

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: A CASE STUDY DESCRIPTION OF THE IMPACT OF CHECK & CONNECT WITH STUDENTS RETURNING FROM ALTERNATIVE EDUCATIONAL PLACEMENTS

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In this case study, the impact of Check & Connect on the first semester reintegration experiences of a cohort of high school students who had returned from a disciplinary alternative educational placement was examined. Archival data, surveys, and interviews were used to compare the students' experiences, academic and behavioral performance, and attendance, to a cohort of control students who returned to schools lacking the intervention and a group of students who remained at the alternative placement. Interviews were also conducted with the intervention implementers (monitors), a sample of the intervention participants' teachers, and the administrators who oversaw the intervention. These interviews allowed for a more thorough examination of the experiences, opinions, and perceptions of Check & Connect's value to the educational experience.

Quantitative data collected showed that while both groups of students who left the alternative school experienced declines in their academic performance, the decline was greatest among students with longer established academic and behavioral difficulties. Students with IEPs or 504 Plans had a higher average decline than their nondisabled peers. Improvements in the number of absences and behavioral referrals

were seen with the majority of the intervention students. Results among the control students were mixed.

Interviews indicated that the intervention participants experienced a stronger connection to their school that was frequently attributed to the use of Check & Connect. Many felt that the intervention, particularly their relationships with the monitors, had provided them opportunities to succeed that they might not have had otherwise. Control students, and students who remained at the alternative program, expressed an interest in developing a similar connection with an adult in their schools. School staff interviewed believed that the benefits of Check & Connect may not be immediately evident in the quantitative data, but that the relationships made between the students and monitors were potentially beneficial. Teachers found the additional information provided helpful and frequently requested greater sharing of resources. Administrators believed that the positive adult relationships formed between the monitor and students reduced the likelihood of eventual school dropout.

A CASE STUDY DESCRIPTION OF THE IMPACT OF CHECK & CONNECT
WITH STUDENTS RETURNING FROM ALTERNATIVE EDUCATIONAL
PLACEMENTS

By

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CHAPTER I: STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Education is often viewed as the key to economic and personal fulfillment. In spite of this view, not all youth succeed within the conventional educational paradigm. Many children with disabilities receive an experience modified by technique, expectation, or environment. Others are educated in alternative settings administered by the local education system. These students, frequently due to behavioral reasons, have been placed outside of the mainstream, conventional school environment.

Kleiner, Porch, and Farris (2002) stated that approximately 612,000 students are educated in alternative educational programs. This comprises roughly 1.3% of the total student population. According to Guerin and Denti (1999), these students are disproportionately poor, disabled, bilingual, and from minority groups. While enrolled in these programs, students attend classes of, on average, 12-15 students (Ruzzi & Kraemer, 2006), with significant amounts of academic and behavioral support. In these environments, many are able to improve their academic performance and begin to exhibit more appropriate behaviors.

Many of the students in the alternative educational population possess high incidence disabilities, which include specific learning disability, emotional disturbance, and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (Foley & Pang, 2006; Gorney & Ysseldyke, 1993). Lehr, Moreau, Lange, and Lanners (2004) reported that 12% of the alternative education students in a 33 state survey were identified as students with disabilities and more than 60% of the students demonstrated learning difficulties not attributed to a documented disability. Individual state reports show a wide range of disability prevalence, with a high of 87%, in some alternative

educational programs (Cortez & Montecel, 1999; Hasazi et al., 2001; Moore et al., 2005).

Ultimately, it is the student's "at-risk" behavior which leads to placement in an alternative school program. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (Kleiner, et al., 2002), approximately half of surveyed districts indicated that one of the following were sufficient reason for admission to their alternative school programs: possession, distribution, or use of alcohol or drugs; physical attacks or fights; chronic truancy; possession or use of a weapon other than a firearm; disruptive verbal behavior; and possession or use of a firearm. In Lehr et al's survey (2004), 88% of responding states indicated that their alternative education students had exhibited problematic behaviors not attributable to a disability. Examples of these behaviors included a history of poor attendance, suspension or expulsion, dropout, or involvement with the juvenile justice system.

Due to the increased cost of these alternative settings, the demand for space within them, and the wider range of educational opportunities available within the comprehensive public school, alternative school students often return to the comprehensive public schools. Upon return, many do not experience success. Many experience a stigma due to their past and staff may present an unwelcoming environment for them upon their return (Kershaw & Blank, 1993). Lower levels of academic support, greater levels of behavioral freedom, and the reintroduction of negative peer influences may contribute to the student failing in his or her transition back to the comprehensive school. This failure fulfills the expectation held by many. The consequences of this failure may include failing grades, absenteeism, disciplinary

problems, and dropout. Each of these consequences may impact the students' later educational opportunities and later adult lives.

Transition Outcomes

The consequences of not graduating from high school are significant. According to the Alliance for Excellent Education (2007a), a high school dropout earns an average of \$260,000 less over a lifetime than a graduate. Dropouts from the Class of 2007 alone are expected to cost the nation nearly \$329 billion in lost wages, taxes, and productivity (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2007b) and more than \$17 billion in Medicaid and uninsured medical costs over their lifetimes (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2006). High school dropouts are 3.5 times more likely than graduates to be arrested during their lifetimes (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2003). Harlow (2003) found that 75% of state prison inmates, and 59% of federal inmates had not completed high school.

Greene and Winters (2006) calculated that the overall dropout rate in the United States, for the high school class of 2003, was 30%. Within this figure, the authors noted that African-American youth had a dropout rate of 45% and Hispanic youth 47%. In each of these subgroups, the dropout rate was approximately 10% lower for females than males. The ten largest school districts in the nation, which enroll more than 8% of the total public school population, failed to graduate more than 60% of their students. These figures are based on the cohort of students expected to graduate in 2003.

In 2002-2003, the average dropout rate for students with disabilities was 33.6% (Twenty-Seventh Annual Report to Congress, 2007). Students with emotional

disturbance had a dropout rate of 55.9%, the highest for any disability group. The report acknowledges that only students who had formally dropped out of school were used in these calculations. Students who have stopped attending, but who have not formally withdrawn, were not included. The actual dropout rate for students with disabilities may be significantly higher.

The transition outcomes for students with disabilities, though improving, are not as positive as for their non-disabled peers. Nationally representative studies such as the National Longitudinal Transition Study 1 & 2 (NLTS 1 & 2), and the National Adolescent and Child Treatment Study (NACTS) have shown that students with disabilities have lower high school completion rates, levels of employment, and postsecondary educational enrollment than their non-disabled peers (Greenbaum & Dedrick, 1996; Wagner, Newman, Cameto, & Levine, 2005). Individuals with disabilities are also overly represented within the justice system. Quinn, et al. (2005) reported that a disproportionate number of all youth in long-term youth correctional facilities receive special education services. Across all states, the median percentage of youth with disabilities served was 33%. Of those receiving special education services, the largest disability categories found were Emotional Disturbance at 47.7% and Specific Learning Disability at 38.6%. Among adult prisoners, Harlow (2003) reported that 66% of those without diplomas stated that they had some form of learning disability.

Data concerning the transition outcomes of students in alternative educational settings is sparse. In Lehr et al.'s (2004) survey, only 19 of the responding states indicated that any form of outcome data was collected. Data from individual districts

is similarly limited. In Tennessee, as an example, only 15% of the state's school districts measure the dropout, graduation, and attendance of students in alternative education programs (Moore et al., 2005).

A high percentage of alternative educational students return to their home schools but little is known concerning this group's transition outcomes. In a survey conducted by Kleiner, et al (2002), 74% of responding districts stated that their policies allowed all alternative education students to return to their comprehensive schools. Criteria for returning included: improved attitude or behavior; student motivation to return; approval of the alternative school staff; improved grades, and approval of the home school administrator or counselor. Sixteen out of twenty-five states (64%) reported that many or almost all of the students return to a traditional educational program after attending an alternative school. Sixty-one percent indicated that the average length of enrollment in alternative educational setting was one academic year or less (Lehr et al, 2004). Upon their return, the postsecondary outcomes of alternative education students are difficult to parse out of the aggregate data.

Numerous factors contribute to the notion that students who have returned from alternative educational settings are at elevated risk of dropping out or having a poor transition outcome. According to Kleiner, et al (2002), ethnic minority and economic status were associated with enrollment in alternative education programs. Their survey showed that a disproportionate number of the students enrolled in these programs were minorities and/or met poverty criteria. Many of the students in alternative educational settings also have high incidence disabilities (Foley & Pang,

2006; Gorney & Ysseldyke, 1993). Statistics from national and state levels surveys vary widely in the percentage of students with disabilities in alternative educational settings (Lehr et al., 2004; Hasazi et al., 2001; Cortez & Montecel, 1999; Moore et al., 2005). Others exhibit academic difficulties not attributable to a disability (Lehr et al., 2004). The behaviors that contributed to the decision to place students in alternative schools may also have an impact on the student's success upon return to their home school and within the greater community. This may influence the perceptions of the staff at the receiving school.

Barriers to Reintegration

The educational experience within an alternative school is very different than what is typically provided by a conventional comprehensive school. A case study conducted by Kershaw and Blank (1993) showed that while the academic rigor provided by the alternative school may be comparable to the home school, the support provided by the staff was not. The small class characterized by the alternative school allowed the staff to develop supportive relationships with the students and modify their instructional techniques to better suit their needs. Socially, the alternative education experience assisted the students in improving their behavior and developing problem solving skills. The students also stated that they felt supported by the alternative education staff and described them, generally, as understanding, patient, concerned, and accessible.

Students returning to a comprehensive school from an alternative educational setting face significant barriers to reintegration. Not all schools possess policies designed to facilitate the return of students from alternative educational placements

(Kleiner, et al, 2002). Furthermore, home school personnel may be biased towards the returning alternative education student. Kershaw and Blank's case study (1993) indicated that the home school personnel did not view the academic progress made while in the alternative education setting as due to student effort. They questioned the standards of progress and rigor of instruction provided to the students. Socially, they stated that improvement may have been exhibited within the alternative program but attributed it to removal from poor influences within the comprehensive school. The alternative setting was viewed as a place to "get rid of students" who were causing too many problems within the school. In most cases, the staff stated that due to the students' families, friends, or substance abuse problems they would "never change".

IDEA

In spite of barriers to successful reintegration of alternative school students to their home schools, federal law supports the return of many alternative education students to their comprehensive schools. Many students in alternative educational placements are students with high incidence disabilities (Foley & Pang, 2006; Gorney & Ysseldyke, 1993). As such, many of the clauses within the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) apply to students in alternative settings. One of these, the Interim Alternative Education Settings (IAES) (20 U.S.C. § 1415(k) can be used to place students with disabilities temporarily, in an alternative setting. These are used to continue educational services while the impact of a disability on a behavioral incident is investigated. For those students who have been placed in an alternative setting, the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), 20 U.S.C. § 1412(a)(5), clause has bearing on the decision to return the student to the comprehensive school. LRE

mandates that youth be educated alongside their non-disabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate. Exclusion from regular classes can only occur when it is determined that the disability is so severe that supplementary aids and services cannot allow them to be educated alongside their non-disabled peers. Based on these clauses, a student with disabilities in an alternative education setting would have the opportunity to return if their performance showed that they could function adequately in the comprehensive school with the appropriate services.

Interventions in the Field

The interim alternative education setting (IAES), 20 U.S.C. § 1415(k), and least restrictive environment (LRE), 20 U.S.C. § 1412(a)(5), clauses within IDEA, provide for the return of students with disabilities to a comprehensive school under certain conditions. A large percentage of alternative education students will return to their home school (Lehr et al, 2004) to uncertain outcomes. Interventions to support the transition of students from alternative education placements back to their comprehensive school have been advocated (Rutherford & Quinn, 1999), but limited research on this topic has appeared in the literature. Studies involving dropout prevention interventions have been conducted, but only a limited number possess research designs allowing for generalizability to other groups (Lehr, Hansen, Sinclair, & Christenson, 2003; Prevatt & Kelly, 2003).

In spite of the limited literature base, the body of research that focuses on school completion does have bearing on the reintegration of students returning from alternative education settings. Much of the available research focuses on alterable variables. These include grades, disruptive behavior, absenteeism, school policies,

school climate, parenting, sense of belonging, attitudes toward school, educational support in the home, retention, and stressful life events (Lehr, Johnson, Bremer, Cosio, & Thompson, 2004; Prevatt & Kelly, 2003). Sinclair, Christenson, Evelo, and Hurley's (1998) original Check & Connect study, a monitoring and mentoring intervention, showed that a sustained initiative, focusing on many of these variables, was able to improve the school completion rate of a cohort of at-risk students. Many of these students experienced significant school mobility as they entered, and returned from, alternative educational settings.

Problem Statement

Federal law, such as the IDEA, as well as community pressures, are leading school districts to initiate efforts to return students from alternative education settings and reduce the dropout rate within their schools. In order to meet these requirements, districts are implementing programs that, while based on research and best practice, may not be true replications of previous work. Often, these initiatives are partnerships with university-based researchers. The goals of the district are different than those of the researcher. For the researcher, the internal validity of a study is paramount. To a school system participating in research, internal validity is important, but external validity is even more so (Potter, 2006). An evaluation of effectiveness can be used to judge the utility of the initiative and inform policy and programmatic decisions.

Evaluation research, closely related to program evaluation, is a research method that can satisfy the methodological requirements of both the researcher and the cooperating school district. Program evaluation can be defined as the systematic collection of information about the activities, characteristics, and outcomes of

programs to make judgments about the program, improve program effectiveness, and/or inform decisions about future programming (Boulmetis & Dutwin, 2000; Patton, 1997). Evaluation research can be considered a type of action research geared towards monitoring and improving a particular program or service (Boulmetis & Dutwin, 2000).

Several evaluations of alternative education programs have been conducted. An evaluation of the alternative education placements in Portland, Oregon indicated that the majority of the programs met established criteria for academic, attendance, conduct, and exit performance (Pacific Research & Evaluation, 2006). Meta-analyses of earlier evaluations have shown that alternative education programs can have positive effects on student achievement, particularly those students who require remedial instruction (Cox, Davidson, and Bynum, 1995; Friedrich, 1997). Few follow-up studies have been conducted and those that have were hindered by the high attrition rate of the participants (Burns, 1996; Cox, 1999).

Mentoring programs, such as Check & Connect, have shown a positive effect with at-risk students. Using meta-analytic techniques, Dubois, Holloway, Valentine, and Cooper (2002) evaluated the effectiveness of mentoring programs for youth. Small to moderate benefit were seen with particular benefit to youth from at-risk backgrounds. Slicker and Palmer's (1993) evaluation of the effectiveness of a mentoring program for at-risk high school students displayed similar effects. A secondary analysis of the quality of the mentoring provided showed that the participants receiving a higher quality experience benefited the most. As illustrated, the use of evaluation research does lead to certain risks to both internal and external

validity (Gorman, 2002). The danger is that pragmatic concerns will lead to a lack of rigor (Potter, 2006). The incorporation of reliability control measures can be used to mediate some of these concerns and enhance the rigor of an evaluation research study.

Purpose of the Study

The study reported here evaluated the impact of a district initiated Check & Connect (Evelo, Sinclair, Hurley, Christenson, & Thurlow, 1996) derived intervention on the academic and disciplinary performance, as well as attendance, of students who have returned to a comprehensive public school from an alternative educational placement. Performance was examined by comparing the performance of the students receiving the intervention to a group of similar students who returned to schools within the district that did not implement the intervention.

Research Questions

Very little research has been conducted concerning the students who return to comprehensive public schools from alternative educational settings. This study compared the performance of students from this population who received the Check & Connect intervention to those who did not. For those who received the intervention, the study explored the impact of the intervention with the students and the participating school personnel. The following research questions were investigated:

- 1. What impact does a Check & Connect intervention have on the academic and behavioral performance of a group of high school students with demonstrated learning and behavioral difficulties returning from an alternative education placement?*
- 2. How do students, faculty, implementers, and administrators involved with*

Check & Connect perceive the implementation and effects of the intervention with students returning from an alternative education placement?

- 3. What do stakeholders think about why Check & Connect had an impact on the students with demonstrated learning and behavioral difficulties who had returned from an alternative education placement?*

Significance

This study examined the effectiveness of an intervention designed to successfully reintegrate students who have returned from alternative educational placements into comprehensive high schools. Findings from the study could be used to further develop this intervention technique and increase the likelihood of successful reintegration into the comprehensive school community, decreasing the likelihood of dropout. Research has been conducted using similar populations, but not with students returning to comprehensive public schools from alternative educational settings.

Overview of Methodology

Case study techniques, including the collection of archival data and a series of interviews, were used to evaluate the effectiveness of Check & Connect with a group of high school students returning from an alternative educational placement. Their academic and behavioral performance, as well as attendance, was compared to a group of control students returning to demographically similar schools within the same district. Interview data was collected to examine the experience of returning to a comprehensive high school after participating in alternative education. Additional interviews were conducted with the students' teachers, the staff implementing Check & Connect, and the vice-principals overseeing the initiative. These staff interviews were used to examine their views on special education, the student participants, as

well as the effectiveness and value of Check & Connect. All study participants, student and staff, were from a single, county-wide school district. All student participants shared the experience of attending the district's single alternative education high school program.

Definition of Terms

Terms used in this study include:

Alternative School-This term broadly refers to public schools designed to serve students who are not succeeding academically, or behaviorally, in a traditional public school.

Comprehensive Public School-This refers to a school which is designed to provide services to a broad cross-section of a community's students. Frequently, this will refer to the school that placed a student into an alternative education placement as well as the school to which the student will be returning.

Monitor- This refers to an individual who administers the Check & Connect intervention to students.

Reintegration- This term refers to the return of a student formerly in an alternative educational setting to a comprehensive public school.

Transition-In educational research, transition often refers to the outcomes of students with disabilities as they leave school. Preparatory and support activities are often referred to as "transition services". In this study, these outcomes will be titled "longitudinal transition outcomes". Transition will be defined as the movement from one school to another.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter begins by examining the research literature on alternative education focusing on its participants and their outcomes. This will be followed by a brief discussion of legislation affecting students in alternative educational placements and their applicability to policies encouraging their return to the comprehensive public school. A review of studies designed to support at-risk students within their

comprehensive public schools will follow. The chapter closes with a discussion of research techniques that can be used to examine and evaluate a program designed to support the reintegration of students returning to comprehensive public schools from alternative educational placements.

Alternative Education

Alternative Schools. Alternatives to the conventional public school experience have been part of the American educational continuum since the early years of the nation (Young, 1990). The modern definition of alternate education has its origins in the civil rights movement (Lange & Sletten, 2002). Educational models, such as the Freedom Schools, were developed to enrich the academic experiences of minority youth. These were frequently located in nontraditional, community oriented settings. Concurrently, the Free School Movement arose to provide self-directed learning experiences for students that addressed their individual interests and emphasized self-fulfillment. The goal of these programs was to engage youth without alienating them through the traditional educational experience. Set within the conventional school, Open Schools provided students with an opportunity to learn non-traditionally, yet maintain a connection to the comprehensive school community. These programs were characterized by extensive choice by the parents, teachers, and students, self-paced instruction, and a child-centered approach (Young, 1990).

Each of these movements reflected the notion that students could achieve educational benefit from instruction in nontraditional environments and techniques (Lange & Sletten, 2002). The current description of alternative schools still reflects many of the goals that arose from the civil rights movement. Alternative programs are

still characterized by small sizes that assist in the development of one-on-one interactions between teachers and students. They also still strive to develop a supportive, flexible environment to assist students in obtaining success. Raywid (1994) identifies three current models of alternative programs as:

Type I Programs-Academic Placements

Type I programs are characterized by innovative, challenging curriculums designed to address the individual needs of students. Within these programs, an emphasis is placed on the student as a self-motivator in task completion and as an advocate for enriching academic experiences.

Programs often include vocational and community components that may include the opportunity for students to earn academic credits in nontraditional ways. Management of these programs is often marked by deregulation, flexibility, and a high degree of influence by the participating faculty. Enrollment in these programs is voluntary. (p.27)

Type II Programs-Discipline Placements

Type II programs are designed to segregate disruptive students from the comprehensive school and provide academic and behavioral management and remediation. Within these programs, academic opportunities are typically limited to the core competency areas and are modeled upon, or provided by, the home school. Students experience a highly structured

behavioral environment where expectations and consequences for actions are clear. Type II placements are frequently used as Interim Alternative Educational Placements for students suspended by their comprehensive schools. Type II programs are sometime known as Last Chance placements and enrollment is usually not voluntary. (p.27)

Type III Programs-Remedial Focus

Type III programs focus on academic and behavioral remediation. Within these programs, students receive individualized instruction and behavioral support to assist in their educational and social growth. These are generally short-term placements with an expressed goal of preparing their students to return to the mainstream, comprehensive school. Enrollment in these programs is voluntary. (p.27)

Lange and Sletten (1995) propose that a hybridization of these models to form a fourth type of alternative program is possible. In their fourth model, school choice, remediation, and innovation are used to provide a “second chance” program for students that have experienced difficulties in conventional school environments.

Increasingly, alternative programs have been viewed as a placement for disruptive and, frequently, disadvantaged students (Arnove & Strout, 1978; Lange & Sletten, 2002; Lehr & Lange, 2003; Skiba & Peterson, 2003). These programs share traits with Raywid’s Type II-Discipline Placement model and Lange and Sletten’s proposed hybrid model and are comprised of students who have demonstrated

behavioral difficulties within their home schools. Placement within these programs is typically requested by the home school, but enrollment by the student is voluntary. Though many of these programs allow their students to complete their education within the alternative placement, a return to the comprehensive school is also considered a successful programmatic outcome.

Alternative Education Students. Lehr, Moreau, Lange, and Lanners' (2004) survey of alternative education programs provides a description of the enrolled students. In their survey, 88% of the 33 reporting states indicated that the students placed had exhibited problematic behaviors not attributable to a documented disability and/or had a history of poor attendance or dropout. Two-thirds had a history of suspension or expulsion. More than 60% had learning difficulties not attributed to a documented disability. Only 12% were identified as requiring special education services. Manifestation determination, the process used to determine if a student's behavioral difficulty is a manifestation of their disability, was not discussed. Individual state reports show a high degree of variability in the percentage of students requiring special education services. For example, in Vermont, 52% of the students in alternative education programs possessed documented disabilities while the others were considered at-risk for academic failure (Hasazi et al., 2001). Of Texas' Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs (DAEP) students, 21% were identified as special education students (Cortez & Montecel, 1999). Tennessee's students with disabilities' enrollment ranged from 9% to 87% by county (Moore et al, 2005).

In an NCES report, researchers found students' ethnic minority status and economic backgrounds were associated with enrollment in alternative education

programs (Kleiner, Porch, & Farris, 2002). In a survey of 840 districts, evidence of a relationship between the percentage of alternative education enrollment within a district and minority disproportionate representation was shown. More than 70% of the districts, with less than 1% total alternative education enrollment, reported that 21% or more of their alternative education students were ethnic minorities. This disproportionate enrollment was also seen in districts with larger alternative education enrollments. Sixty percent of districts with 1 to 1.99% total alternative education enrollment reported that more than 21% of their alternative education students were minorities. Thirty-four percent of districts with 2% or greater total alternative education enrollment reported similarly.

Reports from individual states provide clearer information concerning disproportionate minority enrollment. In many Tennessee counties, the percentage of African American youth in alternative school programs ranged from two to six times larger than the county school system as a whole (Moore, King, Detch, Doss, & Morgan, 2005). In Texas, Hispanic students comprised 39.1% of the students referred to Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs (DAEP) (Cortez & Montecel, 1999).

Similar disproportionate representation was seen in the economic status of students enrolled in alternative education programs. In districts with less than 1% alternative education enrollment, 40% indicated that 11 to 20% of the students in alternative education settings met the poverty criteria. Another 38% of these districts indicated that poverty enrollment was greater than 20% (Kleiner, Porch, & Farris,

2002). As with the minority enrollment, as the total district enrollment in alternative education increased the disproportionate poverty enrollment decreased.

Most alternative school programs serve secondary aged youth. In Kleiner, et al's (2002) national survey, more than 88% of the cooperating districts possessed alternative programs for secondary students. Significant variation within these districts exists. In Vermont, for example 52% of the programs served high school aged students, followed by middle school students (19%), multiple levels (15% middle school/high school, 8% elementary/middle/high school), and elementary school students (6%) (Hasazi et al, 2001). These students were also disproportionately male.

The evidence indicates that students in alternative settings have demographic characteristics that set them apart from their peers (Kleiner, et al, 2002). In districts with low alternative school enrollment, the students enrolled are often minorities or meet poverty criteria (Kleiner, et al, 2002). National reports indicate that though a high percentage of enrolled students had demonstrated learning difficulties, only a small percentage of students received special education services (Lehr, et al, 2004). Reports from individual states indicate that there is a high degree of variability in the percentage of students with disabilities in alternative education settings (Cortez & Montecel, 1999; Hasazi et al., 2001; Moore et al, 2005). Criteria for enrollment, length of attendance, and exit criteria varied in national surveys (Lehr et al, 2004).

Enrollment in alternative schools tends to be fluid. Students are admitted on a daily basis for a wide variety of reasons. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, approximately half of surveyed districts indicated that one of the

following were sufficient reason for admittance to their alternative school programs: possession, distribution, or use of alcohol or drugs; physical attacks or fights; chronic truancy; possession or use of a weapon other than a firearm; disruptive verbal behavior; and possession or use of a firearm. Thirty-eight percent of districts reported that involvement with the juvenile justice system was considered sufficient for transfer to an alternative school. IEP team inputs were also reported to influence the placement decision (Kleiner, et al, 2002).

A large percentage (74%) of the districts surveyed indicated that policies allowing for all alternative education students to return to their comprehensive schools existed. Reasons rated as “very important” in determining eligibility to return included: improved attitude or behavior (82%); student motivation to return (81%); approval of the alternative school staff (67%); improved grades (52%); and approval by a regular school administrator or counselor (40%) (Kleiner et al, 2002). The average length of enrollment in alternative education settings varied in national surveys. Approximately 29% of thirty-one states indicated that the average length of enrollment ranged from 1-6 months. Slightly more, 32%, stated that the average length of attendance was 7 months to one academic year. Sixteen out of twenty-five states (64%) reported that many or almost all of the students returned to a traditional educational program after attending an alternative school (Lehr et al, 2004).

Data concerning the longitudinal outcomes of students in alternative education programs is sparse. Information concerning the outcomes for students who return to their comprehensive public schools is limited due to the data not being disaggregated from the larger pool of student outcome data. Lehr et al’s (2004) national survey of

alternative schools showed that 19 of 36 (53%) responding states collect outcome data for students in alternative education programs. Graduation, dropout, and attendance were the most commonly tracked indicators. Within states, LEAs often do not collect this data. In Tennessee, as an example, only 15% of the school systems systematically measure the dropout, graduation, and attendance of students in alternative education programs (Moore et al, 2005). Findings from small scale longitudinal research on students who complete their secondary education in alternative educational placements is promising though (Gable, Bullock, & Evans, 2006). Due to the high incidence of disabilities among students in alternative educational settings (Cortez & Montecel, 1999; Hasazi et al., 2001; Lehr, et al., 2004; Moore et al, 2005) findings from longitudinal studies focusing on students on disabilities likely apply to this group of students.

Longitudinal Outcomes of Students with Disabilities

Early research on transition outcomes for students with disabilities leaving high school focused on single states or school districts, and with youth with only one or a few types of disabilities (Marder & D'Amico, 1992). Studies reported that a high number of youth with disabilities dropped out of high school, and that few were employed, pursued postsecondary education or lived independently (Edgar, 1987; Harnisch, 1987; Hasazi, Gordon, and Roe, 1985; Mithaug, Horiuchi, and Fanning, 1985; Sitlington, Frank, and Cooper, 1989). These individual studies did not examine nationally representative samples. In addition, these studies typically examined a single outcome indicator rather than the broad array of indicators associated with transition. Nationally representative longitudinal research studies address these

deficiencies and allow for the examination of changes in the sample participants. The NLTS1, NACTS, and the NLTS2 are all designed to examine multiple characteristics of nationally representative samples of youth with disabilities over extended periods of time.

NLTS1. Due to the overall poor outcomes found in the professional literature, Congress mandated the National Longitudinal Transition Study of Youth (NLTS1) in 1983. The purpose of the study was to describe the transition experiences of a nationwide sample of youth with disabilities (SRI International, n.d.). Youth with emotional disturbance, thought to be the most prevalent of the disabilities commonly found in the alternative education student population (Lehr, 2004), had the poorest outcomes of any of the disability classifications. In addition to the high number who dropped out of high school, findings showed low employment, low enrollment in postsecondary education, and a low degree of post-school independence. Furthermore, 58% had been arrested within 3-5 years of leaving high school (Wagner, 1995).

NACTS. Unlike the NLTS1, the National Adolescent and Child Treatment Study (NACTS) focused only on youth with emotional disturbances. Each participant was identified as having an emotional disturbance using either special education criteria or by receiving services through the public mental health system. The study found that approximately two-thirds (66.5%) of the sample had at least one contact with the police in which the child was believed to be the perpetrator of a crime. Approximately one-third (34.4%) of the youth in the study were adjudicated as delinquent or convicted of a crime. Educational outcomes were similarly poor for

those who were 18 at the end of the study (n=353). For these youth, investigators found only 25.1% of the participants with IQs above 70 had obtained their high school diplomas. An additional 17.4% had earned a GED certificate (Greenbaum & Dedrick, 1996).

NLTS-2. The National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS-2) is a follow-up study to the NLTS1. The NLTS-2, currently underway, is addressing factors such as high school coursework, academic performance, extracurricular activities, post-secondary education and training, adult services, employment, independent living and community participation (National Center on Secondary Education and Transition, 2002). Data indicate that youth with high incidence disabilities graduate, or leave with a certificate, at lower rates than other students with disabilities. Students with emotional disturbance had the lowest graduation and highest school dropout rates of the disability classifications examined. Early findings from the Wave 1 data show that youth with high incidence disabilities had similar arrest rates to the samples from the NLTS1 and the NACT.

Each of these three large-scale studies have shown that youth with high incidence disabilities, those most frequently seen in the alternative education student population (Foley & Pang, 2006; Gorney & Ysseldyke, 1993), have poorer transition outcomes when compared to their peers. Improvements have been seen in the overall longitudinal outcomes of students with high incidence disabilities when the findings of the NLTS1 and 2 are compared (Wagner, Newman, Cameto, & Levine, 2005). The outcomes of students with learning disabilities, other health impairments, and

particularly emotional disturbance are still disturbingly poor when compared to students with other disabilities.

IDEA

The movement of students from alternative schools back to their comprehensive schools is not mandated by law. Due to the high percentage of students with disabilities in alternative placements (Cortez & Montecel, 1999; Foley & Pang, 2006; Hasazi et al., 2001; Moore et al, 2005), regulations within the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), specifically those concerning Interim Alternative Education Settings (IAES) and the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), have bearing on this population. Each of these clauses supports the return of students with disabilities from alternate educational placements.

The Interim Alternative Education Settings (IAES), 20 U.S.C. § 1415(k), clause within IDEA allows for the temporary removal of a student with disabilities for disciplinary infractions. While removed, educational services are still mandated and they may be placed temporarily in an alternative educational program. While in this placement, the disciplinary infraction is researched and a discussion is conducted on the impact of the student's disability on the student's actions. If it is found that the student's actions were not a manifestation of the child's disability, conventional suspension/expulsion or disciplinary placement procedures can be pursued.

The Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), 20 U.S.C. § 1412(a) (5), definition within the IDEA requires that students with disabilities be educated with their regular education peers to the maximum extent appropriate. An alternative education placement may not allow students with disabilities the same educational experiences

as their non-disabled peers in the comprehensive school. Furthermore, if academic and behavioral performance has improved within an alternative education setting, that setting may no longer be the least restrictive environment for the student. This may contribute to a decision to remove the student from their separate school environment, the alternative education program, and return them to the comprehensive school environment.

Reintegration: Perceptions and Support

Studies that examine the perceptions of staff towards students enrolled in alternative programs, or have recently returned from an alternative program, are limited. Lehr's (2004) study, described earlier, surveyed special education directors from 48 states, and the District of Columbia, to learn about the major issues regarding students with disabilities in their state's alternative schools. Many of the directors had little to no data concerning the number of students with disabilities being served in their alternative schools. Their perception was that a high percentage of the students being served were identified as seriously emotionally disturbed. Other complicating conditions such as Tourette's syndrome, autism, mental health problems, and conduct disorder were also perceived to be more common in the alternative schools than they had been in the past. The respondents also expressed concern that alternative schools were being used as special education placements. In these cases, previously agreed upon levels of services may have been modified or discontinued to reflect the more limited services available within many programs. Finally, more than half of the respondents raised questions concerning the provision and quality of educational and support services provided to students with disabilities in alternative schools.

Kershaw and Blank's (1993) descriptive case study explored the perceptions of students, teachers, guidance counselors, and administrators regarding their experiences with alternative school settings and their beliefs concerning the return to the traditional public school. Interviews were conducted with staff and faculty within a single school district at both the alternative school and the ten comprehensive public schools. Procedures for reintegrating students returning from alternative education varied greatly. At six of the receiving schools, no formal protocol was in place. Two schools required a brief meeting with the principal or guidance counselor upon reentry. Two other schools had established programs to help in the transition. One had a dedicated support person who met regularly with the students, while the other assigned a peer mentor and held regular meetings with guidance counselors. A support group was also established. Twenty-six of the student participants returned to their home school. Of these, only sixteen were still enrolled in their home schools four months later. Three students had graduated, moved, or enrolled elsewhere. Four students were not contacted by the researchers for follow-up. The ages of the student participants were not identified.

The comprehensive school faculty interviewed did not attribute the success or failure of the students to their experiences in the alternative schools. In many cases, the faculty stated that particular students would "never change" due to their families, friends, or substance abuse problems. Positive effects while in the alternative school were attributed to removal from peers and problems that remained in the home school. Academic gains were attributed to lower standards at the alternative school. Success was attributed to the student's placement being due to a singular mistake or

choice and that strong family support contributed to the changed behavior. A small number of the home school administrators viewed the alternative school experiences as an opportunity for the student to reconsider their behavior. Nearly all stated that the programs were a necessary step before expulsion or as a way to segregate problematic students.

Using data from the 2001 District Survey of Alternative Schools and Programs, Kleiner, Porch, and Farris (2002) examined where alternative educational school experiences were provided, who the student participants were, and whether policies for facilitating return to a comprehensive public school were established. They found that almost 60% of public alternative programs were housed in separate buildings, approximately 12% of the enrolled students were students with Individualized Education Plans, and that student composition was highly fluid with frequent enrollments, discharges, and reenrollments. The researchers found that 74% of districts had policies that allowed for the return of all alternative education students to a comprehensive public school. Twenty-five percent had policies that allowed for some students to return while 1% did not allow alternative education students to return to comprehensive home schools. Small variations were found by region, metropolitan status, and district size. Seventy-five percent of the districts surveyed from the Northeast and Southeast had policies allowing for all students to return to a regular school. Seventy-six percent of the Western districts had policies allowing for all students to return, but only 69% of the districts from the Central region did. Only minor differences were found when urban, suburban, and rural differences were compared. Slight variation was found in districts with higher minority enrollment. On

average, approximately 70% of surveyed districts had policies allowing for students to return to their comprehensive public schools.

