

THE ALTERNATIVE LEARNING AND ATTENDANCE CENTER:

IS IT EFFECTIVE AT A RURAL HIGH SCHOOL

by

Carol Lynn Wheelock

A Research Paper

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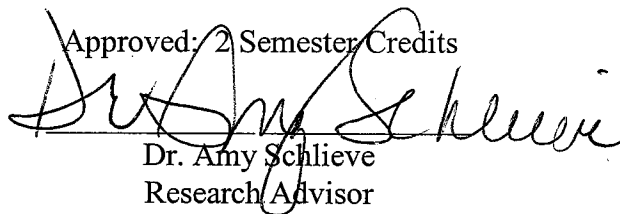
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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dr. Amy Schlieve", is written over a horizontal line.

Dr. Amy Schlieve
Research Advisor

The Graduate School

University of Wisconsin-Stout

May 2004

The Graduate School
University of Wisconsin Stout
Menomonie, WI 54871

ABSTRACT

<u>Wheelock</u>	<u>Carol</u>	<u>L</u>
(Last Name)	(First Name)	(Initial)

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“A 2000 study by the Justice Policy Institute in Washington, DC, reported that 3.1 million youths in America were expelled or suspended in 1997- nearly 6.8 percent of students, up from 3.7 percent in 1974. The study reported that of the more than 6,400 cases schools sent to juvenile courts, more than 90 percent concerned habitual truancy, disorderly conduct and uncontrollable students”. (Kenning, 2003) This study caused many school districts to look for alternatives to school suspensions. The Alternative Learning and Attendance Center (ALAC) is one of those alternatives.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the high school staff’s perceptions of the effectiveness of the newly implemented ALAC room. The study was also used to assess the staff’s understanding of the problems and benefits of the ALAC room, as well as providing them

with an opportunity to make suggestions for improvement.

The study was based on a survey provided to the high school staff, and includes the responses of nine out of nineteen survey participants. The survey was conducted during the summer of 2003, and responses were based upon the use of the ALAC room during the 2002-2003 school year. This study took place at a rural high school in Wisconsin.

The research examined the staff's perception of the effectiveness of the ALAC room in the areas of use, effectiveness, problems, benefits and improvements. The results of this study offered valuable information regarding the perception of teachers and administrators toward their understanding of the effectiveness of the ALAC room. It provides valuable information for the teachers, administrators, and the school district, in making an informed decision about whether to continue or replace a program intended to aid in the learning atmosphere.

It is hoped that this study will provide useful information for improvement in the ALAC room setting of the rural Wisconsin high school.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

.....	Page
Abstract	ii
 CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	
Introduction.....	1
Statement of problem	2
Purpose of the study.....	3
Assumptions of the study	3
Definition of terms.....	3
Limitations of the study	4
Methodology	4
 CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	
What is an ALAC room.....	5
The Four Models of an In-School Suspension Program	7
What makes an ALAC room effective.....	9
 CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY	
Description of methodology.....	13
Subjects.....	13
Instrumentation	13
Procedures.....	14
Data collection	14

Data analysis	14
Limitations	14
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS	
Introduction.....	15
Demographic Information.....	15
Item Analysis	15
Evidence.....	16
Summary of findings.....	29
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION	
Introduction.....	30
Discussion.....	30
Results and Conclusions	32
Recommendations.....	34
Summary.....	34
REFERENCES	36
APPENDIX A.....	38
IRB Approval.....	39
APPENDIX B	40
Request for Participation and Consent.....	41
APPENDIX C	42
Survey	43
APPENDIX D	44
Other Comments Added	45

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

“A 2000 study by the Justice Policy Institute in Washington, DC, reported that 3.1 million youths in America were expelled or suspended in 1997- nearly 6.8 percent of students, up from 3.7 percent in 1974. The study reported that of the more than 6,400 cases schools sent to juvenile courts, more than 90 percent concerned habitual truancy, disorderly conduct and uncontrollable students”. (Kenning, 2003) This study caused many school districts to look for alternatives to school suspensions. The high school in this study is no exception.

This researcher was first introduced to the concept of the ALAC room in the year 2002 in the rural high school in which I worked. With referrals on the rise over the past couple of years, 2000-2002, the administration was searching for something to not just suppress non-compliant behavior, but to modify it. (Hodkowiecz, 2002)

Educators most often express a willingness to work with students and an interest in assisting them in changing their behavior. The perception of the educators at this school was that the concept of the ALAC room at did not seem designed to help them achieve that goal. (Staff meeting, June 7, 2002) In all fairness, however, the system that was in place prior to the implementation of ALAC did not either. If a student misbehaved a referral was written. The referral was given to the vice-principal and the student was called to the office, usually the next day, and a disciplinary action was decided upon. The teacher was then provided with a copy of the report as to what disciplinary action was taken. (Student Handbook, 1999)

The ALAC room is an acronym for the Alternative Learning and Attendance Center. It is a disciplinary approach for behavior modification. The reason that students are sent to the ALAC room is for disruptive behavior in the classroom. It is the belief of the Administration that the

placement of a student in the ALAC room has a positive result for all students. (Kuchta, 2002)

The disruptive student can have immediate and individual attention, and the classroom can be returned to a positive learning environment. The student remains in the ALAC room for the remainder of the period in which they were sent. The student is given papers to fill out and a one-on-one meeting between the teacher and student must take place prior to the student's return to class. (Kuchta, 2002)

