvements in student behavior, successfully completed courses, and attendance (Gold & Mann, 1984).

According to researchers McCann and Landi (1986), Frazer and Baenen (1986), and Raywid (1994), Type II schools/programs have two major disadvantages:

- 1) They are costly, because they usually represent low student-teacher ratios; and they are often only temporarily successful
- 2) When students return to their regular schools, the problems of disruptive behavior, truancy, or a lack of effort recur

Type I alternative schools/programs are notably different than both Type II and Type III. As researcher Raywid (1982) notes, Type I schools are typically less costly for operators or districts because they usually operate with the same student-adult ratio as comprehensive schools. Raywid’s subsequent research on this matter further supports Type I schools and programs by writing:

[Their] successes are both more pronounced and more long lasting. Students who had never engaged with school, or rarely succeeded at it, are sometimes transformed as to attitude, behavior, and accomplishment. (p. 28)

Also noteworthy about Type I schools is the focus they place on instructional modes practiced in the classroom, particularly on ways to provide experimental learning (Gregory & Mann, 1987; Williams, 1993).

All three of the above-mentioned models have been communal responses to the growing need to provide students, particularly at-risk students with a successful model of learning and

school completion. Regardless of the type selected above, the research on alternative education has also brought into question; what accounts for the success of Alternative schools? According to researchers Wehlage et al. (1989), there are two major factors that account for that success.

- 1) These schools generate and sustain community within them, unique to the needs and reflective of the student body in which they serve.
- 2) They make learning engaging, often with classroom curriculum and instructional practices that relate the materials in a manner more closely relatable to at-risk students.

Researcher Raywid (1994) also provided for what he called a ‘third factor’, “...they provide the school organization and structure need to sustain the first two.” (p. 30). By this, alternative education programs/schools succeed when they become places that students want to be affiliated with (Bryk & Driscoll, 1988; Wehlage et al., 1989). Membership, as researcher Raywid (1994) writes, “...is what makes students speak of alternative schools as caring places and liken their school to family” (p. 30).

Measurements and Accountability

A significant foundation of the charter school movement is premised on stripping away as what it sees as, bureaucratic, inefficient, and unresponsive public district school management and moving to institutions who can be more responsive to the public’s will (Ford & Ihrke, 2017). As researchers Ford and Ihrke (2017) write, “The rationale for this accountability shift is the premise on increased performance” (p. 281). A national comprehensive analysis of the aggregate data provided by charter schools shows very little evidence that charter school enrollment leads to higher levels of academic achievement for students (Clark, Gleason, Tuttle, & Silverberg, 2015; Ford & Ihrke, 2017; Miron & Nelson, 2002; Ravitch, 2010, 2013; Witte, Wolf, Carlson, & Dean, 2012). Researchers Chingos and West (2015) have also concluded that Arizona charter

schools report wide variations in the academic performance of students, a finding that is consistent with Ford and Ihrke.

Another consideration regarding accountability is who are schools and/or districts accountable to. For instance, district schools are accountable to the community via a democratically-elected school-board (Berry & Howell, 2005). Charter schools operating in Arizona are held accountable for student academic performance via a contract with an authorizing entity (Ford & Ihrke, 2017; Gawlik, 2012). Free-market advocates contend that this model of accountability leads to efficiency because failing schools can be closed more easily, therefore, motivating charter operators to increase performance or be shutdown (Ford & Ihrke, 2017; Ravitch, 2013). Opponents of the charter-school movement argue that:

Charter schools reduce accountability by expending significant amounts of public funds on schools outside the jurisdiction of a democratically-elected governing board, by accepting a disproportionately low number of high-cost high-need students, and by leading to social consequences when schools are closed. (Ford & Ihrke, 2017; Ravitch, 2013)

Charter schools' private accountability systems are part of what Milward and Provan (2003) called "The hollow state", i.e., the part of the public sector that sits outside of the direct control of government officials (Milward, 1996). As such, accurately holding charter school operators accountable for performance in the hollow state is difficult (D. G. Frederickson & Frederickson, 2006; Milward & Provan, 2000; Terry, 2005). While Arizona government does maintain some control over who can enter into charter management contracts with charter school operators, the day-to-day operations are beyond the reach of governmental organizations (Ford & Ihrke, 2017, pp. 282–283). As researcher Dennis Young (2002) suggests:

In the simplest terms, private organizations are accountable for making money, public organizations are accountable to the citizens for carrying out the public's will, and nonprofit organizations are accountable to their missions.” (As cited in Ford & Ihrke, 2017, p. 283)

Scholars have taken up the issue of accountability; what accountability truly entails from a macro perspective (Ford & Ihrke, 2017). For example, *Kettl* (2005, 2015), describes public-sector accountability as the process of determining to whom an organization is accountable, and for what. Kettl created a framework that allows accountability approaches to vary depending on the organization and the location of said organization. Ford and Ihrke (2017) illustrate Kettl's approach by providing as an illustration:

For example, a school board in one district may view themselves as accountable to taxpayers, while those in another district may view themselves as accountable to parents. In both instances, a school board could be viewed as successfully executing their accountability function, even though the audiences to which they are accountable differ. (p. 284)

Scholars Frederickson et al. (2012) surmised that accountability is a fully external function, and in analyzing the relationship between bureaucratic agencies and political actors, contends that true accountability of an agency or organization is one that does what the state legislature asks of it. Under this type of framework, organizational accountability may be ambivalent in how in they view accountability (Ford & Ihrke, 2017). Dubnick and Frederickson (2011) also explored what they called, “collective obsession with accountability” (xiii), concluding that there exists a cultural “accountability movement” that seeks to broaden what accountability should look like. From the context of school-choice, researcher Yang's (2012),

generalizable view of accountability, is that accountability refers to something community stakeholders want out of their governmental services , but that accountability means different things to different audiences.

If accountability is to be relevant at the school level, the motivations of the school(s), and more importantly, how accountability is to be define, must be considered (Ford & Ihrke, 2017; Mintrop & Trujillo, 2007). According to research conducted by Ford and Ihrke (2017), when researching how governing bodies define accountability they found that:

- 63.4 percent of charter school board members define accountability as high-stakes, while a sizable percentage, 30.5 percent, define accountability as staff/systems. (p. 287)
- 43.2 percent of District school board members define accountability as high-stakes, while 43.9 percent define accountability as staff/systems. (p. 287)

The research indicates that when the majority of district schools governing-boards agree that accountability is measured as performance on high-stakes assessments, those bodies did see an increase in high-stakes test scores (Ford & Ihrke, 2017, p. 291). This is of particular significance, considering the findings of researchers Clark et al. (2015) on the aggregate achievement gains for students enrolled in charter schools, specifically the absence of gains resulting from macro-governance reforms.

Viewing accountability through the prism of alternative education also creates additional considerations. Title I Part A(4)(v)(c) of the Template for the Consolidated State Plan, issued in 2017 by the U.S. Department of Education grants states with latitude as to how they can indicate different methodologies to determine meaningful differentiation of “success” for alternative schools achievement (Deeds & DePaoli, 2018). Under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), states can elect to have a ‘single accountability systems’ for reporting achievement to the public.

States can also elect to have separate systems of differentiating alternative schools outside of the ESSA state plan. Arizona’s system of accountability for alternative schools places priority on student growth on high-stakes assessments rather than just proficiency outcomes since alternative settings often service students who are already behind proficiency targets (Deeds & DePaoli, 2018). States, like Arizona, that utilize different metrics to measure the success of alternative education are cognizant of the limitations of relying too heavily on proficiency rates unfairly target schools for state intervention, even though they are making strides in their progress of helping students succeed while simultaneously ignoring or failing to identify schools where learning may be stagnant (Deeds & DePaoli, 2018).