Criteria for reenrollment into a comprehensive public school varied among the districts surveyed. The most commonly cited reasons rated as “highly important” in the reenrollment decision included improved attitude or behavior (82%) and student motivation to return (81%). Other criteria reported included the approval of the alternative school faculty (67%), improved grades (52%), and the approval of the receiving school (52%). Smaller districts (48%) cited the approval of the receiving school more often than medium sized districts (35%) or larger districts (25%). High poverty districts also placed more importance on the approval of the receiving school (43%) than low poverty districts (31%).

Rutherford and Quinn (1999) noted that the transition of students and their educational records into and out of alternative schools is an important component in programming for students with disabilities. Students frequently leave with little notice of where and what their next placement will be. The efficient transfer of necessary information, including the student’s IEP, needs to be an essential component of this transition process. The receiving school, alternative program, and involved community based providers should all share in the responsibility for assisting in this reintegration. Yet, research has shown that most districts allow for the return of students from alternative educational placements (Kleiner et al, 2002), but that the receiving schools are resistant to accepting them (Kershaw & Blank, 1993).

Research conducted with youth returning from juvenile correctional facilities reinforces the importance of the initial reintegration experience. Using a sample of

youth returning from the Oregon Youth Authority (OYA), Bullis and colleagues examined the community and transition experiences of youth who were previously incarcerated in juvenile correctional facilities (Bullis, Yovanoff, Havel, & Mueller, 2001). In analysis focusing on engagement, defined as involvement in school and/or employment, research has shown that engagement at six months was “powerfully” associated with engagement at twelve months (Bullis & Yovanoff, 2002; Bullis, Yovanoff, & Havel, 2004). Based on their findings, the researchers noted that the first six months after release appeared to be critical to the sample’s continuing success and that continuing support, beyond the initial six month period, could further enhance the likelihood of success (Bullis, Yovanoff, & Havel, 2004). Further research focusing on the perceived needs of adjudicated youth with disabilities showed that youths themselves identified educational support as their number two need upon release (Unruh & Bullis, 2005). Only family support was considered more important.

Though alternative settings are quite different from adjudication facilities, similarities in the populations do exist. Each has a higher prevalence of disabilities (Foley & Pang, 2006; Gorney & Ysseldyke, 1993; Lehr, Moreau, Lange, & Lanners 2004), a larger percentage of minority involvement (Guerin & Denti, 1999), and a higher level of poverty than observed in many school districts (Kleiner, et al 2002). Furthermore, each of these groups experiences a similar transition from a restrictive setting to an environment where they have previously experienced difficulties succeeding behaviorally. Based on these similarities, it is possible that the early reintegration experiences of students returning from alternative education settings may be similarly critical to their continuing success.

Intervention Models

Alternative education programs are frequently used as “second chance” programs for students at risk of dropping out (Lange & Sletten, 1995). Efforts to reintegrate students returning from alternative educational schools tend to focus on dropout prevention and school completion. Prevatt and Kelly (2003) note that the majority of researched interventions emphasize academic support, social skill development, mentoring, and parent/teacher behavior management training. In spite of these wide ranging strategies, the number of data-based studies describing efforts to support at-risk students is limited (Sinclair, Christenson, Evelo, & Hurley, 1998).

Lehr, Hansen, Sinclair, and Christenson’s (2003) review of the literature identified and critiqued published studies focusing on dropout prevention and/or school completion. Articles were selected for inclusion using the following criteria: (a) published in a professional journal, (b) focused on a dropout prevention or intervention program, and (c) included impact data of the described program. Studies focusing on impacting truancy were also included. This led to the review of 45 intervention studies published between 1980 and 2001. Students with disabilities were the focus group of two of the studies reviewed. In their literature review, the researchers were unable to identify any studies that used random group assignment and manipulation of the independent variable in combination. Approximately 24% (n=11) of the studies used a design involving nonrandom selection with random assignment to treatment or control groups, and 38% (n=17) used comparison groups with nonrandom assignment. Fewer than 10% (n=4) of the studies used pre-post designs for one group. About a third of the articles (n=13) described the program’s

effectiveness as a reduction in the percentage of students dropping out. Hedges G (Hedges, 1981), a technique that examines the difference between treatment and comparison group scores divided by the pooled standard deviation of the two groups, was used to calculate the effect sizes of the small number of studies (n=17) which provided sufficient statistical data. This analysis led to an analysis of 94 effect sizes for dependent variables. Cohen's (1988) standard effect size values were used to assist in the comparison. Approximately one-third (n=31) of the dependent variables yielded moderate to large positive effect sizes (.50 to 2.20). An additional 12% (n=11) yielded small positive effects (.50 to .44). Slightly less than 40% (n=37) had effect sizes close to zero (-.17 to .19). The last 16% (n=15) of the dependent variables reported negative effects sizes ranging from small to large.

The researchers note that while they found many articles in their review of the literature, only 45 could be classified as intervention studies (Lehr, et al. 2003). Meta-analytic techniques were not used due to the small sample size. Of the studies reviewed, only about half resulted in statistically significant effects. In order to bolster the findings of these studies, replication of promising interventions is necessary. Combined with greater methodological rigor, this would allow for a more thorough analysis of the research.

Lehr et al's (2003) review shows that while research focusing on interventions for at-risk youth has been conducted, only a small number of studies can be classified as interventions with statistically significant effects. Three areas of student support that have shown promise in supporting at-risk students within their home schools are Positive Behavior Support, Check & Connect, as well as Check & Connect variants,

and other mentoring programs. Positive Behavior Intervention Support, a model based on public health principles, will be described first. A description of adolescent development and resilience, and their link to Check & Connect and mentoring, will then be provided as an introduction to these two intervention techniques.

Positive Behavior Intervention Support. Positive Behavioral Intervention Support (PBIS) is a data driven, systemic program designed to promote social and academic development while preventing problem behavior. It accomplishes this through the use of three essential components. The first is the collection and use of data to guide administrative decisions within the program. Data collection occurs at multiple levels and performance monitoring may occur at the individual student, school, or district level. The second component is the use of systems designed to support the program staff in the use of instructional and behavioral intervention practices. The third component is the specific practices used to support positive student behavior. The overarching goal of these components is the adoption and sustained use of effective practices (Sugai et al., 1999).

PBIS is organized as a three tier model. The primary level of support focuses on school-wide behavioral interventions. These universal interventions are proactive rather than reactive and are meant to prevent the initial occurrence of problem behaviors. An example of a primary level of support would be a positive school discipline system designed to encourage appropriate behavior from all students. Secondary level interventions target groups of students whose behaviors have not been adequately addressed through primary intervention practices. They are designed to prevent reoccurrences in behavior through monitoring, studying the environmental

influences, and marshalling available resources to reduce the likelihood of further failure. An example of a secondary level intervention would be the establishment of a support program for at-risk students. Tertiary level interventions are meant to address the needs of individual students. Students receiving tertiary support have proven to require services beyond those provided within primary and secondary interventions. This level of intervention is highly individualized and resource intensive. An example of a tertiary level intervention would be the establishment of wraparound services to address a youth's needs at home, in school, and in the community (Scott et al., 2002).

Researchers have commented that although a large body of research has been conducted on PBIS at the elementary level, less has been conducted in the middle and/or high school environments (Skiba and Peterson, 2003; Lane, 2007; Lane, Robertson, & Graham-Bailey, 2006). Additionally, few descriptions exist of interventions in the PBIS model focusing on groups of students at elevated risk of antisocial behavior (McCurdy, Kunsch, & Reibstein, 2007). Secondary level intervention studies with elementary age at-risk students have shown improvements in early literacy skills, attendance, and behavior (Lane & Menzies, 2005; Lane et al., 2002; Lane et al., 2003). While PBIS is used in alternative and comprehensive schools, there were no studies that used PBIS to support students returning from alternative school environments in the professional literature.

Adolescent Development and Resilience

Prior to beginning a discussion of Check & Connect and mentoring research, it is necessary to examine the developmental underpinnings on which they are based. In Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, eight stages of life are described

(Erikson, 1959, pp. 65-98; Thomas, 1992, pp. 168-173). Five of these pertain to at-risk youth. During the “Basic Trust vs. Mistrust” stage (birth-18 months), children develop a sense of trust in adults and the world around them. This trust is considered essential by Erikson in the development of a belief in achieving personal goals. The “Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt” stage (1 ½ - 3 years) is characterized by the child’s developing independence. Autonomy is fostered by a caregiver providing guidance and reasonable choices for the child. At the “Initiative vs. Guilt” stage (3-6 years), initiative towards goal achievement begins in earnest. Aggression can be seen as a sign of frustration when goals are not achieved. It can also be used as a tool to achieve goals. Caregivers are essential at this stage for their ability to model appropriate goal seeking behaviors, helping the child realize their own capacity to meet goals, and encouraging the child’s personal initiative. The “Industry vs. Inferiority” stage (7-10 years) is characterized by a desire for competency. Children are interested in pleasing adults through their accomplishments. Conversely, disobedient behavior is also exhibited by children expressing their independence. At this stage, allowing a child to experience success is essential to the development of personal competence. During the “Identity vs. Identity Diffusion” (10-17 years) stage, children become newly concerned by how they are perceived by others. A desire to fit into a social group, and the approval of it, competes with a desire for approval from caregivers. While developing their own identity, children at this stage often come into conflict with their parents, siblings, and other caregivers (Thomas, 1992, p. 172). Erikson theorized that many of these individuals are, in fact, surrogates that allow the child to reengage with earlier conflicts (Erikson, 1963, p. 261). For some children,

school personnel, their peers, and the community at-large serve as these surrogates. In Erikson's view, successful navigation through these early psychosocial challenges contributes to "...an increased sense of inner unity, with an increase of good judgment, and an increase in the capacity 'to do well' according to his own standards and to standards of those who are 'significant to him' " (Erikson, 1968, p. 92).

Atypical adversity can make the successful resolution of these psychoeducational challenges more difficult. Poverty, disabilities, discrimination, and conflict within the home or community are all examples of circumstances that may lead a child to being considered "at-risk". Despite these varied risk factors, many children from difficult backgrounds do not display negative impacts attributable to their personal challenges. Resiliency theory provides a framework for understanding why some youth who are exposed to a risk do not exhibit the problem behavior associated with that risk (Zimmerman, Bingenheimer, & Notaro, 2002). Resilience can be defined as an individual's capacity to respond to stress, adversity, and trauma in an adaptive fashion and succeed despite the disadvantages in their life (Broussard, Mosley-Howard, & Roychoudhury, 2006; Christensen & Christensen, 1997; Edwards, Mumford, Shillingford, & Serra-Rodan, 2007). Compensatory efforts to enhance a child's resiliency may contribute to a more positive outcome than his or her background might predict.

Erikson noted that the impact of a child's early conflicts is not necessarily unalterable (Thomas, 1992, p. 169). A relationship with a supportive, trusted, and caring adult who sets and models high expectations is one of the most important predictors of resilient behavior in children (Dumont & Provost, 1999; Masten &

Coatsworth, 1998). Mentors can demonstrate that, in spite of previous experiences, positive relationships with adults are possible (Rhodes, Spencer, Keller, Liang, & Noam, 2006). Evidence has shown that the development of a connection with a mentor enhances a child's capacity to relate well to others (Rhodes et al, 2006; Rhodes, Grossman, & Resch, 2000). Mentors can also provide adult perspective, advice, and suggestions that might be ignored if presented by a primary caregiver (Keller, 2005). This sense of protection and support may allow the child to productively explore his or her environment and develop their knowledge, skills, and competence (Rhodes et al, 2006). These functions align with the challenges presented to a child during the first four stages of psychosocial development described by Erikson (Thomas, 1992, pp. 168-172). In addition, non-familial role models have a capacity to serve as protective buffers for vulnerable youth (Broussard, Mosley-Howard, & Roychoudhury, 2006). From a psychological perspective, mentors can serve as "external regulators" whose ego capacities and strengths can be "borrowed" by a youth until they are able to internalize them. By using these capacities, youth are more capable of controlling their impulses, delaying gratification, and moderating their emotional responses (Southwick, Morgan, Vythilingam, & Charney, 2006). Each of these influences may assist youth as they resolve the "Identity vs. Identity Diffusion" challenges associated with adolescence while simultaneously mitigating the impact of earlier experiences.

Check & Connect. The Check & Connect (Evelo, Sinclair, Hurley, Christenson, & Thurlow, 1996) model is based on resilience theory and is designed to encourage student engagement in school, reduce the likelihood of dropout, and

increase school completion. It is a data-driven intervention focusing on alterable characteristics of school disengagement such as academic performance, absences, tardiness, skipping classes, and discipline referrals. In the Check & Connect model, a school staff member is assigned to a disengaged student as a monitor/mentor. This individual is instrumental in the development of the program's five essential elements (Christenson, Hurley, Hirsch, Kau, Evelo, & Bates, 1997; Sinclair, Christenson, Lehr, & Anderson, 2003). The first of these elements is relationship building. Trust needs to be established between the student and the staff member. This is done through following through on promises to the youth, providing support to the child and their family as they navigate through the school system, investing time in the developing relationship, and helping the student connect to services inside and outside the school. The second element is the monitoring of alterable characteristics. This constitutes the "check" component of the intervention. Systematic tracking of attendance, discipline, and academics is conducted by the monitor/mentor. This includes meeting or communicating with the student's teachers to monitor behavior, inquire about assignments or work completion, and negotiate accommodations. If applicable, the monitor/mentor also attends the student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings. The third element of the intervention is the development of problem-solving skills in the student. This is essential to helping the youth resolve their conflicts more effectively. The monitor/mentor helps the students to consider the problem in a less passionate manner, consider their options, choose and implement an option, and then evaluate the consequences. Like element one, the fourth element, affiliation, is part of the "connect" aspect of the

intervention. This aspect of Check & Connect requires the monitor/mentor to build a connection between the student and the school community. The importance of school must be reinforced and supports, resources, and extracurricular activities designed to reduce the student's sense of alienation need to be identified and utilized. Finally, the fifth element is persistence plus. This is defined as providing continuity, consistency, and persistence in the relationship with the student and is considered essential to the monitor/mentor role.

The practices and supportive relationships developed during the use of Check & Connect are designed to bolster and strengthen the resilient characteristics of the recipient. Benard (2004) describes resiliency in the individual as being comprised of four broad domains; social competence, problem solving, autonomy, and a sense of purpose. Table 1 describes the first two of these broad domains, social competence and problem solving, and defines several sub-domains which comprise either social competence or problem solving. The practices of Check & Connect which are meant to support and develop these are also described. Table 2 describes the second two domains, autonomy and sense of purpose, and defines their sub-domains and relation to the practices of Check & Connect.

Table 1
Resiliency and Check & Connect Practices: Social Competence and Problem Solving

Social Competence	Definition	Check & Connect Practices
Responsiveness	Able to get positive responses from others. Being “well-regulated” and “positive in mood.”	Expresses caring, regard, and compassion for the student.
Communication	Able to assert oneself without violating others. Conflict resolution skills	Assists in mediation of conflict by coaching and counseling the student.
Empathy/Caring	Understanding the feelings of others.	Explaining the viewpoints of peers and authority figures.
Compassion/Altruism/Forgiveness	Desire to care for and alleviate the suffering of others.	Explaining how their success can help their families and communities.
Problem Solving		
Planning	Provides a sense of control and hope for the future. Seeks success and avoids problems.	Coaching the students in identifying goals and developing paths to success.
Flexibility	Recognizes and seeks alternatives to both cognitive and social problems.	Assisting the students in finding ways to persevere when confronted by barriers or failure.
Resourcefulness	Identifying external resources and surrogate sources of support.	Identifying additional supports and researching how to gain access to them.
Critical Thinking/Insight	Identifying and analyzing the deeper meaning of an event, statement, or situation. Recognizing that your immediate experience isn’t necessarily permanent.	Providing perspective and assisting the student in identifying other potential realities.

Table 2

Resiliency and Check & Connect Practices: Autonomy and Sense of Purpose

Autonomy	Definition	Check & Connect Practices
Positive Identity	Identifying who and what you want to be. Recognizing the situational self. Different selves for different environments.	Assisting in postsecondary goal development.
Internal Locus of Control/Initiative	Sense of control over situations, circumstances, and direction. Recognition of what it outside of your personal control.	Identifying areas of personal responsibility and helping the student to assert themselves.
Self-Efficacy/Mastery	Belief in the capacity for success. Feeling when the capacity to succeed is expressed.	Identifying and recognizing areas of accomplishment.
Adaptive Distancing/Resistance	Recognizing the separation between themselves and dysfunction. Ability to march to “a different drummer.”	Providing encouragement and support as the students learns to separate themselves from maladaptive peer and community influences.
Self-Awareness/Mindfulness	The recognition of emotions/reactions before action is taken.	Assisting in the development of emotional regulation.
Humor	Ability to transform pain and anger into laughter. Serves as a coping mechanism.	Supporting appropriate coping mechanisms.
Sense of Purpose		
Goal Direction/Achievement Motivation/Educational Aspirations	A fierce commitment to a vision of success.	Monitoring and mentoring the student as they progress towards graduation.
Special Interests/Creativity/Imagination	Finding an area of success that can serve as an actual buffer from adversity.	Encouraging extracurricular activities that separate the student from poor influences.
Optimism/Hope	A positive view of the future.	Expressing belief in the student’s capacity for success.
Faith/Spirituality/Sense of Meaning	Sense of trust that they will be supported while working towards success.	Serving as someone who believes in the students’ potential for personal change and success.

Check & Connect is based on two levels of intervention; basic and intensive. The basic level of intervention begins with an introduction between the monitor/mentor, the student, and family, an explanation of the staff member's role and the Check & Connect model. Conversations between the monitor/mentor and the student continue on a monthly or weekly basis and focus on their progress in school, the link between their engagement in school and their progress, the importance of school completion, and problem solving strategies to address the challenges they are experiencing. These regular meetings allow for the monitors to develop a positive, supportive relationship with the student and reinforce the skills required to actively engage with the school. Within the PBIS model, this level of service is seen as a secondary tier intervention.

The intensive level of intervention is provided for students who are considered to be at high-risk for school disengagement. Check & Connect defines high-risk as exhibiting one or more of the following behaviors; being tardy five or more times in one month, skipping class three or more times in a month, being absent three or more times in a month, receiving four or more behavior referrals or detentions in a month, and receiving in-school or out of school suspension for two or more days per month. Academic difficulties including having one or more "Fs" and/or two or more "Ds" per grading period or earning 80% or less of the possible credits per grading period would also classify a student as high-risk. As with the basic level of intervention, the monitor/mentor is responsible for monitoring the student's progress, but they are also expected to have much more frequent contact with all involved parties to enhance the responsiveness of the intervention. This enhanced level of contact typically includes

contact nearly daily between the student and monitor as well as multiple weekly interactions with other involved school personnel. In addition to the services provided at the basic level, individualized supplemental services are provided to address school participation, student responsibility, and academic and behavioral competence.

Examples of individualized interventions include calling the home in the morning to encourage the student to come to school, working with families to develop effective homework completion strategies, and negotiating with administrators for alternatives to out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, or administrative transfers. Within the PBIS model, intensive level Check & Connect is an example of a tertiary tier intervention.

Check & Connect: Studies. In the first Check & Connect study, Sinclair, Christenson, Evelo, & Hurley (1998) examined the efficacy of a sustained dropout prevention strategy for urban secondary students with disabilities transitioning from middle school into high school. The participants in their study were 94 students (47 treatment, 47 control) with learning or emotional disabilities in a northern Midwest urban school district. A learning disability was the primary classification for 75% of the participants. Slightly more than 40% were identified as having a severe disability. Demographically, 59% of the participants were African American and 68% were male. The majority (71%) participated in the free and reduced meals (FARMS) program. Mean age at the beginning of the intervention was 13 years, 4 months.

Analysis showed that the treatment group was more engaged in school, more likely to be enrolled, and more “persistent” as defined by higher attendance and likelihood to complete assignments at the end of the first year of participation. They were also more likely to graduate in four years and exhibited fewer academic or

behavioral difficulties than the control group. The disproportionate representation of African-Americans, and students using FARMS services, limits the applicability of the findings to the broader student population.

Though the What Works Clearinghouse (2006) states that Sinclair et al's (1998) study met evidence standards, a number of fidelity issues were noted. Minimal information was provided concerning the training received by the program implementers. Key attributes including patience, a belief in student's abilities to succeed, and willingness to work cooperatively with families and staff was noted, but, follow-through to determine if these traits were expressed in the interactions between the students and assigned staff was not. Monitoring sheets used to document the number of interactions between staff and students, and the content of these interactions, were also briefly described. As with the key attributes required of the staff, follow-through describing verification of these interactions was not described. An exploration of these topics would have clarified the fidelity concerns associated with the study.

As a follow-up, Sinclair, Christenson, and Thurlow (2005) used an experimental design to investigate the effectiveness of the Check & Connect model with urban high school students labeled as emotionally disturbed. Two cohorts of 9th grade students with emotional disturbance were used to generate a stratified sample of 206 participants. Included in this sample were students whose primary disability (69%) or secondary (12%) disability category was emotional disturbance. Students with learning disability and other health impairment labels were also included if their IEPs possessed behavioral goals (19%). The majority of the students in the study

were African American (64%, compared to 44% district wide) and male (84%, compared to 52% district wide). Seventy percent were eligible for free or reduced meals and 65% resided with a single parent. The study participants were, on average, 14 years and 6 months old at the beginning of the 9th grade. This disproportionate representation was similar to the initial study (Sinclair et al, 1998). After attrition, a total sample of 71 treatment and 73 control participants were available for full-participation in the 5-year long longitudinal study.

Analysis showed that the participants randomly assigned to the Check & Connect intervention were more likely to graduate in 4 years and had better attendance than the control group. These findings were seen with African-American students as well as students of other ethnic backgrounds. In addition, participants with EBD were less likely to stay out of school for an entire school year than the control group.

Unlike the initial Check & Connect study (Sinclair et al, 1998), greater detail was provided concerning training and monitoring verification. An initial orientation workshop was offered to all intervention staff to introduce the Check & Connect program. This was followed by weekly, or biweekly, staff meeting and periodic staff development sessions focusing on program implementation and completing the monitoring sheet consistently across monitors and settings. Printouts of participants' attendance records were used to verify entries on the monitoring sheets. Each of these practices provided evidence of program implementation fidelity.

Lehr, Sinclair, and Christenson (2004) also evaluated the efficacy of Check & Connect with an elementary aged sample. The students' attendance and tardiness

were the primary areas of interest. This was done in eleven elementary schools located in five suburban districts. To conduct the evaluation, the researchers used a sample group provided for them through referrals by the participating schools. The participants were primarily Caucasian (75%) with a nearly even split between male and female students. A large percentage of the participants were eligible for Title I (52%) and/or special education services (32%). Approximately, $\frac{1}{4}$ of the participants' homes were receiving services through a county social worker. The mean age of the 147 students in the study was 8 years, 11 months and ranged between 5 and 12 years old. Fourth through sixth graders comprised 41% of the sample. Kindergarten through third graders comprised 59%.

Statistically significant improvements in both attendance and tardiness were demonstrated by the Check & Connect participants at the conclusion of the study. The age and level of independence of the participants limits their responsibility in respect to their timeliness and attendance in school. Within this study, the impact of the Check & Connect model may not have been on the behavior of the study participants, but on their caregivers. An exploration of this alternate research topic may have revealed that this increased attention on the children contributed to increases in the parent engagement in their child's education. This enhanced engagement may have contributed to the children's improved tardiness and attendance rates.

Questions of fidelity of implementation can also be raised in this study. During the description of the intervention, steps to describe the measure the integrity of implementation are noted. Monthly collection and review of completed monitoring sheets, records of implemented interventions, and weekly staff development meetings

with a supervisor are briefly mentioned. Initial training, means for verifying record entry, or evaluating the quality or quantity of interactions between the staff and student were not described in the methodology of this study. Without this information, the fidelity of implementation cannot be gauged.

Building on the early Check & Connect research, Cheney et al (2009) combined Check & Connect with the Behavioral Education Program to develop the Check, Connect, and Expect intervention. Where as Check & Connect can be viewed as a tertiary, individually targeted intervention, the Behavioral Intervention Program is a group oriented intervention that has shown promising behavioral outcomes for elementary and middle school students (Hawken, 2006; MacLeod & Rawlings, 2007). Using a stratified random sample, the investigators examined the efficacy of the intervention with a cohort of 1st through 5th grade students over a 2-year period. The Systematic Screening for Behavior Disorders (SSBD; Walker & Severson, 1992), along with nominations from the participating schools' IEP teams, was used to identify 207 participants (121 treatment, 86 control). Nine intervention and nine control schools were matched demographically during this study and special education participation ranged from 6.0% to 12.5%, an average of 53% received free or reduced meals, and 52.3% were Caucasian.

Using linear growth analysis, it was found that graduates of the program (n=73) showed significant reduction in externalizing and internalizing behavior measures to normative levels. Significant changes in social skill and academic measures were not seen. Non-graduate and comparison participants remained in the clinically at-risk range across the 2 years.

The researchers noted differences in adherence and quality of implementation among the teachers implementing the study over the 2-year period. Monitoring activities showed slight improvement in adherence and quality during the course of the study, while data management and providing consistent feedback to the participants were more unstable. Graduates reported a slight decline in their relationships with the teachers at the end of the 1st year, while the teachers rated their own relationships with the graduates more positively at the end of the second year. They also observed that Caucasian female students, who aligned demographically with the majority of the teachers, were more likely to be graduates of the intervention program than other students. Hispanic students were less likely to graduate from the program. Students whose initial assessments showed that they were at greater risk of severe behavioral problems were less likely to graduate from the Check, Connect, and Expect intervention than their peers.

Additional Mentoring Studies. Mentoring programs pair an adult role model whose function is to provide support, guidance, and protection with a younger individual. In many areas of life, mentors advise and provide feedback to their protégés as they navigate through a process. In the Check & Connect model, these duties are assigned to a monitor within the school. Other mentoring studies have demonstrated similar effects to the Check & Connect studies (Sinclair, Christenson, & Thurlow, 2005; Sinclair et al, 1998; Lehr, Sinclair, & Christenson, 2004). Dubois, Holloway, Valentine, and Cooper (2002) examined the effectiveness of mentoring programs for youth using meta-analytical techniques. Small to modest effect sizes were seen in the studies examined. Program characteristics shown to contribute to

positive effects included the quality of the relationship between the mentor and youth, longevity, and the frequency of contact. Youth from at-risk backgrounds, defined by Resnick and Burt (1996) as coming from impoverished environments, dangerous neighborhoods, or from dysfunctional families, were shown to receive the greatest benefit from the mentoring experience. The following studies examine the effectiveness of mentoring programs on academics, school discipline, and dropout.

Thompson and Kelly-Vance (2001) studied the impact of the Big Brothers/Big Sisters mentoring program on the academic performance of 25 at-risk, early adolescent boys using a quasi-experimental evaluation design. These participants were considered at-risk due to their home environments as well as their exhibition of risky behavior such as truancy, early substance use and abuse, running away from home, and association with delinquent peers (Resnick & Burt, 1996). The boys receiving the intervention (n=12) had been assigned a mentor, while the control group (n=13) was still on a waiting list for a mentor. Reasons for remaining on a waiting list were not explored by the researchers. The mentors and participants met weekly for 2-4 hours. Activities and conversations held were based on the relationship developed and the interests of the participants. Case managers provided training to the mentors and follow-up was provided through an initial contact with the parent, youth, and mentor after two weeks and then monthly through the first year of participation in Big Brothers/Big Sisters. Participants in the mentoring group performed significantly better on the Kaufman Test of Educational Achievement (KTEA) at post-test compared to the pre-test 8-9 months earlier.

Rhodes, Grossman, and Resch (2000) also examined the impact of the Big Brothers/Big Sisters mentoring program with adolescents. In their study, they hypothesized that the mentoring experience would be mediated partially through improved parental relationships and would lead to improved academic outcomes. Unlike Thompson and Kelly-Vance (2001), the researchers utilized a randomized design involving multiple sites to construct their treatment and control groups. The sample size was also significantly larger (n=959). Training focusing on agency policies, communication, relationship building, and individual issues involving the participants were provided at each site. During the course of the study, more than 70% of the youth met with their mentor at least three times a month and approximately 45% met one or more times per week. The average length of each meeting was 3.6 hours. Follow-up, 18 months later, showed that the treatment group had significantly better school attendance, improvements in perceived scholastic competence, and improved parental relationships.

Jackson (2002) examined the outcome of a mentoring program designed to minimize the conduct problems of young adolescents at-risk for delinquent behavior. The potential participants in the study were nominated by the administrators at their junior-high schools. Twenty-nine were randomly selected from this group. The mentors received training prior to beginning the intervention and weekly coaching with a study supervisor. Each mentor was required to work with their student 15-20 hours per week. This level of participation was verified by the students through a weekly activity journal. Mentors were required to meet for two hours weekly with a clinical psychologist for supervision and instruction. During these meetings, clinical

training focusing on the intervention, problem solving techniques, and group support was provided. Though teacher reports did not indicate significant behavioral change, parent reports indicated reductions in both internalizing and externalizing behaviors. It was also shown that the study participants received few to no school infractions by the end of the study.

Slicker and Palmer (1993) evaluated the effectiveness of a mentoring program on the academic and drop-out status of 86 academically at-risk high school students during a six month period. The experimental group (n=32) chosen were those considered most at-risk, while the control group (n=32) was chosen from the remaining sample. Attempts were made to match the two groups on demographics and school performance. Initial analysis showed that the control group had an improved self-concept compared to the experimental group, but no significant differences could be found in either the grade point averages or dropout rate of the two groups. While evaluating the fidelity of implementation, it was learned that the quality of mentoring provided varied greatly. The experimental group was then divided between those who were considered “effectively mentored” and those who weren’t. None of the students who were “effectively mentored” dropped out of school. The grade point averages were also slightly, but not significantly, better. Differences in self-concept were not found.

These four studies illustrate some of the difficulties of research involving mentoring interventions. With the exception of the Rhodes et al (2000) study, sample sizes are generally small. Sample construction is often compromised by the needs of the cooperating agency. Jackson’s (2002) and Slicker and Palmer’s (1993) sample

groups were influenced by the perceptions of the participants' schools as to who was most at-risk. The fidelity of the intervention is also a concern in this line of research. In mentoring, the relationship developed between the child and the adult is the intervention. Jackson's (2002), and Thompson and Kelly-Vance's (2001) to a lesser degree, described the contact requirements for the mentors. Jackson's study also included weekly meetings and student participant journaling to gauge the quality of the intervention. Rhodes et al's (2000) study provided limited information concerning the training and supervision provided, but did provide data concerning contact time between the mentor and the participant. Slicker and Palmer's (1993) need for a post-hoc analysis of mentoring quality demonstrated the impact that poor implementation fidelity can have within a study.

Summary. Data concerning the outcomes of students in alternative education settings is weak. Nearly three-quarters of surveyed school districts indicated that procedures were established to allow for the return of alternative education students to the comprehensive school and that 64% eventually do return (Lehr et al, 2004). Upon return, their degree of success is unclear. Few local educational agencies track the performance of students who have returned from alternative education settings as a distinct subgroup within their schools. Surveys of comprehensive school faculty indicate that many students return to schools where they may be stigmatized due to their earlier behavior (Kershaw & Blank, 1993). A large percentage of the students in alternative education settings possess documented special education needs (Cortez & Montecel, 1999; Hasazi et al., 2001; Lehr, Moreau, Lange, & Lanners, 2004; Moore et al, 2005). High incidence disabilities, particularly emotional disturbance, are the

most frequently identified. Others demonstrate significant learning difficulties, but are not identified as having disabilities (Lehr, et al. 2004). Longitudinal studies of youth with high incidence disabilities, particularly for youth with emotional disturbances, have demonstrated poor post-school outcomes when compared to their non-disabled peers (Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Garza, & Levine, 2005).

Due to the prevalence of special educational needs within the alternative educational student population, specific clauses within the IDEA are applicable. For students who violate a school's conduct code, the Interim Alternative Education Settings (IAES) clause provides for a continuation of services while the impact of the disability on the conduct infraction is considered. The Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) clause mandates that a student be educated in a conventional, comprehensive school if supplemental supports will allow for satisfactory progress. Federal education law does not directly address the need for reintegration support for non-disabled students returning from alternative education placements.

Applicable intervention models have been developed through the support of the U.S. Department of Education. Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS), a three-tier model, is designed to allow for targeted interventions for students who do not demonstrate success under school-wide behavioral support systems. Students returning from alternative settings have typically experienced behavioral and academic failure within school-wide support systems. Secondary or tertiary supports may be required to assist these students, upon their return, so that progress achieved while at the alternative school can be maintained and built upon. Researchers have noted that more PBIS research is needed in middle and high school environments

(Skiba and Peterson, 2003; Lane, Robertson, & Graham-Bailey, 2006) and with students at elevated risk for antisocial behavior (McCurdy, Kunsch, & Reibstein, 2007). The majority of students returning to their comprehensive schools from alternative settings are secondary students who have exhibited antisocial behaviors (Lehr, Moreau, Lange, & Lanners, 2004).

The Check & Connect model was developed to improve the school completion rates of at-risk secondary level students with high-incidence disabilities such as emotional disturbance. Using two levels of monitoring and intervention, alterable characteristics of school disengagement such as academic performance, absences, tardiness, skipping classes, and discipline referrals are addressed by a monitor/mentor within the school. Longitudinal studies have shown that participants in the Check & Connect model earned more academic credits, were more likely to be on track to complete high school in four years, attended with greater regularity, and demonstrated lower levels of school mobility than control groups (Sinclair et al, 1998; 2005). A significant percentage of these students have documented disabilities, typically high-incidence disabilities (Cortez & Montecel, 1999; Hasazi et al., 2001; Lehr, Moreau, Lange, & Lanners, 2004; Moore et al, 2005). Mentoring studies with students considered at-risk, but not identified as having disabilities, have shown improvements in academic and behavioral performance (Jackson, 2002; Rhodes et al, 2000; Slicker & Palmer, 1993; Thompson & Kelly-Vance, 2001).

Methodology and internal validity concerns limit the strength of the findings in the preceding studies. In spite of this, school districts are acting on the available evidence and implementing programs based on Check & Connect and mentoring

research. These programs are designed to address specific concerns within the culture of a particular school or district. To evaluate the effectiveness of these initiatives it is necessary to examine the intervention within the cultural context of that school or district. For this reason, a case study utilizing the available qualitative and quantitative information may provide an accurate description of the impact of an intervention such as Check & Connect.

