The Bumblebee Flies Anyway:
A Qualitative Analysis of Educational Resilience in Alternative High Schools in Contra Costa County

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Suzette Parkin
Ed.D. candidate
Saint Mary’s College of California

Kristine Chase, Ph.D.
Director, Center for the Regional Economy
Saint Mary’s College of California

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Executive Summary

Based on a growing concern over the increased numbers of high school dropouts in Contra Costa County, open-ended, in-depth interviews were conducted with students at alternative high schools in three districts: John Swett, Mount Diablo and Antioch (West Contra Costa was invited to participate, but did not reply to the invitation.) Sixteen students were interviewed over a period of three months.

The focus of the project was to determine what material factors do traditionally at-risk students, in an alternative high school setting, identify as determinative in their decision to continue their education through graduation.

Key findings were that successful at-risk students possess unusual resilience, even though they came from troubled environments. While these students felt traditional high school had failed them, they accepted responsibility for their own success and failure, spoke of at least one particular teacher who cared for them personally and viewed the transition to the alternative setting favorably, rather than as a negative experience.

Based on this research, teachers need be trained in the special needs of at-risk students, including the demands on these students outside the classroom. Schools can help develop the needed resiliency, through small class sizes, teachers who posses empathy as well as subject knowledge and policies that recognize the “one-size does not fit all” at the secondary level. The lost income and increased welfare and law enforcement cost of dropping out is far greater than the cost of providing support to achieve resilience through graduation.
**Problem Statement**

The problem statement for this study stems from a growing concern over the increased number of high school dropouts in Contra Costa County, California. Commissioned by the Contra Costa Economic Partnership to the Center for the Regional Economy at Saint Mary’s College of California, this study was designed to discover why students in Contra Costa County, California, who have been identified as at-risk and who attend continuation high schools, persist in their education rather than dropping out. By soliciting the unique stories of students, this research study focused on 16 students who described the personal experiences affecting their educational journey. The participants shared experiences in terms of personal influences, family involvement, school experiences and community support. Although the number of participants was limited, the stories are powerful and offer insights into understanding the factors contributing to the success of students matching this at-risk profile.

Society has become increasingly aware of the high school dropout crisis in the United States. It is estimated that almost 33 percent of our nation’s youth are leaving high school without a diploma (Barton, 2005b). A recent study, sponsored by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, revealed that half of the students in many cities don’t graduate on time. Of further concern are the large disparities of racial and ethnic groups, with less than 55% of African American and Hispanics graduating (Tucker & Herman, 2002).

The nation recognizes that individuals who leave high school prior to graduation will be severely handicapped in the knowledge driven job market of today. Political and public pressure to improve the quality of education in the United States continues to gain momentum. Both President Bush and the National Governor’s Association have made
education a national priority by increasing accountability measures, implementing higher academic standards, and closely examining student performance in the schools. The No Child Left behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 outlines the President’s plan to hold every state accountable for its schools and includes on-time graduation as one of its primary objectives. Contrary to the goals of NCLB, the application of higher academic standards as a prerequisite for graduation has tended to increase rather than decrease the dropout rates. The idea of a one-size-fits-all educational approach to earning a high school diploma is failing many of our students. By attempting to provide an equal education for all, the current system gives preference to students well suited to a traditional academic environment and limits those who are unable to experience academic success on one prescribed path.

California is not immune to this crisis. The California Department of Education showed the graduation rate for California schools in 2006 as the lowest in ten years (CA DOE, 2007). It is estimated that the 170,000 students who failed to complete their high school education in 2006 will cost the state approximately $48 billion in lost earnings and state taxes. Some districts in Contra Costa County have reported higher dropout rates for the 2004-2005 school year than others. Compared to the overall county dropout rate of 9.8 percent for the 2004-2005 school year, five districts have exceeded that number. Antioch Unified (AUSD) reports a 15.9 percent dropout rate; John Swett Unified (JSUSD), a 17.5 percent rate; Martinez Unified (MUSD), a 10.3 percent rate; Mount Diablo Unified (MDUSD), a 13.9 percent rate; and West Contra Costa Unified (WCCUSD), a 14.9 percent rate. These five districts have contributed significantly to the increase in the number of high school dropouts for the County as a whole. For the purposes of this study, we focused specifically on the Antioch, John Swett and Mount Diablo Unified School Districts. (One of
the five districts with the highest dropout percentages asked to participate in the research study, West Contra Costa Unified School District, did not respond to the invitations mailed.)