When the ALAC room was first implemented, there was a different instructor in the room every forty-three minutes. If an instructor had a substitute for that day, the substitute also took the instructors place in the ALAC room. It was the conclusion of the administration that this was not conducive to behavior modification and one full time person was hired to monitor the ALAC room. (Staff meeting, December 13, 2003) This seemed to be a better solution as "splitting the roles of personnel can cause inconsistency in the program delivery". (Southard, 2003)

Statement of the Problem

The 2000 Justice Policy Institute study stated that most of the behaviors that led to suspensions were for immature behavior that is common among adolescents: defiance of authority, disturbing class, failure to attend detention, profanity, vulgarity and use of tobacco. (Kenning, 2003) These were also the reasons that students were being sent to the ALAC room. (Staff meeting January 2003) As the concept of the ALAC room is to modify these behaviors, while allowing the students to receive uninterrupted instruction, it was necessary to find out if it was indeed being effective.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the high school staff's perceptions of the effectiveness of the newly implemented ALAC room. The study was also used to assess the staff's understanding of the problems and benefits of the ALAC room, as well as providing them with an opportunity to make suggestions for improvement.

The study was based on a survey provided to the high school staff, and includes the responses of nine out of nineteen survey participants. The survey was conducted during the summer of 2003, and responses were based upon the use of the ALAC room during the 2002-2003 school year.

Assumptions of the study

There are several assumptions that were considered when conducting this research. All staff members of the high school had access to the use of the ALAC room. All staff members of the high school viewed the ALAC room as a behavior modification program. All supervisors of the ALAC room would follow the same disciplinary procedures, and all required paperwork would be completed by the student and returned to the staff member in a timely fashion.

Definition of terms

ALAC room: The ALAC room (Alternative Learning and Attendance Center) is a room where students that are displaying disruptive or non-compliant behavior are sent when any staff member at the high school, for the remainder of the period, removes them from the classroom, or other area of the school. This center is also used as an area for students to clear up any attendance problems they have had in the past. This area serves as the school's ISS room as well.

ISS: An acronym for in-school suspension. In-school suspension is a punishment for students for one or more entire days of school, in lieu of being sent or remaining at home. The

student is required to complete all in class assignments and homework assignments the he or she missed as a result of being in ISS.

OSS: The term OSS (Out-of-school suspension) refers to the punishment of students for disciplinary infractions by sending or having them remain at home for one or more entire days of school. Out-of-school suspension requires a parental conference prior to the student's return to school.

Limitations of the study

There were several limitations that were identified during the completion of this research. The research was completed only at one high school. Not all staff that utilized the ALAC room chose to participate in the survey, and the survey was administered during the summer and not during the period when the ALAC room was in use.

Methodology

Participants from a rural high school were provided with a survey consisting of ten questions. The survey was developed by this researcher to determine the effectiveness of the newly implemented ALAC room at a rural high school. Sixty staff members were invited to participate, nine surveys were returned.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will review the literature with regard to in-school suspension programs, and in particular the ALAC room. The specific discussion will be how the literature relates to the implementation of the ALAC room. The literature review will define what an ALAC room is, the four models of in-school suspension programs: punitive, discussion format, academic model, and individual model, as well as what makes an ALAC room effective.

What is an ALAC room

“Is “discipline” concerned with preventing misconduct or punishing it? The word, according to the American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, refers to both prevention and remediation”. (Cotton, 2002) Every school sets its own discipline policy, and this high school is no exception. However, most schools have traditionally dealt with the student misbehavior by checking it as it arose, usually through punishment. (Gushee, 1984) This high school has attempted to alter this style by implementing an ALAC room.

The ALAC room, a supervised in-school suspension room, was designed to serve two purposes within the school. The first was to allow the teacher to reestablish the learning atmosphere that the student has interrupted and the second to provide a setting for the student to examine the actions that led to removal and make a commitment to correct his or her behavior. (Kuchta, 2002)

The reestablishment of learning environment is an important one as approximately one-half of all classroom time is taken up with activities other than instruction, and discipline problems are responsible for a significant portion of this instructional time. (Cotton, 2002)

According to Lang (1999) polls taken by the teacher's union find that teachers state that what's essential, yet commonly unavailable, are alternative classrooms for disruptive students, and even alternative schools.

The ideal situation for a school would be to have a positive school environment and not have a need for any alternative classrooms. According to a growing body of literature, the primary determinant of discipline policy effectiveness is a healthy relationship between school and student. (Gushee, 1984) A school can head off many discipline problems by having a positive climate. A warm school climate, characterized by a concern for students as individuals, is typical of well-disciplined schools. (Cotton, 2002) A positive school climate is not easy to achieve, however and requires commitment on the part of all staff to maintain appropriate student behavior as an essential precondition of learning. Well-disciplined schools tend to be those in which there is a school wide emphasis on the importance of learning and intolerance of conditions that inhibit learning. (Cotton, 2002)

It is unrealistic to imagine that even with a positive school climate discipline problems will not occur. A well thought out and implemented school discipline policy can help to prevent and control student behavior problems by coordinating the school's disciplinary procedures and by informing students what types of behavior are expected of them and what types are forbidden. (Gushee, 1984)

In this day and age of increasing violence schools are not immune. Each month approximately three percent of teachers and students in urban schools, and two percent in rural schools, are robbed or physically attacked. (Cotton, 2002) However, it must be decided not only exactly how these increasing incidents are to be dealt with, but what the root cause of these incidences are. If principals are not careful, they can be lured into the trap of concentrating on

disciplined when the real problem may be poor instruction. (Varner, 1999)

If a school decides to implement a program, they must be very careful when choosing and implementing an in-school suspension program. In-school suspension models can be classified into one of the following categories:

1. Punitive model-assumes punishment will reduce behavior.
2. Discussion model-assumes active discussions with the program staff and activities to improve self-esteem, communication, and problem-solving skills will help develop and influence appropriate behavior.
3. Academic model-assumes behavior is a direct result of academic frustration and improved basic skills will help improve student behavior.
4. Individual model-assumes reasons for misbehavior vary student to student and combines models 1-3 with an evaluation component. (Sheets, 1996)

The ALAC room is an example of an Individual Model.