Implications for Research

The preceding studies show that providing a positive, supportive adult relationship to an at-risk youth can lead to improved academic and behavioral outcomes and increase the likelihood of school completion. Students returning from alternative education settings share many characteristics with students considered at-risk for dropout. Due to these similarities, districts frequently implement initiatives modeled on interventions, such as Check & Connect, to address specific needs within their schools. Partnerships between educational researchers and schools are often used to develop, conduct, and evaluate these initiatives. In this study, I partnered with a school district to evaluate their use of Check & Connect as a tool for reintegrating and supporting students returning from alternative educational placements.

Program evaluation, defined as “the systematic collection of information about the activities, characteristics, and outcomes of programs to make judgments about the program, improve program effectiveness, and/or inform decisions about future programming” (Boulmetis & Dutwin, 2000, Patton, 1997) is a technique frequently used to evaluate organizational sponsored initiatives. Evaluation research, closely related to program evaluation, focuses on explaining educational effects and

devising instructional strategies (Isaac & Michael, 1995). One danger associated with program evaluation, and evaluation research, is that the focus on pragmatic concerns will lead to a lack of rigor (Potter, 2006). Another is the cooperating agency's desire for external validity to the potential detriment of internal validity (Potter, 2006).

To address these concerns, I used reliability control techniques while developing a case study that evaluated the use of Check & Connect as a tool for reintegrating and supporting students returning from alternative educational placements. Two broad questions, "How has Check & Connect affected a group of students returning to their comprehensive schools from an alternative placement?" and "If it had an impact, why did Check & Connect have the influence it did?" were used to guide this proposed study. Descriptive data, surveys, and qualitative interview data were used to answer specific research questions. These specific research questions, and the procedures used to collect data, address fidelity and validity issues, and analyze my findings, will be described in Chapter III: Methodology.

Chapter III: METHODOLOGY

In this study, descriptive data, surveys, and qualitative interview data were used to develop a case study that answered two broad questions, “How has Check & Connect affected a group of students returning to their comprehensive schools from an alternative placement?” and “If it had an impact, why did Check & Connect have the influence it did?” The specific research questions examined are described here.

Research Questions

1. *What impact does a Check & Connect intervention have on the academic and behavioral performance of a group of high school students with demonstrated learning and behavioral difficulties returning from an alternative education placement?*
2. *How do students, faculty, implementers, and administrators involved with Check & Connect perceive the implementation and effects of the intervention with students returning from an alternative education placement?*
3. *What do stakeholders think about why Check & Connect had an impact on the students with demonstrated learning and behavioral difficulties who had returned from an alternative education placement?*

During this study, a total of six high school students, assigned to two intervention sites, were provided the Check & Connect intervention. Three control students, who were assigned to demographically similar high schools in the district, also participated. Three students who chose to not return to their high schools were interviewed for additional perspectives. Between the two intervention sites, a total of eleven teachers, two program implementers (monitors), and two vice-principals were interviewed. More detailed description of the participants by group will be provided during the description of the research sites. Due to concerns about the size and construction of the sample, as well as the ethical questions raised by willfully denying

a potentially beneficial intervention to a comparison group, the most appropriate methodology to examine the implementation of this intervention was an explanatory case study.

In this chapter, I provide a brief summary of Check & Connect, followed by a description of the demographic characteristics of the school district, and the participating schools from which my participants will be drawn. Within this description, I will briefly describe the study participants. An explanation of the district's placement procedures, a description of the experience shared by the students while in placement, and the procedures for returning to a comprehensive school will also be provided. A description of how Check & Connect was implemented with the participants follows. Finally, an in-depth description of the inquiry techniques to be used, as well as their analysis, completes the description of the study. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the trustworthiness of findings and the role of the researcher in data collection and interpretation.

Check & Connect

As discussed in Chapter II, Check & Connect (Evelo, Sinclair, Hurley, Christenson, & Thurlow, 1996) is an intervention model designed to encourage student engagement in school, reduce the likelihood of dropout, and increase the likelihood of school completion. Based on resiliency theory (Sinclair, Christenson, Lehr, & Anderson, 2003), Check & Connect uses a monitor to "check" the student's performance on alterable characteristics of school disengagement such as academic performance, absences, tardiness, skipping classes, and discipline referrals through continuous assessment. This is done through the monitoring of records and regular

communication with academic instructors and administrators in charge of discipline. Based on this data, the monitor then “connects” with the student and their family. By developing a supportive relationship with the student, the monitor is able to help the student develop new skills to assist them in navigating the challenges of adolescence while mitigating the impact of some of the difficulties they have experienced earlier in their lives.

Intervention Sites and Research. A large, mid-Atlantic county-wide district was the site of the case study. This district is among the fifty largest school systems in the United States and is comprised of urban, suburban, and rural communities. The district has wide variation in socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds of the students. During the 2008 school year, the district reported that 24.7% of their elementary students, 21.4% of their middle school students, and 14.6% of their high school students were eligible for Free and Reduced Meal Service (FARMS). Approximately two-thirds of the students are identified as Caucasian. African-American students, the next largest subgroup, are 22.7% of the student population. Limited English Proficiency (LEP) students represent a small, but growing percentage of the districts student population. Overall special education enrollment in the district is slightly more than 10%, while Section 504 eligibility ranged from 2.1 to 4.4% at different school levels.

During this study, six intervention students, three who returned to Pulaski High School and three who returned to Stark High School received the Check & Connect intervention. Two eventually left the program, one due to returning to the alternative educational placement and one due to withdrawing from school. Three

high school students, divided between two demographically similar schools, served as control subjects. All participants were identified by the district's alternative education director as returning to the study sites after being enrolled in the alternative program during the Fall 2008 semester. Each potential student participant was presented an invitation to enroll in the study by either the monitors at the intervention sites or the vice-principals of the control sites. Included in these materials was a letter of introduction, a brief description of the study, and parental and student consent forms. Contact between the researcher and the students were initiated after receipt of the completed consent packets. Table 3 shows student demographic characteristics for the 2007-08 school year and provides a general description of the population from which the sample was drawn.

Table 3
Challenges Alternative School Population, 2007-2008

		Population/Attendance Rate			
Male/ Female	Indian/ Alaskan Native	African American	Asian/ Pacific Islander	White	Hispanic
29/11	0/0.0%	26/77.0%	0/0.0%	12/78.4%	2/0.0%
Special Services					
	Special Education	LEP	FARMS	504	
	30.8%	0%	36.5%	9.6%	

The students enrolled in the district's alternative educational program are not representative of the district as a whole. The students have significantly higher rates of poverty and disability than the district overall. At the high school level, 10.3% are eligible for special education services, but only 14.6% receive free and reduced meals. More than twice these percentages are seen at the Challenges Alternative Program.

The district has established procedures for guiding the placement decision

into the alternative educational program. Discipline logs, interim reports, report cards, and attendance are all examined to determine if a pattern of poor school performance exists. At this time, the student's health and IEP/504 Plan, if applicable, are examined to determine whether a disability may be impacting the child's performance. On-site interventions such as functional behavior assessments (FBA), behavior intervention plans (BIP), and therapeutic curriculums are then pursued to address the student's challenging behavior. If unsuccessful, a request for placement is made to the district's central placement committee. Along with the documentation of challenging behavior, and a report of attempted interventions and their outcomes, a written report of the student's strengths and weaknesses is prepared by each of the student's teachers. If the committee agrees to the change of placement, a conference between the parent, student, and an administrator at the alternative program is scheduled. During this meeting, the student's records are discussed and the structure of the program is explained. After this meeting, placement only occurs if the student and his or her parent agree to enroll in the alternative educational placement. Upon enrollment, a special code is attached to the student's electronic file in the district. This code follows them throughout the school system and assists the district in tracking their further development.

While enrolled at the Challenges Alternative Program, students experience an educational environment significantly different from the district's comprehensive schools. It is characterized by smaller classes, higher levels of academic and behavioral support, and clear and consistent rules for conduct. During visits, I observed classes with fewer than 10 students per teacher. Within these classrooms,

the standard county-wide curriculum was in use but higher levels of support and modification were provided to the students. A point based behavior management system, in addition to a school-wide Positive Behavioral Support program, was also observed. In this system, material rewards were provided for positive interactions with staff and peers. Additional staff was available to act as academic tutors and behavioral support as needed within the facilities. Multiple students were asked to discuss the rules and expectations at their placements. The similar responses, combined with my observations, led me to believe that consistent rules and expectations were provided by the staff and faculty. When asked if they were interested in returning to their comprehensive schools, students frequently expressed interest in participating in their schools extracurricular activities but didn't think they would receive the same types of close, supportive relationships with the staff that they had developed at the Challenges Alternative Program.

The district's philosophy is that the process for transitioning back to the comprehensive school begins at the initial placement meeting. According to the cooperating district, upon placement in the district's alternative educational program, an Individualized Success Plan (ISP) is developed. A description of the presenting problems is developed with a focus on attendance, behavior, and academic achievement. A baseline and the percentage change required to meet a minimum standard of 98% attendance, five or fewer low level behavioral referrals, and a grade point average of 2.0 is measured. Similar to an IEP, documentation of interventions, review dates, and a description of success or failure is then provided. Reenrollment in the comprehensive school is based on the student's progress on the ISP. The decision

to return the student is heavily influenced by the alternative educational setting administrators and the wishes of the student's guardians. The receiving school must accept the student upon discharge from the alternative program. Revisions to this procedure have been in discussion within the district, but as of September 2008, no changes had been made.

Two schools, Pulaski High School and Stark High School, served as the intervention sites during the development of this case study. Additional data were collected from two additional high schools, Nimitz and Patton High Schools, which served as control sites. These high schools were selected due to the historically high number of students referred to the alternative education program. The four high schools are considered by the district to serve comparably diverse student populations. Enrollment of the participants in each of the schools is based on their home address and was made independently of this study. Tables 4 and 4a describe the high school sites that participated in the development of this case study. The Check & Connect intervention was implemented at Pulaski and Stark High Schools, but not at Patton or Nimitz High Schools. Bi-weekly site visits were conducted at each intervention site. Visits were also made to the control schools to determine the types and level of support available to the returning students. A description of each school follows.

Table 4
Study Site School Populations, 2007-2008

		Population/Attendance Rate				
	Male/ Female	Indian/ Alaskan Native	African American	Asian/ Pacific Islander	White	Hispanic
Intervention Sites						
Stark HS	971/969	12	1111	119	530	168
		89.3%	91.1%	95.6%	91.6%	90.4%
Pulaski HS	970/924	6	452	40	1327	69
		92.5%	92.2%	95.7%	92.3%	89.5%
Control Sites						
Patton HS	800/813	0	683	61	632	237
		0%	91.2%	94.3%	94.4%	87.5%
Nimitz HS	1052/1001	5	551	77	1296	124
		95.0%	91.7%	94.7%	90.9%	88.2%

Table 4a
Study Site School Populations-Special Services, 2007-2008

		Special Services			
		SPED	LEP	FARMS	504
Intervention Sites					
Stark HS		10.7%	2.1%	26.7%	1.2%
Pulaski HS		14%	0%	24.3%	2.6%
Control Sites					
Patton HS		7.8%	11%	29.1%	5.3%
Nimitz HS		12.7%	3.5%	24.8%	2.9%

Intervention Site-Stark High School. Stark High School, located on the outskirts of a large military base, serves a diverse group of students from the neighboring military dependent and civilian population. The physical structure of the school reflects its history of being on the forefront of many district initiated innovations. Specific areas of the physical plant had been, and were currently, designated for initiatives focusing on specific career areas, population groups, and advanced curriculum studies. Retrofits designed to accommodate these varied initiatives contributed to disjointed architectural styles, maintenance levels, and inefficient movement from one part of the school to the next.

Observed faculty interactions appeared to be strained at Stark High School. One teacher interviewed mentioned that teacher contract negotiations were underway and that a contingent of the faculty were “working to rule”, or only doing what was strictly required by their contract. Communication between staff was also seen as a significant issue by the teachers. During numerous classroom observations, I observed many teachers with low levels of personal interaction with the students and lessons with few attempts to actively involve them in the educational process. The teachers interviewed during this case study did not demonstrate these deficiencies and showed significantly more interest in involving their students in the observed lessons.

Intervention Site-Pulaski High School. Pulaski High School was located in a traditionally “blue collar” community, outside of a large mid-atlantic city. Though physically older than Stark High School, the physical plant appeared to be much better maintained. Additions to the building were only distinguishable by the different style of flooring tiles. These retrofits, and the classrooms assigned to these different wings of the building, appeared to facilitate efficient movement of the students from one classroom to the next. Unlike Stark High School, Pulaski High School only possessed one signature, curriculum initiative that though housed in a single wing of the building, appeared to be well integrated with the greater school community.

Greater collegiality was observed between the members of the faculty and administration than at Stark High School. Communication, perhaps facilitated by the monitor’s longevity in the school, appeared to be cordial and fairly prompt. As in Stark High School, it was reported that some of the teachers had chosen to only perform the duties mandated by their teaching contracts. Fewer classroom

observations were made during my visits, but more numerous spontaneous faculty-student interactions were observed in the hallways. These interactions, with few notable exceptions, appeared to be supportive and friendly towards the students.

Control Site-Patton High School. Patton High School possessed the newest physical plant of the schools visited, but was recognized as the oldest high school in the district due to its history. Only a brief tour of the facility was conducted with the property and classrooms appearing to be well maintained. Documentation stated that the school possessed a wide array of advanced curriculum opportunities and conversations with administration indicated that a variety of remedial services were available, particular for students needing English as a Second Language (ESOL). A conversation with one of the vice-principals revealed that that great disparity in economic levels existed within Patton High School, and that there was tension between the recent immigrant population and the less affluent African-American population. Gang members, reportedly, were in the school but violence between groups was fairly rare. Basic level Check & Connect had recently been initiated within the school, but not the intensive level of services examined in this case study. Darius, the control student interviewed at Patton High School, was not a participant in the basic level Check & Connect provided at the school.

Control Site-Nimitz High School. Nimitz High School, located in the same community as Pulaski High School, was an older facility and consisted of numerous stand-alone structures resembling a small, urban college campus. Students moved from class to class by exiting to a common courtyard and then walking to the building housing their next class. Ninth grade level courses were housed in a separate building.

The vice-principal who arranged the meeting with the control students at this site indicated that the structure of the campus, along with the close proximity of a commuter train station into a neighboring city, contributed to frequent attendance issues at the school and constant fears of non-students entering the grounds. Check & Connect had not been established at the school, but the vice-principal felt that it would be a helpful addition to the services provided by the staff.

Participants. A cohort of students, teachers, monitors, and vice principals participated in this case study. Students, as discussed earlier, were asked to participate based on their status as students who had returned to one of the study sites at the beginning of the semester. Teachers were selected based on student participant nomination. The monitors were the staff assigned to administer Check & Connect at the two intervention sites. The two administrators selected were the direct supervisors of the monitors at Pulaski and Stark High Schools. A brief description of each participant, by location and stakeholder status, follows.

Pulaski High School-Students.

Armando: A 17.2 year old Hispanic male, Armando returned to Pulaski High School after attending Challenges Alternative Program for two semesters. Though in his third year of high school, Armando was still considered a sophomore due to the number of credits he had earned. According to Armando, he was placed at the alternative program due to a pattern of noncompliance and poor attendance at Pulaski High School. He had also attended the district's middle school alternative program. Armando did not possess an IEP or 504 plan. Shortly after returning to Pulaski High School, Armando asked to return to Challenges Alternative Program stating that he

believed it was his best opportunity to earn his academic credits. Armando presented himself as a very guarded young man during his first interview and expressed a desire to control situations, through intimidation if needed. He viewed Check & Connect, and the monitor, as a tool with which he could reduce the consequences for his actions. His second interview was conducted at the Challenges Alternative Program.

During Armando's second interview, he was less guarded than he had been previously. This change in behavior occurred after we briefly discussed my background with at-risk students. He remarked that it was very important to him to know his teachers as individuals in order to develop a respect for them. Armando also described how his behavior at Challenges Alternative Program had escalated since his return due to his belief that there were few consequences available to the administration due to his sophomore credit status. Since coursework at the alternative program only extended through the sophomore year, they were unable to accommodate him for an additional semester. Armando believed that, regardless of his actions, he would return to Pulaski High School in the fall.

Benjamin: A 16.1 year old Caucasian male, Benjamin returned to Pulaski High School after attending Challenges Alternative Program for a single semester. During his first year at Pulaski High School, Benjamin described having extensive difficulty with authority figures in the school and compliance with school rules. He agreed to attend the Challenges Alternative Program when the opportunity was presented to him. Benjamin did not possess an IEP or 504 plan. Benjamin was the most open of the students interviewed during this study and freely shared information about himself, his family, and his feelings about the experience of returning to

Pulaski High School. This openness contributed to certain faculty members, particularly Mr. Rizzo and Mr. Smith, thinking highly of him in spite of the behavior he exhibited.

During Benjamin's two interviews, he presented two conflicting paths to his personal success. The first path was externally oriented. Benjamin spoke of his interest in eventually joining an electrical contracting business which employed many members of his family. He felt that his family connections, and the reputation of his father and uncles, would ensure him a well-paying position in the firm when he asked for it. Benjamin did not feel that his actions in high school would positively impact this prospect. During his second interview, Benjamin expressed a greater sense of personal ownership of his actions and his future. He acknowledged his own role in his behavioral difficulties and had begun to consider options to increase the likelihood of graduation. These included enrolling in night school concurrently in order to earn more credits towards graduation and, potentially, enrollment in a state sponsored diploma completion "boot camp" program.

Tanya: A 15.4 year old African-American female, Tanya, returned to Pulaski High School after attending Challenges Alternative Program for one semester. She had begun her freshman year at Pulaski High School, but was removed shortly after arriving for possession of weapon. At the midpoint of the study, Tanya transferred to Stark High School, the second intervention site. Check & Connect services were then continued by the monitor assigned to that school. She was not identified as a student with an IEP or 504 Plan. Tanya was the most highly regarded of the intervention participants. She was seen as bright and motivated by the staff at both high schools

and was considered for nomination for “Student of the Month” by Ms. Rodriguez at Pulaski High School prior to her transfer.

Over the course of the semester, a growing sense of confidence was seen in Tanya. During her first interview, she appeared to be quite apprehensive about speaking about her past and embarrassed by the incident that led her to being placed in the alternative program. At her second interview, she discussed how she was initially apprehensive about returning to a conventional high school but that she was now committed to remaining in a conventional high school. Tanya viewed herself as primarily responsible for her progress and felt it was important to maintain personal distance from her peers in order to continue to succeed. She credited the adults she had met upon reentry; particularly Anna, Ms Rodriguez, and a school police officer assigned to Pulaski High School in helping her adjust emotionally to being in a larger school environment.

Pulaski High School-Teachers.

Mr. Rizzo: A Caucasian male, Mr. Rizzo was an eighth year non-core subject area teacher and coach. He had significant interaction with Benjamin and was seen as being very supportive of his progress. This support was shown both before and after Benjamin participated in a fight in his classroom. When interviewed, Mr. Rizzo mentioned that he had worked with students who had returned from the Challenges Alternative Program in the past and that he felt it was important to “have an open mind” concerning their prospects for success in his classroom. He believed that the students who returned from the alternative program had the academic capacity to succeed, but frequently did not exhibit the emotional control required to stay out of

trouble. Though broadly supportive of the use of Check & Connect at Pulaski High School, he believed that the development of problem solving skills, particularly involving anger management, was an area that could be further strengthened.

Mr. Bartlett: An African-American male, Mr. Bartlett was a seventh year core subject area teacher. Though Mr. Bartlett had not visited an alternative educational program during his teaching career, he had knowledge of them through students he had worked with and individuals he had grown up with. Though he believed that students should have the opportunity to return from alternative education, he felt that some were a threat to the safety of the school and should be restricted from returning. When discussing Benjamin, a student he was instructing, he stated that though he was doing well socially he did not see academic effort from him. Mr. Bartlett felt that Check & Connect in Pulaski High School had the potential to provide attention to students that he as a subject area teacher could not and felt that students returning from placement, due to their history of volatility, should be the continuing focus of the initiative.

Mr. Collins: A Caucasian male, Mr. Collins was a seventh year core subject area teacher. He was known in the school as one of the more popular teachers due to his relaxed teaching style. Mr. Collins believed that students who returned from the Challenges Alternative Program integrated quite well into his classroom and he described Tanya's return as the "best case scenario." In his view, the greatest benefit to the inclusion of Check & Connect at Pulaski High School was that it provided additional support to the students and additional background information to the teachers giving them "an edge."

Ms. Rodriguez: A Caucasian female, Ms. Rodriguez was a sixteenth year core subject area teacher and a close friend of Anna, the monitor assigned to Pulaski High School. A handful of brief observations were made of Ms. Rodriguez's classroom over the course of the study. During these observations, she appeared to be effectively leading a larger than average sized classroom roster for her school and subject area. Her classroom leadership style appeared to be authoritative, while simultaneously expressing empathy and compassion towards her students. Ms. Rodriguez found the support provided by Check & Connect to be helpful with many of the students at Pulaski High School, but believed that it would have limited impact with students who had not accepted "personal responsibility" for their academic and behavioral progress. She worked closely with Tanya, one of the Check & Connect participants, and felt that her sense of personal responsibility for her success distinguished Tanya from many of the other intervention participants in the school.

Ms. Hunt: An African-American female, Ms. Hunt was a thirteenth year core subject area teacher at Pulaski High School. She had a very low opinion of the Challenges Alternative Program and felt that most students "come back worse" than before they were placed. Ms. Hunt had never visited an alternative educational program and stated that she was not interested in doing so. She had a tense relationship with Anna, the monitor, and did not acknowledge the existence of Check & Connect at Pulaski High School due to her belief that it was not formally introduced by the school administration. When asked what she felt was needed to support students returning from alternative educational settings, Ms. Hunt described an intervention that was nearly identical to Check & Connect. The one significant

difference in her hypothetical intervention was the requirement that the staff implementing the intervention be of the same gender as the student they were working with. Ms. Hunt believed that male students would be better able to relate and accept correction from a male mentor, while female students would benefit more from one that was female.

Pulaski High School-Monitor.

Anna: A Caucasian female, Anne was a core subject area teacher for thirty-two years prior to becoming a Check & Connect monitor. She was in her second year in the role during the development of this case study. During her career, Anna had taught in two other states as well as in a foreign country. Her formal background in alternative education was confined to an internship during her training. Though she was unable to confirm it, she believed that many students that she had worked with in the past in co-taught and lower level courses may have had experience in an alternative educational environment. Since assuming the role of Check & Connect monitor, she had visited the Challenges Alternative Program numerous times and held significant concerns of the academic and behavioral preparation the students received prior to returning to Pulaski High School.

In Anna's role as a monitor at Pulaski High School, she was viewed as "a leader" in the building by Mr. Smith, the administrator supervising her. This role extended into her acting as a substitute administrator during a time of crisis while this case study was being developed. Anna was given a great deal of flexibility and support in her use of Check & Connect by the administration. She was also viewed as having primary responsibility for overseeing her students' progress. This perception

of responsibility led to the Check & Connect participants being known among the staff as “Anna’s kids.”

Anna viewed her role as stressful, but very important to the future of the students she worked with. During observations, she cycled through the building doing spot observations to ensure her “kids” were in their proper classes. When in her office, she was frequently writing emails to teachers requesting her information, contacting parents, or meeting with students. Anna felt that the pace of her day made it difficult for her to meet the documentation requirements of Check & Connect and felt that many pieces of essential data were not making it into her student records. A significant source of concern for Anna was her perception of the view the school district took towards the impact of the intervention. She believed that the district expected a greater quantifiable impact in the students’ academic and behavioral performance through the use of Check & Connect than she was observing.

Pulaski High School-Administrator.

Mr. Smith: A Caucasian male, Mr. Smith had been a vice-principal for six years and an electives teacher and subject coordinator in a neighboring district for four and a half years. He had visited the alternative program in his previous district and frequently visited Challenges Alternative Program as the administrator overseeing Check & Connect at Pulaski High School. Mr. Smith viewed the role of Check & Connect monitor as a leadership role and frequently used his influence to obtain timely information from teachers in his school. He was broadly supportive of Anna’s efforts and attributed the continuing enrollment of many of the students to her use of Check & Connect.

During my observations at Pulaski High School, I frequently observed Mr. Smith conferring with Anna on disciplinary matters with the students on her caseload. He expressed having a great deal of trust in her and respect for her approach to the position of monitor in his school. Mr. Smith appeared to be significantly involved with the implementation of Check & Connect and gave many anecdotes concerning individual students, particularly Benjamin and Armando, during his interview. These anecdotes were fairly balanced with references to both their previous difficulties and examples of their success since their involvement with Check & Connect.

Stark High School-Students.

Lamont: A 15.1 year old African-American male, returned to Stark High School after a single semester at the Challenges Alternative Program. Lamont began his freshman school year at Stark High School, but was removed within the first few weeks due to possession of contraband materials. Though not identified as having a disability, concerns were raised by school staff and permission to assess was sought. School staff was unable to obtain a response from Lamont's guardian and an assessment for disabilities was not conducted.

During the development of this case study, Lamont was interviewed twice and observed frequently in class. He appeared to be disengaged from the educational experience available at Stark High School and was viewed by many of his teachers as exhibiting little effort academically. In the classroom, Lamont sat quietly towards the back or the side in an apparent attempt to avoid attention. During my interviews with Lamont, he provided vague, and occasionally conflicting, statements about his previous school experiences.

School personnel were concerned by Lamont's activities and he was being watched closely for signs of gang involvement and/or drug dealing in the school. Lamont attempted to reduce the school's ability to monitor his activities by not providing Mary, his monitor, his class schedule until several weeks after he arrived and then not providing the school an accurate contact number for his parent. It was later learned that his parent was not in the house during the work week and that he was unsupervised during these times. At the second interview, approximately two weeks before school ended, contact had been reestablished with his parent.

Hussein: A 17.0 year old male of Middle Eastern descent, returned to Stark High School after a single semester at the Challenges Alternative Program. Hussein was enrolled at Stark High School during the previous school year, but had not completed his spring semester there. According to Hussein, he was placed due to gang involvement and a perceived potential for violence by the school. Though raised in the United States, Hussein was receiving English as a Second Language services. According to his records, these services had been provided sporadically since middle school. An interest in assessing him for a disability was found in his records, but parental permission had not been obtained.

Hussein presented himself as a friendly young man during both of his interviews. When talking with him, it was often necessary to reword questions to help him understand them. Teachers observed similar difficulties in Hussein and believed that his comprehension of speech was lower than he admitted to. During observations, he was observed to be working, friendly, yet slightly uncomfortable with the additional attention given to him through the use of Check & Connect. This was later

confirmed during his second interview where Hussein discussed not enjoying having Mary visit him in class and saying that he was "...not bad anymore."

After talking with Hussein's teachers, there appeared to a disconnection between teachers who had a high regard for him and those he felt affection towards. Ms. Johnson, one of his subject area teachers, enjoyed having Hussein in her class greatly and frequently complimented his performance. When asked about this, Hussein remarked that he didn't like Ms. Johnson or his female math teacher. During his second interview, he was unable to identify his monitor's name, his female guidance counselor, or the female vice-principal he was assigned to. Hussein correctly named numerous male teachers and described enjoying their classes. Each of these teachers offered a more negative assessment of his performance in their classes. It was not directly asked, but it is possible that his cultural heritage influenced his ability to relate to female authority figures and that this might have contributed to his desire to distance himself from Mary and her implementation of Check & Connect.

Keenan: A 17.6 year old African-American male, Keenan returned to Stark High School after a single semester at Challenges Alternative Program. Though in his third year of high school, Keenan had just met the minimum credit count required to be considered a sophomore. He attributed his behavioral difficulties, and chronic absenteeism, to distractibility and limited discipline when around peers. He was not identified as having a disability. Keenan withdrew from school midway through the semester. His second interview was conducted in the community. During this meeting, he discussed feeling "old" in his classes and felt the pressures of having a

child contributed to his decision to leave Stark High School.

During his interviews, Keenan was very polite, but also very reserved. It was only during his second interview that he was willing to discuss many of the difficulties he felt when he returned to Stark High School. Chief among these was his sense of feeling “old” in his classes. Keenan was nearly eighteen years old and, due to the number of credits he possessed, placed in courses with students who were two to three years younger than him. He explained that he was expected to “live by his own hand” and be a self-supporting adult by his family and that this experience separated him from many of his peers in the school. These feelings, along with his desire to support his child, contributed to Keenan’s decision to withdraw from school.

In spite of his decision to withdraw from Stark High School, Keenan expressed an appreciation for the value of education. After withdrawing from school, he had begun to explore enrolling in a regional vocational training program which would also allow him to earn his high school diploma. In this program, he would be required to live at the facility during the week and then return home on the weekends to help with his child. While waiting for his second interview at the program, he was looking for a full-time job. Keenan was eager to discuss this educational opportunity with Mary, his former Check & Connect monitor, at Stark High School. Significant interactions between Mary and Keenan were not observed during the development of this case study, but Keenan’s interest in obtaining Mary’s approval and advice supports the notion that a mentoring relationship was developed between the two of them.

Stark High School-Teachers.

Ms Benning: A Caucasian female, Ms. Benning was a second year core subject area teacher and worked with Keenan in her class. Only two observations were made in her classroom due to Keenan's frequent absences and eventual withdrawal from school. Her teaching style appeared to be highly structured and students, including Keenan, appeared to be engaged with their assignments. During my interviews with her, she expressed regret that she had not known that Keenan had returned from an alternative education placement and that she wished the Check & Connect monitor had approached her with that information. While discussing Keenan, she described one episode where, in frustration, he called her "a dumb bitch." Following that incident, she had no further issues with him and believed that he was a student who had, in the past, a pattern of poor behavior. Ms. Benning believed that Keenan was maturing and this behavior was largely behind him.

Mr. Simmons: A Caucasian male, Mr. Simmons was a first year core subject area teacher and identified himself as the youngest member of the teaching staff at Stark High School. While observing Hussein in his classroom, he appeared to have a more relaxed style of instruction and tried to lead his class using his personality rather than strict rules. Mr. Simmons described his teaching style as "sarcastic" in that he liked to engage his students using light teasing. In reflection, he felt this approach may not serve him well with all students, but that it had been successful during his first year teaching. Like Ms. Benning, he did not know that his student had previously been enrolled at the district's alternative educational program. As the semester progressed, he described having few difficulties with Hussein and felt that this may have been one

of the reasons why he had limited contact with Mary, his Check & Connect monitor.

Mr. Fox: A Caucasian male, Mr. Fox was a sixth year core subject area teacher. Unlike many of the other teachers interviewed during the development of this case study, Mr. Fox had entered teaching at a later age and he considered it his second career after running his own small business. He worked with Keenan in his classroom and also worked with him a few years earlier. Mr. Fox was very supportive of Keenan and felt that he had matured significantly and valued education much more than he had earlier. He had a strong working relationship with Mary, and felt that she was a good influence on his student due to being a compassionate, but firm, disciplinarian.

Mr. Athens: A Caucasian male, Mr. Athens was a thirtieth year core subject area teacher who worked with Lamont. Even though he still enjoyed working with the students, he did not support many of the federal initiatives impacting the educational system and believed that they ultimately harmed the students. He felt that they minimized the personal responsibility of the student to exert effort and placed blame for failure solely on schools and teachers. Due to this, Mr. Athens was eagerly looking forward to retiring.

While interacting with Check & Connect, he was very frustrated by the perceived lack of effort demonstrated by Lamont. This frustration was amplified during his second interview after Lamont skipped the state assessment for his class. In spite of his frustration, he felt that he had a good working relationship with the student. This statement was supported by observations made in Mr. Athens' classroom.

Unlike the other teachers interviewed at Stark High School, Mr. Athens had a

long-standing professional relationship with Mary, the Check & Connect monitor. They had worked together for a number of years at Patton High School, one of this study's control sites, and Mr. Athens stated that he had a great deal of respect for her.

Mr. Gibson: A Caucasian male, Mr. Gibson was a fifteenth year English as a Second Language program coordinator and provided assistance to Hussein after it was learned that he had not passed his English proficiency exam. Prior to meeting Hussein, he had never worked with a student who had attended an alternative educational program. He believed that Hussein's involvement with a gang was an attempt to develop a sense of affiliation, something he believed that many language minority students desired. Mr. Gibson felt that it was his role to establish a sense of affiliation among the students in his program through their shared acquisition of the English language. He felt that Hussein was making friends through the program, particularly with two young men with a similar language background. During my second interview with Mr. Gibson, he stated that he believed Hussein was ready to pass his proficiency exam. He planned to continue to be a resource to him and hoped that this, combined with Mary's use of Check & Connect, would provide him with a sense of affiliation that didn't require him returning to a gang.

Ms. Johnson: A Caucasian female, Ms. Johnson was a seventh year core subject area teacher who worked with both Lamont and Hussein. She was raised and educated outside of the United States, but in an English-speaking country, and had a very noticeable accent. In spite of this accent, she was very easy to understand and was considered to be one of the better teachers in the school. From observing her classroom, she appeared to have a very interactive relationship with her students and

was able to set firm expectations while still providing a high level of encouragement.

Ms. Johnson had worked with a number of students who had returned from alternative educational settings in the past and recalled few significant behavioral issues with them. Her source of concern was in their lack of academic effort, which she found personally disrespectful. She perceived Lamont as having these behaviors. Ms. Johnson held Hussein in high regard and admired his effort in her class in spite of his language difficulties. She found Lamont to be equally pleasant, but had not been able to find a way to sustain his engagement in her class.

Like Ms. Benning and Mr. Simmons, Ms. Johnson had received limited information on the backgrounds of Lamont and Hussein. She felt that this was more due to the professional culture of the school than to decisions made by Mary as an individual. Ms. Johnson felt that the philosophy of Stark High School was to provide limited student information to the teachers out of fear that students would be treated differently. She described this extending beyond just the students participating in Check & Connect, but also to students with disabilities in her class. Ms. Johnson disagreed with this practice and felt that, as professionals, a certain degree of trust should be placed in the teachers to use information in a manner that would enhance their ability to instruct the students.

Stark High School-Monitor.

Mary: An African-American female, Mary was previously employed as a subject area teacher and guidance counselor for thirty-two years. She was raised in a neighboring mid-atlantic city and began her teaching career in a community oriented program for at-risk students. This program was located in one of the largest public

school systems in the United States. Mary then returned to the area and was employed by the cooperating school district for approximately thirty years. During her last twelve years, she was a guidance counselor for a community based dropout prevention program for at-risk high school students. Mary described this as a “school within a school” where the students had their own cohort of teachers and were kept largely separate from the rest of the school body. She retired from this position, but then returned to the district as a substitute guidance counselor before assuming the role of Check & Connect monitor just prior to the beginning of the study semester.

