A QUANTITATIVE STUDY EXAMINING STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR

ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL EXPERIENCE THROUGH A LENS OF SELF-

DETERMINATION THEORY

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

With a

Major in Educational Leadership in the

Department of Graduate Education

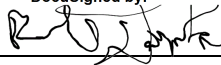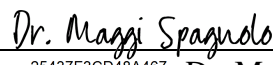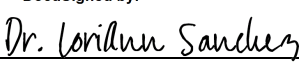Northwest Nazarene University

by

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June 2024

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AUTHORIZATION TO SUBMIT

DISSERTATION

This dissertation of Rebecca Kosinski, submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy with a major in Educational Leadership and titled "A Quantitative Study Examining Students' Perceptions of Their Alternative School Experience Through a Lens of Self-Determination Theory," has been reviewed in final form. Permission, as indicated by the signatures and dates given below, is now granted to submit final copies.

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ABSTRACT

The following study investigates students' perception of the alternative schools they attend through the lens of Self-Determination Theory. This research assesses current 18- to 21-year-old students attending alternative schools in the Pacific Northwest using a quantitative approach. The study, based in the Pacific Northwest with data collected specially in Idaho, utilizes a survey that gathers demographic data and student responses to a five-point Likert scale focused on self-determination and its subscales: autonomy, relatedness, and competence in an alternative school setting. This study addresses the gap in literature regarding Pacific Northwest alternative schools, their students, and the effectiveness of these schools.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Historically, dropout has been an issue in education (Kumm et al., 2020; Long et al., 2018; Poyrazli et al., 2008). High school dropout is defined as leaving school prior to completion and has a variety of negative long-term personal consequences including unemployment, long-term poverty, and shorter life expectancy (Dupéré et al., 2018; McDermott et al., 2019). Students in the United States can drop out of school between the ages of 16-18 depending on the state they reside in (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2021a). Dropout can be caused by internal and external factors including struggling with school engagement and difficult home and family dynamics (Dupéré et al., 2019; Zengin, 2021). More specifically students who leave school before completion often face issues with bullying, unstable home lives, substance abuse issues, and are often minorities, males, and students with disabilities (Cavaco et al., 2021; Foreman-Murray et al., 2022). High school dropout rates are a problematic issue in the United States and other countries (Motevalli et al., 2021; Zeinalipour, 2022; Zeldin et al., 2018). Dropout rates have fluctuated over the last fifty years; however, decreases have not been consistent (Amitay & Rahav, 2020; Hickman & Anderson, 2019; Staff et al., 2020). Notably, the status dropout rate, which is the number of students who left school during a surveyed year in 2010, was 8.3, and in 2021 was 5.2 (NCES, 2021a). While there was a decrease over the last decade the rate of dropouts remained in the 5% range from 2017 to 2021 with an increase from 5.1 to 5.2 occurring between 2019 and 2021 (NCES, 2021a). Students who dropout of high school experience negative life outcomes including earning less, struggling with health issues, and negatively impacting the community in which they live financially (Cavaco et al., 2021; Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011).

Realizing the impact of dropping out, many researchers have dedicated studies to preventing dropout and understanding the factors that lead to it (Hsieh et al., 2021; Yavrutürk et al., 2020; Young-sik et al., 2018). Internal factors that can lead to dropout include engagement, low motivation, mental health, lack of belonging, and other social and emotional influences, while the external factors often include school issues, criminal activity, having to support a family, becoming pregnant, or bullying (Dupéré et al., 2018, 2019, 2021). The implementation of alternative education programs was introduced in the late 1900s as one solution or support system for these students (Lange & Sletten, 2002; Porowski et al., 2022). To support the students who were struggling to be successful in school, the United States started implementing alternative school programs. Alternative schools/programs can be defined as any program or school that provides alternative pathways to high school completion (Aron, 2006; Lange & Sletten, 2002; K. L. Wilkerson et al., 2018). Since their inception, alternative programs and schools have diversified to meet the needs of struggling students and provide alternative experiences including vocational and arts-based programs. (Lea et al., 2019; Nada et al., 2020). For the purpose of this study, alternative schools serving at-risk youth will be the focus, as they are directly created to support potential dropouts (Afacan & Wilkerson, 2019; Ahn & Simpson, 2013; Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Hoge & Rubinstein-Avila, 2014; Kennedy & Soutullo, 2018; Novak, 2019; Stevenson et al., 2021; K. Wilkerson et al., 2016).