Contra Costa County’s suburban high schools mirror suburban high schools in other parts of the country insofar as students come to school with a variety of problems that impinge on their ability to succeed academically. In CCC, at-risk students who have become disengaged from regular education are offered “last chance” alternative educational opportunities in continuation high schools located on campuses separate from the traditional high school campuses. Although the floodgates are open with respect to students dropping out, it is important to note that many more students are not. For every one or two students who are unable to successfully graduate from a continuation high school, eight or nine remain in school and successfully complete the requisites for a high school diploma.

All of the participants in this study were similar in that they had overcome difficult life circumstances and were succeeding against the odds. More than half of the students who participated in this study hoped the research might help other at-risk students in the future. They understood the researcher was a classroom teacher, someone in a position to express students’ needs in a way that they might be heard to people who had the power to facilitate change. Through the use of open-ended, in-depth interviews, each of the participants shared their personal stories, providing important insights about themselves and their home, school and community. These unique insights can inform future research and educational practices.

**Research Findings**

While it is comparatively easy to identify the issues that keep students from graduating, it is a far more challenging task to identify and implement effective strategies and programs to overcome the influences of those factors. This research identifies key factors
that contribute to the success of these students within at-risk populations as they persist through graduation. By presenting a different perspective on a current social problem, this research provides conclusions and recommendations for further study and research. The implications of this study will be drawn from the researcher’s personal understanding and reflections of the phenomenon under investigation and the data collected.

Student experiences at home, school and within the community all play a role in an individual’s educational experiences. The life experiences of each of the participants in this study were compelling and often enormously difficult to hear. Each of the students interviewed displayed a common characteristic of personal strength or resilience. The students’ stories shed light on both the events and individuals in their lives that enhanced or detracted from their experiences, and the influences that kept them moving forward when others may have fallen by the wayside. Refusing to let adversity define them, the participants in this study consistently moved toward their goal of a high school diploma.

The various characteristics uncovered through this research fell into four overarching themes, which, in isolation or in combination, appeared to be at the foundation of every successful participant: the individual student; the family/home environment; the school; and the greater community. All of the study participants effectively drew upon positive influences to successfully plot a course bypassing the ever-present risks to achieve academically where others, possessing less resilience factors, could not.

Multiple resilience factors, or themes, emerged from the review of the participant surveys, interviews and archival data. Participants shared the following characteristics:

- a sense of purpose or a goal for the future;
• intrinsic and extrinsic motivation;
• a sense of personal responsibility;
• a caring relationship with a family member, close friend, or significant other;
• the influence of a positive role model;
• the ability to separate from dysfunctional relationships and adverse environments;
• a favorable response to the transition between the traditional high school and the alternative high school experience;
• the capacity to learn with teacher and school support; and
• positive social factors, such as involvement in a church community or a job.

Data Analysis
The participants in this study gave the researcher enormous insight into their lives, their many achievements and their respective struggles. The individual stories of personal strength and resiliency were awe-inspiring, and the researcher felt honored to have met with these incredible students and to have shared in such an intimate exploration of their personal experiences, their thoughts and the essence of who they are.

The majority of the students in this study came from troubled home environments. Despite numerous obstacles encountered by the participants, including dysfunctional parenting, divorce, poverty, mobility, and family turmoil caused by issues such as drugs and alcohol abuse, these students were able to overcome these challenges. In spite of the many stressors, they learned to accept their home life for what it was and, rather than being discouraged and giving up on any hope of something better for themselves in the future, they
chose to rise above it. It may be that the students developed the ability to persist in times of trouble because of so many disquieting home factors. The despair at home may have become the driving force in their desire to succeed academically and graduate with a high school diploma.