The Four Models of In-school Suspension Programs

As it is stated above, there are four types of models for in-school suspension: punitive, discussion, academic, and individual. In a punitive model, it is assumed that punishment will reduce unwanted behavior. This assumption meets with much adversity. Marshall (1998) in particular states that punishment is not an effective form of discipline and is not conducive to changing behavior in students. Additionally, Marshall states that punishment serves to only manipulate behavior not to change it. Punishments are temporary and transitory. Once the punishment is over, the student has served his time and is free and clear from further responsibility. When a student understands that he will not be punished, it is easy for him to acknowledge inappropriate behavior, self-evaluate, take ownership, and develop a plan.

Establishing a no coercive environment, where people feel they will not be harmed, is a prerequisite for a positive classroom and school climate. You may coerce someone into temporary compliance, but change comes from internal motivation. In all human relations and in fostering social responsibility with young people, lasting changes come from within, not from without. (Marshall, 1998)

Discussion format assumes active discussion with the program staff and activities to improve self esteem, communication, and problem solving skills will help develop and influence appropriate behavior. Teaching obedience is not enough. The ultimate goal is that young people act responsibly because it pays off for them, rather than to please someone else. (Marshall, 1998)

The discussion format relies heavily on counseling. The literature supports in-school suspension if counseling to improve self-esteem is provided with a qualified counselor, parents are involved, a philosophy is established through shared decision-making, and continued academics are part of the program. (Guindon, 1992)

Students rely on counselors and program staff to talk through the problems that are causing the behavior problems, however most importantly, the students must think through the consequences of their choices, so they can learn from their mistakes. (Besso, 2002)

The academic model assumes behavior is a direct result of academic frustration and improved basic skills will help improve student behavior. The Student Advisory Center (SAC) is an example of the academic model. The SAC room is furnished with study carrels to deter unnecessary student interaction. The room contains textbooks from each grade level and subject area as well as reference materials (encyclopedias, dictionaries, etc.). There is a mediation/conference table and a hospitality table where basic classroom supplies are available.

A certified teacher staffs the SAC room. This teacher monitors all aspects of student work and behavior while in the program. (Sanders, 2003)

The individual model assumes reasons for misbehavior vary student to student and combines models 1-3 with an evaluation component. (Sheets, 1996) The instructor is the most important part of the individual model of the in-school suspension program. The instructor of the in-school suspension classroom should have skills in counseling, behavior management, teaching, communication and collaboration. Feedback from teachers, administrators and students via evaluation forms can provide valuable information for improving the in-school suspension program as well as increasing school wide support of the program. (Behavior, 2003)

An individual in-school suspension program uses objectives, learner outcomes and assessments to achieve effectiveness. In-school suspension programs which include guidance, support, planning for change, and opportunities to build new skills have been demonstrated to be effective in improving individual student behavior and thus increasing school order. (Cotton, 2002)

What makes an ALAC room effective

There is much literature that provides information regarding the components of an effective in-school suspension program. Sanders (2003) points out that although in-school suspension programs are a big part of the school system, schools often fail to treat them as such. Every curriculum has objectives, learner outcomes, and assessments that are designed to ensure a path of success for our students. Unfortunately, he contends, we often fail to provide those same components in programs designed to help our at risk students, the very students that need them the most.

There are several components of an in-school suspension program that insures its success. Whitfield and Clete (1996) suggest that an effective in-school suspension program should include but is not limited to the following components: A mission statement explaining the goals of the program, a full-time, qualified staff person to supervise the in-school suspension room, and who serves as a supportive resource or mentor for students, a protocol for student referral and communication of academic assignments to the in-school suspension teacher, and access to individual and group counseling for students (Behavior, 2003)

Sanders states that in addition to the above components, counseling, parental engagement, and a continued monitoring of students is necessary. He states that the essential components of a successful in-school suspension program are as follows: a clear statement of purpose, written procedures that detail how students are referred to the program and who has the responsibility for determining if in-school suspension is the appropriate course of action, a clear set of expectations for students who are assigned to the program, an academic component that enables students to keep up with their class work, a requirement that teachers provide daily assignments to students who are in the program, a strong counseling component, provisions for engaging parents in the process, and provisions for monitoring student progress after returning to the regular classroom. (Sanders, 2003)

The ALAC room at this rural high school was implemented as a response to the rising number of referrals. Prior to its implementation students were sent to the office to wait to see the principal or vice-principal and interrupted the normal operations of the school day. If there was no principal available the students were required to sit in the office until the bell rang and then move on to their next scheduled class. According to the literature that was sent home to parents of students from this high school, "A good learning atmosphere in the classroom is the joint

responsibility of the teacher and students, and is promoted through the use of clearly defined rules and regulations. Because of the varying personalities and classroom environments, these rules may differ somewhat from teacher to teacher. The teacher is generally responsible to resolve infractions of classroom rules. When normal corrective actions prove ineffective, the teacher may temporarily reassign a student from the classroom to ALAC". (Kuchta, 2002)

Additionally, Kuchta (2002) explains that the purpose of assigning a student to ALAC is:

a) to allow the teacher to reestablish the learning atmosphere which the student has disrupted, and b) to provide a setting for the student to examine the actions which led to removal and to make a commitment to correct his/her behavior.