Despite their longevity, many alternative schools have not been thoroughly vetted for effectiveness due to their ever-changing structure and the difficulties with student attendance and retention (Ahn & Simpson, 2013; Hsieh et al., 2021; Lange & Sletten, 2002; K. Wilkerson et al., 2016). Specifically, recent literature has indicated that most alternative schools serve a student population that is predominantly male, low income, and has special needs (Afacan & Wilkerson,

2019; Rubens et al., 2019; Staff et al., 2020). The overrepresentation of these underserved populations in alternative education indicates a need for further research on these schools and their effectiveness (Doll et al., 2013; Frank, 2019; McDermott et al., 2019). It is important to note is that students who drop out are often targeted as "at risk." The term "at risk" is used in educational environments for those students who are at-risk of dropping out of school (Donnelly, 1987; Trauth & Harris, 2019). Current literature available on dropouts and alternative schools coincides with research done on at-risk populations as students who are at risk may also be placed in or choose to attend an alternative school setting (Dupéré et al., 2018; Glavan, 2019; Staff et al., 2020). Substantial research has been conducted on factors contributing to dropouts as well as understanding who dropouts are (Antoni, 2021; Paraman & Hussain, 2022; Staff et al., 2020; Szlyk, 2020; Vera et al., 2016; Zengin, 2021). Additionally, there has been emerging qualitative research on alternative schools and the experiences of students attending those schools in major cities and large urban areas, as well as sections of the United States including the Midwest (Ballard & Bender, 2022; Cantey, 2022; Conner et al., 2022; Fortner, 2022; Paraman & Hussain, 2022; Ramsdal & Wynn, 2022; Runkle, 2022). However, there is a gap in the research on alternative schools from a quantitative perspective, including rural alternative schools. This purpose of this study is to use the perspectives of current alternative school students in the Pacific Northwest (PNW) to better understand what effective elements of alternative education are and how these elements lead to a student's completion of school. This chapter will define the current issue and related terms and determine the study's significance followed by brief insight into the study's methods.

Statement of the Problem

Understanding the cause of student dropouts is critical to continuing to reduce the dropout percentage, which is important because of the negative impact dropping out has on society and the individuals who leave school (Cavaco et al., 2021; Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011).While there has been an overall decrease in dropout over the last decade, the dropout numbers remain consistent among minorities, students with disabilities and students living in poverty (Dameron et al., 2019; Dupéré et al., 2019; Jordan et al., 1994). Dropping out of school can have adverse effects on the individual and society in general. Notably, the estimated cost per dropout to the economy is approximately $272,000 per individual over their lifetime (National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2021a). This means that during 2020, when two million students dropped out of school, the cost was approximately 544 billion dollars, about $1,700 per person in the US (NCES, 2021a). Students who drop out negatively impact the socio-economic development of a country by contributing to what is considered an untrained workforce (Zengin, 2021). Moreover, students who drop out of high school experience health issues as well as challenges with employment and homelessness (Marlow & Rehman, 2020; Runkle, 2022; Vinas-Forcade et al., 2021).

Alternative schools are one of the resources available to support students at risk of dropping out of school (Flores & Brown, 2019; Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011; K. Wilkerson et al., 2016). Alternative schools were designed to meet the needs of students not finding success in the traditional school setting (Aspiranti et al., 2021; Hsieh et al., 2021; Mann & Whitworth, 2017; Perzigian & Braun, 2020). The Pacific Northwest states which include Idaho, Washington and Oregon, all have state laws in place that support the placement or choice of students at risk of dropping out to participate in alternative school programs. Numerous studies have been

conducted on the reasons leading to students dropping out of high school. However, there is a lack of data indicating the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of alternative programs that have been put in place to prevent dropout (Antoni, 2021; Duke & Tenuto, 2020; Flores & Brown, 2019). The importance of further research on alternative schools has heightened due to the increase in dropout students and at-risk students following the impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable populations (Antoni, 2021; Chiu, 2022; Colao et al., 2020; Edge, 2020; Outhwaite & Gulliford, 2020). In a recent article, 20 of the 26 states where data is available, graduation rates fell in 2021, and while further comprehensive national data will likely not be available until 2023, there are early indicators that this trend will continue (Barnum, 2023).