Significant adult relationships offer encouragement and a much-needed support system (McMillan & Reed, 1993). Osofsky & Thompson (2000) found that a healthy functioning family with effective parenting always has a beneficial consequence in promoting a child’s development of resilience. The participants in this study came from a variety of backgrounds; some reported positive relationships with one or both parents or caregivers while others shared a significant lack of parental support.

More than 80% of the participants lived in a single parent home or with someone other than their parents. Aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents and foster homes were more often than not the primary caregivers. Although the participants talked about their home situations and the difficulties encountered, not one stated directly, nor implied, that an unstable home situation led to their scholastic struggles. The students were very matter-of-fact when sharing troubling family situations. One student, Kit, recalled her mother’s alcoholism as something that didn’t really affect her or her sister until it became so bad that, “It just overflowed into the day time and she wouldn’t go to work, and couldn’t take us to school.” Only when her mother could no longer get her and her sister to school or afford to buy food and pay the rent did her mother’s alcoholism become an issue. The verbal abuse she experienced when her mother was drunk, or the general unavailability of her parent throughout her short life, were things just she dealt with. Her mother’s inability to parent was just “the way it was;” it was just another “whatever” in Kit’s young life. Another student,
Will, was also very matter-of-fact when talking about his father’s struggles: “My dad always seemed to lose his job because he drank too much, he would go to work for three weeks and then get drunk for a whole week, that was every month up to, up to when I moved over here.” It is noteworthy that while many children succumb to a lack of caring parenting by losing motivation, disengaging from school, and behaving poorly, the students in this study took an opposite approach. As things spiraled downward, these participants took greater personal responsibility for themselves. Rather than give up, they stepped up, choosing to move forward in a positive way.

Sadly, the lack of a caring relationship can lead to truancy, disengagement, no motivation, and behavior problems. However, in the case of the participants in this study, it became clear that it can also have the opposite effect by helping students see that they need to take personal responsibility for their lives. Wolin and Wolin (1993) stated that resilient students wanted to put their past behind them and not relive the problems to which they were accustomed. Resiliency seems to develop out of a desire to maintain self-esteem despite the negative influences of the family.

Wolin and Wolin (1993) found that resilient children often draw boundaries between themselves and the troubled parents. By maintaining their independence, they are able to keep an emotional distance between themselves and their parents. Many of the participants in this study had parents who were struggling with their own issues and seemed ill-equipped to support their children, often resorting to negative comments and destructive predictions of inevitable failure. Benard (1997) referred to the refusal to accept negative messages about oneself as “resistance” and the ability to disassociate oneself from dysfunction as “detachment.” These factors were apparent in many of the participants of this study.
A strong sense of self emerged repeatedly throughout the interviews. Although the participants acknowledged their struggles, they did not see them as the deciding factor in success or failure. While a troubled home made things more difficult, the participants did not blame that as a reason for their struggles. Participants openly admitted that past academic failure was due in part to their own lack of effort, because they just stopped trying or didn’t bother to study or complete their homework assignments.

Each participant interviewed was able to verbalize clear and specific goals for the future. All of the participants shared an optimistic belief in a good life, which to most meant having money to spend, a nice home, a car, a good job, and most importantly freedom. Ray said, “It’s just that I tell myself everyday, it’s like go to school and you’ll get a good job and you’ll have money and you can do whatever you want.” While Cathy said, “I just want my own freedom. Move out (away from her alcoholic mother), getting past this point in my life.” The comments made by the students demonstrated an understanding that their own choices, decisions, wants, needs, and behaviors had the potential to promote positive outcomes.