The following are the ALAC procedures outlined by this high school, and sent home to parents and guardians of high school students.

1. Students sent to ALAC must report directly there within four (4) minutes.
2. While in ALAC the primary work for the student is to complete two "work-it-out sheets, followed by any work form the assigning teacher, then any other homework or work assigned by the ALAC supervisor. Work-it-out sheets are to be done using complete sentences and directly addressing the problem that caused the removal from class.
3. Upon completion of the plan, but before readmittance to class, the student must have one of his/her parents sign the "work-it-out sheets".
4. The student is to present the completed, signed "work-it-out" sheet to the classroom teacher before school begins the next day, in time to get the teacher's signature, take the completed sheet to ALAC, and still report to class on time. Under no

circumstances will the student be allowed to interrupt a class to submit his/her “work-it-out” sheet.

5. The student remains in ALAC for that period each day until the assigning teacher and the student agree on the student’s plan on the “work-it-out” sheet.
6. If the student fails to bring the teacher the properly completed “work-it-out” sheet before 8:20 A.M. it may be treated as insubordination. Such violations result in further consequences, such as detentions, parent conferences, suspensions, etc.
7. When a student is sent to ALAC, by the same teacher two times in a semester for unrelated incidents, the teacher is to contact the parent concerning the student’s behavior.
8. Failure to report to ALAC will result in an automatic suspension. Students who feel they have been sent to ALAC unjustly must still report to ALAC as directed, then discuss the problem with the appropriate principal later.
9. Disruptive behavior while in ALAC or failure to cooperate with the ALAC supervisor will result in an automatic suspension. (Kuchta, 2002)

This high school’s ALAC room appears to have all of the components in place for an effective, individual model of an in-school suspension program. The program is designed to inspire students to take responsibility for their own behavior, and assist them in managing their behavior, in order to return them to the classroom as quickly as possible. “Kids don’t learn anything when they’re not in school.” (Baker, 2003)

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter will describe the subjects, instrument and procedure used to obtain the data. The procedure for analyzing the data and the limitations will be reviewed as well.

Subjects

Approval from IRB was received prior to the implementation of the survey. A copy of the letter of approval was included in Appendix A. A public high school with an enrollment of 668 was selected for the study. The Principal and Vice Principal approved the survey and all staff members received a letter in their mailboxes inviting them to participate in the study. Nineteen letters were returned. Those nineteen received a survey. Of these, nine surveys were returned. A copy of the survey was included in Appendix C.

Instrumentation

The survey used was developed by this researcher to determine the effectiveness of the ALAC room as perceived by the teachers and staff at the high school. Question #1 was used to determine if the staff members had used the ALAC room. Question #2 was used to determine if the ALAC room had accomplished what the administration claimed it would accomplish. Questions #3 through Question #5 used a Likert-type scale to determine the usage of the ALAC room by the staff. Questions #6 through Question #8 were open-ended questions regarding the teachers and staff perceptions of the ALAC room. Question #9 directly asked the teachers and staff to predict whether the referrals were reduced since the introduction of the ALAC room. A copy of the survey is located in Appendix C. A means to measure the validity of this survey does not exist.

Procedures

On July 9, 2003, Human Subjects Consent forms and surveys were sent to nineteen staff members of a rural high school. Due to the fact that the survey would be completed in the summer, teachers were asked to provide their address or email address in order to receive the survey. Sixty staff members were invited to voluntarily participate. Nineteen provided their address.

Data collection

The data for this study was collected during the summer of 2003. Participants were given the option of returning the survey via email, mail or by placing the survey in my mailbox at school. Surveys were sent out on July 9, 2003 and collected by July 23, 2003, allowing three weeks for their return. Results of the study were provided to the administrator.

Data analysis

The data collected from the survey instrument was analyzed by separating subjective and statistical questions. Statistical analysis was recorded for questions one through five and nine and ten. Questions six, seven and eight, which were subjective, were analyzed for frequency. The data was calculated and recorded in a table format.

Limitations

The open-ended questions allowed for teachers and staff to interject emotion, which was less reliable than documented records. Due to the fact that the surveys were voluntary, participation was very small. Another limitation was the fact that the instrument was of an original design and therefore had no measure of reliability.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the staff of a rural high school's perception of the effectiveness of the newly implemented ALAC room. The questions were divided into three main categories, the use of the ALAC room, and the effectiveness of the ALAC room, and problems, benefits and improvements. The question with regard to use of the ALAC room, were based on a Likert-type scale and answered as to the number of students that were sent to ALAC. The questions with regard to the effectiveness were answered on a yes/no basis and on a Likert-type scale as to overall effectiveness. The problems, benefits and improvements were presented as open-ended questions, which were left to the participants.

Demographic Information

There were forty-six (46) teachers and staff members that were invited to participate in the survey. Of those nine (9) returned completed surveys. This represents nearly twenty percent (19.5%) of the staff members.

Item Analysis

The following results were based on responses to a ten question survey. The participants were asked to mark their response choice for seven (7) out of the ten (10) questions, and to give their opinions on three (3) of the questions.

Question 1: *Have you sent any students to the ALAC room this year?*

Of the nine staff members that completed the survey, seven answered yes. This indicates that almost seventy eight percent (77.7%) of those that returned the survey had sent students to the ALAC room. The remaining 2 (22.2%) did not.