Other means of meeting ESSA requirements of reporting and accountability for alternative education also include using an extended-year graduation rates within the graduation rate indicator. Alternative schools are still recognized as being “performing school’s,” with a focused on, “...getting students across the finish line, however and whenever that may happen” (Deeds & DePaoli, 2018). According to an analysis of the Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rates (ACGR)- which calculates the percentage of high school freshman who graduate with their respective assigned cohort, (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019), in the 2015-2016 school year, 22.6% of overall students in Arizona did not graduate ‘on-time’. When students identified as being low-income students who are known to have a higher probability of attending alternative education school, that rate increases to 26.9% (Chen & Kaufman, 1997; National Center for Education Statistics, 2019; Quinnan, 1997).

Another important concept for states to take into consideration when “measuring success in alternative setting,” is the use of weights in the reporting system (Deeds & DePaoli, 2018). For instance, the Arizona College and Career Readiness (re: SQSS) weighted category is worth

much more in the accountability framework for alternative schools than for the comprehensive schools; as researchers Deeds and DePaoli (2018) note:

Although the Alternative accountability framework is not used to identify schools under ESSA, Arizona has nevertheless recognized that the “non-academic” measures are especially important in assessing the quality of alternative schools.

The use of weights also has implications for alternative settings in how they measure comprehensive support and improvement in two ways:

- 1) How states outline their accountability system in their ESSA state plans must identify no less than the lowest-performing (5%) of schools receiving Title I funds, and
- 2) States must also identify all high school students who do not graduate one-third of more of their students.

If both of these measures are weighted more heavily than growth measures, alternative schools will likely be disproportionately identified as failing schools (Deeds & DePaoli, 2018).

Part of the larger framework of this study is examining the effects of charter schools and their impact on student achievement. According to researchers Clark et al. (2015), the impact of secondary-education charter schools on achievement nationally were overall negative, when taken in the aggregate, but not statistically significant. Yet, when they isolated the impacts on schools that serve lower-achieving, or more at-risk populations, their affects were large and positive. Looking at the specifics of Arizona charter schools however, researchers Chingos and West (2015) found that performance of charter schools vary widely, more so than that of district schools. Their findings suggest that, on average, charter schools at every grade level are modestly less effective than the district schools when it comes in raising achievement; though these researchers do make a point to notate this this phenomena is likely due to Arizona charter

schools considerable share of campuses designed to serve at-risk students (Chingos & West, 2015).

Alternative Education Campus Cost Considerations

Districts have an important and complicated relationship in regards to allocated funds to support alternative education schools and programs, in both size and dimensions, and an analysis conducted by researchers Gronberg et al. (2017) suggest that charter schools that offer alternative education services enjoy a considerable cost-advantage over comprehensive schools. Research suggests a significant positive relationship between cost and student retention, noting that:

Evaluated at the mean, we find that a five-percentage point increase in the annual student retention rate is associated with a 2.6% increase in the per-pupil cost of education, all other things being equal. (Gronberg et al., 2017, p. 731)

Important to note, researchers Gronberg et al. (2017) also convey that costs are a function of retention rates, but not a function of academic gains. Cost comparison between charter and district schools also includes that, on average, district alternative schools spend twice as much on athletics and extracurricular activities, being mindful to include, “The efficiency advantage of [alternative education charter schools] may disappear if we exclude athletics and extracurricular activities from the analysis.” (p. 734)

Researchers Gronberg et al. (2017) offer three hypothesis to explain the relative cost inefficiency of district alternative schools compared to charter alternative schools:

- 1) Charter schools may be employing a less expensive mix of personal. Charter schools do not face the same teacher certification requirements as do district public schools and charter schools employ, on average, a higher proportion of uncertified teachers (pp. 736–737).

- 2) A wage analysis suggests that teachers in district schools receive systematically higher wage when compared with teachers in charter schools. (pp. 736–737).
- 3) Charter schools sites are generally much newer than the district school site, requiring less maintenance and operations expenditures. (pp. 736–737).

These three considerations are attributable to why charter schools are able to report higher educational achievement outcomes at a lost cost than Districts (Gronberg et al., 2017).

Criticisms

Alternative education programs and schools have gained notoriety, with an estimated half-million students attending an alternative education school/program each year (Fedders et al., 2018). As the growth of alternative educational offerings has accelerated, there has also been an increasing amount of district schools encouraging or mandating transference to alternative education placement (Camilla & Lehr, 2009). Concerns over the potential development of “separate-but-equal” have led to criticisms that, as one historian describes it:

The development of separate public-school systems as constituting ‘two contradictory traditions of American education’: schooling for democratic citizenship and schooling for second-class citizenship (Anderson, 1988). (As cited in Fedders et al., 2018, p. 882)

Many opponents of Alternative education believe that their existence is the antithesis of success for at-risk students, ascribing to the theory, as researcher Derek Black (2012) writes: “The most effective means of assisting low-income students has proven over time to be socioeconomic integration of a school” (p. 425). This approach suggests that a student’s academic achievements are directly correlated to the ambitions of the students who surround them (Black, 2012; Fedders et al., 2018).

Researchers Fedders et al. (2018) suggest that by encouragement of forcing enrollment into alternative education school/programs there exists an implicit aim to blame the student in a manner that creates segregated communities to “like” students with “like backgrounds.” There may be a basis for the claim that comprehensive school administrators and districts using the existence of alternative educational school/ programs as a way to systematically remove undesirable students from their rosters (National Clearing House, 2017). Researchers Fedders et al. (2018) note that in the 2011-2012 school year, over 3.3 million students were suspended at least once, while over 100,000 students were expelled altogether (National Clearing House, 2017). Researcher Derek Black (2015) also found that as the growth of alternative educational services grew over the past twenty years, so too has the increase in referrals to those schools and programs. This increase may not be because of more serious infractions and student misbehavior, but rather, the tendency to schools to expand the range of behaviors that permit the usage or requirement of suspension (Kim et al., 2010). As Derek Black (2015) notes:

[The] data suggest that students are less violent in school now than in the past. Today, schools...report that [relatively] minor misbehaviors, like disruption and disrespect, account for ninety-five percent of suspensions and expulsions (p. 157).

Additional contentious criticisms of alternative education environments is that students with emotional or behavioral disabilities may be unduly pushed into alternative education settings by comprehensive school administrators (Carver & Lewis, 2010).

As accountability directs the actions of district and school leaders to be cognizant of their reported achievement scores, there rests an incentive to transfer academically struggling students to alternative education schools rather than address their learning needs (Fedders et al., 2018; Vogell & Fresques, 2017). Provisions in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) can make it

more difficult for policymakers to hold alternative education schools/programs accountable to their academic progress (Fedders et al., 2018). Since alternative schools who belong to districts may be designed as temporary placements for disciplinary or credit recovery concerns, this full-year provision may result in excluding test-scores of students attending those schools (Fedders et al., 2018). Researchers Mills, Renshaw and Ziplitin (2013) wrote about the temptation, motivated by achievement rankings on high-stakes tests, may use the existence of alternative schools to push-out lower-achieving students writing:

those who might significantly lower school averages on standardized tests-or disrupt the orderly environment supposedly needed for good outcomes on such test- are often hidden from view, encouraged to find a 'more suitable school', or excluded or suspended to the point where they do not bother to come back. (p. 13)

Summary

Alternative education reform has seen a fundamental transition since its birth in the 1970s. Increasingly, these programs and schools are not only viable alternatives to more traditional comprehensive campuses and as an alternative route to graduation, but also as innovative institutions that reinvent educational practices. The immense growth of charter schools, stemming from an increasingly hospitable environment in Arizona, embraced by market-place advocates communicate the growing need for alternative education reform. Accountability is essential in the continued success of any organization, and carefully constructed avenues of embracing that accountability are equally important as Arizona continues to shift this responsibility away from duly-elected governing-boards to privately operated charter school operators.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Chapter Three describes the population and sample of this study along with the research method utilized along with the rationale for the selected research method. Additionally, this chapter explains the nature of the data collected, the method of data collection, and the details regarding how the data will be analyzed. This study is broken down into seven sections which serves to provide a detailed description of this study: (a) Restatement of the Problem, (b) Restatement of the Purpose of the Study, (c) Restatement of the Research Questions, (d) Research Design, (e) Population and Sample, (f) Sources of Information, and finally (g) Data Analysis Procedures.