Mary viewed the position of Check & Connect monitor as being very similar to her earlier role as a guidance counselor in the community based dropout prevention program. She felt that a significant weakness of Check & Connect, as implemented at Stark High School, was its lack of a community focus. Mary believed that many of the students she worked with, with Lamont and Keenan being two examples, would benefit from an intervention that provided them greater community experiences and provided them instruction as a cohort, separate from the larger Stark High School population. This view did not appear to be based on a sense of bias or low expectations, but out of a desire to provide a protective and secure environment for the students who returned from the alternative educational program. This sense of protectiveness extended to how she related to the faculty of the school. She did not share a great deal of information with the teachers working with her students, believing that they “...need(ed) to mind their own business and just teach.” As the semester continued, this position softened and she began to collaborate more with her colleagues. Differences in the level of collaboration were seen between the younger

faculty and those closer to her age or with staff who she had a long standing working relationship with.

Unlike Anna's role as a monitor at Pulaski High School, Mary was viewed as a paraprofessional by her supervisor at Stark High School, Ms. Jones. As such, she was charged with numerous duties throughout the day in addition to monitoring and mentoring the students. These included signing late passes in the morning, hall and lunch monitoring, and serving as a bus attendant at the end of the school day. An additional difference was seen in the programmatic emphasis that each placed on their role as Check & Connect monitor, and the emphasis placed by their supervisors. Unlike, Anna at Pulaski High School, Mary placed minimal focus on "the numbers", the students' quantifiable academic and behavioral performance. She preferred to focus on her own observations of their performance in class. Her supervisor, Ms. Jones, placed great emphasis on this quantifiable data, an emphasis not expressed by Mr. Smith at Pulaski High School.

Stark High School-Administrator.

Ms. Jones: An African-American female, Ms. Jones was a second year vice-principal at Stark High School. Prior to entering administration, she was a core subject area teacher for five years, a coordinator for a grant funded college preparatory initiative, and a guidance counselor for one year. Even though she viewed the grant funded college preparatory initiative as a form of alternative education, Ms. Jones had not visited a disciplinary alternative educational placement, such as the Challenge Alternative Program, during her career. Unlike Mr. Smith, she did view Check & Connect as a distinct initiative at Stark High School. Rather, she viewed it

as a component in a broader PBIS based program that she designed and initiated at the school. Ms. Jones viewed Mary as a paraprofessional implementing her program, with a particular focus on monitoring the students who had returned from the Challenges Alternative Program.

During my observations at Stark High School, I seldom saw Ms. Jones interact with Mary, the monitor assigned to her school, or the students participating in the intervention. She appeared to have a very hierarchical style of leadership when compared to her counterpart at Pulaski High School. During her interview, she expressed that she did not believe that Mary's background as a teacher or guidance counselor provided her any additional skills or capabilities beyond those possessed by the other paraprofessionals implementing her intervention. Ms Jones also did not believe it was necessary to collaborate with the teachers while implementing Check & Connect, or her PBIS variant. She felt that through their classroom observations and interactions with students, Mary and the paraprofessionals would be able to gain the information they needed to provide support to the teachers, who would then provide support to students. While describing her views of the intervention, Ms Jones did not reference any student specifically and minimized the impact that Mary, as an individual, may have had with the students. Instead, she attributed programmatic impact with the students who returned to Stark High School to her intervention and stated that "the numbers speak for themselves." These positions were quite different from her peer's at Pulaski High School.

Control Sites-Students.

Canard: A 17.1 year old African American male, Canard, returned to Nimitz High School after attending the Challenges Alternative Program for a single semester. During the preceding year, he had attended Nimitz High School but performed poorly and frequently skipped classes. According to Canard, he attempted to establish himself with an older peer group and was distracted by becoming a parent to a child in a neighboring community. During that school year, he was discharged from special education services and a decision to place him at the Challenges Alternative Program for the following fall was made.

During my interview with Canard, he presented himself as a quick-witted young man, but with low impulse control. He frequently discussed his need to establish where his peers, particularly the ones he met while at Challenges Alternative Program, were from and made references to street crime associated with these communities. His relationships with these peers were very important to him. Canard was very concerned about his future and did not feel like he was adequately prepared to succeed beyond high school. He spoke of how he felt that his high school years were going by too quickly and that he didn't have the academic skills he needed to compete with his peers for work or enrollment in college.

Andre: A 17.0 year old African American male, Andre, returned to Nimitz High School after attending the Challenges Alternative Program. District records showed that he had attended Nimitz High School during his freshman year, returned briefly for his second year, and then placed at Challenges Alternative Program for a single semester. According to Andre, he had also attended the district's alternative

middle school program. Andre stated that he was placed at Challenges Alternative Program for pulling a fire alarm, but district records did not support his statement. During his freshman year, records indicated that he earned less than a quarter of his available credits and had a high number of absences and discipline referrals. Andre possessed a 504 Plan, but it was unclear as to what modifications he was receiving to assist in his success at Nimitz High School.

Andre presented himself as someone who was easily led by his peers. He frequently referenced Canard during our conversation and seemed to look to him for guidance. At many points, Andre discussed the importance of knowing his peers and felt that these relationships were the most important part of integrating into a school. He had great difficulty answering complex questions which asked him to describe his perceptions of his time at the Challenges Alternative Program or his return to Nimitz High School. Interestingly, he did see formal education as having a role in his future success. Andre felt that his family connections would enable him to find a postsecondary career with ease.

Darius: An 18.1 year old African-American male, Darius, returned to Patton High School after attending the Challenges Alternative Program during the preceding semester. Though in his fourth year of high school, he had not successfully completed the credits required for junior standing. Darius's high school records indicated that he had attended three conventional high schools and had been enrolled at the Challenges Alternative Program on two occasions. He stated that he and his family had requested his placement at the alternative program due to conflicts in the community involving students enrolled at various high schools. Darius was identified as having a Specific

Learning Disability, but his description of his classes did not indicate what forms of accommodations he was receiving for it.

During his interview, Darius spoke of his interest in being successful in school was feeling frustrated due to not having someone willing to show him how. He felt that he had received significantly more support at the Challenges Alternative Program and wished that he could have finished his high school diploma there. Darius was interested in participating in Patton High School's football program, but was unable to meet the academic eligibility requirements for the team. In preparation for his future, Darius had begun speaking to a military recruiter at his school. Having a juvenile court record, Darius was very focused on doing well in school and the community in order to meet the recruiter's conduct recruitment for enlistment.

Student Mobility

While exploring the background of the students, concerns over the continuity of their educational experiences arose. An examination of their school records revealed a high level of school mobility with the most significant amount of student movement occurring among the intervention participants. Over a two year period, each participant attended 3-5 different educational programs, including the Challenges Alternative Program. Tanya and Lamont each attended two middle schools during this time period. These programs are labeled as Middle School 1 and Middle School 2 to show the school mobility. Tanya and Lamont were not enrolled in the same school together during this time period. A description of the students' placement history, by month, is presented in Table 5.

Table 5
Intervention Student Mobility

		Tanya	Benjamin	Armando	Lamont	Hussein	Keenan
Fall Semester 07-08	Sept	Middle School 1	Pulaski HS	Pulaski HS	Middle School 1	Stark HS	Stark HS
	Oct						
	Nov						
	Dec	Middle School 2					
	Jan						
Feb							
Spring Semester 07-08	Mar	Challenges	Middle School 2	Night School	Night School		
	Apr						
	May						
	Jun						
Fall Semester (Alternative Placement) 08-09	Sept	Pulaski HS	Challenges	Challenges	Stark HS Challenges	Challenges	Challenges
	Oct	Challenges					
	Nov						
	Dec						
	Jan						
Spring Semester (Study Semester) 08-09	Feb	Pulaski HS	Pulaski HS	Pulaski HS Challenges	Stark HS	Stark HS	Stark HS
	Mar						
	Apr	Stark HS					
	May						
	Jun						

The control students were also mobile, but not to the extent of the intervention students. Darius attended a school, identified as High School 1, which was outside the scope of this case study.

Table 6
Control Student Mobility

		Darius	Canard	Andre
Fall Semester 07-08	Sept	High School 1	Nimitz HS	Nimitz HS
	Oct			
	Nov			
	Dec			
	Jan			
Spring Semester 07-08	Feb	Night School		
	Mar			
	Apr			
	May			
	Jun			
Fall Semester (Alternative Placement) 08-09	Sept	Challenges	Challenges	Nimitz HS Challenges
	Oct			
	Nov			
	Dec			
	Jan			
Spring Semester (Study Semester) 08-09	Feb	Patton HS	Nimitz HS	Nimitz HS
	Mar			
	Apr			
	May			
	Jun			

Many of the intervention and control students were placed in Night School during the 2007/2008 school year. According to district officials, this program was often used as an additional disciplinary placement for students who were exhibiting behavioral difficulties in the high school. Hussein, Keenan, and Darius's placement in this program was due to their behavior and provides evidence of an established pattern of difficulties prior to their placement in the alternative educational program.

Administration of the Intervention.

At the intervention sites, participants received the Check & Connect intervention beginning on their first day back to their comprehensive schools. During the first week of school, the monitors assigned to each intervention school initiated contact with each student on their caseload. This caseload consisted of students considered at-risk for placement in an alternative educational program as well as those who have just returned from placement. This case study focused specifically on the students returning from placement at the beginning of the second semester of the 2008/2009 school year and followed their progress during the first semester upon return. During this initial contact, the monitors were responsible for obtaining contact information from the student, explaining their role, and beginning to develop a relationship with the student. As part of this conversation, the monitor asked the student about their interests, things they found rewarding, and their initial concerns about returning to the comprehensive school. After these initial meetings, the monitor contacted their student's families to introduce themselves, explained their role within the school and the purpose of Check & Connect, and offered themselves as a contact and advocate for their child.

Once an initial contact with the student was made, the monitor was charged with beginning the “check” duties of the program. The first stage of this process required obtaining the students identifying information so their academic performance, attendance, and number of behavioral referrals could be monitored using the districts computerized record keeping system. This was followed by using the student’s course schedule to identify and initiate contact with their teachers. The goals for these initial contacts were to establish a dialogue with each individual teacher, explain the goals of the Check & Connect intervention and the role of the monitor, and to establish procedures for contacting the monitor quickly so that potential crises could be deescalated within each classroom. As the semester progressed, the monitor could use these relationships to monitor their students’ progress in each class, communicate with each teacher on at least a weekly basis, and develop interventions and supports to enhance their students’ performance in school.

In addition to monitoring the student’s progress through the school’s computerized record keeping system and academic personnel, the monitors were responsible with using their relationships with the student to gauge progress and performance. At a minimum, three contacts between the student and the monitor per school week were to be conducted. The purposes of these contacts were to develop a relationship based on trust and support between the student and monitor, discuss the concerns of the student and the faculty working with the student, reinforce the importance of staying in school, and to develop problem solving strategies. These contacts could be brief conversations of up to five minutes, between or during instructional periods, or longer more in-depth conversations during lunch, study,

disciplinary removals, or before or after school. At a minimum, one of the weekly contacts was expected to be greater than 10 minutes in length to allow for a discussion of “connection” strategies.

Each of the student participants in this study were considered to be at high-risk for school disengagement and, therefore, received intensive level Check & Connect services. In addition to the higher frequency of “check” meetings between the student and monitor, additional “connect” strategies were to be introduced as required to maintain progress in the comprehensive school. These strategies could focus on academic support, problem-solving, or recreational and community service exploration. Examples of intensive connection strategies to address academic concerns could include providing a subject area tutor, facilitating the development of class work completion contracts, and making individual accommodations for exams and assignments. Problem-solving strategies could include the facilitation of social skills groups, arranging for problem-solving meetings between the student’s family and school personnel in a time or location convenient for all involved parties, negotiating reduced sanctions for discipline referrals, or the establishment of behavior contracts. Potential areas for recreational and community service intervention could include coordinating services with community providers and assisting the student in pursuing employment or positive extracurricular activities. Additional intensive connection strategies could have been developed based on the needs of the student and the resources available to the monitor.

Implementation of Check & Connect requires extensive data collection by the monitors. Records concerning the number, content, and quality of contact between the

student participant and the monitor are used to gauge progress, document patterns of behavior, and guide the development of supplemental services. As part of their role, each monitor was responsible for maintaining a student log. Within these logs, progress reports focusing on the students' academic performance, attendance, and behavioral referrals were to be kept. These reports were to be comprised of both the printouts from the districts computerized record keeping system and written reports and messages from the student's teachers. A log of personal contact was also to be kept. Conversations between the student and monitor were to be documented as well discussions with the student's teachers, parents, and administrators. These logs were meant to be used as documentation of the interventions conducted by the monitor, the student's receptiveness, and their ultimate impact. The material from these logs was of critical import to answering this study's research questions as well as providing evidence of efficacy to the district supervisor overseeing the initiative.

Case Study

Yin (2003) defines a case study as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. A case study depends on multiple sources of evidence, with data being required to converge in a triangulating fashion. Through triangulation, multiple strands of evidence are used to answer "how" and "why" a phenomenon has, or is, occurring. In this study, I used archival material, surveys, and unstructured interviews to develop my case study. A description of the archival material collected and its applicability to research questions 1 will be provided first. This will be followed by a description of

the survey and unstructured interview data collection techniques employed and their applicability to research questions 1-3.

Research question 1 was used to address the broad question of “How has Check & Connect impacted a group of students returning to their comprehensive schools from alternative placements?” Archival material was a significant source of information for answering this question. This study was characterized by a small sample size limiting the strength of statistical findings. For this reason, I pursued descriptive data within the archival records. The primary tool for obtaining my descriptive data was the district’s computerized record keeping system. This allowed me to confirm the placement history of the participants. The record keeping system also identified whether a student received supplemental or differentiated services through either an IEP or 504 plan. This database also maintained a running record of attendance, academic performance, and discipline referrals. An examination of performance on these three measures prior to placement in the alternative setting, during placement, and upon return was made during the course of this study. This data was required to describe quantifiable change in the performance of the student participants.

In addition to archival material, surveys and unstructured interviews were used during the development of this case study. This information was essential to answering broadly the perception of programmatic impact required by research question 1 as well examining research questions 2 and 3. The surveys used a Likert scale to explore the student participants’ feelings concerning their preparation to return to the comprehensive school, their experiences upon returning, and their

interactions with their teachers. All participants also participated in unstructured interviews. The goal of these open-ended interviews was to describe the impact of the intervention and learn why the participants believed it had the effects it did. This allowed the dialogue to explore the opinions of the participants and allowed for follow up questions based on their statements. The choice to use this format was due to a desire to understand the complex behavior of the participants without imposing a priori categorization and potentially limiting the field of inquiry (Fontana & Frey, 2008, p.129). To guide these discussions, an interview protocol with initial topics to discuss was developed for each participant group. Specific topics within the protocol, and the interviewing procedures for each participant group, follow.

Students. Different procedures were used for both the intervention and comparison student participant groups. Each intervention participant was interviewed twice during the study semester. The first session occurred shortly after their return to either Pulaski or Stark High School. The goal of this first meeting was to explore the students' initial impressions of the reintegration experience. During this session, the participants completed a Likert based rating scale utilizing a number of the required and non-mandatory resilience and youth development probes from the California Healthy Kids Survey (WestEd, 2007). These were used to assess the students' feelings towards the school, the faculty, their monitors, and their overall sense of belonging within the school. Once completed, a discussion was held to build upon and discuss the items from the rating scale. Discussion topics focusing on the relationships between the students and their mentors were based on resilience theory while additional topics focused on the students' progress and sense of acceptance in

the school. A second area discussed was the experience of returning and reintegrating into the comprehensive school community. Additional topics, concerns, and observations were explored using an open-ended interviewing format. A second survey and interview session was conducted near the end of the semester. An additional area that was explored during this session in both the rating scale and group discussion was how the experience had changed or evolved over the course of the semester.

The control students were also interviewed for this case study, but only near the end of the semester. The students were asked to complete the same rating scale completed by the intervention group which focused on their feelings towards the school, the faculty, and their overall sense of belonging within the school. They were then asked to discuss their experience returning and reintegrating into the comprehensive school community. As with the intervention participants, an open-ended discussion focusing on the relationships between the students and the adults working in their school, their individual progress, and sense of acceptance in the school was conducted. The goal of these interviews was to compare the experiences of a group of students similar to the intervention participants who were placed in sites that had not implemented the Check & Connect intervention.

Teachers. During the first round of the intervention student participant interviews, the students were asked to nominate teachers who they anticipated having significant interactions with during the study semester. These nominations were used to select academic faculty for interviews. As with the monitors, the themes of previous experiences with alternative education students, beliefs concerning the

prospects for their success upon return to their home school, and perceptions of the impact of the Check & Connect intervention were explored. In addition, the faculty was asked to discuss their experiences working with the students receiving the intervention and their experience working with the monitors. The faculty members were interviewed a second time at the end of the semester. The goal of this second interview was to identify potential changes in beliefs or opinions due to their interaction with the student and intervention. Within this line of conversation, constructive criticism and ideas for “next steps” were also pursued.

Monitors. An interview protocol was developed that explored the experiences and opinions of the monitors. Topics discussed included their previous experiences with alternative education students, their beliefs concerning the prospects for their success upon return to their home school, and their perceptions of the impact of the Check & Connect intervention. Individual interviews were conducted during the last two weeks of the semester. During the study, I shadowed each monitor at their schools for a minimum of 4 hours a day at least bi-weekly. During these visits, copious field notes focusing on the monitor’s actions and interactions were taken.

Administrators. Similar conversational themes to those used during the faculty and monitor interviews were pursued while interviewing the school administrators. Greater emphasis was placed on the perception of the returning students within the school among the school personnel and changes in their viewpoints since the introduction of the Check & Connect intervention. The perceived value of the intervention to the students, teachers, and administration was also discussed.

All interviews were conducted at either the individual participant's school, or at a mutually agreed upon outside location. While conducting the interview, handwritten field notes were taken and an audio recording made of the meeting. This assisted in the development of a thick description, defined by Merriam (1998, p.30-1) as a complete, literal description of an incident or entity being investigated, of the participants, their experiences, and their assessment of the Check & Connect intervention. During the course of the interviews, a brief summary and interpretation of the participants' statements was made to allow for clarity, correction, and elaboration by the participants.

Fidelity of Check & Connect Implementation

Case study research focuses on the examination of a phenomenon within its natural context (Yin, 2003). As such, fidelity of implementation is usually of limited concern. In contrast, in any study where an intervention is being studied, fidelity of implementation is important. Without it, researchers are not able to determine whether negative or ambiguous findings are due to an ineffective program or due to a failure to implement the program and its conceptual and methodological underpinnings as intended (O'Donnell, 2008, p.42). An examination of the impact of Check & Connect was a central feature of the study. In order to determine whether the intervention had an impact, and potentially why, it was necessary to examine the quality and fidelity of its implementation.

O'Donnell (2008) states that during an effectiveness study where implementation occurs in a natural setting, variations in implementation are expected. Fidelity to the critical components and processes should be captured quantitatively so

that levels of fidelity can be related to outcomes. In the previous Check & Connect studies, limited measures to gauge the fidelity of implementation, particularly quantitatively, were described (Lehr, Sinclair, & Christenson, 2004; Sinclair, Christenson, Evelo, & Hurley, 1998; Sinclair, Christenson, & Thurlow, 2005; What Works Clearinghouse, 2006). O'Donnell continues by describing five criteria for judging fidelity of implementation. These five criteria will be defined and their use within this proposed study described.

Adherence to Procedures. O'Donnell (2008) defines this as whether the components of the intervention are being delivered as designed. Check & Connect has procedures that are mandatory and others that are administered as needed. The basic "check" procedures include the monitoring of academic, behavioral and attendance indicators. These are mandatory. Meeting with the students to discuss their progress, reinforce the importance of staying engaged with school, and problem solve are also mandatory. High risk students may also require academic support, more intensive problem solving intervention, or supplemental supports. Multiple means were used to determine if these actions were taken. The first was the use of the monitor's student logs. Each monitor was required to keep a log of their monitoring activities and personal interactions with the students. These logs were required to include academic, attendance, and behavioral performance checks, notes documenting interactions between the monitor and the student, their family, and other school personnel. In addition, email interactions between the monitor and the student's family, teachers, and school administrators were collected and made part of the log. A biweekly assessment of these logs was made for adherence to the

principles of the intervention. These data were then compared to the matrix of Check & Connect activities on the original researchers monitoring sheet for fidelity of implementation. A running email conversation was conducted between the alternative education director, monitor, and I that provided feedback, clarified concerns, and offered guidance to improve the fidelity of implementation. These email conversations were supplemented by site visits to observe and provide feedback to the monitors within their school environments. Periodic group discussions including the district alternative education director, the monitors, and myself focused on concerns raised during practice and the appropriate usage of Check & Connect.

Duration. This is defined as the number, length, or frequency of sessions implemented. Check & Connect requires frequent and persistent contact between the monitor and the student. In each student's log, the number of contacts between the monitor and student was documented. This documentation was collected during my biweekly student log assessments.

Quality of Delivery. This refers to the manner in which the implementer delivers the program using the techniques, processes, or methods described. While observing the monitors at Pulaski and Stark High School, copious notes were taken which focused on the interaction of the monitor with the participant students, and other stakeholder groups within the school. Copies of files, student records, and logs of interactions were also collected. The quality of delivery was assessed by comparing my findings from this data with the practices suggested by the *Check & Connect: A comprehensive student engagement intervention manual* (Christenson, et al 2008). Feedback emails were written to each monitor within 24 hours of an

observation to provide feedback on the quality of implementation and offer suggestions to improve fidelity. Group discussions between the alternative education director, monitors, and me were also used to address quality of implementation concerns raised by the group and facilitate problem-solving strategies to improve quality.

Participant Responsiveness. Participant responsiveness is defined as the extent to which participants are engaged by and involved in the activities and content of the program. An assessment of student participation was made through a review of the interactions between the monitor and student during the biweekly log assessments. Further information concerning their participation was derived through the running email conversation between myself and the monitors. Additional feedback was received via group discussions involving the district alternative education director, the monitors, and myself and during the interviews with the student participants.

Program Differentiation. This refers to whether critical features that distinguish the program from the comparison condition are present or absent during implementation. During the study, Check & Connect had only been formally in two of the district's high schools, the two intervention sites. Confirmation of this was made through correspondence with the district's alternative education director and via site visits to the comparison schools. During these site visits, an investigation was made focusing on the available supports for students who had recently returned from the alternative educational program.

Data Analysis

Data analysis during this case study was based on the theoretical proposition that the use of Check & Connect with a group of students returning from alternative educational placements would contribute to improved performance on alterable factors of school disengagement and assist in developing positive relationships with adult authority figures in their comprehensive schools. This proposition was based on the findings from the early longitudinal Check & Connect studies (Lehr, Sinclair, & Christenson, 2004; Sinclair, Christenson, Evelo, & Hurley, 1998; Sinclair, Christenson, & Thurlow, 2005), improved school and family interactions shown in the mentoring literature (Dubois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002; Jackson, 2002; Rhodes, Grossman, & Resch, 2000; Slicker & Palmer, 1993; Thompson & Kelly-Vance, 2001), the benefits attributed to mentoring in resiliency theory (Broussard, Mosley-Howard, & Roychoudhury, 2006; Dumont & Provost, 1999; Keller, 2005; Rhodes et al, 2006; Rhodes, Grossman, & Resch, 2000; Rhodes, Spencer, Keller, Liang, & Noam, 2006; Southwick, Morgan, Vythilingam, & Charney, 2006 Masten & Coatsworth, 1998), and the stability of academic performance and improvements in behavior and attendance reported by the participating district during their one-year long pilot program. Using an explanatory model, the goals of my data analysis were to determine if this theoretical proposition was supported by the available data, to explore why my independent variable; i.e. Check & Connect, may have had an impact on the school experiences of my participants, and to identify and explore any potential rival explanations that arose during the course of the study.

The first source of data examined was the descriptive data derived from the districts computerized record keeping system and the monitors' student logs. This data focused on the academic performance, attendance, and number of behavioral referrals of the student participants. A comparison of each student's performance for the school year prior to placement in their alternative program, for their time in placement, and during the semester after their return to the comprehensive school was conducted. Differences between the intervention participants and students in the comparison groups, as well as students with and without disabilities were also examined. Due to differences between the programs, the limited number of data points, and the small sample size within this proposed study, statistically significant findings were not possible.

The second source of evidence that was analyzed was the field notes and archival records kept by the monitors in their student logs. As previously described, these logs documented the interactions the monitors had with the student participants, their families, and other school personnel. Beginning with this source of evidence, data was coded and categorized to identify and explore patterns within these documents. Pattern matching, defined by Yin (2003, p.116) as a technique that compares an empirically based pattern to a predicted one, was then used to identify patterns of performance that could be attributed to the use of Check & Connect derived practices. A cross-case synthesis was also conducted using the participants assigned to each specific monitor as a distinct cluster for analysis. Yin (2003, p.133) defines a cross-case synthesis as an examination of smaller case studies with the context of a larger case study. Patterns of themes, experiences, and outcomes were

examined within the larger case of each intervention site. This allowed for the cases to be analyzed using the consistent independent variables of the same intervention site and the same intervention provider. A second level cross-case synthesis was conducted examining the patterns, experiences, and outcomes documented at each intervention site.

The third source of evidence analyzed was the data collected through the student surveys and participant group interviews. During the survey and interview process, field notes and an audio recording were taken to develop a thick description of each interviewing event. Similar data coding and categorization, pattern matching, and cross-case synthesis procedures were then used to analyze the data from the surveys and open-ended interviews conducted within this study. Data from these interviewing sessions was then coded and categorized to identify and explore patterns within the responses. Examples of themes that emerged during analysis included “apprehension”, “stigma”, “confidence”, and “responsibility.” Specific attention was paid to identifying alignment with the theoretical proposition of my analysis while remaining open to rival explanations for the students’ experiences. Each participant site was then viewed as an individual case for a cross-case synthesis between the two intervention sites. This cross-case synthesis was used to identify differences between the two sites, summarize commonalities, and describe the impact of Check & Connect over the course of the study. Procedural differences among the participant groups were then described.

Students. As described earlier, the student intervention participants at each site completed rating scales and participated in open-ended discussions focusing on

their reintegration experiences. These events occurred twice at each site, the first event occurring early in the semester and focused on initial impressions and experiences while the second event occurred late in the semester and focused on how the students experience had changed or evolved. This allowed for a time-series analysis (Yin, 2003, p122-4) to be used, measuring changes as the semester has progressed. Immediately after each interviewing event a thick description based on my field notes and an audio recording transcription was developed. Specific attention was paid to identifying alignment with the theoretical proposition of my analysis while maintaining openness to rival explanations for the students' experiences.

Unlike the participants who received the intervention, the students at the comparison sites only participated in one interview. These sessions occurred near the end of the semester at each comparison site. Like the intervention participants, they were asked to complete a rating scale and participate in an open-ended interview session focusing on their experiences returning to their comprehensive schools. Greater variability in the student's experiences was expected due to not having the shared independent variable of the Check & Connect intervention. After a cross-case synthesis among the comparison participants was completed, a second cross-case synthesis was used to compare the experiences of the intervention participants and comparison site students.

Teachers. During the first round of student intervention site interviews, the participants were asked to nominate teachers with whom they had significant interactions since returning to their comprehensive schools. From these nominations, a small group of teachers at each intervention site were asked to participate in two

open-ended interviews, one shortly after the first student interviews and one at the end of the semester. From these two interview sessions, a time-series analysis was conducted in addition to the coding, categorizing, pattern-matching, and cross-case synthesis procedures being conducted with the other participant groups.

Monitors. Each of the monitors participated in an individual open-ended interview with the researcher during the second half of the semester. As described earlier, the interviews focused on their previous experiences with alternative education students, their beliefs concerning the prospects for their success upon return to their home school, and their perceptions of the impact of the Check & Connect intervention. Additional data was collected during bi-weekly on-site observations.

Administrators. During the individual monitor interviews, the participants were asked to nominate the school administrator most involved with the intervention at each site. An open-ended interview was then conducted with each nominated administrator near the end of the semester. The responses from each of the administrators, as with the other participant groups, were analyzed using coding, categorizing, pattern-matching, and cross-case synthesis.

During this study, particular care was made to use as accurate a representation of the raw data as possible so that multiple, complementary analysis techniques could be used to identify emerging patterns as well as rival explanations. Though a small amount of my data was quantitative, the majority of the evidence used in this case study is subject to my interpretation. As such, my personal viewpoints and bias may have influenced the findings from my data. To address this concern, I will next discuss the role of trustworthiness in qualitative research.

Trustworthiness

In order to demonstrate methodological rigor it is paramount that the trustworthiness of the findings be established. In qualitative research, there is more of a focus on validity to determine whether the account provided by the researcher and the participants is accurate, can be trusted, and is credible (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Brantlinger et al, (2005) describes a number of techniques that can be used to enhance the trustworthiness of qualitative research. Many of these techniques will be incorporated into the following discussion of trustworthiness. Triangulation, credibility, transferability, external validity, and reliability were all considered aspects of trustworthiness in this study and the means to achieve them are described here.

Triangulation. Triangulation is the use of multiple sources of data to confirm or corroborate findings. These multiple sources of data lead to the development of a converging line of inquiry (Yin, 2003 p98; Gay & Airasian, 2003, p.215). Data triangulation refers to the use of multiple sources of information to corroborate a fact or phenomenon (Yin 2003, p.99). In this study, this was achieved through archival evidence, surveys and the open-ended interviews of multiple students, teachers, monitors, and administrators. Multiple participants from each group were asked thematically similar questions concerning their experience as a participant in the intervention and its impact. Analyst triangulation, or “using multiple analysts to review findings” (Patton, 2002, p. 556) was achieved by having a cohort of graduate students from the College of Education independently code the data received via the participant interviews. This was done to verify the impartiality of my analysis.

Credibility. Patton (1997, p.250) defines credibility as a complex notion that

includes perceived accuracy, fairness, and believability of the evaluation and the evaluator. Attention to these concerns is essential to demonstrating the internal validity of an explanatory case study (Yin, 2003, p.36). To assist in developing credibility, thick descriptions were employed during the interview process. This was accomplished by taking hand-written field notes as well as tape recording, and later transcribing, all interviews. To reiterate, Merriam (1998, p.30-1) defines thick description as complete, literal description of an incident or entity being investigated. The goal of these descriptions is to portray the event vividly for a reader (Patton, 2002). These records helped to establish an audit trail from which questions and concerns could be addressed as the study progressed. Member checking will also be employed to enhance the credibility of the study. Member checking is the process of bringing summaries of the data back to the study participants to ensure that the statements and findings accurately reflect their experiences (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2007, p.134). During the interviews, this was done by summarizing the statements of the participants from my field notes and asking whether their statements, and my initial interpretations, were accurate.

External Validity & Reliability. Yin (2003, p.37) defines the problem of external validity in case study research as knowing whether or not a study's findings are generalizable beyond the immediate case study. By design, this study employed replication. At each of the intervention sites, Check & Connect was employed with students who have returned to their home school from an alternative educational setting. Though similar demographically, and from the same school district, each of these schools possessed its own character due to the surrounding communities,

personnel, and attending students. The use of a distinct monitor at each intervention sites introduced variation in experience, style, and personality into the study. This negatively impacted the internal validity of this study, but enhanced its external validity. The use of Check & Connect at each individual site with its data collection procedures, menu of suggested intervention strategies, along with the feedback implementation feedback procedures discussed, was used to reduce some of this variability. In spite of this, it is possible that the findings from this study may be only applicable to the cooperating school district, or to the two intervention sites.

Opinions vary on the importance of reliability in qualitative research. For example, Cresswell & Plano Clark (2007, p.134) state that reliability plays only a minor role in qualitative research while Yin (2003, p.38) believes that, due to the poor reliability of earlier work, greater attention to reliability should be made in case study research. In this study, I developed procedures designed from their inception to assist a future researcher in replicating my work. I immersed myself in the literature surrounding Check & Connect, resiliency, mentoring, and related programs used to support at-risk high school students. I then developed a professional relationship with the cooperating school district's Director of Alternative Education to determine areas of common interest and to explore the possibility of conducting my research at Pulaski and Stark High Schools. A research protocol was then developed which addressed the district's interests in programmatic impact and my areas of research interest. Within this research protocol were procedures to gain the assent/consent of the various stakeholders, the survey tool to be used, interview protocols to be used to guide the unstructured interviews with the study participants, and a description of the

archival and observational data I planned to connect during my biweekly visits to Pulaski and Stark High Schools. It was here that my decision to audio-tape and transcribe all interviews to assist in the development of a thick description and audit trail was made. This research protocol was then reviewed by the University of Maryland's Institutional Review Board and the cooperating district's research office. Only after approval from both offices was granted did the development of this case study begin.

Confirmability: Interviewer as Instrument

In a qualitative study, the primary instrument for gathering and interpreting data, as well as responding to challenges and opportunities during an investigation, is the researcher. As a human instrument though, mistakes can be made, opportunities missed, and personal bias can interfere (Merriam, 1998, p20). Observational interpretation of a phenomenon can be influenced by the mood, experience, and intention of a researcher (Stake, 1995, p95). Due to the subjectivity that can influence qualitative research, it is important that a researcher be candid with their audience concerning their background, personal beliefs, and their potential impact on the interpretation of findings.

I brought my personal biases and experiences to this case study. I began my career in education as a paraprofessional at a residential treatment center for emotionally disturbed youth. While there, I earned my teacher certification by taking evening courses at a local university. After almost two years with this program, I took my first certified teaching position at a regional day treatment program for middle and high school students. This program was located in an economically depressed,

rural community. While there, I taught all the academic subjects to a largely junior high aged group of students. Being concerned with the academic rigor of the program, I modeled my lessons on the curriculum of the local junior high and high school. My goal was to provide an academic experience for my students comparable to what they could receive in a less restrictive environment. I believed, and continue to believe, that being accustomed to this rigor better prepared them to return to their local school when they were emotionally ready. I continued this practice in my next position as a special education teacher in a juvenile detention center. While there, my colleagues and I developed relationships with the surrounding school districts so that our students' progress would be recognized and factored into their grades and attendance upon return. Frequently, my colleagues and I encountered resistance to my students returning to their home schools.

When I decided to apply to graduate school, my entrance essay focused on my desire to investigate and develop programs that could assist my former students in returning from their restrictive placements. As I've explored many interests through my studies, this theme of return and reintegration has remained consistent. Within my doctoral program, I have taken coursework in qualitative research as well as general research methodology. I have applied these skills in numerous data collection activities and have learned as much from my failures as from my successes. These experiences have led me to this study.