Table 1**Question 1: Use of the ALAC room**

Response	Frequency	Percent
YES	7	77.8
NO	2	22.2
Total	9	100

Question 2: *Did you find that removing the disruptive student from the classroom allowed you to “reestablish the learning atmosphere which the student had interrupted”?*

Of the nine staff members that completed the survey, seven answered yes. This indicates that almost seventy eight percent (77.7%) of those that returned the survey believed that the ALAC room accomplished the reestablishment of the learning atmosphere, as administration had implemented it to do, while the remaining 2 (22.2%) stated it did not. One additional comment was added to the survey next to the question. (After the effects of the disruptive student on the other students has dissipated-sometimes 10-15 mins) See Appendix E: Other comments added.

Table 2

Question 2: Reestablishment of the Learning Atmosphere

Response	Frequency	Percent
YES	7	77.8
NO	2	22.2
Total	9	100

Question 3: *Approximately how many students do you have in your classes throughout the day?*

In question three respondents were asked the approximate number of students they had in their classroom during the day. This question had eight valid answers and one was not applicable. As both teaching and non-teaching staff are allowed the use of the ALAC room, there was one staff member for which this question was not valid.

Of the eight (8) valid responses, zero (0) taught less than fifty, four (50%) taught 50-100, four (50%) 100-150, zero (0) taught 150-200, and zero (0) taught more than 200. This question in relation to the number of students sent to ALAC, question four, shows no correlation.

Table 3

Question 3: Number of Student throughout the day

Response	Frequency	Percent
Less than 50	0	0
50-100	4	50
100-150	4	50
150-200	0	0
More than 200	0	0
Total	8	100

Question 4: *Approximately how many different students did you send to the ALAC room?*

Of the nine responses, six (66.6%) sent 1-5 students, and one (11.2%) sent 6-10 students. Two participants (22.2%) added the response, zero students.

Table 4

Question 4: Number of different students sent to ALAC

Response	Frequency	Percent
1-5	6	66.6
6-10	1	11.2
11-15	0	0
16-20	0	0
21-25	0	0
More than 25	0	0
*Zero students	2	22.2
Total	9	100

Question 5: *How many students did you send more than once?*

Of the nine responses, five (55.5%) sent 1-5 students, and zero (0) sent 6-10 students. Three participants (33.3%) added the response, zero students. One participant did not respond to this question.

Table 5

Question 5: Number of students sent to ALAC more than once

Response	Frequency	Percent
1-5	5	55.6
6-10	0	0
11-15	0	0
16-20	0	0
21-25	0	0
More than 25	0	0
*Zero students	3	33.3
Total	8	100

Question 6: *Do you see any problems with the ALAC room?*

Two reoccurring themes that participants saw as problems, question six, were visiting and interruptions. Some responses that evidenced this were “not run like an ALAC, more like a social center”, “students visit too much”, and students were trying to get sent to ALAC just to go hang out with friends (Appendix B). The ALAC room supervisor was also responsible for student’s unexcused absences. This resulted in any students that had an unexcused absence the day before being called to the ALAC room on an hourly basis. This caused great interruptions to the ALAC room. Some responses that evidenced this were “attendance should be taken care of somewhere else” and “by having students with attendance issues sent to the room on an hourly basis the room has turned into a zoo” (See responses below).

1. Watch TV.
2. ALAC is a punishing room and need to be run that [way].
3. Not responsible for homework
4. Students in the hallway at passing time.
5. Only can use 2 times per year per student.
6. Not run like an ALAC, more like a social center.
7. The environment of the room is not one that it should be.
8. Students are allowed to talk and play games.
9. Other students who are not suppose to be in there are.
10. Students were trying to get sent to ALAC just to hang out with friends
11. There are too many distractions.

12. By having students with attendance problems sent to the room on an hourly basis the room has turned into a zoo.
13. I don't even know if students are completing their homework of the required sheets.
14. There needs to be more discipline (NO TALKING) and fewer disruptions.
15. Attendance should be taken care of somewhere else.
16. This should not be a place where students want to go.
17. Failure to follow through with rules.
18. I had one student not come back for over a week.
19. Yes, many
20. I do not think some of the kids realize what they have done. They tend to blow off the forms. I have tried to make them re-due and it never is as good as I want it to be. I don't think I have high standards, but I am not satisfied they should be back in there the next day to re-due the forms the way I like them.
21. Students want to go there-ask for passes.
22. Students visit too much.
23. Inconsistency, students looked forward to the ALAC room because they didn't have to follow some of the same classroom rules, and their friends or "cohorts" were also there.
24. It has turned into a play room.

Question 7: *Are there any benefits to having the ALAC room?*

The responses as to the benefits of the ALAC room, question seven, were positive overall.

However many respondents suggested that the benefit would be greater if the rules were followed or the ALAC room were run correctly. (See responses below)

2. If there is a problem student they can be removed without sending them to the office.
3. Yes, if done correctly. No other school in our area runs the ALAC the way that we do.
Theirs works, ours does not.
4. If the rules are followed, but as of now they are not.
5. It does give a teacher a way to remove disruptive students from class.
6. There are times when a student just refuses to work and becomes a disturbance, other times a student is a behavioral disturbance. When you remove the disturbance it helps the other students get refocused.
7. Yes, if it's run correctly.
8. If there is a problem student they can be removed without sending them to the office.
9. Does work when run appropriately.
10. It is a place to send kids which is one step "below" a principal.
11. Could be if run right.