Restatement of the Problem

As of 2019, many of the at risk students enrolled in an alternative education school in Arizona were enrolled in an alternative education charter school. According to the Arizona Department of Education 27,158 out of the 31,857 students statewide, or 85.25%, were enrolled in one of the 107 operating alternative charter school campuses. Contrast this to the mere 4,699 of students who were enrolled in one of only 43 alternative district schools during the same time-period. Prior to 2019, alternative schools, both district and charter, were exempt from state reporting and being assigned an A-F Letter (Arizona Department of Education Research and Accountability, 2020f). In 2019, the Arizona Department of Education adopted a new Alternative A-F Accountability Reporting Business Rules, creating a significantly different formula and introducing an accountability system from these previously exempted schools. alternative schools first began self-reporting their data to the appropriate state agencies in 2019 and has been subsequently published for public conception in April of 2020 (Arizona Department of Education Research and Accountability, 2020a, 2020b). Although research has

been conducted analyzing school performance between district and charter schools over the previous two-decades, there is a gap in the research, in that previous models did not discerned between alternative district and charter schools and their traditional comprehensive school counterparts.

Restatement of the Purpose of the Study

Assigning schools a letter grade conveys to the public a dedication of welcomed scrutiny and accountability. at-risk students, those who have been historically underserved, have also been enrolled into Arizona schools with the least amount of accountability. By appropriately removing both the district and charter comprehensive schools data from analysis, in conjunction with using the same A-F Letter Grade Accountability Business Rules, this study is to determine whether students enrolled in Secondary (9-12) alternative educational schools, i.e., district schools vs. charter Schools, demonstrate significant differences in achievement as measured by the 2019 A-F Letter Grade Accountability System, as well as to determine whether district and charter schools differ in enrollment characteristics of their student bodies.

Restatement of Research Questions and Hypotheses

RQ1: Is there a statistically significant difference in student proficiency scores in secondary alternative district schools and secondary alternative charter schools using the revised 2019 A-F School Letter Grade Business Rules?

H1₀: There is no statistical difference between district alternative schools and charter alternative schools in student proficiency as outlined by the A-F School Letter Grade Business Rules.

H1_A There is a statistical difference between district alternative schools and charter alternative schools in student proficiency as outlined by the A-F School Letter Grade Business Rules.

RQ2: What are the differences in enrollment characteristics, i.e.- demographics including SPED, between district alternative schools and charter alternative schools?

H2₀: There is no statistical difference district public alternative schools and charter alternative schools in enrollment characteristics.

H2_A There is a statistical difference between district alternative schools and charter alternative schools in enrollment characteristics.

RQ3: Is there a statistically significant difference in student dropout rates between district alternative schools and charter alternative schools?

H3₀: There is no statistical differences in student dropout rates between district alternative schools and charter alternative schools.

H3_A There is a statistical differences in student dropout rates between district alternative schools and charter alternative schools.

Research Design

The purpose of this study is to identify if there is a significant difference between alternative district and alternative charter schools in Arizona relating to proficiency, enrollment characteristics, and graduation rates. Since the data are collected ex post facto and uses numerical scores for comparison, a quantitative research design is necessary. For research questions 1 and 3 an independent samples *t*-test was selected due to using two independent samples in which each embodies the same normally distributed populations with similar characteristics and unknown variances (Rochon, Gondan, & KieserMeinard, 2012). Research question 2 utilizes descriptive statistics since the essential aspect of analysis is to measure the central tendency and dispersion of known units of analysis (Fisher & Marshall, 2009).

Population and Sample

This study takes place in Arizona using data provided to the Arizona Department of Education's Accountability and Research department. For research question 1, data were disaggregated from the 2019 Final School Letter after Appeals Report and was used to compare district and charter Schools using the same weighting and metrics. Although there were 164 registered alternative schools in Arizona in fiscal year 2019, this study only analyzes 128 of them due to a lack of self-reported data being submitted from 36 of those institutions. Excluded from this research are thirteen district secondary alternative schools and ten charter alternative schools as well as thirteen alternative schools providing educational services in a K-8 environment only.(Arizona Department of Education Research and Accountability, 2020d). Research question 2 utilizes the subgroup and ethnic data which was compiled by the Arizona Department of Education for the 2019 Total Student Enrollment Annual Report. The annual reporting identifies students by key categorical indicators, i.e., ethnic makeup, subgroups such as ELL and SPED, and disaggregates data by cohort and site (Arizona Department of Education Research and Accountability, 2020f). Research question 3 is based upon data reported for fiscal year 2019 to the Arizona Department of Education in its annual reporting of Dropout Rates and is disaggregated by subgroup and site (Arizona Department of Education Research and Accountability, 2020c).

Sources of Information

The 2019 Combined A-F Public File After Appeals Record consist of the self-reported data from schools in which schools account for the categorical weighted point values derived from the alternative education business rules formula. These categories evaluate Academic proficiency, growth toward graduation, credits earned, alternative English learners (EL)

proficiency, graduation rate, and growth points and college and career readiness for enrollees. A further analysis of where schools derive their data from follows in the proceeding sections.

Proficiency

Proficiency is predominately based upon student scores on the Educational Readiness to Inform Teaching (AzMERIT) English Language Arts 9 and AzMERIT Algebra I assessments. The AzMERIT examinations are written and scored by an independent agency and administered at each school site. Once the results have been collected they are electronically reported back to the school sites and then use to compute a school's Proficiency categorical value utilizing the A-F alternative accountability business rules formulas.

English Language Learners

Proficiency measurements for English Language Learners (EL) include all students who received a less than proficient score, earning a 1 or a 2 on the Arizona English Language Learner Assessment (AZELLA) in the current or prior fiscal year, including recent arrivals. Students who are assessed outside of the Spring AZELLA testing window, who subsequently are assessed as proficient are also included in the EL calculations. To earn proficiency points, a school's EL proficiency percentage is compared to the State's current-year proficiency percentage and converted to a score out of 5. EL growth calculates the percentage of EL students using two test records, comparing current fiscal year testing with student's prior year AZELLA results. Students who take a placement exam prior to October 1st of the current fiscal year who subsequently test again during the Spring testing window are also included in this reporting (Arizona Department of Education Research and Accountability, 2020b, 2020a).

Growth to Graduation

Growth to Graduation is a measurement is of three sub-categorical groupings: Academic Persistence, Credits Earned, and On-Track to Graduate. The Academic Persistence is calculated by taking a list of eligible students who finished the previous fiscal year and checking for subsequent enrollment at any public school in Arizona by October 1 of the current fiscal year. Students are also eligible to be included if they receive an applicable Year-End Status Code from the school from the previous fiscal year. Credits Earned is based upon the self-reporting from schools of the number of students who are meeting enrollment criteria and earned greater than or equal to 4.5 credits, or the remaining credits needed for graduation, by the end of the fiscal year. Lastly, On-Track to Graduate is the self-reported tracking system by schools whereby two reports are submitted and compared to each other to determine student inclusion eligibility. The first report must be submitted to the Arizona Department of Education no later than February 28th with the final list being due no later than July 31st of the current fiscal year. These reports are then compared and identify eligible students who 1) Were actively enrolled through the entire period with no gaps in enrollment exceeding ten school days, 2) Need no more than three credits to meet the established graduation requirements, and 3) Mathematics credit accounted for no more than one of the remaining credits that the student must earn in order to graduate. Students who were not enrolled as of the January 31st report because of meeting graduation requirements earlier in the fiscal year are included as eligible students for reporting purposes.