Having a long-standing interest in this topic, I acknowledge that I hold strong beliefs concerning reintegrating students returning from restrictive placements. My experiences, and those of my former students, have generally been negative. These

experiences have made me suspicious of the opinions and beliefs held by the staff of comprehensive schools towards students returning from alternative educational placements. In spite of these experiences, I am cautiously optimistic. The district, recognizing a need, initiated this support program. In addition, the monitors all voluntarily applied for their positions in the program. Interest in seeing these students succeed exists within the school district. By acknowledging these competing personal beliefs, I have made every effort to see the data as it exists and not make inferences based on my own opinions and values.

Confidentiality

The confidentiality and anonymity of all participants has been maintained. Pseudonyms have been assigned to all sites and participants in this case study. Within this document, the intervention is called Check & Connect rather than the name used by the district. This was done to further protect the anonymity of the cooperating district. Approval of this study was received by the University of Maryland's Institutional Review Board and the district's research office. All participants in this study, and their guardians when applicable, signed consent agreements indicating their responses would be used for research purposes and that all recordings would be destroyed upon completion of the study.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

This chapter will address the Research Questions posed in Chapter 3. Using primarily qualitative data, I will describe the experiences of the students and school personnel during the semester after returning from the alternative educational program. The experiences of the students receiving the Check & Connect intervention upon return to their comprehensive high school will be contrasted with those of a control group of students who returned to their comprehensive high school but without the Check & Connect.

As discussed in Chapter III, the mobility of students during the development of this case study may have influenced their experiences with the Check & Connect intervention. Discussions of the role of student mobility, when supported by the data, are included in the findings for Research Questions 1-3. The caveats provided by this additional influence have been used to provide added detail and perspective on the data.

Research Question 1

What impact does a Check & Connect intervention have on the academic and behavioral performance of a group of high school students with demonstrated learning and behavioral difficulties returning from an alternative education placement?

To address this question I will first present the quantitative data derived from the district's archival database system. This will be used to show the intervention and control students' performance on the academic and behavioral measures used by Check & Connect. This will be followed by a description of the findings from my own observations, the students' personal statements, and the assessment of their instructors.

Quantitative Findings. In Check & Connect, monitors are required to track a student's academic progress, number of behavioral referrals, and attendance. This is done in order to gauge their progress and so that additional interventions can be implemented quickly to provide supplementary support. During the course of this study, archival data was used to assess the intervention and control students' progress in these three areas. The findings from this data source, followed by findings from additional sources of data will now be presented.

Changes in academic performance. To examine students' academic performance, grade point averages were computed for each student in the core academic areas; Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies. A Grade Point Average (GPA) was calculated by assigning a numerical weight to each grade (A=4 points, B=3 points, C= 2 points, D=1 point, E (failing grade) = 0 points) calculating the sum and then dividing by the number of core courses completed that semester. Multiple courses in the same subject area were factored into the students' GPAs. Courses marked as "R" or "NG" were considered as failed due to the removal of the student from the course. Courses marked as "W", indicating that credit for the course has been revoked due to attendance are also considered to be failed courses. In the school year prior to placement, Tanya and Lamont were both enrolled in middle school programs. Their GPAs are based on their performance during the complete 2007-08 school year.

Table 7
Academic Performance of Study Participants

	Fall Semester 07-08	Spring Semester 07-08	Fall Semester (Alternative Placement) 08-09	Spring Semester (Study Semester) 08-09
Pulaski High School				
Tanya		2.60	2.75	1.50
Benjamin	1.0	0.25	1.50	0.00
Armando	0.75	0.80	2.25	0.50
Stark High School				
Lamont		1.75	0.50	0.50
Hussein	1.50	0.00	2.67	1.50
Keenan	0.50	1.67	2.67	Withdrew
Control Students				
Darius	0.50	0.00	2.00	0.25
Canard	0.50	0.25	2.25	0.00
Andre	0.50	0.00	1.25	0.00

Table 7 shows a general decline in the performance of both the intervention and control students following their return from the Challenges Alternative Program. With the exception of Benjamin, the intervention students showed greater academic progress than the control students. The two most successful students, Tanya and Hussein, showed the least decline in performance yet were still seen as performing poorly. Neither of these students was identified as having a disability, though Hussein was receiving ESOL services and an interest in assessing him for a disability had been made in the past. The control students experienced a more significant decline in GPA than the intervention students. It should be noted that, on the continuum of learning difficulties, the control students had greater documented difficulties than the intervention students. Darius was identified as having a specific learning disability and Canard had been discharged from special education services during the Spring Semester 07-08. Andre possessed a 504 Plan.

Student mobility may have contributed to the quantitative findings found in the students' records. Among the intervention students; Tanya, Armando, and Keenan each experienced mobility during the development of this case study. Tanya transferred from Pulaski to Stark High School, the second intervention site, midway through the semester. Armando returned to Challenges Alternative Program approximately a month after returning to Pulaski High School. His GPA is based on his performance at both programs. Keenan withdrew from school midway through the semester. His performance up to that point is unknown.

Change in Behavior-Referrals. The number of behavioral referrals received by the intervention and control students is shown in Table 8. As discussed earlier, many of the intervention students attended multiple schools during the period when records were examined. With the exception of Armando, enrollment at more than one site during a semester appeared to have minimal impact on the number of behavioral referrals received. After returning to the Challenges Alternative Program during the Spring Semester (Study Semester) 08-09, he received ten of his eleven discipline referrals. Andre, one of the control students, received twice the number of behavioral referrals as during his last full semester at Nimitz High School. Among the students who completed the Check & Connect intervention, only one student received a behavioral referral for a physically aggressive act. Andre, the control student with 30 behavioral referrals, received few if any suspensions for his actions as evidenced by his low number of absences during the study semester.

Table 8
Number of Behavioral Referrals by Participant Group

	Fall Semester 07-08	Spring Semester 07-08	Fall Semester (Alternative Placement) 08-09	Spring Semester (Study Semester) 08-09
Intervention Students				
Pulaski High School				
Tanya	0	1	1	2
Benjamin	5	4	5	7
Armando	10	3	1	11
Stark High School				
Lamont	0	6	1	4
Hussein	5	2	0	1
Keenan	12	5	0	2
Control Students				
Darius	2	8	2	1
Canard	8	7	1	4
Andre	7	15	7	30

Change in Behavior-Attendance. As shown in Table 9, an overall decrease in absences was seen among all the students who returned from the alternative program and remained at their comprehensive school. The value of this data is compromised by the district's policy concerning suspensions. Per district policy, out of school suspensions are reported as absences in the district's central database. This highly impacted Tanya, as an example, who was suspended for an extended period prior to being placed at the Challenges Alternative Program during the Fall Semester (alternative Placement). Student mobility also affected the number of absences reported. The numbers reported reflect the total absences accrued throughout each individual semester and account for those from multiple sites when applicable.

Table 9
Days Absent by Participant Group

	Fall Semester 07-08	Spring Semester 07-08	Fall Semester (Alternative Placement) 08-09	Spring Semester (Study Semester) 08-09
Intervention Students				
Pulaski High School				
Tanya	6	17	29	7
Benjamin	11	23	15	21
Armando	27	5	14	27
Stark High School				
Lamont	0	7	11	8
Hussein	12	17	7	5
Keenan	13	21	10	14
Control Students				
Darius	15	2	5	9
Canard	0	6	9	7
Andre	0	53	4	9

Differences were seen between the verified, quantifiable performance of the students and the perception of their performance by the stakeholder groups. Often, they were viewed as more successful than their GPAs and behavioral records portrayed. This alludes to a wider definition of success, particularly among the staff assigned to Pulaski and Stark High Schools.

Perception of Impact. Differing opinions were expressed by the stakeholders interviewed concerning the impact of Check & Connect on the academic and behavioral performance of the intervention students. These views ranged from perceiving no discernable effect to seeing significant impact. In order to portray the range of opinions expressed by the students and staff, I will present my findings by stakeholder group; students, teachers, monitors, and administrators. I will then provide a brief summary that examines commonalities and differences.

Students. Students expressed that the use of Check & Connect had a greater impact on their behavior than their academics. Several believed that having an

individual to talk to, to coach them, and to mediate for them reduced the frequency and severity of their poor behavior. Tanya appreciated “How people helped me and how people paid attention to me if I was feeling down, how I could use Anna to talk to if I needed help with anything. I just had someone able to go to talk to.”

Keenan and Lamont at Stark High School experienced a similar connection and believed that their monitor, Mary, was preparing them for life after high school by asking them about their futures. Lamont believed that, without her supervision of him in class, he would behave more poorly than he had. In fact, differences in behavior were observed in class with Lamont when the monitor was directly observing him and when her attention was with another student. When attention was shifted from him, Lamont would put aside his assignments for activities of his own interest. These were rarely disruptive, but were viewed as disrespectful by some of his teachers.

Benjamin and Armando both discussed how the intervention had allowed them to mediate with their teachers to reduce the frequency and severity of their behavior. Benjamin, though acknowledging that he had behavioral difficulties, believed that they had been mostly for “dumb stuff.” He felt that through participating in Check & Connect, he had received greater opportunities to get to know his teachers, reducing the frequency and severity of his behavior. Armando saw his monitor, Anna, as someone who could reduce the consequences of his behavior and stated “Yeah, usually she’ll, like, talk to the teacher and try to get them to not write the referral or something.” He hoped that, upon his return to Pulaski High School, his monitor would pair him with teachers with whom he could develop a relationship.

Armando stated that the power of these relationships was a contributing factor to his decision to return to Challenges Alternative Program during the study semester.

Academically, the students attributed fewer benefits to the use of Check & Connect. Tanya believed that it was her responsibility alone to achieve in her classes. When asked if she believed either Anna or Mary played a role in her academic success, she replied definitively “no.” Benjamin and Hussein both felt that being assigned to teachers with whom they had not worked before had provided them with greater opportunities to succeed. Only Benjamin described a direct academic benefit to the intervention. While describing his work with Anna, he stated that “She influences me, like she...she asks me if I’m doing bad in a class and I’m going to let her know if I don’t believe I’m going to pass the class, she’ll pull me out the class for a little bit, talk to me, let me do my work in her class.” Over the course of the semester, Benjamin also described attempts by the monitor to facilitate the development of alternate assignments and extensions to provide him a greater opportunity to pass his courses, particularly as his absenteeism grew. Benjamin followed through on only a few of these opportunities, and only after Anna applied significant personal pressure.

Teachers. The teachers, similarly, saw greater behavioral impact through the use of Check & Connect than academic impact. Many attributed this to the students having a caring adult in the school who expressed an interest in their success. Others attributed this to having an additional level of supervision. Primary behavior changes that were seen were a reduction in disruptive behavior and improved interactions with

peers. Increased engagement in the curriculum was not perceived by the majority of the teachers interviewed.

During the course of this case study, only two incidents of significant classroom disruptions were described by the teachers at the two intervention sites. The first occurred at Stark High School and involved Keenan and Ms. Benning. The teacher described Keenan becoming frustrated when he was unable to make up missing assignments and called her “a dumb bitch.” The second incident involved Benjamin and a student who was insulting him in Mr. Rizzo’s classroom at Pulaski High School. After first asking to speak with Anna, Benjamin returned to class and then struck the other student. After receiving behavioral referrals and consequences for their actions, Ms. Benning and Mr. Rizzo both described the students as calm, polite, and cooperative after their return to class. Ms. Benning, though not observing the interaction, believed that Mary had assisted Keenan in calming down and altering his behavior in her classroom. Mr. Rizzo attributed Benjamin’s successful return to Anna’s effectiveness in guiding students through what he described as “a decision-making situation,” allowing them to more quickly, and rationally, recover from incidents in the school.

With the exception of the fight involving Benjamin, no episodes of poor peer interactions were described by the teachers. In fact, more frequent complaints of excessive, yet friendly, side conversations were made by the teachers interviewed. Mr. Simmons, one of Hussein’s teachers, remarked that “This semester he’s gone from extraordinarily quiet to talkative, he’s definitely connected to a lot more of the students which is good and bad.” Evidence of this was also seen in Hussein’s science

class where Anna and the instructor collaborated to mitigate the impact of his language barrier. Mr. Bartlett, of Pulaski High School, believed that peer relations were the smallest difficulty presented in his class by either Benjamin, or the other students receiving Check & Connect who were not part of this study. In spite of this observation, Mr. Bartlett believed that the students' peer relations were of a critical concern to the intervention due to the participants' history of behavioral difficulties and potential for influencing the culture of the school. Due to the few problems he observed with students who were potentially quite volatile, Mr. Bartlett believed that the intervention was succeeding in, at least, minimizing harmful interactions between the students participating in Check & Connect and the larger student population.

A wide range of academic engagement was described by the teachers interviewed, though the majority felt that students who returned from an alternative educational placement often displayed low motivation. Many believed that this low motivation was linked to an academic skill deficit. Ms. Johnson, a teacher who worked with both Lamont and Hussein at Stark High School, believed that though both students possessed low skill levels, it was Hussein's level of engagement that most contributed to his success. Their differences in engagement were observed during visits to Ms. Johnson's classroom. During the lesson, Hussein sat by himself and attempted to work independently. He frequently raised his hand asking for assistance with the assignment. Lamont was seen sitting with a group of other students. He was quietly talking with them and drawing a picture of a house. When redirected by the teacher or monitor, he would begin working on the assignment but then put it aside after a few minutes. Similar patterns of behavior were observed with

both students in a variety of classes. Mr. Athens, a second teacher at Stark High School felt personally frustrated by the lack of engagement he perceived in Lamont. During the course of the study, he and Mary had collaborated to establish numerous interventions in his classroom for Lamont. During observations, I saw both individual tutoring by Mr. Athens and the use of peer tutoring involving a second student. Mr. Athens gave his second interview after Lamont had skipped the state level assessment required in his class twice. While discussing the student, he stated that

Now if you'd like to have more fun you've got to do something about it. You're not passing. You're not a piece of cheese sitting on the desk. You're not in a deli case. It's your responsibility. You have to come across on something. You have to do homework, you have to bring a pencil, you have to bring paper, you have to have a positive attitude, you have to participate, you have to tell people what you need and when you need it. And you need to behave yourself. You need to be checked on all of those things. As far as...to stop treating them as if they're these passive little entities that have been wronged by "the big bad system", that's a crock of shit. A total crock of shit.

At the other extreme, teachers expressed high regard for students who they felt were engaged in their classes. Mr. Rizzo spoke highly of Benjamin, in spite of the fight which occurred. Mr. Fox, who had worked with Keenan in the past, was impressed by the effort he exhibited prior to withdrawing from school. Mr. Gibson and Mr. Simmons shared Ms. Johnson's enthusiasm for Hussein's growth. Ms. Rodriguez, a teacher at Pulaski High School, spoke very highly of Tanya, the student considered to be most successful of the intervention participants.

She is excellent. She has been one that apparently turned totally around. She is one of my best students. She is very bright, which a lot of these kids are bright anyways. It has nothing to do like I said earlier, it's not their level, it's the choices they've made. She apparently has done probably a 180. She's one of my best students, she's respectful. I actually suggested her for our Student of the Month from our team, for this month...She's just very responsible. You would never know that she was one of the kids.

Many of the teachers interviewed were unsure of the impact of Check & Connect with the students' levels of academic engagement. Most viewed the intervention as a way to encourage engagement and to identify alternative strategies to promote participation. Ultimately though, the responsibility to succeed was viewed as residing with the students. Mr. Athens believed that the ability of Check & Connect, or any other mentoring relationship, was linked to the value that the student placed in the relationship. He stated that

So, in and of itself, I mean, its inherent value is really tied up with whatever absolute value it can establish with these kids. If you've got kids who are amenable, it's a good idea to have someone to follow them around. If they're being just as dismissive to the person following them around as they are to the people in the classroom...it's just a failed relationship.

The monitors and administrators similarly believed that Check & Connect had a greater behavioral impact than an academic one. Unlike the teachers, they placed greater emphasis on the intervention's role in maintaining the participants' enrollment in school, with an eventual goal of graduation, than on success in individual classes. This perspective was similar to that of the original researchers who viewed Check & Connect as a means to support students as they progressed towards graduation (Christenson, Evelo, & Hurley, 1998; Sinclair, Christenson, & Thurlow, 2005).

Monitors. The two monitors, though sharing a belief that the impact of Check & Connect could not be easily measured, disagreed concerning the value of

measuring the participants' academic and behavioral performance. Anna, the monitor at Pulaski High School, believed it was important to track her students' academic and behavioral progress using her observations, available records, and the input of her colleagues. Mary, the monitor at Stark High School, believed that her observations combined with her experience reading the guidance counselor codes provided in the students' interim reports and report cards were more effective tools to measure progress. Their views of the impact of Check & Connect with the student participants follow.

During the development of this case study, Anna frequently expressed anxiety over the measurable impact of Check & Connect. She believed that the low academic performance of many of the student participants reflected poorly on her and the value of Check & Connect. Anna often stated that she believed even the low level of academic success she was seeing should be considered progress. She believed that a student who was initially failing all of their courses, but later earning "Ds", should be thought of as making progress. They were still enrolled in school. They were still earning credits towards graduation. Her belief was that the students' academic performance would follow improvements in their behavior such as academic engagement, attendance, and number of behavioral referrals. Anna did not believe that short-term measurable progress would be seen, but that the likelihood of her students ultimately graduating from Pulaski High School was enhanced through the use of Check & Connect.

Mary, in contrast, did not place significant value in the measurable impact of Check & Connect. Unlike Anna, she was seldom able to provide an estimate of the

students' measurable academic or behavioral progress during the study. When asked about the value of this data, she responded

Well, I don't dwell on the numbers so I don't know for sure, but, the very fact that, for example, when I saw Tanya the other day and I said "you've been out for the last two days, where you've been" and that meant a lot to her. And I know when no one answers from home. She knew that I knew that she wasn't here and that meant a lot to her. And nobody else would notice that.

In addition to her own observations, Mary placed a great of worth in the codes provided as teacher feedback in the students' interim reports. As a former guidance counselor, she felt confident in her ability to interpret these codes and she stated that "they tell me everything I need to know." Anna, the monitor at Pulaski High School, did not have this skill nor was she observed as having as close a relationship with the guidance department as Mary possessed at Stark High School.

The notion of having a caring and attentive adult in the school as a programmatic impact was shared by both Anna and Mary. Each monitor believed that through the relationship they were developing with the student participants, they were showing them that not every adult was an adversary. That someone in the school valued them. They believed that the use of Check & Connect provided a caring, insular environment in the school that Mary described as "like a family." Anna extended this idea of creating a "family" atmosphere by attempting to pair the students assigned to her with teachers that she believed would be supportive of them and with whom they could develop a relationship. Benjamin's inclusion in Mr. Rizzo's class and Tanya's assignment to Ms. Rodriguez were done for this purpose. Anna believed that helping the students have a positive academic experience would contribute to them being more likely to persevere and continue their enrollment at

Pulaski High School. In addition, she hoped to have the teachers working with her students speak highly of them to their colleagues. Anna felt that having staff in the school, other than her, promoting the students positive traits and accomplishments would diminish the bias many of her colleagues felt towards students returning from the Challenges Alternative Program. She believed that this would lead to less adversarial interactions between the students and the faculty and, ultimately, greater academic and behavioral progress.

As with the monitors, the administrators saw the development of a positive adult relationship as a programmatic impact that was difficult to measure. Interestingly, the two administrators interviewed also assigned different value to the measurable and experiential effects of the students participating in Check & Connect. Their foci did not necessarily align with those of the monitor assigned to their school. Mr. Smith, the vice-principal of Pulaski High School, placed less focus on the measurable effects of Check & Connect than Anna, the monitor working in his school. In contrast, Ms. Jones was much more interested in the measurable impact of the intervention than Mary, the monitor assigned to Stark High School. Their views on the impact of Check & Connect will now be described.

Administrators. Views of the impact of Check & Connect, in addition to the students' measurable academic and behavioral performance, arose while interviewing Mr. Smith and Ms. Jones. Many of these focused on the social benefits of the intervention which, in time, could lead to the students' graduation from high school. These will be explored first, followed by a brief discussion on the vice-principals'

views of the intervention's direct impact on the participants' academic and behavioral performance.

During Mr. Smith's interview, he focused primarily on the social benefits of Check & Connect and their role in stabilizing the students' behavior. He believed that the primary benefit of the intervention was that the students were paired with an advocate in the building who was able to provide the nurturing of a supportive parent and the boundary setting required to establish an acceptable standard of behavior. Mr. Smith felt that Anna filled this role well and he attributed much of the students' success to her. He believed that Anna's attention and efforts prevented stressors such as the school size, academic rigor, and peer pressures of Pulaski High School from becoming overwhelming and leading to either behavioral difficulties or dropout. He attributed the continuing enrollment of several students to the use of Check & Connect and to Marty's relationships with the students, their families, and their teachers.

When speaking specifically of the students enrolled in this study, he discussed Check & Connect's role in the experiences of Benjamin and Armando. Due to Tanya's limited time in Pulaski High School, he was unable to offer a description of her progress. In spite of the behavioral difficulties that Benjamin exhibited, Mr. Smith had a surprisingly high opinion of him. He believed that his initial return went well, but that "the chip on his shoulder" grew as the semester continued. He describing liking him a great deal, in spite of "the chip on his shoulder", and felt that he was still learning how to manage his anger and frustration. Even with this difficulty, Mr. Smith

felt that Benjamin was more approachable than he had been prior to his involvement in Check & Connect.

Armando, in contrast, did not remain at Pulaski High School. After approximately a month, he returned to the Challenges Alternative Program. Prior to him leaving, Armando had begun to skip classes with another student and exhibit poor classroom behavior. At this time, I observed Mr. Smith saying to Anna, “And so it begins”, a reference to the return of Armando’s earlier behavior. During my interview, Mr. Smith appeared to have a respect for Armando’s request to return to the alternative program. He described aggressively advocating for his return when Armando approached him and Anna stating that he believed he had a better opportunity for success at the Challenges Alternative Program. Mr. Smith believed that this form of self-advocacy, facilitated by Anna, was a successful effect of the intervention.

In spite of Anna’s focus on the measurable impact of Check & Connect, her supervisor at Pulaski High School, Mr. Smith, never discussed the quantitative effects of the intervention. Ms. Jones, the vice-principal overseeing Mary at Stark High School, in contrast, viewed Check & Connect as a component in a broader PBIS support program that she had initiated. She was quite proud of this program and viewed herself as pivotal in its creation, implementation, and potential expansion. When asked to describe the impact of this broader program, she stated that “the numbers speak for themselves.” This data was never provided to the researcher and based on the low performance of the students at Stark High School, and Mary’s own

statements concerning the value she placed in the measurable data, the quality of Ms. Jones data is debatable.

During her interview, Ms. Jones also expressed a belief in the ability of the monitor to provide support and structure to students at-risk for school dropout, including the students who returned from the Challenges Alternative Program. She believed that these functions eased their transition and acclimation into the larger school setting. Ms. Jones did not provide specific examples of how this was done, nor did she reference any student participants specifically. Unlike, Mr. Smith, Ms. Jones saw the primary impact of her support program, which she considered Check & Connect to be a component, was that it provided support to teachers as they worked with difficult students. Mr. Smith's position was the focus of the intervention was with the student and supporting them as they interacted with the larger school community.

Interestingly, both administrators commented on the preparation of the students returning from the Challenges Alternative Program and the impact on their potential for a successful return to their respective schools. Mr. Smith, based on his experiences with students who had returned to Pulaski High School, and his own personal observations at the alternative program, questioned the rigor of the program and the transition preparation the students were receiving. He stated that he was hesitant to send additional students there, implying a confidence in Pulaski High School's ability to support these students on-site. Check & Connect in his school, along with providing support for students who had returned from the alternative program, was also being used with students perceived to be at-risk of being placed. In

contrast, Ms. Jones had never visited the Challenges Alternative Program and had a higher regard for the academic and transition programming she believed were being provided there. Interestingly, she believed that students who were not “ready” to return would likely fail in their transition to Stark High School regardless of their accomplishments at the Challenges Alternative Program. She believed that students who answered that they were not “ready” to return to a larger high school had a low likelihood to succeed and that the students at Stark High School who had poor reintegration experiences would likely state that they were not ready to return. With this position, it is unclear whether Ms. Jones would assign credit or fault towards the intervention when success or failure is essentially predetermined by the student’s readiness.

While developing this case study, significant differences in Check & Connect implementation were observed at Pulaski and Stark High Schools. These differences were not only due to differences in background, personality, and skill sets in Anna and Mary. I believe that differences in programmatic focus, perceived professional status, and delegated authority by the two vice-principals also played a role in the impact of Check & Connect on the study participants’ academic and behavioral performance. Mr. Smith viewed Anna’s role of monitor as a leadership role at Pulaski High School and provided her broad authority to provide services to the students. Ms. Jones saw Mary as a paraprofessional and Check & Connect as a component of a broader PBIS derived initiative which she had designed. The focus of this intervention, from her description, was to provide support and resources to the

teachers of Stark High School. These differences, and their implications, will be further explored in Research Question 2 and 3.

Research Question 2

How do students, faculty, implementers, and administrators involved with Check & Connect perceive the implementation and effects of the intervention with students returning from an alternative education placement?

As this case study developed, the perceptions of many of the stakeholders involved with the implementation of Check & Connect changed. Perceptions of implementation, and the effects of the intervention, shifted due to involvement in the program. These shifts were observed at both Pulaski and Stark High Schools. Interview data was the primary source of data for my exploration of this research question. My findings will be presented by stakeholder group: students, teachers, monitors, and administrators.

Students. Each student participant presented a slightly different view of the implementation and effects of participating in Check & Connect after returning from an alternative educational placement. These viewpoints acknowledge the differences they experienced due to their particular histories, the site and monitor they interacted with, and their own actions upon returning to either Pulaski or Stark High School. To describe these experiences, I have grouped the student participants by intervention site. This will assist in portraying the commonalities and differences the students experienced under the unifying experience of attending a particular high school and working with a particular Check & Connect monitor.

Pulaski High School. Each student who returned to Pulaski High School participated in Check & Connect as administered by Anna, the monitor assigned to that site. Two of the students, Benjamin and Armando, had direct interaction with Mr.

Smith, the vice-principal who supervised Anna and the reintegration initiative. Tanya had less interaction with him due to her status as a ninth grade student. At Pulaski High School, ninth grade students were assigned to another vice-principal who, though not formally interviewed during the development of this case study, shared an office with the monitor, Anna. Conversations with both alluded to a cordial relationship, though Tanya stated that one of her goals was to not provide a reason for her school administrator to approach her.

Of the three students who returned to Pulaski High School, only Benjamin completed the study semester there. Tanya transferred to Stark High School, the second intervention site midway through the study. Armando requested a transfer back to the Challenges Alternative Program shortly after returning to Pulaski High School. Over the course of the study, Benjamin's expressed feelings towards his school, the staff working with him, and the intervention varied widely. When he arrived, he discussed needing to overcome the stigma of his past, maintain his grades in spite of the reduced support, and resist the influence of his peers in order to succeed. Benjamin acknowledged that this would be difficult for him but he believed that if he was able to maintain his self-discipline, he felt he could succeed.

Benjamin, as well as many of the staff who worked with him, remarked that he had started the semester well. He felt comfortable with Anna and felt that, with the help of the intervention, he was performing well in his classes. He also felt that her calls home to his family, reporting his progress, had improved his relationship with his parents. As the semester progressed, his performance in all areas declined. In his second interview, Benjamin stated that he felt he got "distracted" and "fell off track"

and attributed some of these difficulties to the friends he kept both within and outside of the school. While in school, Benjamin exhibited behavior that he called “dumb stuff”; such as “getting smart with teachers”, “smoking in the bathroom”, and arguing with his peers. This behavior culminated in a fist-fight in Mr. Rizzo’s class. As his absenteeism increased, he fell further behind in his classes. Ultimately, though Benjamin was allowed to complete many of his missed assignments, academic credit for the semester was revoked due to his high absenteeism. Only credit for Mr. Rizzo’s class was granted. In his second interview, Benjamin acknowledged that he was the primary source of his difficulties throughout the semester and that he was trying to correct the problems he had created.

During Benjamin’s second interview, he provided a very insightful description of his experiences during the semester and the opportunities for success that Anna, and the intervention, had provided him. His feelings towards Check & Connect, and Anna, ranged between regret, annoyance, and thankfulness. Benjamin felt that he had been provided an opportunity to succeed at Pulaski High School that he had not fully taken advantage of. He described how Anna had arranged opportunities to complete missed assignments, attempted to have his credits reinstated in spite of his attendance, and frequently assisted him in regulating his behavior. As the semester continued, Benjamin rejected much of the assistance offered to him. He came to find Anna’s oversight stifling and wished that she had found a way to approach him in ways that were not as stigmatizing. In spite of this discomfort, he recognized that Anna’s actions were taken out of concern for his progress. While describing Anna approaching him in front of his friends, he stated that

I mean, it's weird, like, 'cause all my friends, like, I'll be in the hall and Anna is always stopping me. Always asking me, like, "what's going on?" So, they know, like, they even say "why is that lady always on your shoulder, watching you and asking about you?" It's just, heh... Which, she does good but...she looks out for people. It's just some things she does that doesn't...it gets on my nerves but I understand why she does it. It's part of her job and she wants to see me do good.

While discussing this statement, Benjamin came to believe that Anna's actions were similar to that of an overly protective parent. He did not regret participating in the intervention and felt that, regardless of how his performance was perceived, that his behavior was considerably better than it had been in the past. Much of that he attributed to being part of Check & Connect and to his relationship with the monitor.

When asked directly what he would have changed about his experience in Check & Connect, and what advice he would give his monitor for the future, Benjamin discussed Anna's implementation style. He felt uncomfortable with her visiting him so frequently in class and believed that it elevated his anxiety. Instead, he wished that Anna had approached him more discreetly during his lunch period or outside of the instructional day. He appreciated why she did it, but felt frustration over being treated differently than his peers.

Tanya was also assigned to work with Anna at Pulaski High School. Unlike either of the two male students, she was a true freshman and did not have previous history at the school. In addition, Tanya transferred to Stark High School, the second study site, midway through the semester. During both of her interviews, the first at Pulaski high School and the second at Stark High School, she appeared to be hesitant to share personal information about herself and her life outside of school. She presented herself initially as timid, particularly towards authority figures, yet

determined to be self-reliant. As each interview progressed, Tanya appeared more confident to discuss her experiences in school yet still very apprehensive to discuss related topics.

Tanya described having significantly more interaction with Anna, the monitor at Pulaski High School, than she had with Mary at Stark High School. She described meeting with Anna briefly on almost daily basis. I observed a handful of these meetings. They were almost always initiated by Tanya and consisted of a summary of the feedback that Anna was receiving from her teachers and a brief discussion of required next steps to continue her progress. Classroom visits were also made, but Tanya frequently looked uncomfortable when these occurred. As the positive feedback from her teachers continued, the monitor altered her approach to working with Tanya by reducing the number of classroom visits and allowing her to come to the monitor as needed. This approach was recommended to Mary when Tanya transferred to Stark High School.

During her second interview, Tanya acknowledged the concerns likely shared by the school staff towards her, and appreciated the autonomy, trust, and high regard she had developed among them through her participation in Check & Connect. Due to this, Tanya's monitors had begun to approach her less and allow her to seek them out, when needed, instead. She still felt like she was being watched closely, particularly when she was still at Pulaski High School. Tanya stated that

But, with Anna it is a little different. Just a little tiny, with Anna if she see me in the hallway she like "Tanya, did you get your grades up?" (Imitating Anna's voice) But she already know that I am. I told Anna that I already know, it's ok it's just she concerned about me, she want to know that I'm going right, but I am.

She did not experience this while working with Mary at Stark High School, but believed that she would be available to her if needed. Tanya also stated that she greatly appreciated “How people helped me and how people paid attention to me if I was feeling down, how I could use Anna to talk to if I needed help with anything. I just had someone able to go to talk to.” She believed that having this outlet gave her a chance to think before acting and avoid problems with the other students.

Of the three students who participated in Check & Connect at Pulaski High School, Armando had the least exposure to the intervention. He returned to the alternative school approximately a month after he arrived and chose to participate in this study. This transfer was facilitated by his monitor, at his request. Armando’s initial interview was conducted at Pulaski High School and his second interview was conducted at the alternative school. Due to his limited interaction with the intervention, he had little to share concerning his direct experiences. During the interview, Armando did not share a great deal about himself and was very standoffish until we discussed my background as a former teacher of students at-risk for dropout. Following this side conversation, Armando was more willing to discuss his views on the intervention and his experiences with Anna.

Armando viewed Check & Connect as a means to reduce his responsibility to behave in his comprehensive school. He viewed Anna as someone who would intervene with administration when consequences for his behavior were being considered. Armando also stated that he wanted the monitor to find teachers who would “respect” him and treat him leniently when he returned from the Challenges Alternative Program the following semester. During our second meeting, Armando

described feeling that he needed a relationship with his teachers based on mutual respect in order to perform well in their classes. He felt that if he didn't have a good relationship with them, then he didn't feel it was necessary to behave well in their classroom. Armando then described a teacher that he had respected and enjoyed working with while at Pulaski High School. He provided information on this teacher's family, his previous involvement in sports and the military, and described going to him when he wanted to talk. Armando had not developed this type of relationship with Anna prior to leaving Pulaski High School. He stated that he hoped to work with this history teacher again and said that knowing a great deal about the authority figures he was working with was important to him and that it helped him to understand their teaching and disciplinary style.

Stark High School. The students who returned to Stark High School participated in Check & Connect as administered by Mary, the monitor assigned to the site. This administration was characterized by more frequent classroom observation, but less frequent observed personal interactions. Hussein and Lamont both completed the semester at the school, but Keenan chose to withdraw from school midway through the study. At approximately the same point, Tanya, a student participant from Pulaski High School, transferred to Stark High School. None of the students indicated having significant interaction with any member of the school administration team and Hussein was not aware of the name of the vice-principal he was assigned to.

Hussein was viewed as the most successful of the students who returned from Challenges Alternative Program by both Mary, his monitor, and the teachers working

with him. From conversations with him, it was unclear as to what level of involvement he perceived having with Mary and Check & Connect. Hussein was initially placed in Mary's homeroom class to allow her greater interaction with him, but then reassigned a few weeks later to Mr. Gibson's English as a Second Language (ESOL) room. This reassignment was based on the discovery that he had not taken the district's proficiency exam.

During the initial interview, Hussein was unclear as to who Mary, his monitor, was or what her role was. When I described the intervention to him, he said that she had approached him shortly after he had arrived and offered to assist him in his classes. Hussein also said that the monitor had been in contact with his mother and that they had begun to establish a relationship. Over the course of the semester, I had the opportunity to observe Hussein frequently in his classes. At no point during any of these visits did I observe Hussein initiating contact with any of his female teachers or with the monitor. When approached by them, he always appeared to be courteous and was viewed as a pleasant young man by each female staff member I spoke to. During the first, and again during the second, interview he was unable to correctly name any of his female teachers, his female guidance counselor, the female vice-principal, or the female monitor he was assigned to. Hussein was able to identify his male teachers and the male principal of the school. It is unknown if this was merely a coincidence or whether his cultural background influenced his ability to identify with female authority figures.