Question 8: *Are there any suggestions you would make to improve the ALAC room?*

In response to question eight, suggestions for improvement, many participants stated that the ALAC room supervisor needed more training and was not enforcing the rules consistently. There was a reoccurring theme of needing more administrative support for the program. (See responses below)

12. The idea behind the ALAC room at [school deleted] is a commendable one. However, the ALAC room has to be run correctly in order for it to be effective. Like any new procedure, it takes time to achieve this. This means administration must commit themselves to making this project successful. They can't look at it as a "bothersome" job.
13. Staffed by a qualified, trained person, (and I stress the word trained !)
14. Consistency, consistency, consistency!
15. All established ALAC room rules must be enforced at all times by all persons who staff ALAC.
16. Substitutes for ALAC personnel must be trained-not just thrown into the room.
Administrators will need to periodically check on the sub throughout the day.
17. ALAC atmosphere should not be a fun, enjoyable experience. This means no talking, no TV, no leaving the room except for bathroom breaks. Work should be brought to ALAC room by the student's teachers; the student shouldn't leave ALAC to walk around school collecting work. Lunch should also be brought to the students.
18. Immediate assistance from an administrator if ALAC room supervisor experiences any difficulties.

19. Immediate follow-up with all forms students fill out in ALAC.
20. Counselors should meet with ALAC student during his/her time in ALAC. We have counselors-let's use them! If counselors need special training for this, then train them.
21. Most of my ideas are above. I would like to be able to send a kid more than twice a year.
That is the only other problem I see. I would like to see maybe twice a quarter [unless it is that already. I sent so few] I would rather have the kids in class, but those chronic problems, I would like more chances to get rid of them. Even the occasional problems come up way more than twice a semester or twice a year.
22. Remove TV, do not allow laptop, get rid of desks, use Carol [sic] system-prevent socializing.
23. Keep on top of rules, enforce them and make it a punishment.
24. Stricter rules.
25. Forms available for use.
26. No benefits.
27. Continued support for administrator to make it part of the learning environment.
28. Remove current administrator that is where the misdirection comes from.
29. The ALAC personnel are used to do follow up that should be done by Administrator.
30. Current Administrator does not treat all students the same. Excuses sport kids too often-overbearing on female students-fails to listen to teacher recommendations, seems to know it all-but knows little about teenage discipline.
31. More discipline, better supervision, fewer interruptions, better follow up, more consistency, different location for attendance.

32. Follow the present rules. If the kid doesn't bring the sheet back, he/she would be put in ISS, not given a 2nd, 3rd, 4th or 5th chance.
33. No TV, no phone privileges, no talking to other students, no pass privileges.

Question 9: *In your opinion, what is the overall effectiveness of the ALAC room?*

All nine participants responded to this question. Three (33.3%) stated that the ALAC room was not effective at all, five (55.6%) stated that it was somewhat effective, and only one (11.1%) stated the ALAC room was effective. No respondents stated the ALAC room was highly effective.

Table 6

Question 9: Overall effectiveness of the ALAC room

Response	Frequency	Percent
Not at all	3	33.3
Somewhat effective	5	55.6
Effective	1	11.1
Highly effective	0	0
Total	9	100

Question 10: *Do you feel that the use of the ALAC room has decreased the amount of referrals given in the 2002-2003 school year?*

Only seven of the nine participants responded to this question. Of the seven valid responses, five (71%) stated the use of the ALAC room had not decreased the amount of referrals, and two (29%) stated that it had. There were five comments added to this question by participants. They had the overall theme that it was understood by teachers that referrals were reduced during the 2002-2003 school year, however the reason behind the decrease was not necessarily due to the ALAC room (Appendix E).

Table 7

Question 10: Decrease in referrals

Response	Frequency	Percent
YES	2	29
NO	5	71
Total	7	100

Research Questions

Research Question #1- *Is the ALAC room being used?*

Survey items 1, 4, and 5 dealt with this question. Seventy eight percent of the respondents stated that they sent students to the ALAC room. Eighty-seven (87.5%) sent one or more students, yet only sixty two percent sent students more than once.

Research Question #2-*Is the ALAC room effective?*

Survey items 2, 9, and 10 dealt with this question. Seventy eight percent stated that the ALAC room had effectively reestablished the learning environment; yet eight respondents (88.9%) stated the ALAC room was not effective or somewhat effective, and 71 % stated that the ALAC room was not responsible for decreasing the number of referrals.

Research Question #3-*What are the problems and benefits of the ALAC room, and can improvements be made?*

Survey items 6,7 and 8 dealt with this question. There were many responses but little consensus, and more negative than positive responses were noted.

Summary of Findings

In summary, it appears that the ALAC room is being used, and students are generally being sent more than once. Participants in the survey stated overall that the ALAC room was somewhat effective or not effective at all, yet the majority answered that the ALAC room had allowed for the “reestablishment of the learning atmosphere”. This was the Administration’s goal in implementing the ALAC room.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of the effectiveness of the ALAC room at a rural Wisconsin high school. The study took place in the summer of 2003. Data was collected through the use of surveys sent via email, mail or placed in their school mailbox. Staff had 14 days to complete the survey.

Discussion

The first research question that this researcher posed was is the ALAC (Alternative Learning and Attendance Center) room being used. Responses to questions one, *“Have you sent any students to the ALAC room this year?”*, four, *“Approximately how many different students did you send to the ALAC room?”*, and five, *“How many students did you send more than once?”*, supported this research question.