All of the participants interviewed had hope in spite of all their negative experiences, and all saw a bright future ahead. Masten (2001) found that resilient students had internal motivation and believed in their own effectiveness. Mr. C, the vice-principal at BCHS, would tell the students that life is what you make of it: “Life is like a boomerang – what you throw out there comes back to you.” He added, “Achievement starts from the time you get dressed– it’s attitude.” Reflecting on his experience as a teacher and an administrator, Mr. C. noted that resilient students seemed to possess a positive self-image, visualizing themselves being successful and maintaining positive thoughts.
The one thing the participants in this study all recognized was that their future plans and dreams hinged on their attaining a high school diploma. Particular experiences they had encountered reinforced the importance of graduating from high school. Matt said,

I’m just like, I’m hoping for the best; that’s why I’m here trying to get my diploma and just saying, what’s next, what’s my next move? How am I going to get more money? How am I gonna, you know, come up, you know in life, you know? Of course if you don’t get a diploma, you ain’t gonna go nowhere but back to school.

All of the participants reflected on the internal forces that kept them going to school. Several participants articulated a specific experience in their lives that highlighted the importance of a high school education and motivated them toward this end.

Negative school experiences were shared by all of the participants. The study participants disengaged from their traditional high school over a period of time, usually starting in middle school or the first two years of high school, primarily because they felt bored, misunderstood, unable to achieve, and/or they did not see the relevance of the schoolwork to the real world.

Schools not only contribute enormously to the shaping of a child’s identity, both individually and socially, but they also form a child’s attitude toward learning and thereby influence the child’s behavior. “Schools are places where the basic human needs for support, respect, and belonging are met, where motivation for learning is fostered” (Benard, 1997).

Wang (1997) found that the school, and in particular the classroom, has the most influence in fostering individual growth and educational achievement. It is important that students feel respected, supported, and encouraged by teachers and the school’s
administration. Participants in this study reported feeling as though they didn’t belong to the
traditional high school community and were not valued as members of the school. Many
shared a feeling of vulnerability in the regular high school classroom. Academic struggles
became overwhelming, and participants felt there was very limited support. The majority of
students perceived a lack of caring and discussed the poor communication between
themselves and their teachers. All of the participants mentioned wanting a teacher who cared
about them and who was fair, not someone who was punitive and threatening. It became
clear through the interviews that when teachers and administrators ignore the basic needs of
students, schools become alienating places. Many of the participants in this study reported
that their traditional high school was too large and the classes were crowded. Gina said, “I
think you learn more when you’re in a smaller environment because the teacher’s more
available, she’s more willing to help.”

A distinct lack of teacher support and understanding left students with academic
difficulties feeling ignored or rejected. Several participants felt the teacher perceived them as
hopeless. Art said, “If a teacher sees you getting a C, they just feel that you haven’t put out
the effort, even though it might be your best effort. It’s almost like they give up on you, the
way that I get it.”

Participants reported that their traditional high school teachers appeared to have low
expectations for their academic performance and treated them differently from their higher-
achieving peers. When they asked for help they were made to feel foolish. Teachers often
appeared exasperated when, after explaining a concept, the student was still not able to
understand. Students wanted to learn, but struggled to meaningfully access the curriculum.
Art felt that teachers just didn’t have the time to spend with someone who was struggling. He said, “They’d (teachers) huff and puff and be like, why can’t you get it, basically.”

Several participants found their teachers to be driven by the curriculum rather than student learning. They felt that the teachers were unresponsive because they were more focused on the subject they were teaching and less on the students trying to learn the subject. Art said, “They were specialized in a subject by teaching the subject. I feel that people have specific ways of learning, and I felt that they were unable to find out what the different ways of learning were for a specific person.”

Several participants mentioned homework concerns. Matt said, “Like you had to do homework. There’s no homework policy here (at the continuation school), so like you know you don’t have to do homework if you don’t want to.” He added, “Just like, we get out early; there’s more things to do in a day; there’s no homework that you have to do to pass. Because that’s part of the reason why I didn’t pass over there, ‘cos I didn’t do homework.” Mr. G, one of Matt’s continuation school teachers, explained that his school was lenient in terms of homework and added, “Not having a homework policy really helps.”

