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Determining if Students at Northumberland High School Who Choose GED or Other Alternative Programs are Successfully Prepared for Employment

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Determining if Students at Northumberland High School Who Choose GED or Other
Alternative Programs Are Successfully Prepared for Employment

A Research Paper

Presented to the Graduate Faculty
of the Department of Occupational and Technical Studies
at Old Dominion University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for
the Master of Science Degree

By
Sandra Green
December 2004

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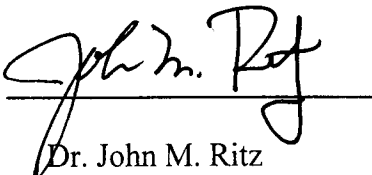
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APPROVAL PAGE

Sandra Green prepared this research paper under the direction of Dr. John M. Ritz in OTED 636, Problems in Occupational and Technical Studies. It was submitted to the Graduate Program Director as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Science.

APPROVAL BY:  12-15-04
Date

Dr. John M. Ritz
Advisor and Graduate
Program Director

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

It used to be a time where a high school senior could hardly wait for the day when they would walk across the stage and receive their high school diploma. Not only were they excited but also most of the family would turn out for such a life-changing event.

Today many students do not share this excitement. Portions of the high school population now make a decision to dropout of the regular high school curriculum and enroll in other programs. These programs provide alternatives to the regular high school experience. Some are administered at home at the convenience of the student and others are housed in alternative educational facilities.

High school teachers, administrators and counselors who work daily with the students should have some indication of academic difficulties and concerns they are facing. If a student is identified as a potential dropout, other assistance needs to be offered.

Some alternative programs that lead to a diploma are provided by the school system. Others can be purchased and the instruction is done at home. The General Education Development Program (GED) is another alternative to achieve a certificate.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The problem of this study was to determine if students at Northumberland High School who choose GED or other alternative programs were being successfully prepared for employment.

RESEARCH GOALS

The following goals were established to guide this research:

1. Identify reasons students choose other programs to regular high school education.
2. Investigate programs that are available for students as alternatives to high school graduation.
3. Determine if assistance is being offered within the high school before students dropout of school.
4. Assess if students are properly prepared for work opportunities through investigating alternative education programs.

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

Northumberland County School System has been involved in the general educating of residents for many years. The need for alternative educational programs to graduate students was initiated approximately 10 years ago. Since that time a variety of programs have been in operation. Home Instruction has been a program used in the Northumberland County School System. The General Educational Development Program and other correspondence courses have been widely accepted.

This study would provide information on student needs, programs available and alternatives to dropping out of school. The study will assist the county in identifying students who have special educational needs and concerns. Providing assistance to students who were identified will help them to stay in school and receive a high school diploma. They may later decide to continue their education or obtain a job. In this way, these young adults should become productive members of their community and society.

LIMITATIONS

Limitations to guide this study were:

1. The research period was from 1998 to 2003.
2. The research was limited to students former enrolled in Northumberland High School.
3. The research was limited to students who enrolled in 9th grade and did not receive a high school diploma.
4. No previous follow-up research was available for this county on alternative programs.

ASSUMPTIONS

There were factors in this study that were assumed to be true and correct. The assumptions were as follows. Northumberland County Schools' administrators, faculty, and staff will be willing to assist in this study and give current information. Students who participated in alternative programs can be located in the local area. Information from unpublished sources will be available for review to gather data to complete the study. The results of this study will inform the school system and students in making

educational decisions to increase graduation. Students in alternative programs will lack technology and work-related skills.

PROCEDURES

This study will provide Northumberland High School students and administrators with information on alternative programs that offer a high school diploma and their related benefits. The information needed for this study will be personal interviews and school records. Student records housed at Northumberland High School and Northumberland School Board will provide necessary information of student program choices.

Students enrolled at Northumberland High School during the years 1998 to 2003 will be contacted personally or by telephone interviews in order to gain adequate information. This data will be shared with the Northumberland County administrators and guidance personnel to increase awareness and sensitivity to student's needs for education and employment.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

The following terms will aid the reader in an understanding of their meaning in relationship to this study:

- Dropout- a student who abandons their regular high school curriculum.
- GED- General Education Development Program.
- At-Risk-Student- a student who has been identified as a potential high school drop out.