College and Career Ready (CCRI):

For students to be included in a schools self-reporting, two criterions should be included for each student: 1) The students graduated at any point during the current fiscal school year, and 2) The student was included in the On-Track to Graduation initial submission for the current fiscal school year. Any student who was removed from the initial On-Track to Graduate calculation after the initial data submission due to withdrawal from school then they are also

removed from the CCRI calculations (Arizona Department of Education Research and Accountability, 2020b, 2020a).

The A-F Alternative Letter Grade model employs a CCRI point evaluation based upon a student earning above or below 1.0 raw point from a weighted list of 27 key indicators. If a student earns 1.0 points or above, then the school reports the full CCRI points for that student. If the student earns less than 1.0 raw point, then the school reports 0 CCRI points for that student.

Student Enrollment Data

Information regarding a student's background information such race, gender, and subgroup eligibility, i.e. economic status, housing status, military family status, special educational services, are collected by individual schools during a student's initial enrollment. Student background information is then annually reported to the Arizona Department of Education and is published in the Total Student Annual Report and made publicly available for download as a .csv file.

Dropout Rates

Research question 3 are based upon data reported for fiscal year 2019 to the Arizona Department of Education in the annual regarding Dropout Rates and is disaggregated by subgroup and site (Arizona Department of Education Research and Accountability, 2020c)

Data Analysis Procedures

The data collected for this study are based upon fiscal year 2019 State reporting and will be put into Microsoft Excel with indicators assigned to school type in the sample. This study uses one independent variable, Alternative Schools, with two separate groups, District Schools and Charter Schools.

The dependent variables will be:

- 1) The proficiency scores as reported in the A-F Letter Grade Public File After Appeals Record,
- 2) The number of students enrolled based upon enrollment characteristics, including race, gender, and subgroup eligibility, i.e. economic status, housing status, military family status, special educational services, and
- 3) The student dropout rates.

For questions 1 and 3 an independent samples t-tests will be run to determine whether the means of the two groups differ significantly in the first and third categories. Descriptive statistics will be used to identify general tendencies in the data for Charter school campuses and District school campuses, to assess student dropout rates for each campus group.

Summary

Chapter Three reviewed the purpose of this study along with the three research questions and hypothesis that will guide the researcher. An explanation of the design study, rationale, populations, sample, sources of information, and data analysis procedures was included. Chapter Four will analyze the data and explore the significance of the results. Chapter Five will provide a summary of the study and offer suggestions and practical application for future research.

Chapter Four: Findings and Results

Introduction

Chapter Four describes the results and the findings from this study as it relates to student successes in secondary alternative education settings in Arizona. The purpose of this study was to determine whether students enrolled in Secondary (9-12) alternative educational schools, i.e.- district schools vs. charter schools, demonstrate significant differences in achievement as measured by the 2019 A-F Letter Grade Accountability System, as well as to determine whether district and charter schools differ in enrollment characteristics of their student bodies. Additionally, this study examined the dropout rates of students who attend alternative charter and alternative district schools and to examine if there is a statistical difference in this key consideration for at-risk students.

Both alternative charter and alternative district schools' records were obtained through the Arizona Department of Education's website via publicly accessible files as downloadable .csv files. In order to examine student achievement, data were collected from the 2019 Combined A-F Public File After Appeals Record consist of the self-reported data from schools in which schools account for the categorical weighted point values derived from the alternative education business rules formula. To examine student body background information such as race, gender, and subgroup eligibility (economic status, housing status, military family status, special educational services), data was collected from the Total Student Annual Report for 2019. To examine annual dropout rates for each respective school type, data were collected from the 2019 Dropout Rates Annual report and was disaggregated by subgroup and site.

Data collection and analysis were inclusive of all secondary alternative education schools. Although there were 164 registered alternative schools in Arizona in fiscal year 2019, this study only analyzed 128 of them due to a lack of self-reported data being submitted from 36

of those institutions. Excluded from this research are thirteen district secondary alternative schools and ten charter alternative schools, as well as, thirteen alternative schools providing educational services in a K-8 environment only (Arizona Department of Education Research and Accountability, 2020d). Table 1, shown below, identifies the schools included in this analysis by identifying the geographic location of each institution by County as well as disaggregated by District, Charter, and student populations.

Table 1
Location and Enrollment of Alternative Schools

Secondary Alternative Schools by County			
Schools/Students By County	District	Charter	Total Students
Apache	0	0	0
Cochise	1	4	598
Coconino	4	0	298
Gila	1	1	177
Graham	1	0	68
Greenlee	0	0	0
La Paz	1	0	40
Maricopa	8	57	20,958
Mohave	0	1	119
Navajo	2	1	83
Pima	6	26	6504
Pinal	4	3	981
Santa Cruz	1	1	259
Yavapai	1	0	33
Yuma	1	3	490
Totals	31	97	30608

Source: Arizona Department of Education FY19 School Enrollment Report.

It is worth noting that although this study used all available data collected by the Arizona Department of Education for secondary alternative education schools spanning 13 of the 15 counties in Arizona, the vast majority, or 50.78%, of these schools were located in Maricopa County alone. Excluded from the list above are Apache County and Greenlee County, which did not have any reported secondary alternative schools in fiscal-year 2019. These 65 Maricopa county schools are also responsible for a total student enrollment of 20,958 students, or 68.47%, of the total student enrollment in secondary alternative education schools statewide. Maricopa County is the largest county in Arizona and is home to the state's largest urban population center.

Research Question 1 (RQ1) Findings

RQ1: Is there a statistically significant difference in student proficiency scores in secondary alternative public schools and secondary alternative charter schools using the revised 2019 A-F School Letter Grade Business Rules?

H1₀: There is no statistically significant difference between Public Alternative Schools vs. Charter Alternative Schools in student proficiency as outlined by the A-F School Letter Grade Business Rules.

H1_A: There is a statistically significant difference between Public Alternative Schools vs. Charter Alternative Schools in student proficiency as outlined by the A-F School Letter Grade Business Rules.

To examine RQ1 an independent sample t-test with unknown variables was calculated to assess whether there was a statistically significant difference in the mean scores of alternative district and charter schools based upon the total percentage earned scores as reported to the

Arizona Department of Education's 2019 Combined A-F Public File after Appeals Record. In total, 97 alternative charter schools received a higher mean score ($M=68.43$, $SD= 12.19$) compared to the 31 alternative district schools ($M=60.28$, $SD= 15.22$) which demonstrated a significantly better performance on the A-F Letter Grade Total Percentage Earned scores, $t(43)=-2.71387$, $p= 0.00953$. Furthermore, the Cohen's effect size value ($d = -0.6$) suggested a moderate to high practical significance, thus the null hypothesis was rejected.

To examine each specific categorical indicator found within the A-F Business Rules accountability formula used to answer RQ1 an independent sample t -test with unknown variables was calculated to assess whether there was a statistically significant difference in the mean scores of alternative district and charter schools based upon each of the categorical weighted categories and is disaggregated below. Table 2 shown below shows a side-by-side comparison of alternative charter and alternative district schools with their respective mean scores and significance findings.

When examining the total points earned, alternative charter schools received a higher mean score ($M=61.72$, $SD= 11.91$) compared to the alternative district schools ($M=52.16$, $SD= 14.86$) which demonstrated to be statistically significant, $t(31)=-3.26049$, $p= 0.002179$. A Cohen's effect size value ($d = -0.7$) suggested a moderate to high practical significance, thus the null hypothesis was rejected.

When examining the total proficiency points earned, alternative charter schools received a higher mean score ($M=2.189$, $SD= 1.66$) compared to the alternative district schools ($M=1.40$, $SD= 1.26$) which demonstrated to be statistically significant, $t(63)=-4.930$, $p= .00001$. A Cohen's effect size value ($d = -0.89$) suggested a high practical significance, thus the null hypothesis was rejected.

When examining the total academic persistence points earned, alternative charter schools received a lower mean score ($M=9.56$, $SD=0.497$) compared to alternative district schools ($M=9.60$, $SD= 0.37$) though this was determined to not be statistically significant, $t(67)=0.510$, $p= .611352$, thus the null hypothesis was retained.