As homework assignments were a part of the course grade, those who didn’t complete them were receiving failing marks. Diva wanted to do her homework, but lived in an environment where it was extremely difficult. “It’s just like it’s a long day at school, and then when I go home I wasn’t motivated to sit down and do my homework ‘cos there was all this distraction.”

Another recurring theme discussed by participants was school drama. Gina felt beleaguered with the social aspect of the traditional high school and said she preferred the no-nonsense attitude and lack of peer drama at her continuation high school:
It’s better away from JHS, because you don’t have all the drama with everybody and you’re not worried about other people. You’re worried about your work. At JHS, if we were back on JHS’s campus, nobody’s going to do their work because they’re going to be too occupied about what people are saying about them and everything else.

Each of the participants felt the high school failed them in a variety of different ways. Ernie, who was chronically truant, felt the school should have been more in tune with his academic struggles and more persistent in its endeavor to get him to school. When asked what his high school could have done differently, he responded:

Seeing more of the signs, I guess; make me go to school first of all. They called my house a couple of times, like you know for not showing up. I even went to a court meeting thing you know -- truancy officer, went to him. I just laughed at him, “Ha ha ha!” Whatever. He then came to my house a couple of times. I wasn’t even at my house. They said they were going to take my mum to jail or something; they never did. They just stopped calling my house after freshman year. They didn’t really care.

According to Benard (1997) teachers and schools have the power to transform the lives of those at-risk for academic failure. In order for this to happen there needs to be a caring relationship between the student and the teacher, positive and high expectations for student achievement, and opportunities for the student to express his or her thoughts and opinions while participating in the learning experience.

Werner (1999) reported that outside of the family, a special teacher was often mentioned as a positive role model in a child’s life. The teacher was not only the academic instructor, but in many cases a sounding board, a person with whom the child could identify
(Werner, 1999). Werner and Smith (1989) found that “a special teacher was not just an instructor for academic skills, but also a confidante and positive role model for personal identification” (p.162).

Almost all of the participants in this study spoke highly of one particular teacher with whom they felt connected. Participants talked about teachers who cared about them, respected them as individuals, encouraged their efforts, listened to their words, and regularly offered praise. When asked what makes the teachers different at OCHS, Mr. G. responded, “They’re more understanding for the most part. They’re more flexible. They’re here because they want to be here.”

Wang (2000) found that school environments that are responsive to a diverse student body focus on the strengths of the individual and work toward addressing those needs. All of the students in this research study shared positive thoughts regarding the academic program offered at the continuation high school. Participants reported feeling that the assignments were sufficiently challenging, the workload more manageable, and the teachers more responsive to their personal and intellectual needs. In contrast to the more authoritarian relationship students experienced in the traditional high school, students saw themselves in a more collaborative relationship with their teachers at the continuation school. They discussed feeling respected and valued there, something they saw as lacking in the regular high school setting.

The relationship between the student and teacher is of particular importance. Werner and Smith (1992) reported that apart from a loving, caring family member, a favorite teacher who paid attention to and took a personal interest in a child was the second most vital element in a student’s success. Sadly, teachers are burdened by large class size, lack of
resources due to decreases in educational spending, and students whose enormous and diverse academic needs outstrip teachers’ ability to meet them. Although teachers cannot change many things about schools and how they are funded and organized, they can have a positive impact on students by displaying a caring attitude and having high expectations for every child.

The availability of supportive relationships outside of the family have a protective influence on children (Masten, 2001). Caring seems to be one of the most important factors in fostering resilience; however, it does not have to come solely from a family member or member of the school community. The majority of the participants were quick to name someone outside their family and school community circles who had significantly impacted their lives. They often discussed a close friend, a significant other, or even a boss or job as supporting them and motivating them to continue. Harvey (2007) reported that positive emotions such as love and gratitude increase the individual’s resiliency because they serve as a buffer against negative emotions such as depression.

When asked if there was anyone outside of school to whom they look up, who takes a special interest in them, whom they would consider a mentor, the participants overwhelmingly named mothers and grandparents; however, several participants talked about a special boss or close friend.