The combination of the continued high percentages of high school dropouts, the number of alternative schools housing a disproportionate number of marginalized communities, and emerging social issues, primarily the social and emotional impacts of COVID-19, indicates a need for research on the effectiveness of alternative schools as a form of dropout prevention (Dupéré et al., 2021; McDermott et al., 2019; Szlyk, 2020; Yavrutürk et al., 2020; Young-sik et al., 2018). Due to the wide variety of types of alternative schools' programs, it is imperative to isolate what specifically is effective in supporting students at risk of dropping out of school (Amitay & Rahav, 2020; Duke & Tenuto, 2020; Griffiths et al., 2019; Henderson et al., 2018; Hickman & Anderson, 2019; Joslyn et al., 2019; Newton et al., 2017; Trauth & Harris, 2019; Young-sik et al., 2018). The purpose of this study is to better understand alternative schools and how they support students at risk of dropping out. These schools house students who have been unsuccessful in school due to their academic struggles, behavior difficulties, and social and emotional challenges, making them an important sample for the study of school effectiveness from the student perspective (Ahn & Simpson, 2013; Poyrazli et al., 2008; K. Wilkerson et al.,

2016). Students in alternative schools are a vulnerable population due to their at-risk status, so for this study, only the perspectives of current 18- to 21year-old students will be included in the population. The goal of the study is to better understand if students who attend alternative schools in the Pacific Northwest were able to complete their education because of the self-determination elements present that were specific to the alternative school they attended. Furthermore, research that is focused on the quantitative measuring of students' perspectives of the effectiveness of alternative schools as a form of dropout prevention is needed to add and support the current primarily qualitative research on alternative schools (Cantey, 2022; Fortner, 2022).

Background and Theoretical Framework

Historically, the tracking of high schools' dropouts began in the 1960's through the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2021b). There was a pattern of consistent dropout rate throughout the decades following. Starting in 2010, there has been a steady decline in the dropout rate. The dropout rate has consistently declined, but the numbers for students from American Indian/Alaska Native, Hispanic, and Black households are significantly higher than those of other ethnicities. The most recent NCES dropout rate was collected in 2021 and was 5.2%, which is lower than previous years (NCES, 2021a). A potential correlation and reason for the consistent decrease in dropout rates is the implementation of alternative schools. Alternative schools became a prominent fixture in United States Education in the late 1960s to assist in dropout prevention and to serve those who were not successful in traditional schools (Doll et al., 2013; Lange & Sletten, 2002; Vogell, 2017).

Students who attend alternative schools must qualify as at-risk students, which can include students who participate in criminal activity, substance abuse, truancy, are victims of

poverty, have experienced adverse childhood experiences (ACES), and racial inequity, all of which lead to educational barriers and credit deficiency (Afacan & Wilkerson, 2019; Aspiranti et al., 2021; Frank, 2019; McDermott et al., 2019; Rubens et al., 2019; Staff et al., 2020; Tierney, 2020). The term at-risk formerly refers to a student at risk of dropping out of high school and those students who lack the social, economic, or foundational skills to be successful in the traditional education setting (Churchill et al., 2021; Deli et al., 2021; McBath, 2018; Messner, 2018; Ohrt et al., 2020).

School engagement and belonging are strong indicators of student success in traditional and alternative settings (Hsieh et al., 2021; Novak, 2019; Walker & Graham, 2019; Yavrutürk et al., 2020). Both terms relate to the idea of students having a sense of ownership and belonging in their educational environment and the immediate success it has on student achievement and attendance (Moffatt & Riddle, 2021; Perzigian & Braun, 2020; Stevenson et al., 2021). When these concepts, ownership and belonging, are studied in an alternative school setting, beneficial findings can be discovered, including a better understanding of how to facilitate student engagement and retention. (Afacan & Wilkerson, 2019; Tierney, 2020; Yavrutürk et al., 2020).