Question number one indicated that the majority of respondents (77.7%) had sent students to the ALAC room. Question four concurred with 77.8% of respondents having sent students and that more than sixty percent (66.6%) had sent 1-5 students. The responses to question five indicated that over fifty percent (55.5%) sent 1-5 students on more than one occasion. This supported the research that teacher state that an alternative classroom for disruptive students is essential (Lang, 1999), as teachers are using the ALAC room.

The second research question posed by this researcher was if the ALAC room was effective. Question two, *“Did you find that removing the disruptive student from the classroom allowed you to “reestablish the learning atmosphere which the student had interrupted”?*, supported this research, while questions nine, *“In your opinion, what is the overall effectiveness*

of the ALAC room?, and ten “*Do you feel that the use of the ALAC room has decreased the amount of referrals given in the 2002-2003 school year?*”, did not. The overall majority stated that the ALAC room was not effective.

In question number two, seven out of the nine respondents (77.8%) stated that the use of the ALAC room had reestablished the learning environment. Question number nine indicated that one respondent (11.1%) stated the ALAC room was effective, while the remaining 89.9% stated it was somewhat effective or not effective at all. Question ten revealed that 71% of the staff stated that the recent decline in referrals to the office was not due to the implementation of the ALAC room.

This was the most significant of the studies findings. The administration provided staff with the main purpose of the ALAC room, reestablishing the learning atmosphere which the student had disrupted” (Kuchta, 2002) and 77.8% of the respondents stated that the ALAC room had served that purpose. However, 89.9% stated that the ALAC room was not effective. This would indicate that the administrator and staff do not agree on what would indicate effectiveness.

The third research question posed by this researcher was what are the problems and benefits of the ALAC room, and can improvements be made. Survey responses to questions 6, 7 and 8 supported this research. Question six, “*Do you see any problems with the ALAC room?*”, was open ended and allowed for respondents to interject their own feelings and interpretations. Two reoccurring themes that participants saw as problems were visiting or socializing with other students, and interruptions. The responses as to the benefits of the ALAC room were positive overall, however many respondents suggested that the benefit would be greater if the rules were followed or the ALAC room were run correctly.

Question 8, “*Are there any suggestions you would make to improve the ALAC room?*”, had respondents stating two distinct themes, the supervisor and the administrator. Many respondents stated that the ALAC room supervisor needed more training and was not enforcing the rules consistently. There was a reoccurring theme of needing more administrative support for the program. These findings are supported by the findings of Whitefield and Clete (1996) who suggested that an effective in-school suspension program should include but is not limited to the following components: A mission statement explaining the goals of the program, a full-time, qualified staff person to supervise the in-school suspension room, and who serves as a supportive resource or mentor for students, a protocol for student referral and communication of academic assignments to the in-school suspension teacher, and access to individual and group counseling for students. (Behavior, 2003)

Limitations

There were several limitations that were identified during the completion of this research. They are as follows. The research was completed at only one school, the staff was not in-serviced as to the proper procedures for use of the ALAC room, ALAC room supervisors were not in-serviced as to the proper supervision of the ALAC room, not all staff that utilized the ALAC room chose to participate in the survey, and the survey was administered during the summer and not during the period when the ALAC room was in use.

Results and Conclusions

There is great potential for the ALAC room at a rural high school. The choice to implement the ALAC room was a needed and accepted addition to the existing discipline program. In-school suspension programs, such as ALAC, are a step in the right direction in that

their purpose is to keep students in school. However, in-school suspension programs viewed only in terms of the narrow goal of keeping students in the school building, and not behavior modification can create the illusion that progress exists.

The literature suggests that the supervisor of the ALAC room should possess a counseling or teaching certification. This is a component that is missing from the studied ALAC room program. The program now employs a full time supervisor who does not possess a degree.

The literatures, as well as the staff, have suggested that counseling should be part of the ALAC program. One suggestion was made by a staff member that counselors should meet with students during their time in ALAC. Although this may not always be possible, due to time constraints, there should be some follow-up made by counselors with the students.

Another component that was missing from the ALAC room was parental involvement. Students are required, according to the ALAC room procedures, to have their "work-it-out" sheets signed by one of their parents, prior to the return of the student to the classroom. Some of the staff commented that they were not certain that the paperwork was being returned.

One reoccurring suggestion from the staff was for one of consistency. One recommendation for a solution for the lack of consistency was proper training of the supervisor and all of the substitutes that would be supervising the ALAC room.

The most reoccurring theme from the staff suggestions was that the students find the ALAC room a more enjoyable place to be than the classroom. Students were requesting passes to the ALAC room, or purposely misbehaving to be placed in the ALAC room. There was also mention of students watching television, using the telephone, and receiving passes out of ALAC. The literature, specifically that of Sanders, suggests the use of carrels to avoid interaction between students.

Any in-school suspension program, including an ALAC room, should be implemented with the support of the staff, and with the use of in-service training for all participants.

Recommendations

There are a number of recommendations this researcher has as a result of this study.

1. This researcher would recommend that the sample size be larger. This researcher believes that a more accurate picture would result if more staff participated.
2. This researcher recommends that the mode of delivering the surveys be changed. This researcher would recommend addressing all of the staff members at a staff meeting to show administrative support, and hand delivering the surveys in an effort to increase the rate of return.
3. Another recommendation would be for questions 6,7,and 8 to be eliminated and narrowed choices are available for participants to choose from.
4. This study had survey questions that pertained to the participants' perception of the effectiveness, but not what constituted that effectiveness. The survey should be expanded to include certain aspects of what effectiveness entails. For instance: Do you believe that the students should have improved behavior on their return from the ALAC room.