The students in this study successfully reached 12th grade in spite of many risk factors such as poverty, violence, divorce, mobility, and parent/caregiver drug and alcohol abuse. The data collected during this study reveals that the students were able to adapt to difficult life circumstances through the use of internal and external resources. Adversity had taught these participants that while they didn’t have control over many things that happened
in their lives, they did have the power to shape their future as competent adults and productive citizens. The students in this study had overcome adversity. Their resilience did not come from super-human powers, but from such ordinary things as thinking and planning, nurturing oneself, capitalizing on family and other adults, taking advantage of everything the continuation schools had to offer, and getting support from member of the outside community.

While the participants in this study often experienced threats to their basic human needs, they were able to compensate for the threats by developing protective systems to deal with adversity. These adaptations allowed them to experience success. All but 5 of the 16 participants graduated with a high school diploma in early June, 2007. Sadly, one participant chose to leave his continuation school in early May. His friends from the class reported seeing him “hanging with an older crowd” and thought he was “heavily into drugs.” Of the remaining four, all anticipate a December 2007 graduation. On a scale of 1 to 10, 10 being “without a doubt I will graduate” all four gave themselves a 10. Similarly, not one of the teachers doubted these four students would graduate.

Important environmental factors influence the development of strong, resilient personalities. Such a support system at home, school, and in the community leads to the development of resilient personality traits including self-esteem, goal setting, optimism, and personal responsibilities.

As educators we need to strengthen the factors that enhance positive outcomes. By building resources that reduce the negative impact of some events, we can support our at-risk youth in learning to effectively cope in difficult situations.

Implications
While there are many troubled students in our school system, there are also some who show amazing resilience, doing well despite the adversity in their lives. The family, schools, and community all play a crucial role in the effort to instill resiliency in children. By giving a child knowledge, attitude and a value system, resiliency can be instilled. With a school’s support and encouragement, an at-risk child is given hope and with hope comes the promise of a better tomorrow. Resiliency is not a “magical power” and does not happen without outside support. The more support we give our struggling youth, the more success we will see.

Changing and improving our schools is feasible; changing the students is not. Schools cannot transform the family or the homes from which children come. Schools cannot alter the poverty, the homelessness, or the abuse of their clients, but they can change the way they do business. By building educational resilience in troubled students, learning can be enhanced and challenging circumstances survived. Krovetz recommends that schools need to foster resiliency by insisting that each student is known by the adults, is supported to achieve at a high level and is aware that she or he is a valued member of the school community.

The challenge for our schools is to provide the emotional and physical support system that engenders strong, resilient students. The day-to-day efforts of teachers, counselors, administrators and support staff can make a difference. When a school provides positive caring relationships and creates and maintains a supportive environment, at-risk students can and often do succeed. Schools can make a real difference in boosting student success by providing children with the most important resource, the most important protective factor, a competent, caring adult (Masten, 1994). It is time to invest in the basic infrastructure of teaching and learning.
Resiliency research discusses the importance of specific protective factors that enable individuals to overcome difficult circumstances. The involvement of a significant adult in a child’s life, whether a parent, teacher, family member or friend, is extremely important. All of the participants in this study talked about important adults in their lives. Some discussed their parents, while many more shared the important role their teacher played in their continuing success.

Teachers help students to develop the values and attitudes needed to persevere. A close relationship between a teacher and a student can reduce stress and offer positive support. Teachers aren’t just about academics; they can also serve as confidants and positive role models. The study participants disengaged from their traditional high school over a period of time, primarily because they felt bored, misunderstood, unable to achieve, and/or they did not see the relevance of the schoolwork to the real world.

Relationships with teachers or other adults in high school have the potential to significantly impact academic success. Many of the study’s participants felt slighted or misunderstood by teachers in their traditional high schools and these slights led to extremely negative feelings toward school. In response, teachers need to communicate a sincere interest in the academic and emotional growth of students. Croninger and Lee (2001) found that, with all things being equal, high schools where the teachers are highly supportive of the student body, drop out rates can be cut by almost 50 percent.