Thirty-eight states have developed statutes that support the implementation of alternative programs to support students who have not been successful in traditional schools (Kannam & Weiss, 2019). More specifically, research has been conducted on alternative education and successful school strategies that support at-risk students, but there is a gap in the literature combining the concepts and assessing them from the alternative student's perspective in populations of mixed demographics, specifically a population that represents both rural and urban areas (Cantey, 2022; Farrelly & Daniels, 2014; Fortner, 2022). Many qualitative studies have been conducted in the United States on alternative schools but there have been no studies

on the alternative schools in the Pacific Northwest, which is defined as Idaho, Oregon, and

Washington (Cantey, 2022; Farrelly & Daniels, 2014; Fortner, 2022; Glavan, 2019).

The Pacific Northwest houses over 100 alternative programs in rural and urban areas.

These areas also include two states with dropout rates higher than the national average and one

that aligns with the national average dropout rate. NCES (2021a) indicates that Oregon and

Washington have a higher than U.S average of dropouts, with both being more than 6.5%. Idaho

closely follows, meeting the U.S average at 6.0%. Figure 1 illustrates the status dropout rate in

the United States.

Figure 1

NCES Status Dropout Rate Map
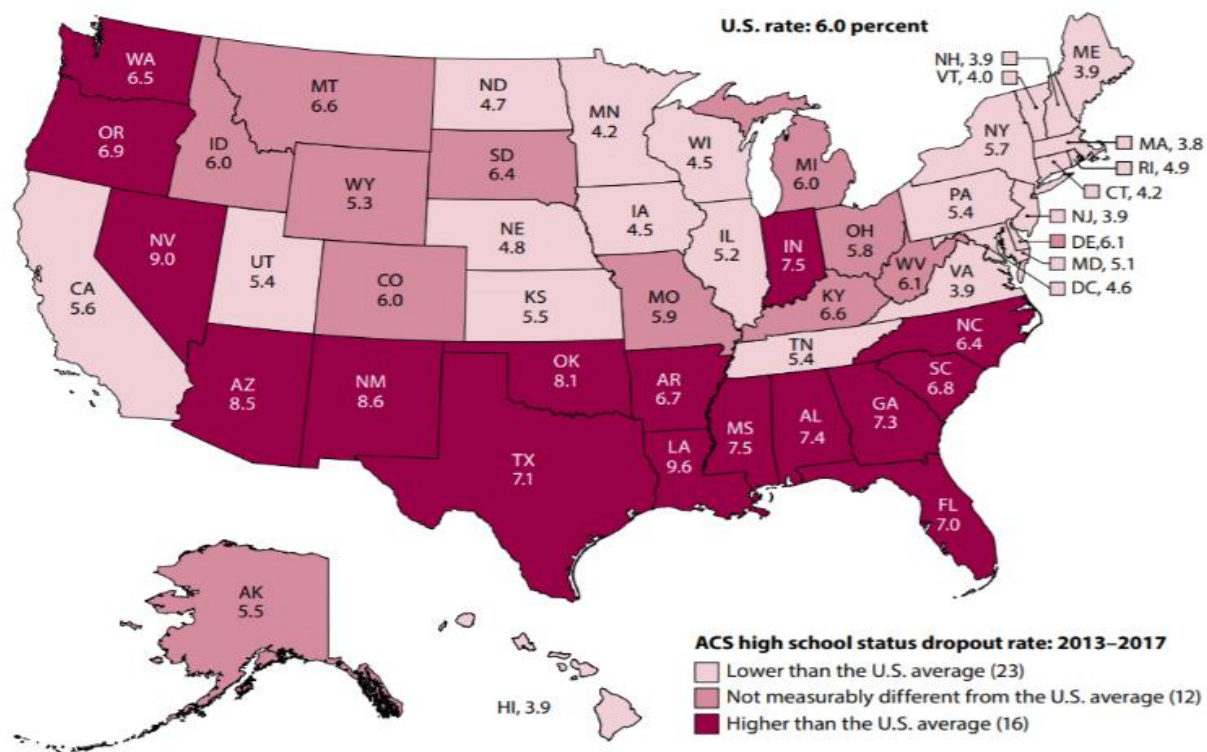
Note: The map above shows the state status dropout rates as provided by NCES (2021a).