When examining the on track to graduate points earned, alternative charter schools received a higher mean score ($M=8.093$, $SD= 3.16$) compared to alternative district schools ($M=8.08$, $SD= 3.22$) though this was determined to not be statistically significant, $t(38)= -0.00937$, $p= .0992571$, thus the null hypothesis was retained.

When examining the credits earned points earned, alternative charter schools received a lower mean score ($M=5.029$, $SD=3.21$) compared to alternative district schools ($M=5.23$, $SD=3.11$) though this was determined to not be statistically significant, $t(50)= 0.315206$, $p= .0753917$, thus the null hypothesis was retained.

When examining the EL proficiency points earned, alternative charter schools received a higher mean score ($M=6.50$, $SD=3.46$) compared to alternative district schools compared to alternative district schools ($M=4.50$, $SD=2.12$) though this was determined to not be statistically significant, $t(2)= -1.19643$, $p= .0354124$, thus the null hypothesis was retained.

When examining the graduation rate points earned, alternative charter schools received a lower mean score ($M=6.86$, $SD=2.13$) compared to alternative district schools ($M=7.18$, $SD=1.49$) though this was determined not to be statistically significant, $t(61)= -0.69823$, $p= 0.487687$, thus the null hypothesis was retained.

When examining the college and career readiness points earned, alternative charter schools received a higher mean score ($M=29.054$, $SD= 7.85$) compared to alternative district schools compared to alternative district schools ($M=22.36$, $SD= 11.01$ which demonstrated to be

statistically significantly, $t(40) = -3.13517, p = 0.003214$. A Cohen's effect size value ($d = -0.7$) suggested a moderate to high practical significance, thus the null hypothesis was rejected.

When examining the total bonus points earned, alternative charter schools received a lower mean score ($M=1.77, SD=1.55$) compared to alternative district schools ($M=2.25, SD=1.43$) though this was determined to not be statistically significant, $t(26) = 1.140072, p = 0.26465$, thus the null hypothesis was retained.

When examining the total points including bonus points earned, alternative charter schools received a higher mean score ($M=61.72, SD= 11.91$) compared to alternative district schools ($M=52.16, SD= 14.86$) which demonstrated to be statistically significantly, $t(31) = -3.26049, p = 0.002179$. A Cohen's effect size value ($d = -0.7$) suggested a moderate to high practical significance, thus the null hypothesis was rejected.

When examining the total points eligible, alternative charter schools received higher mean score ($M=91.28, SD= 5.64$) compared to alternative district schools compared to alternative district schools ($M=87.58, SD= 7.17$) which demonstrated to be statistically significantly, $t(43) = -2.62936, p = 0.011819$. A Cohen's effect size value ($d = -0.6$) suggested a moderate to high practical significance, thus the null hypothesis was rejected.

Table 2

Alternative School Business Rules Letter Grades and Indicators Values

Category	District Mean Score	Charter Mean Score	Significance
Total Percentage Earned	60.28774	68.43284	Significant
Total Points	52.16609	61.72397	Significant
Academic Persistence Points	9.609677	9.566316	Not Significant
On Track to Graduate Points	8.086779	8.093566	Not Significant
Credits Earned Points	5.236476	5.029863	Not Significant
EL Proficiency & Growth Points	4.5	6.5	Not Significant
Graduation Rate Points	7.1802	6.864086	Not Significant
Alternative CCRI Points	22.36774	29.05464	Significant
Bonus Points	2.25	1.773584	Not Significant
Total Points Eligible	87.58065	91.28866	Significant

Research Question 2 (RQ2) Findings

RQ2: What are the differences in enrollment characteristics, i.e.- demographics including SPED, between Public Alternative Schools vs. Charter Alternative Schools?

H2₀: There is no statistically significant difference between Public Alternative Schools vs. Charter Alternative Schools in enrollment characteristics.

H2_A: There is a statistically significant difference between Public Alternative Schools vs. Charter Alternative Schools in enrollment characteristics.

To examine RQ2 descriptive statistical analysis was conducted based upon the total students enrolled as reported to the Arizona Department of Education’s 2019 Total Student Annual Report. In total, the alternative charter schools enrolled a mean of 275.72 students, compared to the alternative district schools’ mean enrollment of 124.61

After determining that the average student enrollment was larger for alternative charter schools than for district alternative schools the next step in analysis was to compare all subgroup enrollments for students using descriptive statistics to evaluate the proportional representation for each respective school type disaggregated by ethnicity, income eligibility, EL proficiency, and by students with disabilities. No summations were concluded to suggest significance of any of the subgroup comparison indicators. Table 3 below shows a side-by-side comparison of student body enrollments characteristics between alternative charter and alternative district schools adjusted on a per capita basis as well as a proportional range based upon the standard deviations calculated.

Table 3
Alternative School Business Enrollment Characteristics

Category	District	Charter
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	Enrollment		Enrollment	
All Subgroups	125	34-215	276	0-489
	Average Enrollment	District Range	Average Enrollment	Charter Range
Asian	0.00%	NA	0.20%	0.0%-2.2%
American Indian/ Alaskan Native	9.14%	0.0%-24.0%	4.84%	0.0%-15.5%
Black/ African American	4.51%	0.0%-14.4%	6.41%	0.0%-17.8%
Hispanic/ Latino	58.42%	0.0%-100%	55.45%	0.0%-100%
White	20.30%	0.0%-42.4%	27.37%	0.0%-100%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0.00%	NA	0.09%	0.0%-1.0%
Multiple Races	0.00%	NA	1.82%	0.0%-10.9%
English Language Learners	0.62%	0.0%-3.2%	3.39%	0.0%-10.1%
Income Eligibility I	43.66%	0.0%-100%	31.88%	0.0%-94.2%
Income Eligibility II	1.55%	0.0%-6.4%	17.72%	0.0%-63.8%
Students with Disabilities	10.25%	0.0%-25.6%	10.87%	0.0%-30.1%

The average Asian student enrollment was 0.20% for alternative charter schools, this ranged from 0.0%-2.2%. Conversely, alternative district schools reportedly enrolled no Asian students.

The average American Indian/ Alaskan Native student enrollment was 4.84% for alternative charter schools, this ranged from 0.0%-15.5%. Conversely, alternative district schools average enrollment of American Indian/ Alaskan Native students was 9.14%, which ranged from 0.0%-24.0%.

The average Hispanic/ Latino student enrollment was 55.45% for alternative charter schools, this ranged from 0.0%-100%. Conversely, alternative district schools average enrollment of Hispanic/ Latino students was 58.42%, which ranged from 0.0%-100%.

The average Black/ African American student enrollment was 6.41% for alternative charter schools, this ranged from 0.0%-17.8%. Conversely, alternative district schools average enrollment of Black/ African American students was 4.51%, which ranged from 0.0%-14.4%.

The average White student enrollment was 27.37% for alternative charter schools, this ranged from 0.0%-100%. Conversely, alternative district schools average enrollment of White students was 20.30%, which ranged from 0.0%-42.4%.

The average Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander student enrollment was 0.09% for alternative charter schools, this ranged from 0.0%-1.0%. Conversely, alternative district schools reportedly enrolled no Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students.

The average Multiple Race student enrollment was 1.82% for alternative charter schools, this ranged from 0.0%-10.9%. Conversely, alternative district schools reportedly enrolled no Multiple Race students.

The average English Language Learner student enrollment was 3.39% for alternative charter schools, this ranged from 0.0%-10.1%. Conversely, alternative district average enrollment of English Language Learner students was 0.62%, which ranged from 0.0%-3.2%.

The average Income Eligibility I, which are students from households with incomes that are at or below the annual level \$5,408.00 per household member, student enrollment was 31.88% for alternative charter schools, this ranged from 0.0%-94.2%. Conversely, alternative district schools average enrollment of Income Eligibility I students was 43.66%, which ranged from 0.0%-100%.