During his second interview, Hussein appeared to be much more comfortable and willing to talk. He stated that he initially would have preferred to stay at the

alternative school but now felt more comfortable at Stark High School and he felt he was doing well. He continued to believe that some of the school staff viewed him poorly and did not acknowledge his changed behavior. In spite of this, Hussein stated that he felt he was treated well by the teachers he was assigned to after returning from the alternative program but that “they’re teachers” indicating continuing resistance or negative associations. Oddly, the female teacher who expressed the most praise for Hussein was the one that he expressed liking the least. When asked about his experiences working with Mary, Hussein did not recognize her name. After I explained who she was, he discussed how she was helping him to address his attendance issues and speaking with his teachers about his performance. He was unable to describe, with any degree of detail, his interactions with the monitor beyond her concerns for his grades and attendance. When I asked him how frequently he saw Mary, he replied that she visited his classroom every other week. This was the approximate visitation schedule that I held and leads me to think that Mary made limited contact with Hussein when I was not observing her. Though he found her pleasant, Hussein’s body language and statements indicated that he was uncomfortable with the attention placed on him when she visited his classes. It is unclear whether his linguistic barrier or cultural background influenced his relationship with Mary or other staff working with him.

Lamont appeared to have more significant opportunities to interact with Check & Connect, and more reasons for increased supervision. At the initial interview, he stated that the intervention was designed to help him maintain his grades and prepare him to graduate and to not be “a statistic.” He stated that the

monitor would be speaking with his teachers, but wasn't able to do that yet because he had not given her his class schedule. This was approximately three weeks after he had arrived at Stark High School. During this interview, Lamont seemed distant and many of his statements were found to be misleading.

My observations, and conversations with teachers, indicated that Lamont avoided interaction with the monitor and attempted to sleep or engage in off-task behavior when her attention was elsewhere. During his homeroom class with Mary, I observed attempts to engage with the student by the monitor. Lamont would briefly interact with her, agree to consider what she suggested, and then go back to sleep or engage in conversations with his peers. As Mary established communication with his teachers, concerns were raised over Lamont's performance in class when the monitor wasn't in the room observing. Some of the concerns raised included the possibility of a learning disability, continued gang involvement, and drug use. Attempts to contact his family were stymied by Lamont not providing an accurate contact number to the school. Mary later learned, by visiting his home, that Lamont was unsupervised during the week while his mother was away at college. As the school year ended, parental contact was not reestablished.

In spite of the barriers Lamont erected, he felt that he would have performed more poorly had Check & Connect not been in place. When asked how the monitor helped to keep him "on track" he replied that she told him "...what he should, and shouldn't do." Lamont then said that without the Mary working with him, he would have likely "act(ed) up" and disrupted his classes. He reported that he did not do well academically, but that this was similar to his performance prior to leaving for the

alternative program. Lamont stated that he did not feel that he had adapted to being in a large school and was unable to describe whether his involvement in the intervention had any bearing on this feeling. Interestingly, Mary had said that she didn't believe she would be able to help Lamont graduate with high school and that he had told her that he wanted to return to the alternative program. She said that this was not possible since his actions hadn't warranted his return, but that he would be better off elsewhere due to being "...simply a fish out of water here." This initial impression of Lamont may have influenced her approach to working with him.

Lamont and Hussein were together in approximately half of their classes. During these classes, I observed no interaction between them. Furthermore, they were typically seated at opposite ends of the room from each other. While visiting classes that they shared together, I observed Mary paying significantly more attention to Hussein's actions than Lamont's. While sitting and talking with Hussein through the majority of his science class, I observed Lamont place his work down and then spend ten minutes at a time using mapping software to look over one particular neighborhood. When the teacher or Mary came near him, he immediately switched back to his assignment. As soon as they walked away, Lamont returned to the map. I passed a note to Mary and the teacher to alert them to this and, only then, did Mary come over to sit with him and observe his work. A similar incident occurred in his math class. Mary, the monitor, was focused on a student that she perceived as doing well while Lamont was off task. I asked the co-teacher to see what he was doing and learned that he was drawing gang signs over his assignments. The paper was confiscated and discreetly given to me by the co-teacher. After class, I gave it to

Mary who did not recognize what it was. When I explained that they were gang insignias, she appeared panicked and said “they’re probably going to throw him out.” We then went down to the gang resource officer who confirmed what they were and who stated that Lamont was currently under observation by the school. This second incident occurred midway through the study. No perceived or reported changes to Mary’s use of Check & Connect were noted afterward.

Keenan, the third student who returned to Stark High School, also was viewed as someone who would not graduate by Mary, his monitor. This assessment was accurate and Keenan withdrew from school midway through the semester. His second interview took place at a restaurant in a neighboring community. During this meeting, He discussed his poor attendance and attempts to make up his missed assignments when he returned to school. As the semester continued, Keenan felt increasingly distracted by his peers and pressured to become more self-sufficient due to being an expectant father. He ultimately decided to withdraw from school and had begun to explore diploma completion programs that included vocational training. When discussing his experiences at Stark High School, Keenan described feeling overwhelmed by the size of the school and not disciplined enough to continue his progress there. He believed that he was better suited for a smaller environment, like the Challenges Alternative Program, where he received greater attention, remediation, and fewer distractions. Keenan hoped to find this in the vocational program he was exploring.

While discussing his relationship with Mary, and Check & Connect, Keenan described feeling comfortable enough to “open up to her.” As an older woman, with a

long career, he enjoyed being able to talk to her and looked to Mary for advice on decisions in his life. Keenan described numerous interventions that Mary facilitated to support him prior to his withdrawal from school. These included the rearrangement of his course schedule so that his classes were physically closer to each other. He hoped this would have reduced his tardiness to class. As our second interview was ending, Keenan stated that he wanted to get in touch with Mary to talk about his plan for enrolling in a diploma completion program. His detailed information about the program, and Mary's background in community oriented programs, led me to believe that they had discussed his intentions prior to his withdrawal from Stark High School.

It was not possible to verify the closeness of the relationship between Keenan and Mary. This was due to Keenan's sporadic attendance at Stark High School. In fact only a handful of direct observations of Keenan in class were possible due to his attendance. Both Mary, the monitor at Stark High School, and Keenan reported having numerous conversations while he was still attending school, but these were never observed by the researcher.

Teachers. Views concerning the implementation and effects of Check & Connect with the students who returned varied between the two sites. Several factors appeared to influence these differences including: the culture of the school, the direction provided by administration, monitor implementation, and the experiences of the teachers. These factors will be discussed while presenting the views of the teachers. For organizational purposes, the viewpoint of the teachers will be presented by intervention site. This will allow me to discuss the perceptions of the teachers of the implementation and effects of Check & Connect within the context of their

experiences with a particular set of students in the context of one particular school community.

Pulaski High School. The teachers at Pulaski High School who worked with one of the participants in Check & Connect were largely supportive of the initiative. Views of how the intervention was implemented appeared to vary by the closeness of the relationship held by Anna, the monitor, to the teacher in question. Those who had a friendly relationship with Anna were strongly supportive. Teachers who exhibited professional distance were less so. One teacher, with a perceived dislike of Anna, did not find the implementation of Check & Connect to be an effective tool for supporting students returning from an alternative educational placement. Views of the effects of Check & Connect with the students roughly aligned with the feelings of the staff towards Anna.

The majority of the teachers interviewed perceived Anna as working very hard to monitor, mentor, and advocate for the students enrolled in the Check & Connect program at Pulaski High School. Many of the teachers, particularly Mr. Rizzo and Mr. Collins viewed Check & Connect as a tool that provided the students an opportunity to work with an adult to deescalate their reactions to a stimulus and to return to their classrooms better prepared to perform. Mr. Rizzo recalled an incident with Benjamin surrounding a seat change shortly after arriving in his class. He was upset with the proposed move but accepted it after meeting with Anna. Mr. Rizzo, describing the incident, said

He was able to go meet with Anna...ask to meet with, speak with her. They talked about it. We talked about it, we thought it would be the best thing for him, for his education, and I explained to him too, 'you know you want to make sure you're around people who will help you to achieve, not around people who will distract you and have a hard time for you to learn what we're trying to learn'. And after talking with Anna, after discussing it with him, he went to his seat change. Things have been going fairly smoothly. He's done a good job.

Mr. Collins added to this notion of the intervention assisting in behavior management, by viewing Anna's implementation of Check & Connect as a proactive resource in his classroom. Speaking broadly, he felt that Anna's outreach to him as students were entering his room provided him valuable information concerning the students' backgrounds, academic difficulties, and behavioral triggers. Mr. Collins stated that this information "gives you an edge" and allowed him to successfully reintegrate students from the Challenges Alternative Program into his class. Of the students he worked with, he considered Tanya to be "the best case scenario" of student success under Check & Connect. An implementation tool that many of the teachers perceived as influencing student behavior was Anna's steady use of student encouragement. Mr. Bartlett, a teacher who maintained a more professional relationship with the monitor, witnessed this with many of the students participating in Check & Connect. He felt that this was more effective with a handful of students whom Anna had a longer working relationship with than Benjamin, who was assigned to his class. Mr. Bartlett believed that

Well, you can always put pressure on a student and encourage them to do with their academic performance, but when they come into the class, it's totally on them. I mean, any individual outside of that person has only but so much that they can do so as to make a student want to learn. Ultimately, it lies on the student. So, what she's doing is encouraging them and that's what we all do.

Ms. Rodriguez shared this position, but felt more strongly about Anna's ability to influence the students' behavior and academic performance. Her personal friendship with Anna and experiences working with Tanya, who she considered very successful, compared to Mr. Bartlett's experience of working with Benjamin, who was viewed as low-performing, may have skewed her strongly positive views of the implementation of Check & Connect.

In addition to Mr. Bartlett's views concerning the limitations of motivating an unmotivated student, he expressed concerns over the aggressiveness of Anna's pursuit of measurable data. He found Anna's frequent requests for real-time data on student performance "burdensome" in light of his obligations to the other students on his caseload. Though not expressed by the other teachers interviewed during this case study, there is evidence that Mr. Bartlett was not alone in this sentiment. Ms Rodriguez felt that she was perceived as more vested in the students' success than the students themselves were. At numerous points during the semester, I observed Anna making email and in-person requests for grades for her students. These requests were frequently ignored or not responded to promptly. Anna shared that one teacher told her that the teacher's union contract only required that they provide grades for the students' interim and semester report cards. Mr. Smith, the vice-principal interviewed during this study, personally intervened and sent out an email request for grades on Anna's behalf. This was effective, but Anna believed that this action potentially damaged the collegiality she shared with the faculty.

All but one of the teachers interviewed felt that Anna's use of Check & Connect was beneficial to the students who returned from the Challenges Alternative

Program, particularly if they were amenable to being assisted. Mr. Bennett, speaking broadly about the students the intervention and participants, felt that

I think they are where the need is, those that have the potential to (have) trouble transitioning. They need assistance and they need support in that instance. I think they are placed properly. Are there other students in schools that could use that type of support? Sure. A lot of kids that didn't come from Challenges (are) in difficult situations, they could use the support. So, if they could expand that to even assisting other students that would be helpful before they are placed.

Ms. Hunt recognized a need for services for students who were considered at-risk, but did not recognize the use of Check & Connect in attempting to address that need.

The majority of the teachers interviewed at Pulaski High School felt that the primary benefits to Check & Connect were behavioral. A reduction in behavioral volatility, which led to a reduced need for “on the record” discipline, was the most common effect seen. Like Mr. Collins, Ms. Rodriguez found the additional information on the students’ background and behaviors helpful. She felt that she could use the information provided by Anna to prevent problem behaviors and involved her in establishing rules for the students participating in Check & Connect. In addition, Ms. Rodriguez believed that the intervention helped the students’ class attendance, but not necessarily their school attendance.

Attendance wise it's a good thing too because a lot of these kids tend to be busy when they get out of class or they cut or they wander. So she's up on that too, if you're in class, if you're not in class. She keeps after that. Knowing someone is watching them kind of forces them to a degree. Some of them, they don't care still but as a whole, they still know that there is somebody watching. And you never know when.

Agreement on the benefits to behavior and individual class attendance was widespread. Agreement on the perceived limited effect of Check & Connect on the

students' academic performance was also. Mr. Bartlett saw little or no academic effort from Benjamin in his class. Both he and Ms. Rodriguez saw this behavior as a choice that many of the students participating in Check & Connect had made. She described her personal frustration by saying

And you can only give them so much help, but you can't make them want to change. They have to want to. And they tell us, all good teachers, if you have the right lesson, and if you do A, B, C your kids will be engaged and they will want to be involved. You can't make some kids want to learn. There are other issues out there. And yes within your classroom you can make it inviting, you can make it challenging and you can make it where the kids are going "oh, I want to do this activity", but if they don't want to do it, if they're shut out, they're shut out.

Though she did not see this behavior with Tanya while she was enrolled in her class, Ms. Rodriguez did see this with many of the non-study participants in Check & Connect working at Pulaski High School. Neither she nor Mr. Bartlett faulted the intervention for this lack of motivation, they faulted the students.

One teacher interviewed did not identify any positive effects of Check & Connect, nor did she acknowledge that an intervention to assist at-risk students at Pulaski High School was in practice. The teacher, Ms. Hunt, was perceived to have a poor personal view of Anna, the Check & Connect monitor, and this may have had an influence on how she viewed the intervention. During our first interview, she stated that she was not aware of Anna's role as a monitor due to the intervention not being formally introduced to her by the Pulaski High School administrative team. Anna had been in the role for two years at this point. Attempts by Anna to develop a relationship with Ms. Hunt were hindered by few returned emails and Ms. Hunt leaving school early for the day when meetings were requested. On the day of my

first interview with her, Anna revealed that she had been in an argument with Ms. Hunt concerning a request for grades that Mr. Smith had supported. During that interview, she stated that she had seen no effects due to not being aware of an intervention taking place and believed that most students who returned from alternative placements came back "...worse than when they left."

Interestingly, when asked how she would structure a program to support students returning from the Challenges Alternative Program, Ms. Hunt described a model very similar to Anna's interpretation of Check & Connect. A significant difference that she focused on was the need to have a monitor of the same gender as the students who returned. She believed that it was necessary to have a male in the role in order to have an individual that the students would be better able to relate to and who can administer gender specific discipline and guidance to the students. Ms. Hunt believed that many of the students who were at-risk did not have strong male figures in their lives outside of school, particularly fathers, and that a woman could not act meet this need for a male student. She did believe that a female monitor could meet the needs of at-risk females at Pulaski High School, necessitating the need for at least two staff assigned to the role in the building. These statements, along with the disregard she frequently showed Anna, make me believe that Ms. Hunt did not believe that Anna, as a female, could impact the performance of her majority male caseload of students.

Stark High School. Similar to the teachers at Pulaski High School, the teachers at Stark High School were largely supportive of Check & Connect, but many only in theory. Due to the approach taken by Mary, the monitor assigned to the school, many

possessed a distant relationship with her and were unclear of what approaches she was using to assist the students who had returned from the Challenges Alternative Program. As such, perceptions of implementation and effect were less detailed than those provided by the teachers at Pulaski High School.

Older, frequently more experienced, teachers appeared to have a different experience with the monitor and intervention than the younger, often less experienced teachers. Mr. Athens, Mr. Fox, and Mr. Gibson all described having a friendly, professional relationship with Mary, the monitor at Stark High School. Mr. Athens had known her for a number of years and worked together at one of the control sites, Patton High School. She appeared to have a friendly relationship with Mr. Fox and Mr. Gibson held her in high regard. It is unknown if she had developed her relationship with Mr. Fox prior to Keenan's enrollment in his class. The enrollment of Hussein into Mr. Gibson's class appeared to be their first professional contact.

During observations and interviews, a more consistent pattern of contact between Mary and these three teachers appeared. During less active periods in the class, I frequently observed Mary talking with Mr. Athens and Mr. Fox about the assignments that Lamont and Keenan, respectively, were working on. This level of professional contact led Mr. Fox to state that

Mary seems like a good, supportive disciplinarian that helps Keenan stay in line as far as focusing on doing what he's supposed to be doing. She's a "no nonsense" person. She works well with the students. She lets, she's firm and fair and, and, um, and she understands that if she doesn't take this position then the students may not be successful. So, I feel that she's a great support for us at this school, especially for some of these behaviors that she's been experiencing with some of these returning students. She's a wonderful resource. I really enjoyed working with her and she's very supportive of the teachers and students.

A high degree of collegiality also occurred in a class in which Hussein and Lamont were also enrolled, but whose teacher was not interviewed for this study. This level of contact and communication between professionals was never seen while observing the classes of the younger teachers. Observations of Mr. Gibson's class did not occur, but conversations with him alluded to contact with Mary concerning Hussein's progress.

During my initial interviews with Mr. Simmons and Ms. Benning, both indicated that they did not know that their students, Hussein and Keenan, had previously been enrolled at the Challenges Alternative Program or that Mary was providing an intervention to them. While discussing Keenan's return from placement, nearly a month after his enrollment, Ms. Benning stated that "I didn't really know till you told me that was the deal. They kind of keep us in the dark which isn't a really good idea." During her second interview, she mentioned that she did not know that Keenan had dropped out of school a month earlier. Mr. Simmons said that he had first seen the monitor when we came in to observe Hussein in his class a few days prior to his interview. Ms. Johnson, describing her contact with Mary, said

I touch base with her. Probably not as often as I'd like to. It's hectic. I'd say we meet pretty regularly. The problem is she can't tell me a lot of the stuff about the kids. So I find it would be very useful if the teacher could know and at this point we can't, we're not allowed unless the student tells us or the parent decides to tell us teachers we can't know the specifics. It's very limiting.

Mr. Simmons commented on a school culture of limited information and communication. Ms. Johnson, speaking specifically about her limited knowledge of the students with disabilities in her class, believed that "This is their theory, that if a

teacher knows specifically what the disability is, that we will label and judge them and treat them differently. But as an educator you would think we would be open minded and not judge people for that. So it makes no sense.” This philosophy of guarding information was shared by the monitor and supported by her administrator, Ms. Jones.

Few detailed descriptions were available from the teachers at Stark High School concerning how Check & Connect was being implemented with the students who returned from the Challenges Alternative Program. Mr. Fox saw Check & Connect as an intervention that provided counsel to Keenan, the student he primarily worked with, but was unable to describe what additional responsibilities Mary had in her role as a monitor. Ms. Johnson felt that the practices she witnessed provided insufficient information to the monitor and believed that more detailed data was obtainable by looking through her grade book than periodically observing her class. Describing this concern, she said that

I know that she will take the students aside and I made sure I e-mail her whenever Lamont is having trouble and let her know what is going on. I've seen her come in sometimes to check him out. But I think it's like anything else. A lot of times when supervisors come in they only see the kids at their best. Yeah, if they were a fly on the wall they'd see a totally different thing. And so, I appreciate that she comes to see how he's doing he's always doing what he should when she's there when she's with us so it's not a real snapshot.

This notion of Check & Connect consisting primarily of observation of the students was held by many of the younger teachers. During observations conducted in classrooms with teachers who were not interviewed, few conversations were conducted between Mary and the faculty. Information collected by the monitor

focused primarily on the performance of the teacher and content of the lesson and not on the performance of the individual students. This perception of teacher focus rather than student focus was supported by statements by Mr. Simmons indicating his belief that Mary's role was to act and intervene on the teachers' behalf and Ms. Benning initial belief that her visitations were focused on her performance as an early career teacher. Later statements by Ms. Jones, the principal supervising Mary, led further support to the notion that the focus of Check & Connect implementation at Stark High School was not fully on the student participants.

Due to their limited knowledge of the implementation of Check & Connect, the teachers at Stark High School were able to provide few detailed responses concerning their perceptions of the effects of Check & Connect with the students. Many responses were speculative and few saw any discernable academic impact. Mr. Simmons, referencing the larger support intervention implemented by Stark High School's vice-principal, felt that

If she is similar to (larger support intervention), and she does her job similar to what I've come to expect, which all of them do and I expect nothing less, then I have no doubt that its really helping Hussein. Going around, checking on their students, making sure that she's there personally to talk to them, just understand what's going on; trying to nip problems in the bud before they really arise. Trying to make sure that she's aware of what's going on. If that's how she's handling it, in the areas that he's having problems in, then he's integrating pretty well.

Others took a more negative view, based on their experiences with individual students. Ms. Johnson and Mr. Athens, through their experiences working with Lamont, both saw limited effects through the use of Check & Connect, or at least

limited effects that could be considered valuable to the school. Describing this conflict in perceived effects in reference to Lamont, he stated that

I'm not certainly saying that it doesn't have an impact. I'm not saying that it doesn't do something good. But, in this age, when you're only as good as your last test score and when the test score isn't high enough, it's the institution's fault, not the individual. The teacher is being held accountable, but not the student themselves and other sorts of nonsense... The numbers don't tell anything. And so, given the fact that the only thing that anyone cares about is Lamont's numbers, you can't look at this and call this successful from the numbers if that's how we're defining success. And in that regard, I despair of him ever being successful. In his, and in lots of people's cases, if that's the sole criteria in which all of us are going to get jobs... does behavior xyz on the institution's part result in the child passing the test in that month, that year, that semester, I mean I don't think the answer is going to be in anybody's favor.

Mr. Athens felt that the ultimate benefit of Check & Connect, or any other form of mentoring intervention, would likely not be perceptible in the short-term. He did not believe that the metrics being used by the district to gauge success accounted for a definition that went beyond test scores. Mr. Athens believed that a successful integration into the community after high school was a better sign of effect, but one that was not measurable and more longitudinal in focus. He did not believe that this was the focus of the cooperating district and did not wish to assign fault to Mary for not achieving a definition of success that he himself did not subscribe to.

Monitors. The themes of information collection and sharing, staff communication, and measuring success were also identified by the monitors, Anna and Mary, as they discussed the implementation and effects of Check & Connect with the students who returned from the alternative educational placement. Each of these was influenced by the individual monitor's personal experiences, philosophies towards the intervention, and school environment. These three themes will be used to

organize Anna and Mary's perceptions of the implementation and effects of Check & Connect with the students who returned from the Challenges Alternative Program.

The first of these themes, information collection and sharing, was viewed quite differently by the two monitors. Anna, the monitor at Pulaski High School, viewed this as one of the critical components in the potential success of Check & Connect at Pulaski High School, and one of her greatest sources of frustration. During conversations with her, she frequently described contacting Challenges Alternative Program asking for updates on the performance of students assigned there from her school. In these conversations, she described receiving contradicting messages concerning their performance and potential for returning the following semester. These conflicting messages made it difficult for her to identify instructors who would treat the students fairly while still providing them a rigorous academic experience. Anna felt that it was her responsibility to identify instructors who would challenge the students, yet would still be flexible enough to modify their instruction to address academic and behavioral difficulties. She also felt it was important to identify one or two teachers who the student would consider "fun" so that they were allowed an outlet and possibly develop a relationship that made the act of coming to school more pleasant.

Mary appeared to share this desire for receiving information from the alternative program, but she was less proactive in attempting to acquire it. This may have been due to a wider range of duties in the school, compared to Anna, limiting her ability to pursue these materials. Like Anna, she also believed that placing a returning student into a supportive class was important. Not having Anna's long

history at Pulaski High School, Mary believed that her skills as a guidance counselor would help her to identify teachers at Stark High School who could effectively work with the students returning from Challenges Alternative Program. According to Mary, she did not have the opportunity to selectively place the student participants from this case study. This may have been due to her taking the position of monitor as they were preparing to return to the school. Tanya, who transferred from Pulaski High School midway through the semester, also was not selectively placed into her courses. While observing her in her math class, she appeared bored by the pace of instruction. Mary spoke with her and confirmed my suspicions, but chose to leave her in the course. She said that Tanya's guidance counselor liked to place at-risk students in "safe classes" and that since she had been in the school for a few weeks; she didn't want to disrupt her schedule.

Differences in the perceived value of quantitative data were also seen between the two monitors. Anna viewed acquiring a running record of the participants academic and behavioral performance as a tool required to guide her actions with the students. For this reason, she pursued this information aggressively. Though effective, Anna felt that involving her supervisor, Mr. Smith, in acquiring data had jeopardized her relationship with various members of the faculty. She feared that they now saw her as "one of them," and no longer as part of the teaching faculty. Mary, in contrast, did not pursue this information aggressively saying "I don't worry about the numbers." Though Ms. Johnson, one of Lamont and Hussein's teachers at Stark High School, offered her open access to her grade book, it is unknown whether she would have encountered resistance to providing real-time data as Anna did.

Rather than focusing on data provided by the teachers, Mary believed that her own observations provided her the information she needed to successfully implement Check & Connect with the students she oversaw. While shadowing her, I spent the majority of the school day accompanying Mary as she made classroom observations of the students who returned from the Challenges Alternative Program. During these observations, Mary would take a seat at a desk near the student she was observing and briefly engage them in conversation while the class was in progress. These observations lasted between twenty and thirty minutes. Anna did not conduct classroom observations of this length while I observed her. Twice a day, she cycled through the Pulaski High School doing spot checks and observations of the students lasting no more than ten minutes. This allowed her to verify that each student, including the participants in this study, were in their assigned classrooms during a single academic period. Anna's practice did not allow her time for individual tutoring, which Mary frequently engaged in during her observations. It also did not provide her an opportunity to consider whether a particular teacher was effectively instructing the students participating in Check & Connect.

Additional differences were observed in the perceived value of collecting qualitative data from the teachers. Through email, teachers stopping by her office, and brief meetings throughout the building, I observed Anna collecting data throughout the day. Frequently this data consisted of concerns raised by her colleagues, but compliments and positive observations were made as well. Anna believed that maintaining an open line of communication, and being seen as responsive, was crucial to maintaining collegiality with the faculty. She felt that this

collegiality was necessary when she needed to advocate on her students' behalf. Mary did not appear to take this approach with all of the teachers her students were assigned to. As discussed earlier, she appeared to possess a more collegial relationship with the older, more experienced teachers at Stark High School. She was seen collaborating with them and asking them for additional information on the performance of the students who returned from Challenges Alternative Program. This was not observed nearly as frequently with the younger, less experienced teachers. In fact, many were not aware that they should have been communicating with Mary about the progress of Keenan, Lamont, and Hussein.

Both monitors were provided tools to track the data collected through Check & Connect and Anna created supplementary tools that allowed her to quickly document communication between herself and the students, their teachers, administrators, and families. Documentation was viewed as difficult by both Anna and Mary. Anna kept files on each of her students, which included students in addition to the study participants. She found it difficult to record data in a timely manner, frequently resulting in a backlog. Mary kept limited data. Each believed that the tool provided to them, which were modeled on the original Check & Connect monitoring tools were potentially useful, but they were never used. They stated that their obligation to provide services to nearly twenty students, as well as supplemental duties in the school, made this level of detailed record keeping difficult.

Staff communication, closely related to information collection and sharing, was an area where the monitors possessed very different views. Anna had worked at Pulaski High School for many years and felt that many members of the faculty were

not just her colleagues, but also her friends. She considered it professionally and personally courteous to not only share the information she could with them, but also to listen to their concerns and problem solve with them. By doing this she found that she could deescalate many of her colleagues' reactions to her students' behaviors. Anna also found that it allowed her an opportunity to promote her students' accomplishments and to reduce some of the bias that her colleagues felt towards the students. By sharing anecdotes about their pro-social interactions with other members of the school faculty, she hoped the teachers she worked with would reconsider their own interactions with the students who returned from the alternative educational placement.

Mary's view of staff communication was heavily influenced by her past work as a guidance counselor and appeared to be supported by her supervisor, Ms. Jones. After interviewing the younger teacher participants from Stark High School, I approached Mary and told her that many of them felt they needed additional information on the students in order to better address their needs in their classrooms. Mary replied angrily that this was "...a crock, they should mind their own business and just teach." A short while later, I asked whether she believed her background as a guidance counselor was influencing her approach to Check & Connect. After thinking for a few moments, she replied that it likely was and explained that due to her training, she had a stricter view of student confidentiality than others might have. Many topics of conversation between her and the students were purposely not documented. At numerous points during the semester, Mary discussed how she approached Check & Connect in a similar manner to her previous work as a guidance

counselor in a community-oriented, “school within a school,” alternative program. She often reminisced over her perceptions of success in this program and how its separation from the larger school community assisted in providing a nurturing environment for the students. This separation included having its own cohort of teachers. It is likely that Mary’s desire to protect the confidentiality, and her belief in the benefits of separating from the larger school community, influenced her limited communication while administering Check & Connect.

The monitors had similar views on measuring the success of the students who participated in Check & Connect. Both believed that quantitative effects, such as changes in the students’ academic performance, were unlikely in the short-term and may not be the best measure of success. Anna believed that progress from failing to passing, or failing all courses to passing a few and successfully earning credits towards graduation was progress that was frequently not acknowledged by either the school or the students’ families. To make these changes, she believed that improvements in attendance were necessary. Anna believed that her monitoring of the students’ classroom attendance encouraged them to not skip classes. This allowed them longer exposure to the curriculum and an increased likelihood of gaining the information to pass. Following a behavioral incident, she believed it was essential to advocate on the students’ behalf when consequences were being considered. Anna believed that by minimizing the length of expulsions, the students wouldn’t fall as far behind and give up out of frustration.

The greater impact that both she and Mary perceived was on the students’ self-esteem and sense of connection to their schools. Anna felt that showing the

students at Pulaski High School what success could look like would encourage the participants in Check & Connect to adopt new behaviors. Mary believed that the sense of connection developed through Check & Connect was the greatest success of the intervention. Using Tanya as an example, she said that

Well, I don't dwell on the numbers so I don't know for sure, but, the very fact that, for example, when I saw Tanya the other day and I said "you've been out for the last two days, where you've been" and that meant a lot to her. And I know when no one answered from home. She knew that I knew that she wasn't here and that meant a lot to her.

Mary believed that providing an individual who allowed them to feel "safe" and "comfortable", it allowed the students participating in Check & Connect to feel as if they were part of "a family." She felt that the students who returned from the Challenges Alternative Program were "...used to disappointment in people. Promising, and not being there." Mary believed that by providing this emotional and material support, it showed that someone was attentive to them and their needs. Anna concurred with this and felt that having an individual who cared at the school made the environment more inviting to the students, which likely positively influenced their attendance.

Administrators. Both Mr. Smith, the vice-principal at Pulaski High School, and Ms. Jones, the vice-principal at Stark High School, saw the development of a positive adult relationship as not only an implementation tool in Check & Connect, but also a positive effect in itself. One significant area in which they differed is in their perception of the measurable impact of the intervention in their two schools. This may have been due to their own interpretations of what Check & Connect was

and their professional relationships with the monitors assigned to Pulaski and Stark High Schools.

At Pulaski High School, Mr. Smith saw Anna as the intervention and that her function was to provide support to the students who had returned from the Challenges Alternative Program. In this role Mr. Smith saw her as having a personality that could be both nurturing and authoritative, as the situation required. He placed a high degree of trust in her and viewed her as having a leadership role in the school. Mr. Smith enthusiastically spoke of her actions to maintain communication between the school and the students' families and her persistence in pursuing the students' grades from her colleagues. While describing her work, Mr. Smith spoke specifically about Benjamin, Armando, and a number of students who had returned during the previous year saying that "I think some them would have either been put out or would have quit" if Check & Connect wasn't in place.

As we talked, Mr. Smith never mentioned Check & Connect's measurable impact on the students' academic or behavioral performance. Instead, he focused more broadly on the impact that Check & Connect had on maintaining their enrollment at Pulaski High School. Mr. Smith believed that the most important of the intervention was the emotional support that it provided to the students saying

I think for some of these kids, they didn't realize what it felt like to be successful. They didn't, they didn't know what it felt like to pass classes. And to realize they were capable of doing that. And for some of them, once they realize that ability that they have, I think it's only helped them continue to want to keep that feeling. I think for some, whether they'll admit it or not, I think they finally have seen what it's like to have someone who, who really cares and will fight for you and kick you in the butt if you need kicked in the butt. Everyday.

In comparison, Ms. Jones viewed the role of Check & Connect, and Mary's role as a monitor quite differently. She viewed Check & Connect as part of a larger, Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS) program that she had initiated which focused on providing support to at-risk students by providing support to their teachers. Within this program, Mary was viewed as a paraprofessional, equal to the other members of the support team. She did not provide the same autonomy that Anna had received at Pulaski High School.

During our meeting, Ms. Jones placed great emphasis on her role in designing the PBIS derived initiative and minimal focus on her views of Mary's implementation of Check & Connect. She believed that it was not necessary for Mary to communicate with the teachers of students returning to discuss the students' needs because

She KNOWS, she should know the kind of teachers that are in the building and so, as she is talking to the kid, this might be a student who needs, we have some of our kids who are (snapping fingers) are self-starters, they got into an incident, it was a major incident maybe, but it got them somewhere else, but.... And so, they might not need that same, they might need a teacher that lets them do what they need to do. That just goes with it. Then another student might need a teacher that's a very guiding, you know, the one that's very structured and things like that.

In order to develop this knowledge, Ms. Jones believed it was essential to observe the teaching styles of the faculty in the building. From these observations, she believed that a monitor would develop the knowledge needed to place students who returned from placement appropriately.

It was unclear whether Ms. Jones was aware of any effects attributable to the use of Check & Connect, or her PBIS derived intervention. At no point did she discuss any student specifically. She spoke often of how students who were "not

ready”, which she described as students who did not believe that they would be successful at Stark High School, as having a high likelihood of failing upon their return and that they should remain either at the Challenges Alternative Program or placed into another program. Ms. Jones stated that “the numbers speak for themselves” in describing her perception of the success of the various support programs in place at Stark High School. These numbers were not provided and Mary herself clearly stated that she did not monitor these statistics. It is unknown whether the failure of a student in Check & Connect, or her PBIS derived initiative, would be attributed to the design of the intervention, its implementation, or the student not being “ready” to succeed within it.

Research Question 3

What do stakeholders think about why Check & Connect had an impact on the students with demonstrated learning and behavioral difficulties who had returned from an alternative education placement?

Several common themes emerged from the stakeholders as to why they believed Check & Connect had an impact on the students who returned from the alternative educational placement. A few views as to why they believed it did not also emerged. In order to present these findings, the views expressed have been grouped by stakeholder group. This will allow for a comparison of views within peer groups and allow for shared and diverging perspectives, by site, to be presented.

Students. Many of the students who participated in Check & Connect spoke of the relationship they had developed with their monitors and how it helped to support their progress in school and, in one case, with their family. This relationship was based on a sense of genuine caring and concern that they received from Anna and Mary, and a belief that their mentorship had value. This belief was not held by all the

students who participated in Check & Connect. It was most evident among those who, broadly defined, were considered successful by the faculty at Pulaski and Stark High Schools.