- Alternative Programs- programs students can complete to receive a high school diploma.
- School to Work Transition- a program designed to help students with educational and employment skills while in school.

OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

This study explores the reasons student choose alternative programs to obtain a high school diploma. It will also provide insight to school personnel on how to direct students who are considering dropping out of high school. Focus will be directed to economic and career opportunities.

Information will be included on the job success of high school and alternative program graduates. A detailed review of all available literature on dropout and prevention will be presented. Data will be collected by personal contacts or telephone interviews. The data will be analyzed and recommendations for future studies will be provided.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A review of current literature was conducted for Chapter II of this study. Information was gathered on dropout prevention as well as alternative programs. Studies have been conducted to investigate reasons why students drop out of high school. The data were used to profile dropouts. Research suggests that many dropouts have basic recognizable characteristics.

Factors related to a student's school and home were also identified as reasons for school dropouts. Issues specific to students in Virginia were discussed including suspension, exclusion, and expulsions. (Virginia General Development Testing Program, 2003)

GENERAL EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT

TESTING

The purpose of the General Education Development, GED, program was to assist students in school, who did not complete requirements for high school graduation. The program provided recognition of these students for their education, life, and employment experiences.

After achieving satisfactory scores on GED tests, participants can earn a General Educational Development Equivalency Certificate. This certificate qualifies them for admission to college, is a requirement for employment, and is needed for promotions on jobs and induction in the United States Armed Forces. State and local licensing boards

also recognize the certificate when educational competence at the twelfth-grade level is required (Virginia General Educational Development Testing Program, 2003).

The GED test consists of a battery of five comprehensive skills that are required during four years of high school. These tests are designed to focus on intelligence rather than knowledge of content. Emphasis is placed on how to think in terms of concepts or ideas, comprehension skills and the ability to evaluate using critical thinking (Virginia General Educational Development Testing Program, 2003).

There are several requirements for issuing GED certificates; the applicant must be at least eighteen years of age. In some instances the age of the applicant has been lowered if the applicant has been officially withdrawn from school. Applicants must be at least 16 years old to take the test. Applicants under 18 years old must provide special documentation to be recommended before being tested (Virginia General Educational Development Testing Program, 2003).

A student does not need high school credits in order to be tested. Non-residents of Virginia may be tested if they are involved in workplace or adult education programs. Otherwise an applicant must be a Virginia resident. A minimum test score battery average of 45 is required. A total of 225 points are required for all applicants (Virginia General Educational Development Testing Program, 2003).

The GED battery includes five tests, which measure skills considered the core of a high school education. The applicants are tested on Writing Skills, Social Studies, Science, Interpreting Literature and the Arts and Mathematics. The test questions focus on the abilities to draw conclusions and analyze and evaluate educational concepts. The

completion time for the entire battery of five tests is seven hours and thirty-five minutes (Virginia's General Education Development Testing Program, 2003).

HOME INSTRUCTION IN VIRGINIA

Some parents choose another alternative program for their children. It is called Home Instruction. In 1950 Virginia law allowed parents to instruct their children at home as an alternative to attending public or private schools. This law has been amended to include religious exemptions and the use of tutors. Parents seeking religious exemptions must show that school is a conflict between their religious beliefs and school attendance. This exemption allows parents to teach their children at home if there are no private or parochial schools available. A tutor can be hired to teach students at home. The tutor or teacher must meet requirements specified by the school board. A valid Virginia teaching license in any area is one requirement. A parent can also be the tutor, if they meet the requirements and provided the superintendent approves them.

There are four alternatives that permit parents to home instruct their own children:

1. The parent who teaches has obtained a baccalaureate degree from an accredited institution.
2. The parent holds a valid teaching license or letter of eligibility for licensure in Virginia.
3. The child may be enrolled in a county approved correspondence course.

4. The superintendent approves the program of study that includes Standards of Learning (SOL) objectives in language and mathematics. The parents must provide evidence that the child's educational needs are being met (Virginia Department of Education, 2000, p. 2).