The average Income Eligibility II, which are students from households with incomes that are at or below the annual level \$7,696.00 but above \$5,408.00 per household member, student enrollment was 17.72% for alternative charter schools, this ranged from 0.0%-63.8%. Conversely, alternative district schools average enrollment of Income Eligibility II students was 1.55%, which ranged from 0.0%-6.4%.

The average Students with Disabilities enrollment was 10.87% for alternative charter schools, this ranged from 0.0%-30.1%. Conversely, alternative district schools average enrollment of Students with Disabilities was 10.25%, which ranged from 0.0%-25.6%.

Research Question 3 (RQ3) Findings

RQ3: Is there a statistically significant difference in student dropout rates between Public Alternative Schools vs. Charter Alternative Schools?

H₃₀: There is no statistically significant differences in student dropout rates between district alternative schools and charter alternative schools.

H_{3A} There is a statistically significant difference in student dropout rates between district alternative schools and charter alternative schools.

To examine RQ3 an independent sample *t*-test with unknown variables was calculated to assess whether there was a statistically significant difference in the mean scores of alternative district and charter schools based upon the total dropout rates for all student subgroups as reported to the Arizona Department of Education's 2019 Annual Dropout Report. The annual dropout report uses a school's total enrollment population figure and then calculates dropout percentages based upon students who were enrolled in school at any time during the school year, but were not enrolled at the end of the school year and did not transfer, graduate, or die. A higher percentile score indicates a higher dropout rate for each subgroups calculated. In total, the

dropout rate among the 96 alternative charter schools was slightly higher (M=18.54%, SD= 10.86%) than the 31 alternative district schools (M=15.48%, SD= 7.62%) though this was determined not to be statistically significant, $t(72) = -1.76013$, $p = 0.082633$; thus the null hypothesis was retained. Table 4 below shows the side-by-side comparison of alternative district schools and alternative charter schools and disaggregates dropout rates by subgroup.

Each subgroup was then disaggregated by ethnicity, gender, homelessness status, income eligibility, and student disabilities and an independent sample *t*-test with unknown variables was calculated to assess whether there was a statistically significant difference in the mean scores of alternative district and charter schools based upon student body groupings.

When examining the dropout rates for students with disabilities, alternative charter schools was slightly higher (M=16.61%, SD= 14.41%) than the alternative district schools (M=13.17%, SD= 8.75%) though this was determined not to be statistically significant, $t(66) = -1.22646$, $p = 0.224382$, thus the null hypothesis was retained.

When examining the dropout rates for students who identified their ethnicity as white, alternative charter schools was slightly higher (M=15.77%, SD= 11.04%) than the alternative district schools (M=15.57%, SD= 11.52%) though this was determined not to be statistically significant, $t(46) = -0.07827$, $p = 0.937952$, thus the null hypothesis was retained.

When examining the dropout rates for students who identified their ethnicity as American Indian or Alaskan Native, alternative charter schools was slightly higher (M=20.52%, SD= 16.25%) than the alternative district schools (M=20.38%, SD= 12.03%) though this was determined not to be statistically significant, $t(12) = -0.02998$, $p = 0.976579$, thus the null hypothesis was retained.

When examining the dropout rates for students who identified their ethnicity as Black/African American, alternative charter schools was slightly higher (M=16.69%, SD= 12.76%) than the alternative district schools (M=15.30%, SD= 10.47%) though this was determined not to be statistically significant, $t(15) = -0.39303$, $p = 0.699828$, thus the null hypothesis was retained.

When examining the dropout rates for students who identified as English language learners, alternative charter schools was slightly higher (M=11.48%, SD= 10.10%) than the alternative district schools (M=8.77%, SD= 10.11%) though this was determined not to be statistically significant, $t(9) = -0.70532$, $p = 0.498456$, thus the null hypothesis was retained.

When examining the dropout rates of students who identify their ethnicity as Hispanic or Latino, alternative charter schools was higher (M=19.07%, SD= 10.80%) than the alternative district schools (M=13.85%, SD= 6.68%) which demonstrated a be statistically significant, $t(76) = -3.12722$, $p = 0.002501$. Furthermore, a Cohen's effect size value ($d = -0.5$) suggested a moderate significance, thus the null hypothesis was rejected.

When examining the dropout rates for students who identify their ethnicity as multiple races, alternative charter schools was slightly higher (M=17.66%, SD= 7.70%) than the alternative district schools (M=12.69, SD= 12.81) though this was determined not to be statistically significant, $t(7) = -0.98916$, $p = 0.355535$, thus the null hypothesis was retained.

When examining the dropout rates for students who identify as homeless, alternative charter schools was slightly higher (M=23.26%, SD= 12.87%) than the alternative district schools (M=18.90%, SD= 9.16%) though this was determined not to be statistically significant, $t(39) = -1.75479$, $p = 0.08715$, thus the null hypothesis was retained

When examining the dropout rates of students who were identified as income eligible, both I and II, alternative charter schools was slightly higher (M=19.84%, SD= 10.89%) than the

alternative district schools (M=14.19%, SD= 9.12%) which demonstrated a statistically significant, $t(21)= 2.41035$, $p= 0.021023$. Furthermore, a Cohen’s effect size value ($d = -0.5$) suggested a moderate significance, thus the null hypothesis was rejected.

When examining the dropout rates of students whose gender was reported as male, alternative charter schools was slightly higher (M=19.35%, SD= 11.31%) than the alternative district schools (M=17.02%, SD= 8.35%) though this was determined not to be statistically significant, $t(68)= -1.23556$, $p= 0.220874$, thus the null hypothesis was retained.

When examining the dropout rates for students whose gender was reported as female, alternative charter schools was slightly higher (M=17.31%, SD= 11.20%) than the alternative district schools (M=13.74%, SD= 8.33%) though this was determined not to be statistically significant, $t(64)= -1.87411$, $p= 0.065481$, thus the null hypothesis was retained.

Table 4
Alternative School Dropout Rates

Category	District Rates	Charter Rates	Significance
All Students	15.48%	18.58%	Not Significant
Students with Disabilities	13.17%	16.61%	Not Significant

White Students	15.57%	15.77%	Not Significant
American Indian or Alaska Native	20.38%	20.52%	Not Significant
Black/ African American	15.30%	16.69%	Not Significant
English Language Learners	8.77%	11.48%	Not Significant
Hispanic or Latino	13.85%	19.07%	Significant
Multiple Races	12.69%	17.66%	Not Significant
Homeless Cohort	18.90%	23.26%	Not Significant
Income Eligibility 1 and 2 students	14.19%	19.84%	Significant
Males	17.02%	19.35%	Not Significant
Females	13.74%	17.31%	Not Significant

Summary

Chapter Four presented a description of the analysis of the data collected, findings, and results of the three research questions which this study sought to address. The findings of this study suggest that there is an overall statistical difference between district alternative and charter alternative secondary schools as measured by the 2019 A-F Letter Grade Business Rules, with alternative charter schools showing measurably higher overall achievement. The findings of this study also reviewed student demographic enrollment data to discern as to whether or not enrollment bias may exist and found that although alternative charter schools have measurably higher student body enrollment, the per capita comparison of student grouping based upon ethnicity, sex, socio-economic, and student with disabilities showed that no immediate enrollment bias exist between district alternative and charter alternative schools. Lastly, this study compared student dropout rates and found that overall, both alternative district and alternative charter schools have comparable dropout rates with outliers in Hispanic/Latino and income eligibility students with alternative charter schools showing statistically significant

higher dropout rates compared to the alternative district schools. The researcher was able to accept the null hypothesis for two of the research questions analyzed.