Tanya and Benjamin, both from Pulaski High School, provided the most detailed explanations as to why they believed they benefitted through the relationship they had with their monitor, Anna. Tanya, who demonstrated both academic and behavioral progress, saw Anna as someone who was able to assist her in maintaining self-control. At a number of points during the study, Tanya discussed her desire to separate herself from her peers in order to minimize the likelihood of returning to the behavior that led to her being placed at the Challenges Alternative Program. When describing her peers' behavior, she demonstrated a visceral, confrontational reaction that she appeared to be struggling to control. Her chosen isolation appeared to be an attempt to control this irritability. Tanya described Anna, and later Mary when she transferred to Stark High School, as someone to whom she could talk when she became irritated and to whom she could go in order to calm down instead of confronting her peers. As she developed a greater sense of restraint, Tanya appreciated that the monitors became less proactive in seeking her out and allowed her to approach them on an as needed basis. She felt that this approach allowed her to develop the confidence she needed to continue her progress at Pulaski and Stark High Schools, rather than returning to the Challenges Alternative Program.

Benjamin, in contrast, did poorly academically, but was seen as having made significant behavioral changes through his participation in Check & Connect. Members of both the faculty and administration of his school, perceived him as

someone who still needed to refine his impulse control, but had made progress when compared to his earlier behavior. Benjamin largely agreed with this assessment and the opinion that his behavior worsened as the semester progressed. He attributed this to difficulty in resisting the influence of his friends in the school and the community. Benjamin discussed, and was observed, conferencing with Anna more during the first half of the study than the second. He felt that having Check & Connect, and Anna in particular, available to him was helpful and that it provided him an outlet when he felt frustrated or angry.

The reemergence of Benjamin's behavioral problems coincided with his decision to distance himself from Anna and the intervention. He found her proactive approach uncomfortable, particularly when Anna visited him in his classes. Hussein, at Stark High School, expressed a similar discomfort concerning Mary's observations of him. Benjamin stated that being approached in class elevated his frustration and that, though he appreciated that his monitor was trying to help, it "...made the situation worse" by drawing undesired attention to him. This feeling of undesired attention extended to his time out of class and led to him feeling that Anna was "on his shoulder", particularly when approached in front of his peers. As this feeling developed, Benjamin began to avoid Anna and her influence on his behavior. In retrospect, he felt that he would have been less influenced by his peers if he had maintained his involvement with Check & Connect and his monitor. He hoped to have an opportunity to meet with Anna the following semester to discuss ways to maintain contact that were not stigmatizing to him.

Other participants also commented on the benefits of having a monitor, but their responses were less detailed and my observations did not support their statements. Lamont felt that his interaction with Mary was helping him to “not become a statistic” by providing him advice and helping him to consider the opportunities available to him if he graduated from high school. Evidence of these reported interactions was sparse. In fact, on numerous occasions, when Mary attempted to discuss his future, she was rebuffed by Lamont. Similar statements were made by Keenan, the student who ultimately withdrew from Stark High School. Unlike Lamont, Keenan provided more detailed descriptions of his interactions with Mary, particularly while discussing his interest in attending a regional diploma completion program. This was a program that Mary had discussed frequently and Keenan’s detailed description of it, and his desire to contact Mary after his second interview there, led me to believe that this was an opportunity that they had discussed in depth.

A number of the students believed that Check & Connect had provided them opportunities to succeed that they would not have had without the oversight of a monitor. These opportunities took a number of different forms. For Armando, his monitor, Anna, assisted him in returning to the alternative school shortly after the study semester began. He believed that this was his best opportunity to earn academic credits and continue his progress towards graduation. Benjamin believed that his placement with teachers at Pulaski High School who were largely willing to look past his previous behavior provided him a fair opportunity to succeed. He, as well as other participants, felt that having the monitor working with their teachers to identify

missed assignments, mediate disagreements, and address unexcused absences gave them an opportunity to pass their classes which they would not have had otherwise. Though ultimately unsuccessful with Benjamin, Mary's communication with Hussein's family contributed to the decision to award academic credit for the semester in spite of his attendance.

In order to identify opportunities for success, both Mary and Anna were responsible for closely monitoring the academic and behavioral performance of the students. Reactions to this oversight varied by student. Some found this particularly onerous and attempted to limit the monitor's ability to oversee their performance and communicate with their family. Lamont, one of the students assigned to Mary at Stark High School, did not provide a class schedule to his monitor until a few weeks after reentry and would not give her an active contact number for his family. It is unknown why Mary was unable to retrieve this information independently. It was later learned that this was not an oversight on Lamont's part. He did not want the school to communicate with his parent, who was frequently absent from the home. This resistance hindered the ability of Check & Connect to monitor Lamont's performance and to identify strategies to assist in his reintegration into Stark High School. A desire to limit the intrusion of Check & Connect into their daily lives was expressed by many of the students, but Lamont's resistance appeared to be the most calculated.

The students who were considered to be the most successful, Tanya from Pulaski High School and Hussein from Stark High School, also desired lower levels of oversight from their monitors. Rather than attempting to avoid their Check & Connect monitors, they both explained that they wanted to prove that they though

they appreciated the school's concern, a high level of oversight was not needed. Tanya and Hussein believed that by performing well, they would reduce the scrutiny they received through Check & Connect. They wanted to show the adults in the school that, in the words of Hussein, that they "...weren't bad anymore." Tanya acknowledged that her past necessitated her involvement in Check & Connect and appreciated having the opportunity to prove herself. She felt that the reduced oversight she received after transferring to Stark High School was a result of her performance under the intervention.

Through their participation in Check & Connect, many of the students viewed their monitor in ways that skewed their role in Pulaski and Stark High Schools. Descriptions provided by the students of their monitor's role and responsibilities blurred the distinction between administrator, teacher, counselor, parent, and friend. An undeniable connection with an adult interested in their success was established. Many of the students believed that this relationship provided them opportunities to prove that they could succeed in a comprehensive high school. Some felt that they had not fully exploited these opportunities, but appreciated that someone had cared enough to provide them.

Teachers. The teachers assigned to Pulaski and Stark High Schools received very different experiences through their work with Check & Connect. This resulted in sharp contrasts in their views of what the students received through the intervention. A high degree of consensus was found in why the teachers believed Check & Connect had an impact and, among the teachers who did not have interaction with their school's monitor, what they believed students returning from an alternative

educational placement needed to be successful in their schools. The rationales provided by this second group of teachers aligned closely with the explanations of benefit provided by the teachers who worked closely with their school's monitor.

The primary explanation provided by the teachers as to why Check & Connect impacted the students who returned to Pulaski and Stark High Schools was that it provided a caring, attentive adult in the students' lives. This view was shared by each stakeholder group. Even though nearly every teacher expressed their own affection and interest in the students they worked with, it was clear they felt that it was difficult to develop a close personal relationship with all of them. Having the monitor available to them, according to Mr. Athens of Stark High School, made school a "tolerable experience" for children who were disengaged from the educational process. In his view, the types of adult-student relationships fostered by Check & Connect, similar to many mentoring relationships he had witnessed in the past, enabled staff to

... take the sword out of their hands, joke with, get to know, and try to make high school a process that they could live with. Live through, and sometimes having genuine success in that regard, so that they stuck, they graduated and got out in one piece.

At Pulaski High School, the participants in Check & Connect were known as "Anna's Kids" and her role, in many ways, was perceived as a surrogate parent for many of them. According to Ms. Rodriguez, Anna was the first point of contact when one of her "kids" began to have difficulties in her class. She was brought in to mediate with and counsel the students who returned from the Challenges Alternative Program prior to an administrator being contacted for formal sanctions. Ms Rodriguez believed that

Anna's approval or disapproval was important to many of the students with whom she worked, particularly those with whom she had a longer opportunity to develop a relationship.

Mr. Fox felt that Mary had developed a similar relationship with Keenan prior to him leaving Stark High School. He believed that the caring and support he witnessed while she worked with him in his class, combined with her "no-nonsense" demeanor, greatly assisted Keenan. He and Ms. Benning both noted that, in spite of Keenan's frequent absences, he always asked for an opportunity to make up his assignments. This was behavior that Mr. Fox had not seen in the past and he felt that by participating in Check & Connect, the importance of education was being reinforced in Keenan. Even though Keenan withdrew from Stark High School, his interest in immediately entering a diploma completion program, and his desire to talk to Mary about this, supports Mr. Fox's view.

Teachers at both sites felt that the relationships that the monitors developed with the students through Check & Connect positively influenced their behavior. During the study, only one participant, Benjamin, received a referral for a physically aggressive act. Their views of the intervention's impact on the students' academic engagement were less supportive. Among the student participants, only Tanya and Hussein were considered academically successful. Neither the students nor their teachers attributed this success to Check & Connect. Many of the staff interviewed at Pulaski and Stark High Schools who worked with these two students felt that their motivation for success was internal and not coming from the intervention. In fact, Ms. Rodriguez at Pulaski High School and Mr. Simmons and Mr. Gibson from Stark High

School were surprised that these students had been to an alternative educational placement due to the drive they saw in them. Regretfully, this drive was considered rare among the students who returned from the Challenges Alternative Program.

Many of the teachers interviewed believed that Check & Connect could influence a student's academic progress, but they were unwilling to make a blanket statement concerning all students. Rather, they preferred to discuss the students who returned from alternative placements on a case-by-case basis. Nearly all the teachers at Pulaski High School believed that the monitor's support and advocacy had the capacity to keep a child "afloat", at least temporarily. They felt that the enthusiasm and support that Anna provided was able to push students through individual assignments, but this forward movement could not be maintained without the active participation of the student. The Pulaski High School teachers felt that continuing progress required a sense of "personal responsibility" that the monitors could only encourage, not instill in the students. Discussing Benjamin, Mr. Bartlett stated

Benjamin is pretty consistent in his unwillingness to participate, so he's pretty consistent. You know you can't fix everybody. For some reason he just doesn't find the value in, I can't say all education cause I don't know, but (core subject area) at this point in time in his life, and it's very evident in what he does in a classroom. He doesn't participate and he jokes with his neighbors but, when it comes to work, he wants no part of it

This view concerning the limited efficacy of Check & Connect when students were not perceived as active participants was also found at Stark High School. Ms. Johnson and Mr. Athens, at Stark High School similarly, felt that Lamont demonstrated little interest in education and attempted to disengage and blend into the background of the classroom without participating. Speaking broadly, they believed that this lack of

interest negatively influenced the attendance, and ultimately the graduation rate, of many students who returned from the alternative education program. When asked what role Check & Connect might be able to play with addressing this behavior, they replied that they didn't believe that it could and directed no fault towards Mary, his monitor. Both teachers felt that Lamont required additional assessment so that targeted academic support could be provided to him. This required the consent of his parent, which could not be obtained without a means to contact her, and an interest in participating academically that they did not see in Lamont.

This perception of engagement in Check & Connect, and the educational process broadly, was the most frequently stated reason why teachers believed that some students who returned from the Challenges Alternative Program succeeded and others failed. It was this personal engagement that they believed contributed to Tanya and Hussein's success, while Lamont and Benjamin experienced a less productive outcome. In spite of this view, and the open frustration that many of the teachers expressed, nearly all described being committed to finding ways to engage the students in their classrooms. They just didn't know how and looked to the students, and their monitors, for ideas. Mr. Athens, in particular, wanted to engage the students in this process as a way to encourage their active participation in any educational plan that he implemented. Describing conversations he had with students in the past he stated

I can't read your mind, tell me what you want." "Tell me what you want me to do." And, when you're not getting something, you've got to tell me that you're not getting it and you've got to tell me why. And I'll do whatever you want. If you want more time, sit in the back, sit on the roof, do you want to sit in my car... I don't care; just tell me what you need.

His frustration, and one that was shared by many of the teachers, was that many of the students who were considered at-risk for dropout by the school were either incapable or unwilling to respond to these questions. This is how Mr. Athens perceived Lamont. He had hoped that Mary, his monitor, would have been able to help him find these answers so they could have more effectively taught him. This was information that he did not believe that her work with Lamont could provide without greater participation by the student.

Ms. Johnson and Mr. Athens were not alone in their interest in finding ways to more effectively work with the students who returned from alternative educational placements. In fact, many teachers felt that the additional background and support they received from the monitor at their school helped them to more effectively serve the Check & Connect participants. This indirect impact on the students' school experience was most frequently described by the teachers at Pulaski High School. Many of the teachers at Stark High School, particularly the younger less experienced staff, believed they would have been more effective if they had received this. At Pulaski High School, all but one of the teachers interviewed described receiving information on the students that they considered beneficial. Mr. Collins stated that it gave him "an edge" in understanding the needs of his students. Ms. Hunt, a teacher considered to have a poor working relationship with Anna, presented the sole dissenting view. She described not receiving background information on the students from the monitor at Pulaski High School and said that she did not recognize the intervention's role in the building due to it not being introduced to her by the school's administration. When described to Ms. Hunt, she felt the intervention had the

potential to be beneficial to her and her students.

Many of the teachers at Stark High School shared Ms. Hunt's interest in receiving more information about the students who returned from the alternative program. The three younger teachers all stated that they had limited interaction with the intervention and felt that greater communication would have enhanced their ability to work with the students. Ms. Benning, in particular, said that she wished she had known more about Keenan's background so that she could have found a way to work with him more effectively. Ms. Johnson described having greater interaction with Mary after the initial interview, but was unable to identify any positive impact with Lamont. Oddly, the younger teachers did not direct blame at Stark High School's monitor, Mary, for this lack of information. Each of them, instead, described a culture of limited communication between the faculty, administration, and support services at Stark High School as playing a more significant role.

One of the specific areas of concern many of the teachers expressed, particularly at Stark High School, was perceived as outside of the influence of Check & Connect. This was the teachers' belief that the students who returned from the alternative educational placement and Lamont in particular, possessed very low academic skills. Mr. Athens and Ms. Johnson both believed that this was one of the most significant barriers to success and that assessment and remediation should have been a component of the alternative educational experience. Mr. Athens, along with two other teachers, believed that these deficits contributed to the students "disappearing" when they felt overwhelmed academically. He believed that these deficits, as well as the influences of the students' homes and communities, were

beyond the influence of Check & Connect.

Monitors. The reasons why the monitors believed that Check & Connect had an impact with the students who returned from the alternative educational placement closely aligned with those expressed by the teaching faculty. Differences were seen in how Anna and Mary saw their roles at Pulaski and Stark High Schools and these differences influenced their approaches to working with the students and faculty. Due to these differences, slight variations in their views as to why Check & Connect impacted the students were expressed.

One area of consensus shared by Anna and Mary was their view that the caring relationship developed with the students who returned positively impacted them. Each interpreted this positive adult role differently. Anna, in particular, used these insights as a way to encourage her students and to promote them in the eyes of her colleagues at Pulaski High School. She felt that it was important to try to encourage the development of relationships with positive adult role models within the school, as well as with her. Anna believed that developing these relationships would strengthen the students' sense of connection to Pulaski High School and enhance the likelihood of continued attendance. To accomplish these goals, Anna spent as much time as she could learning about her students' backgrounds and attempted to talk with them about areas of personal interest, particularly sports. She then used the flexibility she had as a Check & Connect monitor to meet with her colleagues to try to match her students' interests with staff and activities in the school. Anna focused on sports due to the shared interest she held with many of the students and due to the academic requirements mandated for participation by Pulaski High School. She hoped that the

desire to participate with a team at the school would motivate the students to perform academically in order to maintain their eligibility.

Mary similarly believed that creating a caring relationship with the students was important, but expressed that the security this relationship created was more important than encouraging connections within Stark High School. She believed that, through Check & Connect, she was able to create a relationship with her students that was "...like a family." Mary believed that this created a sense of safety and security for her students that allowed for a refuge from the pressures of the larger school environment. Even though she casually discussed connections that some of her students had made with coaches in the building, she did not describe the use of Check & Connect to facilitate the development of these relationships. Rather, Mary believed that the intervention should be used to assist in the development of services from outside of Stark High School. She felt that one of the deficits in the Check & Connect model was that it did not marshal the resources of the community to provide role models and mentors who could provide enriching experiences for the students and illustrate the benefits of continuing their education. Mary felt that focusing exclusively on services available within Stark High School would not benefit many students who returned from the alternative educational placement, including Lamont and Keenan, who she believed were more drawn to activities outside of school than within it. These were directions she hoped to explore after the completion of this study.

In many ways, Mary's perspective appeared to be an attempt to recreate the "school within a school" model in which that she had previously worked. Even

though both monitors took very different positions on the direction of their efforts, Anna focusing her attention within the school and Mary focusing hers outside of the school, their shared interest was in providing something that they believed the students were not receiving is indisputable. Each believed that one of the best ways to express their caring for the students was to seek out ways to provide for their emotional needs. For this reason, both Anna and Mary believed that one of the greatest sources of support they provided to the students was an open-door policy that allowed for the discussion of needs beyond those pertaining strictly to the school. One of the areas of need that arose from these interactions was that of material deprivation. By using Check & Connect, and the relationships they developed through it, both monitors felt that they were able to uncover hidden barriers to school inclusion among their students, frequently revolving around the issue of poverty. On two occasions, I saw Anna acquiring free athletic equipment and proper school clothing for students on her caseload at Pulaski High School. Neither was a participant in this study, but one of the students had returned from the Challenges Alternative Program during the preceding semester. The other was seen as at-risk for placement in the alternative program. Anna viewed acquiring these items as an investment in the students' continuing enrollment at the school. Mary similarly believed that understanding the issue of poverty, and the embarrassment frequently associated with it, was an essential function of her role as a Check & Monitor. She believed that some of the students' academic noncompliance was a component of not having the resources required to fully participate in school. For this reason, she

believed that it was necessary to be generous with school supplies with the students on her caseload describing how, for some, receiving a pen or a pencil was significant.

An additional view of where the monitors believed Check & Connect had impact focused on the gauging of the students' academic and behavioral progress. This was the most quantifiable component of the intervention and often seen as the most important component of Check & Connect. Anna, the monitor at Pulaski High School, was highly concerned about the perception of this data by her supervisors, while Mary was not. In addition to the value placed in the students' grades and behavior, both viewed the collection of data as a motivational tool for both the students and their teachers. Anna believed that her pursuit of information concerning academic and behavioral data showed that she, her supervisor Mr. Smith, and the school at large, valued the students. She felt that her pursuit of information was similar to what an involved parent would do. Mary felt that by visiting the classrooms of her students at Stark High School, she more effectively conveyed this message. Anna described that when one of her students failed an assignment or received a consequence for his or her behavior, they frequently had difficulty recovering. They would give up hope, stop working, and begin to exhibit greater behavioral difficulties. Through her use of Check & Connect, the students were answerable to someone with a vested interest in their success. The teachers were as well. Anna acknowledged that progress was slow, slower than she believed the school district expected. In spite of this, she felt that identifying classes where the students who returned from alternative educational placements could pass, the earning of some if not all of their credits in a

semester, and demonstrating to them that they could succeed was a valuable service provided by Check & Connect.

In spite of the benefits that both monitors attributed to Check & Connect, they believed that the intervention would not be successful with all students who returned from alternative educational placements to Pulaski and Stark High Schools. Mary believed that some students felt lost and overwhelmed in the larger environment and were unable to make the personal connections she believed were essential to success among the competing stimuli. She believed that Lamont was this type of student and felt that he would have benefited from remaining at the alternative program with its lower student population and higher ratio of staff to students. Mary believed that Lamont might have benefited from a program similar to one she had previously worked with that consisted of a “school within a school” with high community involvement. She did not believe that she, or the intervention, was going to succeed in getting Lamont to eventually graduate.

Anna’s efficacy concerns focused on the academic remediation and emotional preparation the students received at the Challenges Alternative Program. She questioned whether many of the students could succeed at either Pulaski or Stark High School if they had passed only a few of their courses at the alternative program, while receiving levels of support that were unavailable in her school. Anna was unclear how Check & Connect was expected to impact a child who was two years behind in credits and whose skills were so low that they could not keep up with the curriculum. She believed that their frustration would lead to them either leaving or being expelled if they acted out on their frustration. Acting on frustration was seen as

a sign of immaturity by Anna. She felt that students who were mature, who recognized the consequences of their previous behavior, and who were committed to making necessary changes in their school behavior could overcome their academic difficulties. Anna felt that Tanya was one of these students and believed that Check & Connect had helped to guide her through the changes she herself felt were required. Anna initially thought that Benjamin possessed a similar maturity, and was disappointed when he returned to his earlier patterns of behavior. She felt that without this within the student, Check & Connect would have minimal impact.

Along with concerns over the students' capacity to succeed in the comprehensive school, the Anna and Mary also questioned their willingness to be a part of the school community. Anna believed that students who said they were not ready to return to their comprehensive school likely were not. Without a desire to be in the comprehensive high school, she did not believe that they would be willing to interact with Check & Connect and would perform poorly in hopes of returning to the alternative school, or simply stop attending all together. Mary felt that some students had made a decision to fail. She believed that these students would not be satisfied in a large school setting and felt a greater commitment to activities in the community than they did within the school. For these students, Mary believed that Check & Connect would have a limited impact and that providing services in a community setting would be more beneficial if they wanted to continue to pursue a high school diploma. Anna similarly observed that some students were compelled to attend school, frequently by the courts, but had decided to actively resist participation in the educational process. She believed that the intervention could, at best, be used to

minimize the disruption caused by these students to the greater educational community.

While exploring this topic of students who she felt were less likely to benefit from Check & Connect, Anna remarked that there was a distinction between students who had been placed at the alternative program for a singular incident versus those who were placed there due to pattern of behavior. She believed that these differences impacted the efficacy of the intervention. Anna felt that students placed due to an incident likely possessed a personal goal for success that the students with a pattern of poor performance didn't. Anna saw their actions as a singular mistake and that they viewed placement as an adverse consequence. Both Tanya and Hussein were viewed this way, though this perception did not incorporate poor behavior that occurred prior to their first interaction with either Anna or Mary, their monitors.

For students with a pattern of poor performance, Anna did not believe that referral to the Challenges Alternative Program was viewed as an aversive or therapeutic placement. Returning to their former patterns of behavior, upon their return from placement, required little personal effort. This served to confirm the beliefs of many of the staff members in their schools, and strengthened the prejudice held by many towards the returning students. For these students, meeting the academic and behavioral standards of the school was difficult due to their unfamiliarity with success, limited persistence when setbacks were encountered, the risk of alienation from their peers, and potentially from their families.

During the course of the semester, Mary frequently spoke of the successes she had witnessed while participating in her previous position as a guidance counselor at

community-oriented, “school within a school” program. While reminiscing, she discussed feeling that students she perceived as having a low likelihood for success under Check & Connect, particularly Keenan and Lamont, would be more much more likely to graduate under that model. Anna did not have this experience and had a generally low opinion of the few alternative programs that she had observed. Due to this, she felt that she had to find a way for Check & Connect to support the students who returned from the Challenges Alternative Program. Her solution was to not discharge students from service.

Mary, in contrast, describing the students she worked with at Stark High School, stated that

I know I’m going to be asked which ones should be moved on and I’ve come to the conclusion that 90% of mine are ready to go on. There are a few that are still needy, but I think they’re ready to go. I think that 1 year, no more than a year and a half, with support should be sufficient.

Anna felt that, in order to have a chance of succeeding at Pulaski High School, students would likely need to be involved with Check & Connect until they graduated. She did not believe that judging their progress by semester, or even by year, provided a valuable measure of achievement when the end goal was graduation. This position more closely aligned with those of described in the original Check & Connect research literature (Christenson, Evelo, & Hurley, 1998; Sinclair, Christenson, & Thurlow, 2005)

Administrators. Significant differences in the views as to why Check & Connect had an impact on the students who returned Pulaski and Stark High Schools emerged during the interviews with Mr. Smith and Ms. Jones, vice-principals at the two schools. These differences may have been due to their views of the intervention,

the role of the monitor, and their perceptions of the students participating in the intervention. Mr. Smith viewed Check & Connect as an intervention directed at students, considered at-risk for dropout by Pulaski High School, by a professional given wide authority to monitor and mentor the students, and the flexibility to adjust her approach to accommodate the students' needs. Ms. Jones, the vice-principal at Stark High School, did not see Check & Connect as an intervention directed at students who had returned from alternative educational placements. Rather, she saw it as a component in a broader Positive Intervention Behavior Support (PBIS) which she had designed and initiated. The role of the monitor was viewed as a paraprofessional support position whose task was to support students by supporting their teachers. In this role, Mary was not given wide authority or latitude by Ms. Jones and she was considered someone who implemented Ms. Jones PBIS variant, with particular attention placed on the students who returned from the Challenges Alternative Program.

Just as Mr. Smith provided a high degree of responsibility to Anna in her implementation of Check & Connect at Pulaski High School, he also credited a great deal of its perceived success to her. He believed that her persistence in engaging with the students, pursuing performance data from the teachers, and intervening between these two groups to maintain the students' progress was critical to sustaining the students who returned from the Challenges Alternative Program in his school. Mr. Smith believed that many of the students had never experienced having someone who simultaneously cared for them and pushed them to perform. They never had someone who was nurturing yet also authoritative. He viewed Anna as being very much like

the parent that many of the students did not have at home. Mr. Smith felt that many of the students reacted positively to this and that without Anna implementing Check & Connect in his school, many of the students who returned from the Challenges Alternative Program would have become overwhelmed with the pressures and freedoms of a large comprehensive high school. The result of this would likely have been either dropping out of school or being “pushed” out through expulsion.

In contrast, Ms. Jones did not see Mary as essential to the implementation of Check & Connect at Stark High School. She saw Mary as a paraprofessional administering her PBIS variant to a group of at-risk students which included the students who returned from the alternative program. Her work as a Check & Connect monitor was considered part of this PBIS initiative. When describing the role of the intervention, Ms. Jones described it as an initiative which required Mary to visit the classrooms of the teachers in the building to learn their strengths and weaknesses in order to influence the placement of at-risk students. In obtaining this information, she definitively stated that it was not necessary for a monitor to discuss the background of a student with a prospective teacher in order to determine a “good fit” between an at-risk student and a teacher. After placement in a classroom, the monitor was responsible for making regular observations of the students and tasked with supporting the teachers during behavioral incidents. As described by Ms. Jones, once placement in classroom was made, the intervention was essential reactive to observed behavior or general requests made by a teacher. Proactive acts by the monitor were discouraged, likely due to the risk of violating the students’ confidentiality or

contributing to potential bias by the teacher towards the student. According to Ms. Jones, her data supported the effectiveness of this approach.

Neither Mr. Smith nor Ms. Jones attributed the failure of a student to succeed under the supervision of Check & Connect to the intervention or its implementation. Rather, they questioned the preparation of students returning from the Challenges Alternative Program to succeed in Pulaski and Stark High Schools. Mr. Smith, focusing on their academic and behavioral skills, felt that many students were poorly prepared while at the Challenges Alternative Program and he had begun to question the wisdom of sending more students there. He felt that, while within placement, their academic and behavioral needs were “managed” by the small, controlled environment. Mr. Smith saw limited evidence that their deficits, both academic and behavioral, were being remediated. When they returned to Pulaski High School, they were unable to cope with the freedoms associated with the comprehensive school setting. Ms. Jones believed similarly and felt that his discomfort and anxiety contributed to integration problems and resulted in poor academic and behavioral performance.

Ms. Jones expressed a second concern that focused on the concept of “readiness.” She described “readiness” as a sense that the students themselves had as to whether they were prepared to succeed in a larger comprehensive environment. She believed that students who had the personal insight to tell her that they were apprehensive about returning to Stark High School, and felt they would not succeed, would not be successful. For these students, she did not believe that they should return and should remain either at the Challenges Alternative Program or placed in

another off-site facility. Ms. Jones believed that if the students who returned and failed to successfully reintegrate were asked, they would state that they weren't ready to return to her school. Those who were successful would say they were. If this was the case, it is unclear if Ms. Jones believed it was possible for a student who said they were ready to fail under her intervention programs. Those who did were not ready. Their failure could only be attributed to their lack of readiness. It is unknown if she believed that a student who felt he was not ready could succeed through the use of Check & Connect or her PBIS variant.

During my discussions with the two vice-principals, two very different views of the evidence of program impact emerged. While discussing Anna and her work, Mr. Smith described working closely with her and provided stories of how she had interacted with various students in the building, including the study participants. In these stories, he talked appreciatively about Anna's work in diffusing volatile situations, interacting with parents, and in helping students maintain their enrollment in Pulaski High School and eventually graduate. At no point did he discuss "the numbers", the quantitative data that Anna believed the district valued in gauging the efficacy of Check & Connect. Mr. Smith only provided qualitative data concerning programmatic impact, all of which he attributed to Anna's work.

In contrast, at no point during my interview with Ms. Jones did she discuss any student in particular. She did not mention a study participant or any of the other at-risk students who participated in the intervention at Stark High School. Ms. Jones was unable to provide specific examples of Mary's work with any student and spoke in generalities. When I asked her about the potential influence of Mary's extensive

skill set as a former guidance counselor in her work as a monitor, she remarked that “It might”, but then reinforced that these skills were unimportant in her role as an implementer of her PBIS variant. When asked whether she believed that the intervention had positively impacted the students who returned from the Challenges Alternative Program, she enthusiastically replied that it did and that she collected extensive data on the students who participated in the intervention and that “the data speaks for itself.” This data was not shared with the researcher.

Based on my observations and interviews at Stark High School, I question the value of the data that Ms. Jones spoke of. During interviews with numerous teachers on her staff, I was told that students who returned from alternative placements, including those who participated in this study seldom exhibited aggressive or flamboyant behavior in class. Rather, if they attended class, they were described as passively disengaged. They were not disruptive, but nor were they productive. An observation would provide “a snapshot” of behavior and perhaps a momentary uptick of productivity. According to Ms. Johnson, a teacher who worked with both Lamont and Hussein, these “snapshots” were not representative of the daily educational experience of the students. Ms. Benning and Mr. Simmons both were unaware of who Mary was or why she was observing their classrooms until I spoke to them. If they had a concern about Keenan or Hussein, the two students with whom they worked, they did not know that they should contact Mary and provide her information about what they were experiencing. Furthermore, Mary herself stated that she didn’t focus on the quantitative academic or behavioral data produced by the students, preferring to concentrate on her own observations of their behavior. Of the three students who

were followed during this study, one was considered moderately successful, Hussein, but advocacy was required in order to have his credits awarded due to his absenteeism. The second, Lamont, passed a single class with a “D”. Mary learned that he was suspended for excessive tardiness a few days after he returned. The third student, Keenan, withdrew from school midway through the semester. Based on the statements of her staff, and the performance of the students, the quality of the data about which Ms. Jones spoke is questionable.

Control Students and the Challenges Alternative Program

During the development of this case study, the performance and experiences of three control students; Andre, Canard, and Darius were also examined. As shown in Table 1, academically, they performed considerably worse than the students who received Check & Connect. In fact, only one core course was passed among the three control students. The behavioral performance of the three students was mixed. Two of the students, Canard and Darius appeared to have a similar number of absences and behavioral referrals to their peers who attended schools implementing Check & Connect. Andre received twice the number of behavioral referrals as he had prior to being placed at the alternative program, yet less than a fifth of the absences. Detailed information concerning the nature of his behavioral referrals during these two semesters was not available. Due to the district’s policy of recording days suspended as absences, I believe that many of the behavioral referrals Andre received after he returned from the Challenges Alternative Program did not result in suspensions from school.

When asked about their experiences since returning from the alternative program, each control student described a feeling of being lost within the school. They did not feel academically prepared to pick up where they left off and wished that they were enrolled in smaller classes that could provide them additional support. Casual relationships with teachers were discussed, but they each described feeling closest to the vice-principals in their schools who were responsible for overseeing their discipline. While describing their experiences at Patton and Nimitz High Schools, their statements led me to believe that they did not feel connected to the school community. Both Andre and Darius discussed wanting to be involved with their schools' athletic programs, but were ineligible to participate. Of the three, only Darius had a clear sense of what he wanted to do after high school. Canard and Andre did not, and had difficulty explaining how their experiences in high school potentially impacted their lives beyond Nimitz High School.

As with the Check & Connect participants, the three control students all spoke fondly of their time in the alternative educational program. Each student described a deep relationship that they had formed with a staff member there and spoke of how they had received emotional support and guidance from that individual. At the time of the three interviews, they had not formed a similar bond with a staff member at either Patton or Nimitz High School and wished that they could return to the alternative program. Second interviews with the Check & Connect participants occurred approximately a week after Darius, Canard, and Andre were interviewed. Each of the students who received the Check & Connect intervention, and who completed the semester at either Pulaski or Stark High School, identified a teacher they felt

particularly close and expressed no interest in returning to the Challenges Alternative Program.

Three students who chose to remain at the alternative educational program; Daniel, Samantha, and Allison were also interviewed. Samantha would have returned to Pulaski High School as this case study began. Daniel and Allison would have returned to a high school in a rural community in the school district. All three were considered successful by the program and the student with the lowest GPA, Daniel, had a higher GPA than either the Check & Connect participants or the control students. When asked why they chose to stay, each discussed feeling that they would greater academic and emotional support at the Challenges Alternative Program than they would at their home school. They felt that they had staff who were interested in their success, who would take time out of their day to talk with them, and who genuinely cared for them. Each was worried that they would not receive this emotional support upon their return to their home schools and that it might contribute to a return to their previous behavior. When asked, each of them said they would have preferred to stay at the alternative educational program for their remaining high school years, but acknowledged that this was not possible due to the curriculum available at the site.

Summary

Within these findings, several themes concerning the use of Check & Connect with students returning from an alternative education placement emerged. The first of these was that the intervention could be used to support a student, but to have greatest impact it was necessary for the student to be committed to having a different school

experience than they had in the past. The second theme is that the majority of the stakeholders define success more broadly than by the values a student had earned on their GPA, or the number of behavioral referrals, or days absent that they had. Success was seen as still being enrolled at Pulaski or Stark High School and progressing, sometimes slowly, towards graduation. This outcome was perceived to be less likely in the absence of Check & Connect. Students who expressed having a stronger connection to their schools were perceived as more successful. This was most frequently achieved by the student participants developing a strong relationship with their monitor, or another member of the school faculty. Students who did not participate in Check & Connect at their schools expressed a sense of disconnection from the two control schools and reflected fondly on the adult relationships they had made at the alternative program. This sense of connection, and the feeling of support it created, was one of the largest reasons why the three students interviewed who remained at the Challenges Alternative Program chose to not return to their home schools. Finally, the staffs at both schools were interested in the intervention and felt it either was, or could be, beneficial to the students. Most of the teachers felt that a partnership with the monitor would increase the likelihood of success of Check & Connect in supporting this population of students.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

Using case study methodology, I have examined the experiences of a group of high school students who participated in Check & Connect upon returning to their comprehensive high schools from an alternative education placement. Their experiences were compared to those of a small group of control students who returned to two demographically similar schools lacking the intervention. The viewpoints of the intervention participants' Check & Connect monitors, a sample of their teachers, and the vice-principals overseeing the intervention at Pulaski & Stark High Schools were used to provide additional perspectives on the students' experiences. Data from interviews with these stakeholders was supported by findings from student surveys and archival data describing the students' academic and behavioral performance.