SCHOOL DROPOUT PREVENTION

A study was done on School Dropout Prevention from 1986-1999 in the state of Virginia. The study produced significant data on why students choose to drop out of school. The data confirmed the fact that the problem was getting worse every year (Edwards, 1999, p. 1). The dropout rate had reached crisis proportions in the past 10 years (Edwards, 1999, p. 1). High dropout rates can affect our economy, educational status, unemployment rates and a lack of a technology-educated workforce. Data have indicated that dropping out can effect the next generation of children. Parents who were dropouts may have to raise children in poor environments due to the inability to get higher paying jobs.

There are many factors related to the student dropout rate. Some of them are:

- Viewing dropout as a normal part of life,
- Poverty and hopelessness,
- Inadequately prepared instructional staff,
- Personal problems or hardships, and
- A lack of positive role models (Edwards, 1999, p. 4).

Students who are having difficulties in the classroom may find it hard to catch up, then later dropout. Those students who show signs of discouragement are called at-risk

students. Intervention programs can be put into action to encourage the at-risk student such as school to work and career and technical education programs.

The school to work program encourages students to stay in school by learning valuable work ethics and maintaining steady employment. The employee and a school supervisor monitor each student's progress. Students may spend a portion of the day in class and the rest of the day at work. This teaches the student valuable skills for future employment.

Career and technical education classes are designed to provide the student with marketable skills needed for employment. The student attends regular high school for one-half a day and then participates in career and technical education classes for the other half of the day. The student can obtain after school employment to utilize the skills they learn in school while still in high school. Classes can be taught at the high school or students may attend a local technical center where they learn nursing, cosmetology, computer technology, auto mechanics, food service, or masonry skills. Certificates of achievement are awarded for completion in a technical study area.

SUMMARY

A high school diploma is not a guarantee of future success. It does give young people a feeling of accomplishment and the courage to challenge their future. One in six jobs are suitable for the high school dropout. The number is expected to increase due to the technology requirements of today's jobs.

All students, regardless of their academic status or social or economic backgrounds, need to be given a chance to achieve a high school diploma. A high school

experience that combines academics with technology and work-related skills will assist the students in obtaining employment. These skills will follow the student through many years of job and career changes.

Chapter III will discuss the population used in the study. It will also provide information on how the data were gathered for this study. A survey will be used to gather current statistical data.

CHAPTER III

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

This is a descriptive study seeking to determine if students at Northumberland High School who choose an alternative way to receive a diploma achieved gainful employment. This chapter contains sections on the population, instrument design, methods of data collection, statistical procedures and summary.

POPULATION

The population of this study involved students from Northumberland High School, who attended school but did not receive a diploma. Students who enrolled in Northumberland High School and then choose other alternative education methods were contacted. There were 40 students who fit this description.

INSTRUMENT DESIGN

The instrument was designed to gather information on the many reasons why students choose other programs to achieve a high school diploma or its equivalent. The survey included questions on what program they choose, how fair they felt they were treated in school, participation in extra curricular activities, and employment information. Questions were asked about program selection and employment opportunities (see Appendix A).

METHODS OF DATA COLLECTED

In order to gain information for this research project, a survey was designed to gather information. Students who were enrolled in Northumberland High School in the 9th grade, but did not complete the school's curriculum, were given the survey by telephone or personal interview.

The survey attempted to gain information on the alternative programs that were completed, employment accomplishments and satisfaction of educational choice. The questions were developed to answer the research goals.

STATISTICAL PROCEDURES

Statistical data were analyzed through the use of frequency of response and percentages. Numbers and percentages were used to determine how many students responded and how many were employed.

SUMMARY

Surveys were sent to students no longer attending regular classes at Northumberland High School. Information was gathered on alternative program selection, satisfaction of selection, and employment. The information from the surveys were gathered and analyzed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Chapter IV of the study included information gathered from a telephone or personal survey conducted of students who no longer attended Northumberland High School. The survey was designed to obtain information on the types of alternative education programs they selected and their employment information.

The data from the research identified a variety of reasons students choose other programs. Some of the reasons were lack of interest, social conflicts, teacher apathy, and pregnancy. The topics researched were as follows: enrollee in alternative programs, like or dislike of high school, fair treatment of students, length of school day, extra-curricular activities, and educational skills.