Summary

The most significant result of this study was that the staff overwhelming stated that the ALAC room was not effective. Sanders states that the essential components of a successful in-school suspension program are as follows: a clear statement of purpose, written procedures that detail how students are referred to the program and who has the responsibility for determining if in-school suspension is the appropriate course of action, a clear set of expectations

for students who are assigned to the program, an academic component that enables students to keep up with their class work, a requirement that teachers provide daily assignments to students who are in the program, a strong counseling component, provisions for engaging parents in the process, and provisions for monitoring student progress after returning to the regular classroom. (Sanders, 2003) According to the listed responses in questions 6, 7, and 8 these appear to be the components on which the staff is judging the effectiveness of the ALAC room. Yet they concurred that the ALAC room served to reestablish the learning environment that the student had disrupted. This was the intended purpose of implementing the ALAC program.

This study addressed the perceived effectiveness of the ALAC room by the staff at a rural Wisconsin high school. The results would indicate that more communication needs to exist between the staff and the administration regarding the expected outcomes and the components on which the success of the ALAC room will be based.

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APPENDIX A

IRB Approval



Stout Solutions & Research Services
11 Harvey Hall

University of Wisconsin-Stout
P.O. Box 790
Menomonie, WI 54751-0790

715/232-1126
715/232-1749 (fax)
<http://www.uwstout.edu/rss/>

Date: June 11, 2003

To: Carol Lynn Klish

cc: Amy Schlieve
Education

From: Sue Foxwell, Research Administrator and Human
Protections Administrator, UW-Stout Institutional
Review Board for the Protection of Human
Subjects in Research (IRB)

Subject: Protection of Human Subjects--Expedited Review

Your project, "The Effectiveness ALAC Room at The Adams Friendship High School," has been approved by the IRB through the expedited review process. This protocol has been approved provided the following items are addressed. Then the measures you have taken to protect human subjects are adequate to protect everyone involved, including subjects and researchers.

- * The researcher needs to modify #11 of the protocol. The benefit of the evaluation is that it will allow the school to make an informed decision about whether to continue or replace a program intended to aid the learning atmosphere.

This project is approved through June 8, 2004. Research not completed by this date must be submitted again outlining changes, expansions, etc. Annual review and approval by the IRB is required.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB and best wishes with your project.

***NOTE: This is the only notice you will receive – no paper copy will be sent.**

SF:kn

APPENDIX B

Request for Participation and Consent

Dear Survey Participant:

As you know this year there was an ALAC room implemented in our school. According to the letter that we received, the purpose of this implementation was "to reestablish the learning atmosphere which the student had disrupted," as well as provide a place to "work out their problems."

This summer I will be completing my thesis on the effectiveness of the ALAC room, although I will be using statistics of the referrals sent to the office your opinion of the effectiveness is very important to me. Please feel free to add as much information as you feel necessary.

Thank you in advance for your input.

Carol Lynn Klish

CONSENT FORM:

I understand that by returning this questionnaire I am giving my informed consent as a participating volunteer in this study. I understand the basic nature of the study and agree that any potential risks are exceedingly small. I also understand the potential benefits that might be realized from the successful completion of this study. I am aware that the information is being sought in a specific manner so that only minimal identifiers are necessary and so that confidentiality is guaranteed. I realize that I have the right to refuse to participate and that my right to withdraw from participation at any time during this study will be respected with no coercion or prejudice.

NOTE: questions or concerns about the research study should be addressed to Carol Lynn Klish (608) 253-5081, the researcher, or Dr. Schlieve (715) 232-1132, the research advisor. Questions about the rights of the research subjects can be addressed to Sue Foxwell, Human Projects Administrator, UW-Stout Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, 11 Harvey Hall, Menomonie, WI 54751, phone (715) 232-1126.

APPENDIX C

Survey

A survey of the effectiveness of the ALAC room at Adams-Friendship High School

1. Have you sent any students to the ALAC room this year?
Yes No
2. Did you find that removing the disruptive student from the classroom allowed you to “reestablish the learning atmosphere which the student had interrupted”?
Yes No
3. Approximately how many students do you have in your classes throughout the day?
Less than 50 50-100 100-150 150-200 more than 200
4. Approximately how many different students did you send to the ALAC room?
1-5 6-10 11-15 16-20 21-25 more than 25
5. How many students did you send more than once?
1-5 6-10 11-15 16-20 21-25 more than 25
6. Do you see any problems with the ALAC room?
7. Are there any benefits to having the ALAC room?
8. Are there any suggestions you would make to improve the ALAC room?
9. In your opinion, what is the overall effectiveness of the ALAC room?
Not at all somewhat effective highly effective
10. Do you feel that the use of the ALAC room has decreased the amount of referrals given in the 2002-2003 school year?
Yes No

Thank you for you input.

Please return this survey to Carol Lynn Klish’s mailbox or mail to
1120 Fish Ct. PVT
Grand Marsh, WI 53936

APPENDIX D

Other Comments Added

Other Comments Added

Periodically participant added comments to the survey instrument under particular research questions. Those comments are listed below in no particular order, and with the question to which they were added contained in brackets.

1. Decrease in referrals due to lack of actions by administrator. [Question 10]
2. Referrals were destroyed for certain students. [Question 10]
3. Teachers were verbally attacked for writing referrals. [Question 10]
4. Not sure decrease is due to ALAC. [Question 10]
5. After the effects of the disruptive student on the other students has dissipated-sometimes 10-15 mins [question 2]
6. Not necessarily because they shouldn't have deserved one, but because of Administration's pressure to reduce referrals and send them to ALAC [question 10]
7. Not sure [question 10]
8. Depends on student [question 9]