RQ1 examined six different categorical indicators: 1) Academic persistence, 2) On-track to graduate, 3) Credits earned, 4) English language proficiency and growth, 5) Graduations rates, 6) college and career readiness, as well as bonus points, total points earned, total points eligible, and total percentage earned. For the categorical indicators academic persistence, on-track to graduate, credits earned, English language proficiency and growth, graduation, and bonus points, alternative charter schools showed slightly higher mean scores, however, these were all determined not to be statistically significant and thus the null hypothesis was retained. For the categorical indicators as well as overall point scores for college and career readiness, total points earned, total points eligible, and total percentage earned, alternative charter schools demonstrated statistically significant higher mean scores and thus for these indicators the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative hypothesis was retained.

RQ2 examined the enrollment characteristics which disaggregated student populations by ethnicity, sex, socio-economic, and students with disabilities between alternative district and alternative charter schools to see if there were any discernable differences in student populations. The findings determined that alternative charter schools had statistically significant larger student populations than alternative district schools. Adjusted as a per capita percentile, alternative charter and alternative district schools showed similar student body consistencies within five percentile points of one another for Asians, American Indian/Alaskan Native, Black/African American, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, Multiple Races, English Language Learners, and Students with Disabilities. Alternative charter schools demonstrated higher percentile enrollments for two sub-categorical groups; White students with 7.07 percentile points

and Income Eligibility II students by 16.17 percentile points. Alternative district schools demonstrated a higher percentile enrollment in excess of five points for only one student subgroup- Income Eligibility I students by 11.78 percentile points. Student subgroups were adjusted and evaluated based upon a per capita percentile comparison, and it was determined that the vast majority of indicators demonstrated that alternative charter and alternative district schools have similar populations dispersion and based upon that, the RQ2 null hypothesis was retained.

RQ3 compared student dropout rates and found that overall, both alternative district and alternative charter schools have comparable dropout rates based upon total student enrollment and disaggregated student subgroups: Students with disabilities, race, homelessness, income eligibility, and gender. Although overall combined student subgroups demonstrated that alternative charter schools had a slightly higher mean average for student dropouts this was determined to not be statistically significant. When student sub-group data was disaggregated alternative charter schools demonstrated higher dropout mean scores for students with disabilities, white students, American Indian/Alaskan native students, Black/African American students, English language learners students, multiple races students, homeless students, and students by gender, though in all instances this was determined to not be statistically significant. It is important to note that alternative charter schools did demonstrate higher dropout rates compared to the alternative district schools for Hispanic/Latino and Income Eligibility I and II students and was determined to be statistically significant.

Chapter Five of this study will present the summary, conclusions, and recommendations for future research for school leaders.

Chapter Five: Summary, Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine whether students enrolled in Secondary (9-12) alternative educational schools, i.e.- district schools vs. charter schools, demonstrate significant differences in achievement as measured by the 2019 A-F Letter Grade Accountability System, as well as to determine whether district and charter schools differ in enrollment

characteristics of their student bodies. Chapter Five presents a summary of this study and conclusions established from the findings presented in Chapter Four. This chapter also provides a discussion of the implications for practice, as well as recommendations for future research. The chapter concludes with observations about the study as well as a final statement.

Summary of the Study

Chapter One illustrated that for nearly two decades, secondary alternative education schools in Arizona have enjoyed an exemption from customary accountability reporting practices, which conventionally serve as the leading measure of academic performance and help quantify school efficiency. The lack of transparent accountability has meant that students and parents are often unaware that their chosen alternative school may be failing them. The purpose of this study was to determine if students enrolled in secondary alternative district schools and secondary alternative charter schools demonstrated statistical differences in three key categorical indicators that measure student and school success in the following areas: 1) achievement as measured by the 2019 A-F Letter Grade Accountability System, 2) student dropout rates, and 3) enrollment characteristics to assess if there were any apparent enrollment selection biases.

Chapter Two consisted of a review of the literature specifically addressing the historical background of the charter school movement and how political re-alignments inspired a cultural shift to quantify success and achievement. The chapter also highlighted the need for alternative education and provided a broader context of the necessities that need to be afforded to at-risk/high-risk students. In addition to exploring the different models employed in alternative educational institutions, This chapter also explored the evolving measures of student success using the prism of student achievement and school completion as barometers. The chapter concluded by evaluating the criticisms that opponents of alternative education have raised and

the concerns that have arisen as alternative schools have gained notoriety in the era of school-choice.

Chapter Three discussed the overall research design, the population sample, data collection procedures, and methods for analysis. This quantitative study took place in Arizona using data provided to the Arizona Department of Education. Data collected were from publicly accessible records representing most of the alternative education school from 13 of Arizona's 15 counties. Survey data were collected from only 128 out of the 164 alternative schools. Excluded from this research are thirteen district secondary alternative schools and ten charter alternative schools as well as thirteen alternative schools providing educational services in a K-8 environment only. Of the schools that were included in this study's analysis, the vast majority, or 50.78%, of these schools were located in Maricopa County. These 65 Maricopa county schools are also responsible for a total student enrollment of 20,958 students, or 68.47%, of the total student enrollment in secondary alternative education schools statewide.

Chapter Four presented a description of the analysis and data collected, findings, and results of the three research questions posed and their statistical analysis. Chapter Four underscored that alternative charter schools do demonstrate higher student achievement results; do not engage in enrollment selection bias; and do not have a higher dropout rate than their alternative district school counterparts.

Summary of the Findings

RQ1. Is there a statistically significant difference in student proficiency scores in secondary alternative public schools and secondary alternative charter schools using the revised 2019 A-F School Letter Grade Business Rules? Statistical evaluation presented in Chapter Four concluded that there is an overall statistical difference between district alternative and charter

alternative secondary schools, with alternative charter schools showing measurably higher overall achievements results. Letter Grades are based upon the outcomes of 5 weighted categories: 1) Academic proficiency at 15%, 2) Growth toward graduation at 30%, 3) English learners (EL) proficiency at 10%, 4) Graduation rates at 10%, and finally 5) College and career readiness for enrollees at 35%. Overall, alternative charter schools demonstrated a mean percentile score of 68.43, which when converted to a school letter grade using the prescribed cut scores in the A-F Alternative Business Rules equaled a “B” rating (A=100-79.03, B=79.02-68.14, C=68.13-57.25, D=57.24-46.36, F=46.35-0). Alternative district schools demonstrated a mean percentile score of 60.28, which when converted to a school letter grade equaled a “C” rating. It was determined that the difference in final percentile scoring between alternative charter and alternative district schools was of a moderate to high practical significance. Based upon total percentile scores earned, alternative charter schools demonstrated statistically significant higher mean scores thus the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative hypothesis was retained.

RQ2. What are the differences in enrollment characteristics, i.e.- demographics including SPED, between alternative district schools and. alternative charter schools? To address the potential of enrollment bias. Chapter Four analyzed student demographic enrollment data and determined that that although alternative charter schools have measurably higher student body enrollment, the per capita comparison of student groupings showed that no immediate enrollment bias exists between district alternative and charter alternative schools. Adjusted as a per capita percentile, alternative charter and alternative district schools showed similar student body consistencies within five percentile points of one another for seven of the ten student groupings

including students with disabilities. Alternative charter schools did demonstrate higher than five percentile points for students in only two of the ten sub-categorical groups while alternative district schools demonstrated a higher than five percentile point average for only one sub-categorical group. It was determined that the majority of indicators demonstrated that alternative charter and alternative district schools have similar population's dispersion, thus the null hypothesis was retained.

RQ3. Is there a statistically significant difference in student dropout rates between alternative district schools and alternative charter schools? Statistical evaluation presented in Chapter Four concluded that both alternative district and alternative charter schools have comparable dropout rates with alternative charter schools demonstrating higher dropout mean dropout rates for students with disabilities, white students, American Indian/Alaskan native students, Black/African American students, English language learners students, multiple races students, homeless students, and students by gender, though in all instances this was determined to not be statistically significant. Alternative charter schools also demonstrated higher mean dropout rates for Hispanic/Latino and Income Eligibility I and II eligible students, and this was determined to be statistically significant. Chapter Four analysis concluded that although alternative charter schools had a slightly higher mean average for student subgroup dropout rates, based upon overall student body populations the higher means score was not statistically significant and thus the null hypothesis was retained.