SURVEY RESULTS

Information was requested from 40 interviewees and 26 or 65% responded to the survey. Responses were by letter or personal and telephone contacts.

Results from Question 1, "Are you enrolled in an alternative program," showed that 23 of the interviewees responded to enrolling into an alternative program and three did not enroll into an alternative program. Those interviewees who responded "yes" reported that these were the alternative programs that they attended: Continental Academy, Morning Star Academy, and Education Direct High School Diploma Program. See Table 1.

Table 1. Enrollees in Alternative Program

Attending Alternative Program	Not Attending Alternative Program
23 or 88 %	3 or 12 %

Reports from Question 2, “Did you like high school,” showed that 17 interviewees responded “No” to not liking high school and nine responded “Yes” to liking high school. See Table 2.

Table 2. Like or Dislike of High School

Like High School	No Response
9 or 35 %	17 or 65 %

Ten students felt that they were treated fairly by faculty and staff, which was exhibited from Question 3, “Do you feel you were fairly treated by the faculty and staff.” See Table 3.

Table 3. Fair Treatment of Student

Fairly Treated	Not Fairly Treated
10 or 62 %	6 or 38 %

In Question 4, “Did you feel the school day was too long,” three of the interviewees felt that the school day was not too long, whereas 23 of the interviewees did not respond. See Table 4.

Table 4. Length of School Day

School Day to Long	Undecided
3 or 12 %	23 or 88 %

Question 5, “Did you feel school provided enough extra-curricular activities for students,” showed that 18 of the interviewees felt there were plenty of extra-curricular activities, but they did not participate. Eight of the interviewees were enrolled in the high school JROTC program or played sports. See Table 5.

Table 5. Extra-Curricular Activities

Extra-Curricular Activities	No Extra-Curricular Activities
8 or 31 %	18 or 69 %

Question 6, “If employed, do you feel you have the required educational skills for the job,” showed that of the 26 responses, 80% were employed and 6 or 20% were unemployed. It was also found that 86% of the students who responded still live in the local area. See Table 6.

Table 6. Alternative Program Students

Names Listed	Response	Employed	Not Employed
40	26	20	6
Percentages	65%	80%	20%

Other information obtained from this research showed that Northumberland County had the highest number of dropouts in 2001-2002 with 23 students. The report

also showed that Northumberland County has the highest number for Home Instruction and Religious Exemptions in 2003-2004, with 37 students, and was second highest for 2002-2003 school year with 31 students. (Virginia Department of Education – Home-Schooled and Religious Exemptions Report, 2002-2004)

SUMMARY

This chapter reported the findings of a survey of Northumberland County High School students who choose alternative programs to achieve a high school diploma. The data collected were used to determine if these students were employed. Data were collected from 26, or 65%, of the students contacted. Chapter V will provide the summary, conclusion, and recommendation of the study.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Information gathered was studied and analyzed to obtain data for this chapter. This chapter contains information on reasons why students drop out of high school and the alternative methods that are frequently used to obtain a high school diploma. This chapter also gives recommendations for future drop out prevention methods.

SUMMARY

The problem of this study was to determine if students at Northumberland High School who choose GED or other alternative programs were being successfully prepared for employment. The goals of the research project were to identify reasons students choose other programs to regular high school education, and to investigate programs available for students as alternatives to high school graduation. Additional goals were to determine if assistance is being offered within the high school before students dropout and assess if students are properly prepared for work opportunities through alternative education programs by getting the interviewee to answer survey questions.

The review of literature produced information on President Bush, Sr. and his goals on education. An article quoted, "George Bush, Sr. this January set six goals to strengthen American education. One of them is to reduce the national high school dropout rate to 10 percent by the end of the decade. Currently, according to Bush, the rate is 25 percent" (McLaughlin, 1990, p.1). The article also listed some of the shortcomings of an under educated work force. Dropouts cost the country billions of dollars in welfare programs, crime prevention programs, and unemployment.

The National Center of Education Statistics suggested that most dropouts quickly discover that their opportunities in the job market were severely restricted by the lack of education; they then apparently, decided to finish school (McLaughlin, 1990, p. 3).