Findings

The evidence showed greater improvement in the intervention participants' behavior than in their academic performance. Of the students who completed the intervention, all but one student received the same or fewer discipline referrals compared to prior to their placement in alternative education. Only two of the students exhibited aggressive behavior in school while participating in Check & Connect. These consisted of two isolated incidents, one involving Benjamin from Pulaski High School and one Keenan from Stark High School. The teachers who witnessed these incidents both reported that, after returning from their behavioral sanctions, neither student exhibited any additional behaviors of concern in their room.

Academic declines were seen in nearly all of the students who returned from the alternative program. The decline was most evident among the control students. Of the three students, only one passed a single core academic course. Students who had an IEP or 504 plan demonstrated greater academic difficulties than their nondisabled peers. Only two of the control students met this condition. Among the intervention students, students who were perceived as having a longer history of academic difficulties; Benjamin, Lamont, Armando, and Keenan performed more poorly than their peers.

Stronger perceptions of the programmatic impact of Check & Connect were found during the development of this case study than quantifiable results. As with the quantifiable findings, greater impact was seen in the area of behavior than in academic performance. Nearly all of the students who participated in the intervention felt that they had exhibited better behavior than they had in the past which they attributed to their participation in Check & Connect. They felt that their relationships with their monitors helped them to moderate their responses to pressures in the school. The staff at Pulaski High School largely agreed with this statement. Staff at Stark High School believed that the intervention could have produced this effect, but many felt they had inadequate evidence to fully commit to the statement. Among all stakeholders interviewed, the monitors held the strongest convictions concerning the impact of Check & Connect. Each believed that the quantitative measures of Check & Connect were insufficient tools to measure the success of the intervention. Mary, the monitor at one of the two intervention high schools, felt that the positive attention and sense of security provided by the intervention were a greater indicator of success,

while Anna, the monitor at the other school, believed that the benefits of the intervention were likely not measurable immediately. She believed that measurable academic improvements would follow improvements to attendance and behavioral indicators due to the greater amount of exposure to the curriculum.

Several students felt that they had performed better academically than they had in the past. Teachers believed that the intervention had the potential to help the students participating in Check & Connect by providing opportunities to succeed. The responsibility to act on those opportunities was thought to rest solely with the students. Several teachers felt that the students participating in Check & Connect had capitalized on the opportunities presented to them in their classes. Others perceived no discernable change in academic effort.

Surveys conducted showed that the most successful intervention students felt a strong, and frequently growing, sense of connection to their comprehensive schools and to the staff they were working with. Students, who were less successful, felt less connected to the staff and reported a lower interest in continuing their education beyond high school. The responses of the control students varied greatly with two students feeling strongly connected to their comprehensive high school and one feeling little connection to his.

Perceptions of the implementation and effects of Check & Connect varied, primarily by the perceived quality of the relationship the stakeholder had with the monitor. Students who had developed trusting relationships with their monitors, such as Tanya and Benjamin at Pulaski High School, found the support and advice they received helpful, but occasionally overbearing. They, along with Hussein at Stark

high School, felt uncomfortable receiving additional attention while among their peers. Each understood that their past required this additional scrutiny. Tanya and Hussein used this additional attention to show that this level of oversight was no longer required. Other students felt that the attention they received from their monitor, particularly from Mary at Stark High School, was helpful and assisted them in moderating their behavior. For example, Lamont believed that he was less disruptive in class due to the oversight provided by Mary when she conducted her classroom observations.

Teachers who had a close working relationship with the monitor at their school expressed strong support for the use of Check & Connect. They found the persistence and counseling provided by Anna and Mary beneficial to the students which ultimately aided their efforts in the classroom. Teachers who did not describe close working relationships with their school's monitor often could not describe what actions Anna or Mary were taking as they conducted Check & Connect. Each of these teachers believed that they would be better prepared to work with students who returned from alternative education placements through more extensive collaboration with the monitors assigned to Pulaski and Stark High Schools.

Two approaches to the use of Check & Connect appeared during the development of this case study. These approaches appeared to be influenced by the backgrounds of the monitors and the priorities of their supervisors at Pulaski and Stark High School. At Pulaski High School, Anna focused on developing connections between herself, the students, and the resources within her school. This approach appeared to be related to her long-standing history as a subject area teacher at Pulaski

High School and limited background in the resources available outside of it. Anna's focus on developing connections within the school was supported by Mr. Smith, her supervisor, who was beginning to believe that students had a better opportunity for success under Check & Connect than they had if they were placed at the Challenges Alternative Program.

Mary's approach was to try to protect the students who returned from the alternative education program from Stark High School. This approach appeared to be an outgrowth of her training as a guidance counselor and her experience of working in a "school within a school" community oriented alternative education program. Through withholding information from her colleagues and exploring potential resources outside of Stark High School, Mary attempted to create an insular, "safe", environment for the students that sheltered them from the pressures of the larger school environment. This approach was largely supported by her supervisor, Ms. Jones, who similarly believed that it was not necessary to share significant information with the students' teachers. She felt that this information, and the programmatic decisions made with it, should be kept within the intervention.

When asked why Check & Connect had an impact on the students who returned from the alternative education program, each stakeholder group credited the relationship developed between monitor and student. The majority of the students believed that their monitor genuinely cared for them and were concerned about their educational progress. They expressed that Anna and Mary were significant individuals in their lives and that their guidance and support was valued by the intervention participants.

The teachers who were interviewed felt similarly and credited the impact on student behavior that they perceived to the mentoring relationships developed through Check & Connect. They believed that it provided a caring and attentive adult to the students; a role that they frequently felt ill prepared to fill due to the number of students enrolled at Pulaski and Stark High Schools. By developing a close relationship with the student, many of the teachers received, or hoped to receive information from the monitors that enhanced their ability to work with the Check & Connect participants.

As previously discussed, the two monitors had slightly different views as to why Check & Connect had an impact on their students. The foundation of both of their views focused on the development of caring relationships between themselves and the students. Anna believed that though it was important to show the Check & Connect participants that she cared for them, it was also important to find others within the school that would care for them also. She felt that by finding and helping the Check & Connect participants develop relationships with other teachers, coaches, etc. within the building, she could strengthen their commitment to remaining at Pulaski High School. Mary, in contrast, believed that the intervention was best used to build a safe, and secure environment within Stark High School that would be “like a family” for the students who returned from the Challenges Alternative Program. In this, she sought to create a refuge within the building from the pressures of the larger school environment. This view was heavily influenced by Mary’s previous alternative education experiences and guided her practices at Stark High School.

The administrators at the schools also credited the caring relationship developed between the monitors and students through the use of Check & Connect. Mr. Smith, the principal at Pulaski High School, credited the continuing enrollment of many of the Check & Connect participants in his school to Anna's relationship with them. He believed that through her work, she was helping the faculty to become more vested in the success of the at-risk students in the school and hoped that it would improve the likelihood of their graduation. Ms. Jones at Stark High School also believed that Mary expressed genuine caring for the students on her caseload, but assigned any credit for programmatic impact to the PBIS variant she had directed Mary to implement with the students.

In summary, greater evidence of positive impact due to Check & Connect was seen in the qualitative findings than in the quantitative findings. The small sample size, fidelity of implementation, and length of implementation all likely affected these findings. These factors, and their impact, will be further explored in my discussion of the earlier research literature and the limitations of this study.

Relation to the Literature

The findings from this case study closely align with those from earlier research. Each of the early Check & Connect studies (Lehr, Sinclair, & Christenson, 2004; Sinclair, Christenson, Evelo, & Hurley, 1998; Sinclair, Christenson, & Thurlow, 2005) examined the efficacy of a monitoring and mentoring intervention on the academic performance, attendance, and a behavior of students considered at-risk for drop-out. Each showed evidence of positive impact after a year of participation and a greater likelihood of graduation after four years of participation in the

intervention. Findings showed improved attendance and behavioral performance, but less impact on the academic performance of the participants. The true benefit academically, was the enhanced resilience and persistence demonstrated by the participants leading to a higher likelihood of graduation after four or five years when compared to a control group.

This study showed similar difficulties and findings to Kershaw and Blank's (1993) study of youth returning from alternative educational placements. A high attrition rate was seen among the potential pool of student participants in this study. Along with Keenan, who withdrew from Stark High School, three potential control students were unavailable. They did not reenroll in the comprehensive high school after leaving the alternative program. Staff reported that they stopped attending school without formally withdrawing. As in Kershaw and Blank's (1993) study, many of the school staff attributed the participants' successes and failures primarily to the students themselves, and not to the services they received either at the Challenges Alternative Program or through the Check & Connect intervention.

As in Kershaw and Blank's (1993) study, several school staff members held negative beliefs concerning the capacity for students returning from alternative educational environments to change their behavior. Staff held different views towards students who were placed at the alternative program due to a singular incident versus those placed due to a pattern of behavior. Students placed due to a single significant incident were viewed more positively than those with an established pattern of difficulty. These perceptions did not appear to be based on factual information. During our discussions, Anna, the monitor at Pulaski High School, stated that

students placed due to a single incident had personal goals for success that were likely not shared by their peers with an established pattern of poor behavior. Mary believed that students most likely to benefit from alternative education could be identified long before they were placed. Tanya and Hussein, both considered successful by the monitors, were viewed as students placed at Challenges Alternative Placement due to a single incident. This perception was not accurate; both students exhibited behavior problems the previous year. Their involvement in Check & Connect was the monitors' first contact with either student.

Mentoring studies such as those conducted by Dubois, Holloway, Valentine, and Cooper (2002), Rhodes, Grossman, and Resch (2000), and Thompson and Kelly-Vance (2001) showed that, over an extended period of time, mentoring relationships, similar to those essential to the successful implementation of Check & Connect, can lead to improved academic performance, as well as attendance. Key components that led to the achievement of these results were the longevity of the relationship, the frequency of contact, and the quality of the interactions between the mentor and the youth. These factors have bearing on the early Check & Connect research and the findings from this case study.

While acknowledging the positive impact of Check & Connect in these early studies, questions about fidelity of implementation were raised by the What Works Clearinghouse (2006). Many of these focused on the verification of the interactions between the monitor and the students. These questions can be added to those focusing on the quality and longevity of the mentoring relationships previously discussed.

Many of the concerns raised were limitations found during the development of this case study.

Reliability

Multiple measures to assess the veracity of archival data and the reliability of interpretation of qualitative data were used during the development of this case study. All grades, attendance, and behavioral records were provided by the monitors and then verified using the cooperating district's central database. Incomplete records, or unusual findings, were then addressed by contacting the individual schools for additional data.

Student surveys, direct observation, and qualitative interviews were used to provide triangulation. I found close alignment between the survey responses and the student participants' interview statements. Due to differences observed in the implementation of Check & Connect by the two monitors, true replication between the two sites was not achieved.

Analyst triangulation was achieved through the use of a cohort of African-American graduate students from the College of Education who examined the raw interview data. This group was used to provide ethnic alignment with the student sample and to mitigate the impact of potential bias. The African-American graduate students independently examined and interpreted the interview data collected during the development of this case study. They found a high degree of similarity in their interpretations of the data to my own findings.

Limitations

The findings presented are not without limitations. Yin (2003, p.9) states that a case study is an appropriate research design when “a “how” or “why” question is being asked about a contemporary set of events, over which the investigator has little or no control.” In spite of this, efforts were made to address fidelity of implementation concerns in both the “check” and “connect” phases of the intervention. These efforts will be examined first followed by a discussion of the quality and longevity of the mentoring relationships provided by the monitors,

During the “check” phase of Check & Connect, it is essential to systematically monitor a student's academic and behavioral performance, as well as attendance, to provide real-time feedback to the student and immediate intervention to address problems. Approaches to meeting these goals varied by site. At Pulaski High School, conversations with Anna and members of the school administration revealed that student data was frequently not updated in “real-time.” According to the teacher’s union contract, grades were only required to be submitted quarterly. In addition, due to the size of the school, a backlog of attendance and behavioral data was common in the records office. Behavior referrals, as an example, could be received by the administration, acted upon immediately, but not recorded in the database until days later. Anna attempted to bypass these issues using her relationships with the faculty to obtain information via frequent email and personal requests. She believed that these techniques provided her more timely data than the school’s central database could provide. This alternate source of data also possessed limitations. First, the individual receiving a request for information required the time to process it and a willingness to

do so. This was not always immediately available and delays in response, particularly when academic data was requested, were common. Second, an individual interacting with a student participating in Check & Connect would need to know to contact Anna immediately if a behavioral concern was raised. Many members of the school faculty were unaware of which students participated in Check & Connect and, when required, sent behavioral referrals to the main office to be addressed by an administrator without contacting her. Due to her Anna's close relationship with the administration team, these incidents did not impact her ability to implement Check & Connect effectively as much as delays in academic data did.

Mary, the monitor at Stark High School, stated that she did not monitor the academic and behavioral data available from the records office, nor did she believe it was necessary to communicate with the teachers. She believed that her own observations, combined with the reading of the teacher comments from the quarterly interim reports, were sufficient. During my biweekly feedback emails, concerns about this approach were raised. Mary's approach to acquiring data greatly impacted her ability to respond quickly to the needs of the students on her caseload, including the participants in this study. An example that illustrates this involves Lamont. Due to excessive tardiness to class, he was suspended from school for two days. Mary learned about his suspension after he returned to Stark High School. She angrily stated "nobody told me" when describing the episode to me. Shortly after this incident, Mary began to request information more frequently from the teachers working with the study participants. Subsequent interviews showed that Mary's initial

approach of limited communication with the teachers was endorsed by the Stark High School administration.

In Check & Connect, rigorous documentation, including the use of monitor sheets and student logs, is required. Collection of this information was difficult at both Pulaski and Stark High Schools. Anna worked with approximately fifteen students at Pulaski High School, in addition to the three who participated in this case study. Each of these students received “intensive” Check & Connect services. She found it very difficult to document her work in a systematic and timely manner due to the size of this caseload and frequent requests for support from students during the day. It was possible to verify Anna’s interactions with students on the days of my observation and reconstruct patterns of interactions from the logs she provided. Due to my observations of the pattern of Anna’s activities during my site visits, Anna’s statements, and by listening to conversation with her students and colleagues throughout the day, I believe that many of her Check & Connect activities were undocumented.

At Stark High School, the evidence of interaction between monitor and student was not as substantial. Logs provided by Mary frequently focused on the activities occurring in the class, such as the content of a math lesson, and not on the behavior of a particular student. These logs were provided infrequently and many only focused on the days I conducted site visits. Statements made by Hussein led me to believe that he was observed infrequently when I was not conducting a site visit. When asked about the small amount of documentation available, Mary explained that she did not document the majority of her interactions with the students due to the

concerns of confidentiality impressed upon her during her training as a guidance counselor.

During the “connect” phase of Check & Connect, it is crucial that the monitor uses his or her relationship with the student, as well as the faculty and family, to impress upon them the importance of completing school and problem-solving with them so that services can be provided to reach that goal. Records and observations indicate that Anna, the monitor at Pulaski High School, used her personal relationships to assist the students in meeting the school’s academic and behavioral expectations. She attempted to direct the students to additional mentors, such as athletic coaches, within the school and maintained frequent contact with their teachers and families. In contrast, there was no evidence that Mary, the monitor at Stark High School, established a significant dialogue between herself, the students, their families, or most members of the school faculty.

Efforts to influence the fidelity of implementation were limited by the administrative authority and the willingness of the monitors to accept feedback. At Pulaski High School, Anna was given wide authority by Mr. Smith and support for her efforts to obtain information. This authority allowed her to accept my fidelity feedback, some of which was applied to her practice. Mary, the monitor at Stark High School, was viewed as a paraprofessional and her activities were considered part of, and subservient to, a broader administrator initiated intervention. During my interview with her supervisor, Ms Jones, I learned that her approach to both the “check” and “connect” phases of the intervention was heavily influenced by the direction she received by the vice-principal. Ms Jones did not believe that Mary

should communicate openly with the teachers the intervention participants worked with. She believed that Mary's observational skills, along with the observational skills of the other paraprofessionals, provided her the data she needed. This restriction on communication impacted Mary's ability to "connect" the students on her caseload with additional resources in Stark High School. Mary's ability to act on implementation guidance by me was restricted by the directions of her administrator.

Bullis, Yovanoff, and Havel (2004) stated that the first six months after release from a restricted setting was critical to the long-term success of at-risk youth. This position heavily influenced the development of this case study. In contrast, the early Check & Connect research focused on the impact of the intervention after a minimum of a year, with the strongest findings occurring over longer periods of involvement (Sinclair, Christenson, Evelo, & Hurley, 1998; Sinclair, Christenson, & Thurlow, 2005) Research on mentoring of at-risk youth states that not only the quality, but the length of the mentoring relationship is important to achieving positive outcomes (Dubois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002; Rhodes, Grossman, & Resch, 2000; and Thompson & Kelly-Vance, 2001). By design, this case study only examined the initial reintegration experiences of students returning from an alternative high school. Students receiving Check & Connect were only exposed to the intervention for five months, the approximate length of the Spring Semester. Though Bullis, Yovanoff, and Havel (2004) stated that this early support is crucial, continuing support is likely required to see a measurable impact in the students' academic and behavioral performance, or attendance.

Discussion

Throughout the course of this study, students at each site discussed the connections that they had made with the adults in their schools. This was most frequently noted while discussing their relationships with the teachers and staff of the Challenges Alternative Program. Students frequently spoke of how, due to the small class size, they had developed relationships with their teachers that were closer than those they had made with the staff at their home schools. This allowed them to not only achieve academically through a reduced distraction environment, it also allowed them to discuss their anxieties, frustrations, and concerns with an adult who was genuinely interested in their success. The majority of the intervention participants felt that the monitors assigned to Pulaski and Stark High Schools made this type of support available to them, even if they didn't always make use of it. The control students spoke of their desire for smaller classrooms in order to recreate the small, supportive environment they had left at Challenges Alternative Program. Three students who remained there cited these relationships as one of the primary reasons why they chose to stay and hoped to develop similar relationships when they returned to their home schools.

Students' comments closely aligned with Resilience Theory, one of the foundations of Check & Connect (Evelo, Sinclair, Hurley, Christenson, & Thurlow, 1996). Resilience can be defined as an individual's capacity to respond to stress, adversity, and trauma in an adaptive fashion and succeed despite the disadvantages in their life (Broussard, Mosley-Howard, & Roychoudhury, 2006; Christensen & Christensen, 1997; Edwards, Mumford, Shillingford, & Serra-Rodan, 2007).

Mentoring interventions, such as Check & Connect, are designed to enhance the resilience of an at-risk youth by providing a non-familial mentor who can assist in regulating the child's behavior while they are developing the skills necessary to control their impulses, delay gratification, and moderate their emotional responses (Broussard, Mosley-Howard, & Roychoudhury, 2006; Southwick, Morgan, Vythilingam, & Charney, 2006).

According to Benard (2004), resilient individuals are characterized by four overlapping areas of personal strengths; 1) social competence, 2) problem solving, 3) autonomy, and 4) sense of purpose. The purpose of Check & Connect is to bolster and develop these strengths in students at-risk for school dropout. Success in meeting these purposes was found to be mixed in this case study. Much of this can be attributed to the quality of the relationship developed between the student participants and the monitors assigned to the two intervention sites.

Among students who described a strong bond with their monitors, significant benefit was attributed to the efforts made to bolster and develop their resiliency. Tanya and Benjamin, both from Pulaski High School, described in great detail how the use of Check & Connect, and their relationship with Anna in particular, helped them as they returned from their alternative education placement. They spoke of how they saw Anna as someone who cared for them and who was concerned for their future. Other students who participated in Check & Connect did not describe as supportive a relationship as Tanya and Benjamin described. Keenan, the student who withdrew from Stark High School, discussed his close relationship with Mary, but evidence of their interactions was not available. Lamont, also a participant at Stark

High School, spoke vaguely of his relationship with his monitor, Mary, but had difficulty describing how their relationship had helped him reintegrate into the comprehensive high school.

Throughout the development of this case study, questions concerning the fidelity of Check & Connect implementation by the two monitors were evident. During the “check” phase of the intervention, collection and organization of data is required to make informed programmatic decisions. At Pulaski High School it was possible to reconstruct much of the undocumented data from the available records, observations of conversations between Anna and her colleagues and students, and through my interviews with her students and colleagues. This was not possible at Stark High School. Evidence of the implementation of practices designed to “connect” the student participants with supports at Pulaski High School were also evident through reconstructing much of this undocumented data. Conversations with Mary, the majority of her colleagues, and the students she worked with did not provide evidence of this occurring at Stark High School. Potential reasons for these variations in approach include differences in professional background between the monitors, the monitors’ familiarity with the resources available at each site, and the level of autonomy provided by the administrators at Pulaski and Stark High Schools.

Directions for Future Research

Continuing research involving the use of Check & Connect in supporting students returning from alternative education placements is needed. Little is known about the personal experiences of students participating in Check & Connect over an extended period of time. A case study examining a cohort of students over multiple

years would allow for a greater understanding of this experience and could be used to refine the practices of Check & Connect implementers.

Many stakeholders in this study questioned the academic and behavioral preparation of the students returning to their schools from the Challenges Alternative Program. Surveys could be used to identify specific areas of academic and behavioral concern seen by comprehensive school faculty who work with students who have returned from an alternative education placement. Findings from such a survey could be used in curriculum and transition planning at these placements as well as other restrictive educational environments.

An additional area of research that could be explored is the impact of stigma on the experience of students returning from alternative placements. During the course of the study, two conflicting viewpoints on the value of background information emerged. Some teachers expressed interest in why students were placed at the alternative educational program. They believed that this information could serve as warning and that classroom supports could be established as the student returned to the comprehensive high school and entered their classrooms. A second view was that this information should be protected and that the students' pasts should not be shared with the staff. The notion was that this information might prejudice the teachers towards the returning students. The pros and cons of these positions were discussed by the monitors, teachers, and the student participants themselves. An exploration of the merits of both of these positions, potentially through a future case study, could provide valuable data to the community that serves at-risk students as interventions and policies to support them are developed by researchers and educational agencies.

Appendix A

Please mark on your answer sheets how you feel about each of the following statements.

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your school?

		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree Nor	Agree	Strongly Agree
A1.	I feel close to people at this school.	A	B	C	D	E
A2.	I am happy to be at this school.	A	B	C	D	E
A3.	I feel like I am part of this school.	A	B	C	D	E
A4.	The teachers at this school treat students fairly.	A	B	C	D	E
A5.	I feel safe in my school.	A	B	C	D	E

Next, mark how TRUE you feel the next statements are about your SCHOOL and things you might do there.

At my school, there is a teacher or some other adult...

		Not at All True	A Little True	Pretty Much True	Very Much True
A6.	who really cares about me	A	B	C	D
A7.	who tells me when I do a good job.	A	B	C	D
A8.	who notices when I'm not there.	A	B	C	D
A9.	who always wants me to do my best.	A	B	C	D
A10.	who listens to me when I have something to say.	A	B	C	D
A11.	who believes that I will be a success.	A	B	C	D

How TRUE do you feel these statements are about you personally?

		Not at All True	A Little True	Pretty Much True	Very Much True
B1.	I have goals and plans for the future.	A	B	C	D
B2.	I plan to graduate from high school.	A	B	C	D
B3.	I plan to go to college or some other school after high school.	A	B	C	D
B4.	I know where to go for help with a problem.	A	B	C	D
B5.	I can work out my problems.	A	B	C	D
B6.	When I need help, I find someone to talk with.	A	B	C	D

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the

Strongly Disagree = A Disagree = B
 Neither Disagree Nor Agree = C Agree = D
 Strongly Agree = E

Student Name	School	A1. I feel close to people at this school.	A2. I am happy to be at this school.	A3. I feel like I am part of this school.	A4. The teachers at this school treat students fairly.	A5. I feel safe in my school.
Intervention						
Armando	Pulaski-CAP	B--D	C--C	D--D	B--D	E--D
Benjamin	Pulaski	D--D	E--D	D--D	D--C	D--D
Tanya	Pulaski-Stark	D--D	D--D	D--D	D--E	D--D
Lamont	Stark	D--D	B--B	C--C	D--C	D--E
Hussein	Stark	C--D	D--C	C--E	B--C	B--D
Keenan	Stark-Withdrew	D--D	C--C	B--C	E--D	E--D
Control						
Andre	Nimitz	E	D	E	D	C
Canard	Nimitz	E	E	B	E	E
Darius	Patton	D	D	C	C	D
No Return						
Daniel	CAP	B	D	D	E	D
Samantha	CAP	D	D	D	E	D
Allison	CAP	C	D	D	E	E

Next, mark how TRUE you feel the next statements are about your
At my school, there is a teacher or some other adult...

Not at All True = A A Little True = B
Pretty Much True = C Very Much True = D

Student Name	School	A6. who really cares about me	A7. who tells me when I do a good job.	A8. who notices when I'm not there.	A9. who always wants me to do my best.	A10. who listens to me when I have something to say.	A11. who believes that I will be a success.
Intervention							
Armando	Pulaski-CAP	B--B	C--B	B--B	D--B	C--B	B--B
Benjamin	Pulaski	D--D	C--C	C--D	D--D	C--C	D--D
Tanya	Pulaski-Stark	D--D	D--D	D--D	D--D	D--D	D--D
Lamont	Stark	B--C	D--C	C--C	B--C	B--C	C--D
Hussein	Stark	C--C	C--C	C--B	C--C	C--B	C--C
Keenan	Stark-Withdrew	D--D	C--C	B--D	D--D	D--C	B--D
Control							
Andre	Nimitz	D	D	D	D	C	D
Canard	Nimitz	D	D	D	D	D	D
Darius	Patton	C	A	B	C	B	B
No Return							
Daniel	CAP	D	D	D	D	D	D
Samantha	CAP	C	C	D	C	C	C
Allison	CAP	C	D	D	D	D	D

Next, mark how TRUE you feel the next statements are about your
How TRUE do you feel these statements are about you

Not at All True = A A Little True = B
Pretty Much True = C Very Much True = D

Student Name	School	B1. I have goals and plans for the future.	B2. I plan to graduate from high school.	B3. I plan to go to college or some other school after high school.	B4. I know where to go for help with a problem.	B5. I know where to go for help with a problem.	B6. When I need help, I find someone to talk with.
Intervention							
Armando	Pulaski-CAP						
Benjamin	Pulaski	C--C	B--C	B--B	D--C	D--D	C--B
Tanya	Pulaski-Stark	C--C	D--C	C--B	C--C	C--B	C--B
Lamont	Stark	D--D	D--D	D--D	D--D	D--D	C--D
Hussein	Stark	C--D	C--D	B--B	C--D	C--D	B--B
Keenan	Stark-Withdrew	D--C	D--D	D--D	D--C	C--C	C--B
		D--D	D--B	C--A	D--C	B--D	B--C
Control							
Andre	Nimitz	D	D	D	D	D	D
Canard	Nimitz	D	D	D	D	C	C
Darius	Patton	C	C	A	B	D	C
No Return							
Daniel	CAP	D	D	D	D	C	D
Samantha	CAP	D	D	D	D	D	D
Allison	CAP	D	D	D	D	C	D

Appendix B
Protocol: Students

Site: _____
Interview 1

Date: _____

Student Scale

Items taken from the California Healthy Kids Survey
Attach spread sheet

Tell me about your time at the alternative school

What were the classes like?

Did you like going to school?

Describe your relationships with your teachers.

Describe your relationships with the administration.

What did you think it was going to be like when you returned to a regular school?

What did you expect from the teachers?

What did you expect from the administration?

Please describe how the experience of coming to (insert school name) has been so far.

Please describe what it has been like working with (insert monitor/mentor).

What has (insert monitor/mentor name) been doing for you?

Do you think they have had an influence on your grades, behavior, or attendance?

How?

Has working with (insert monitor/mentor) been helpful to you in other areas of your life? If yes, what areas and how?

Tell me about how your teachers have treated you since returning.

Do you feel like you are being treated the same as the other students in your classes?

Please name one of your teachers that you have had a lot of interaction with.

Describe what you think your future will be like.

How do you think your experiences in school will impact your future?

Protocol: Students

Site: _____
Interview 2

Date: _____

Student Scale

Items taken from the California Healthy Kids Survey

Attach spread sheet

Now that you have been back for a semester, please describe what it has been like since returning from your alternative school.

What did you expect?

What has been different?

Has anything changed since the semester began?

Please describe how school has been this semester.

What have your grades, attendance, and behavior been?

Describe your relationships with your teachers.

Tell me about how your teachers have treated you.

Do you feel like you are being treated the same as the other students in your classes?

Describe your relationships with the administration.

Please describe how things have been working with (insert monitor/mentor).

What has (insert monitor/mentor name) been doing for you?

Do you think they have had an influence on your grades, behavior, or attendance?

How?

Have they helped you in other areas of your life? If yes, please describe what they have done?

Describe what you think your future will be like.

How do you think your experiences in school will impact your future?

Appendix C
Protocol: Faculty

Respondent: _____

Date: _____

Site: _____

Interview 1

What do you think about alternative education?

Describe the experiences that led to those opinions or beliefs.

Tell me about your previous experiences with children who returned to school after an alternative education placement.

Please describe your perception of the transition experience of students returning to this school from alternative educational programs.

Has your experience with the students participating in (insert district's program name) been different than those you've had with previous students who have returned from alternative educational placements? If yes, how has it been different?

Do you feel that alternative education students should come back?

Are there "conditions"?

Do you feel that alternative education students can be successful in your school?

Are there "conditions"?

Please describe your experiences so far with (insert district's program name)?

Do you perceive an impact on the students through the use of (insert district's program name)? If yes, please describe.

Do you think the intervention has impacted the students'

-academic performance?

-attendance?

-behavior?

Why do you think the intervention has or hasn't impacted the student?

Please describe your relationship with the monitor/mentor and their work with the student.

Do you think the initiative has had an impact on the school culture up to this point?

Please describe.

Is there anything else you would like to tell me about

- the program?
- the role of the monitor/mentors?
- the students?

Protocol: Faculty**Respondent:** _____**Date:** _____**Site:** _____**Interview 2**

Please tell me about your experiences working with students returning from alternative educational placements over the course of this semester.

Please describe your perception of the transition experience of students returning to this school from alternative educational programs.

Has your experience with the students participating in (insert district's program name) been different than those you've had with previous students who have returned from alternative educational placements? If yes, how has it been different?

Do you feel that alternative education students should come back?

Are there "conditions"?

Do you feel that alternative education students can be successful in your school?

Are there "conditions"?

Please describe your experiences with the (insert district's program name) over the course of the semester?

Do you perceive an impact on the students through the use of (insert district's program name)? If yes, please describe.

Do you think the intervention has affected the students'

-academic performance?

-attendance?

-behavior?

Why do you think the intervention has or hasn't affected the student?

Please describe your relationship with the monitor/mentor and their work with the student.

Do you think the initiative has had an impact on the school culture during the semester?

Please describe.

What "next steps" would you advocate?

Appendix D
Protocol: Monitor

Respondent: _____

Date: _____

Site: _____

What do participating students, faculty, and administrators participating in the Check & Connect intervention think about the intervention?

What do you think about alternative education?

Describe the experiences that led to those opinions or beliefs.

Tell me about your previous experiences with children who returned to school after an alternative education placement.

Please describe your perception of the transition experience of students returning to this school from alternative educational programs.

Can you describe your perception of the experiences of the individual students on your caseload?

What similarities have you observed?

What differences have you seen?

Has your experience with the students participating in (insert district's program name) been different than those you've had with previous students who have returned from alternative educational placements? If yes, how has it been different?

Do you feel that alternative education students should come back?

Are there "conditions"?

Do you feel that alternative education students can be successful in your school?

Are there "conditions"?

Describe how your interactions have developed with the students through the use of (insert district's program name)?

What was the relationship like at the beginning? What is it like today?

Do you perceive an impact on the students through the use of (insert district's program name)? If yes, please describe.

Do you think the intervention has affected the students'

-academic performance?

-attendance?

-behavior?

Why do you think the intervention has or hasn't affected the student?

Do you think that (insert district's program name) has helped the students in other areas of their lives?

If yes, why?

Do you think that participation in (insert district's program name) has had an impact on the child's future? If yes, in what areas? What do you feel has changed?

Do you think the initiative has had an impact on the school culture?

Can you describe why you think this?

What evidence have you seen to support your opinion?

What do you feel should be “next steps”?

Is there anything else you would like to tell me about

- the program?
- Your role as a monitor/mentor?
- the students?

Appendix E
Protocol: Administrators

Respondent: _____

Date: _____

Site: _____

What do you think about alternative education?

Describe the experiences that led to those opinions or beliefs.

Tell me about your previous experiences with students who returned to school after an alternative education placement?

Please describe your perception of the transition experience of students returning to this school from alternative educational programs.

Please describe your experiences so far with (insert district's program name)?

Since this initiative has been enacted, what are your beliefs and opinions towards students returning from alternative education?

Has this experience with these students been different than those you've had in the past?

Do you feel they should come back?

Are there "conditions"?

Do you feel that they can be successful in your school?

Are there "conditions"?

What, if any, role do you feel this initiative has in your opinions of these students?

Do you perceive an impact on the students through the use of (insert district's program name)? If yes, please describe.

Do you think the intervention has affected the students'

-academic performance?

-attendance?

-behavior?

Why do you think the intervention has or hasn't affected the student?

Do you think (insert district's program name) has helped the students in other areas of their lives?

If yes, why?

Do you think that participation in (insert district's program name) has had an impact on the child's future? In what areas?

What role do you see for (insert district's program name) in your school?

How do you think the initiative has had an impact on the school culture?

Describe.

Why do you think the initiative had an impact?

What do you feel should be "next steps"?

Is there anything else you would like to tell me about [name of program]?

Is there anything else you would like to tell me about [name of child]?

Appendix F

Student: School:						Monitor: Dates:
Check	M	T	W	R	F	
Contact with student						
Tardy						
Skip						
Absent						
Behavioral Referral						
Detention						
In-school suspension						
Out-of school suspension						
Spoke with teacher about student grades, attendance, or behavior						
Accessed database for grades, attendance, or referrals						
Connect						
Basic						
Shared general information						
Provided regular feedback						
Discussed staying in school						
Problem-solved about risk						
Intensive						
Arranged for alternative to suspension						
Contracted for behavior or grades						
Communicated with parents						
Made special accommodations						
Participated in community service						
Participated in school-sponsored activity						
Participated in social skills group						
Worked with tutor or mentor						
Academic Support: Other						
1						
2						
3						
4						
Problem Solving: Other						
1						
2						
3						
4						
Recreation and Community Service Exploration: Other						
1						
2						
3						
4						

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