Implications for Practice

The findings of this study lead to the conclusion that alternative charter schools yield higher student achievement results as compared to their alternative district schools' counterparts. Alternative charter schools demonstrated a mean score difference of 8.15 percentile points above

there alternative district schools' counterparts, a statistically significant difference. Alternative charters schools also enjoyed having an overall higher A-F letter grade score, averaging a letter grade classification of a B which stands in stark contrast to the alternative district school letter grade classification of a C. This study also explored the potential of possible enrollment and/or selection bias that critics of charter schools contend have skewed student body representations between district and charter schools. This study examined the enrollment characteristics of both alternative charter and alternative district schools and concluded that there is no readily apparent discriminatory practices occurring. Student body populations for each type of school is relatively and proportionally the same. This study also examined dropout rates for each respective type of school and concluded that, like student demographics, there was no statistically significant difference in dropout rates between alternative charter and alternative district schools.

The main endeavor of this study was to determine if the academic achievement as well as graduation rates for at-risk students were affected by the type of alternative school they attended. This study also sought to address a prevalent criticism of charter schools; that they practice enrollment bias of high-needs students whereby district schools contend with a disproportionately higher amount of high-needs students and thus have skewed aggregate data when being compared to charter schools counterparts.

A few considerations need to be made in attempting to understand what the results of this study concluded. First, although alternative charter schools did demonstrate an overall higher mean score and subsequently a higher letter grade using the A-F Letter Grade formula then did alternative district schools, those gains were in only one of the weighted categories: College and career readiness. For all other categories, i.e.-Academic persistence, on-track to graduation, credits earned, EL proficiency, bonus points, and the overall graduation rates, alternative charter

schools and alternative district schools did not have any statistically significant differences. A benefit of alternative schools having a meaningful instrument to examine site level effectiveness via the A-F letter grade is that the merits and results do not merely use high-stakes testing as the most prominent means of measurement. The alternative A-F letter grade formula takes into consideration the unique challenges that at-risk youth contend with and puts the emphasis of scoring of a school into those realms. An implication for future practice would be for educational leaders to assess the approaches taken to educate at-risk youth and to improve on the services being offered in alternative school settings by using the categorical results within the A-F business rules formula. Educational leaders should also continuously align their actions to reflect the vision and mission of their alternative schools, working to ensure that their actions encompass, and are aligned with, ideals that are in service to the at-risk students they educate.

Another consideration that needs to be made in attempting to understand what the results of this study concluded are the notably absent data from alternative district schools that were classified as programs. Program schools are excluded from reporting student data to the Arizona Department of Education. This study did not seek to identify the number of, or locations of, secondary alternative district program schools. There are no readily available or publicly accessible records that identify these program schools; therefore they were excluded from analysis. It is unknown how many alternative district program schools were excluded. Charter school operators do not have the same statutory abilities to classify schools as programs, which has the primary effect of having student data be retained by a different home school and not the program school in which the student attends classes. An implication for future practice would be for researchers to disaggregate data from those program schools and conduct an analysis of the three research questions explored in this study. Due to the specified nature of educating at-risk

youth, leaders should be eager to review metrics, revise practices, and perpetually work toward effective and meaningful strategies, all of which would be strengthened from data analysis.

Recommendations for Future Research and Implications for Policy

As referenced in Chapter Two, alternative educational schools are typically structured using one of the three dominant models: (1) Type I alternative schools, or restructured schools are seen as a permanent placement with unique cultural values and seeks to make school challenging and fulfilling; (2) Type II alternative schools students are usually assigned to by a higher authority, and are seen as last chance schools prior to expulsion often manifested as boot-camp style schools; finally, (3) Type III alternative schools which are for students who are seen as needing remediation, or help with social/emotional needs, and where placement is temporary and students are encouraged to earn their way back to a comprehensive campus. Researchers show that alternative schools that embrace the Type I model generally yield the highest academic gains and see lower dropout rates. A recommendation for future research would be to survey the secondary alternative education campuses used in this study's research to see which model type referenced most closely resembles their practice. By disaggregating the data used in this study by not only school type, i.e.- charter or district, but also by model type, future researchers may be able to extrapolate then identify trends in model adoption between districts and charter operators. This may help explain the statistical differences between the two.

Future researchers may also want to audit the applications filed by district and charter operators for the alternative designation from the ADE. By examining applications, a researcher may be able to determine what, if any, were the predominant indicators used to apply for alternative status. In order to qualify as, and receive an alternative education designation, a school must meet five qualifications:

- 1) They have adopted a mission statement that clearly identifies its purpose as serving at-risk students who will benefit from an alternative setting
- 2) The educational school or program services must align with the mission of the school
- 3) The school must offer secondary instruction for academic credit and must qualify to issue a high school diploma
- 4) The school will use current-year state assessment scores for their students for accountability
- 5) The school must intend to serve students using one or more of the specific qualifiers listed by the ADE.

To meet the last qualifier listed above, the following conditions are used to determine eligibility:

- 1) Students have a documented history of disruptive behavior issues
- 2) Students who have dropped out of school and are now returning
- 3) Students in poor academic standing as demonstrated by being at least one year behind on grade level performance or academic credits
- 4) Students who are primary caregivers or are financially responsible for dependents and, therefore, may require a flexible school schedule
- 5) Students who are adjudicated; Students who are wards of the state and are in need of an alternative school setting

By examining which qualifiers were used for application, a future researcher will be able to expand on this study's RQ2, and identify the qualifiers that this study could not explore.

The introduction of a secondary alternative school accountability evaluation system was only implemented two years before the publication of this study. Due to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) school closures in fiscal-year 2019-2020, only one year of applicable data was available for evaluation. Educational leaders use metrics such as the A-F school letter grade accountability system to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of their programs and make changes that serve to strengthen the educational opportunities for their students. It is reasonable to suggest that motivated educational leaders in alternative education examined the published school letter grades from fiscal-year 2018-2019 and reflected on best practices that can be incorporated into their schools to increase student achievement. A recommendation for future research would be to conduct a longitudinal study to determine if the publication of A-F letter grades had: 1) demonstrated a consistent trend line or if the first year implementation represents an outlier, and 2) To see publication of letter grades had a positive effect on the achievement indicators of either alternative district and alternative charter schools.

Concluding Remarks

Chapter Five summarized the findings from this study, underscored the implications of the results, and reflected on future research possible for policy that would be beneficial to further address the needs of at-risk students in secondary alternative schools. The research in this study did reveal that there is a statistical significant difference in A-F letter grades between alternative district schools and alternative charter schools, with charter schools showing higher final cut scores. The research also found that those gains were predominately because of the college and career readiness indicators, and not from increased academic performance, on-track graduation rates, credits earned, EL proficiency, or overall graduation rates. This study also concluded that alternative charter and alternative district schools showed similar student body enrollment

subgroup consistencies, suggesting that there is no inherent enrollment selection bias or over represented subgroups in either school type. This study also examined dropout rates and concluded that there was not a statistical difference between alternative district and alternative charter schools in getting students across the finish line and graduating high school.

Alternative schools continue to gain notoriety as a more suitable and available option for at-risk learners. Arizona has seen a significant increase in the popularity of charter schools over the past twenty-years, with many of those who offer secondary education electing to do so as alternative schools. The conspicuous absence of an accountability system to inform the public of the failing and succeeding schools was enjoyed by both district and charter schools for most of those two-decades. In 2019, Arizona moved in the direction of adopting an informed and collaboratively created public-facing accountability reporting metric. This study was a simple snapshot taken at the beginning of the process aimed at encouraging reflection and reform for alternative education leaders. Time is a necessary requisite needed to make assertions of efficacy and achievement for either schooling option. The research presented in this study represents a starting point, where accountability is now a part of the process of evaluation and reform for alternative educational leaders. The results of the study truly address the beginning of the solution to the problem rather than the end.

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