If we are to raise graduation rates, we need to get students to stay in school. Many participants shared how they gradually began to pull away from school, disengaging from the educational process. A review of students’ cumulative files confirmed the disengagement process. Many students began to have attendance problems in seventh and eighth grade and
by ninth and tenth grade were missing a significant number of school days and failing academically. Allensworth (2006) found that the number of absences a child has in ninth grade is 20 times more accurate in predicting academic failure than the eighth grade test results.

Schools need to pay attention to the policies designed to keep students in school. The difficult transition from middle to high school is a stumbling block for many children. The high school environment is more academically demanding while also offering more social opportunities and a far greater degree of autonomy. Adjusting to the many changes is a daunting task for the most driven of children, but for those who are academically vulnerable it can be the beginning of the end.

The three schools in this research study did not offer counseling unless mandated by a student’s Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Collaborative counseling involving teachers, parents, administration and the students is a crucial in supporting the at-risk student. By providing children with the support and services they need to succeed we will improve graduation rates.

Small schools allow students to feel a sense of belonging and usefulness that is crucial to success and resilience. Reductions in class numbers demonstrate how size and structure have a bearing on student success. A smaller size learning community gives teachers more time to interact with students in a more personal setting, allowing for a closer bond to be established.

Students who have been unable to stay on track with the credits needed to earn a high school diploma need alternatives to the traditional approach. According to Saunders and Saunders (2001) alternative schools are typically more caring and cooperative. They employ
a flexible curriculum, which allows students to catch up and keep up with the graduation requirements necessary to earn a diploma. In particular, older teenagers who are significantly behind in their credits need flexible alternatives to the traditional, comprehensive high schools. Schools need to provide students with support that is flexible enough to provide opportunities to make up missed classes while also offering later start times, flexible scheduling, shorter class periods, and earlier finish times.

**Recommendations**

Educate the teachers of tomorrow to fully comprehend the importance of their role

Invest more dollars in the basic infrastructure of teaching and learning

Refocus existing schools (K-12) to develop resiliency in every child

Evaluate teachers on their humanness

Encourage parent participation and offer parent education opportunities

Staff development – faculty meetings, department meetings, in service trainings, staff development

Train teachers to

- be aware of existing research on what works with at-risk youth
- become more approachable and empathetic,
- vary the school day – mornings only, etc.
- differentiate the instruction
- accommodate individual learning needs
- teach in a variety of modalities
Plan programs targeted specifically toward at-risk youth by

- employing a variety of teaching techniques,
- accommodating individual learning needs
- strengthening academic experiences
- reducing or eliminating homework
- Accommodate student work schedules, etc.

Addressing America’s Dropout Challenge, a report from the Center for American Progress and Jobs for the Future, recommends that it is time to invest in keeping high school children in school in order to raise graduation rates. We need to increase the federal support to boost state and local efforts to end the dropout problem.

In large, traditional or standard high schools, many students feel lost and unimportant. They lose hope and gradually begin to pull away from the school. The further they fall behind, the more they lose hope until eventually the prospect of completing high school and earning a diploma becomes insurmountable. Alternative schools are just that: they provide an alternative to the traditional high school, which for many is ineffective. With a smaller homogeneous student body, a staff that cares, and a lot less ‘drama’, students feel a sense of belonging and ultimately develop an “I can do this” attitude. It is with the development of this attitude that they become successful resilient people.

Limitations
This research study was based upon the experiences of 16 individuals, and as such, is limited. Generalizibility is limited because of the size of the study; however, the research does provide insights and generates ideas for future investigational studies.

Another limitation that may have influenced the outcome of this study was that the participants who chose to be involved in this study cared enough to get the permission slips signed. Perhaps their outlook is different and as a result they may have offered different experiences related to their educational experience.

Despite the limitations of this study the implications for alternative schools and regular schools are compelling.