The review of literature indicated some reasons students choose alternative education programs. They were as follows:

1. Social conflicts and pressures,
2. Retention in one or more grades,
3. Unable to cope with school environment,
4. Poor reading or academic successes, and
5. Teen pregnancy (McLaughlin, 1990, p. 5).

The method and procedures used for the study were telephone and personal interviews. A school interest questionnaire form was filled out as information was obtained. The results were used to obtain a 26 response rate, or 80% of employed students who responded.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the research goals of this study, these conclusions were provided:

1. Identify reasons students choose other programs to regular high school education.

Question 2, "Did you like high school?", showed that nine responded "Yes" to liking high school and 17 responded "No" to not liking high school. The research provided reasons that students choose other programs.

They were:

- a) Social conflicts and pressures

- b) Retention in one or more grades
 - c) Unable to cope in school environments
 - d) Poor reading and academic successes
 - e) Teen pregnancy
2. Investigate programs that are available for students as alternatives to high school graduation. Research provided information on programs from Question 1, “Are you enrolled in an alternative program; if yes what is the name of the current program you are attending?” The answers to this question were:
- a) GED
 - b.) Home Instruction
 - c.) Correspondence Courses
 - d.) Home Schooling
3. Determine if assistance is being offered within high school before students dropout of school. Administrators and guidance staff were aware of the dropout rate and alternative education programs. Students who enter alternative programs were classified as transfer students. The school was not held accountable for these students to take the Standard of Learning Test. This information was determined talking with administration and guidance staff.
4. Assess if the students are properly prepared for work opportunities through alternative education programs. The research showed that 80 percent of the students who responded were employed. They were employed in the areas of cashiers, nurse’s aide, construction, and landscaping.

RECOMMENDATIONS

According to the research finding and conclusions of this study, the researcher suggests the following recommendations:

1. Administrators and faculty need to become more involved with students and sensitive to their needs. This will help to ensure an atmosphere where students could learn and want to stay in school.
2. Provide more information to students about alternative education programs. Students who choose not to stay in school should be given information on programs available. Information is being passed by word of mouth according to information received from the students.
3. Conduct a follow-up of students who choose alternative education programs each year. Assistance and guidance should be offered to these students as well as students who are attending regular high school. Students who are in an alternative program are still considered a part of the school system.
4. This research should be reported to a larger group. Research should be continued on these students as a group. The reports from The Virginia Department of Education show the numbers for Northumberland County students choosing alternative programs continuing to increase.
5. School emphasis should be on providing students with basic academic and technical education skills, so they make progress in school and continue to enroll through graduation.
6. Investigation of programs revealed several programs that have been used successfully by students. Assistance is available to anyone who wants to get into

an alternative program. Information is provided to students who seek guidance in this area. Student who choose alternative programs were able to use what skills they had already achieved to obtain employment.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A- Research Survey

APPENDIX B- Sample Cover Letter

APPENDIX A**SCHOOL INTEREST QUESTIONNAIRE**

Name: _____

Date: _____

◆ Answer the following questions by circling**YES /NO****1. Are you enrolled in an alternative program? YES/NO****If YES, what is the name of the current program you are attending?**

2. Did you like high school? YES / NO**3. Do you feel you were fairly treated by the faculty and staff? YES /NO****4. Did you feel the school day was too long? YES/NO****5. Did you feel the school provided enough extra-curricular activities for students?****YES/ NO****6. If employed, do you feel you have the required educational skills for the job?****YES/NO**

APPENDIX B

24 August 2004

Dear:

I am a graduate student currently enrolled at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia, and I am working on this project with Dr. John R. Ritz. My specialization is in determining if students at Northumberland High School who choose the GED or other alternative programs are successfully prepared for employment. In order to solve my research problem, I am distributing questionnaires about your school experiences. Your participation in this study is very important to solving my research problem.

Once again your responses and cooperation is greatly appreciated. I can be reached at my home telephone number (804) 580-2506 after 4:00 P.M. Please complete and return the School Interest Questionnaire. A self-addressed envelope and stamp has been provided for you. I will also be calling you for additional information. Thank you again for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Sandra L. Green
2838 Coan Stage Rd.
Heathsville, VA 22473

Enclosure