No permission required.

Additionally, students in Idaho can drop out at age 16, while students are mandated to attend school in Washington and Oregon until they are 18. (NCES, 2021a). The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction in Washington (OSPI) collects annual annual data surrounding the dropout rate in Washington. In their 2022 report, they found that 85,240 students began the 9th grade in the 2018-2019 school year and 70,121 completed on time with their original cohort (Came, 2019). This is a dropout rate of approximately 18%. Specifically, 20.8% of the students dropping out of Washington schools are American Indian/Alaska Native. Hispanic, Black, and Native Hawaiian students, as well as those students who identify with two or more races, are also represented in the dropout pool, with each race ranging between 9.8-12.9%, while only 9.7% of students who drop out are white (Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction [OSPI], 2019). Students were also classified into certain state-identified student groups, including foster care, homeless, low income, migrant, multilingual learner, and special education students (Came, 2019). Similarly, Oregon has a higher percentage of American Indian/Alaska Native dropouts than other demographics, accounting for 7.83% of all Oregon dropouts, and 11.8% of Oregon dropouts were indicating homelessness (Oregon Department of Education [ODE], 2023). With an overall completion rate of 81.3, Oregon is behind Washington, which has a completion rate of 82.3% (Miller, 2023; Velez, 2023). Idaho falls behind both states with an overall completion rate for 2022 of 79.9%. Idaho schools have shown a consistent uptick in high school dropout rates, with an overall dropout rate of 20.1% in 2022, the highest it has been since 2015. The dropout demographics are similar to those seen in the other Pacific Northwest states, with students who are economically disadvantaged, with disabilities, in foster care, experiencing homelessness, English learners, or migratory having graduation rates below

the state average. This was also true for students who are American Indian or Alaskan Native, Black, Hispanic or Latino, two or more races, or male (Flandro, 2023).

The national and state data provided and the diverse populations in these states solidify the need for research on the Pacific Northwest focusing on alternative schools and student dropouts in these states. Furthermore, this study focuses on a large but diverse demographic group of current 18-to 21-year-old attendees from the Pacific Northwest through a quantitative lens to help identify current and emerging successful factors related to self-determination in alternative schools that are instrumental in preventing dropout and helping students successfully complete school.

Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework is the foundation on which a study is built, and without it, the direction of the study is unclear (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). Self-Determination Theory (SDT) was used as a theoretical framework to guide this current study. Self-Determination Theory is defined as a framework for understanding the factors that promote motivation specifically and when applied to education, focuses on students' engagement in learning, if a student values education, and a students' confidence in being successful in school (Deci et al., 1991; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Self-Determination Theory is focused on factors that influence student learning, such as human motivation and wellbeing, both intrinsic and extrinsic, and more narrowly focuses on autonomy, competence, and relatedness/belonging (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). SDT is based on the belief that human beings are inherently proactive and endowed with a natural tendency to learn, and that social conditions and environments have a significant impact on a person's ability to learn (Howard et al., 2021; Ryan & Deci, 2009). SDT emphasizes students taking credit and accountability for their own learning (Chiu, 2022; Farrelly & Daniels, 2014). Using this

theoretical framework allows a focus on how Self-Determination Theory is rooted in student motivation, and how students' connection and engagement lead to student retention and completion (Close, 2001). For this study, SDT is embedded into the survey questions to better understand from the student perspective how levels of self-determination factors are correlated with alternative school students.

SDT comprises behavior regulation, human needs, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Many studies have used Self-Determination Theory as a basis for assessing students' perceptions of schools and to look exclusively at motivation and its impact on engagement (Afacan & Wilkerson, 2019; Howard et al., 2021; Krettenauer & Curren, 2020; Van Ryzin et al., 2009). Specifically, SDT theorizes that when a student experiences autonomy, competence, and relatedness, they have increased intrinsic motivation and, overall, more engagement in school (Ryan & Deci, 2009) (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

Three Innate Needs of Self-Determination
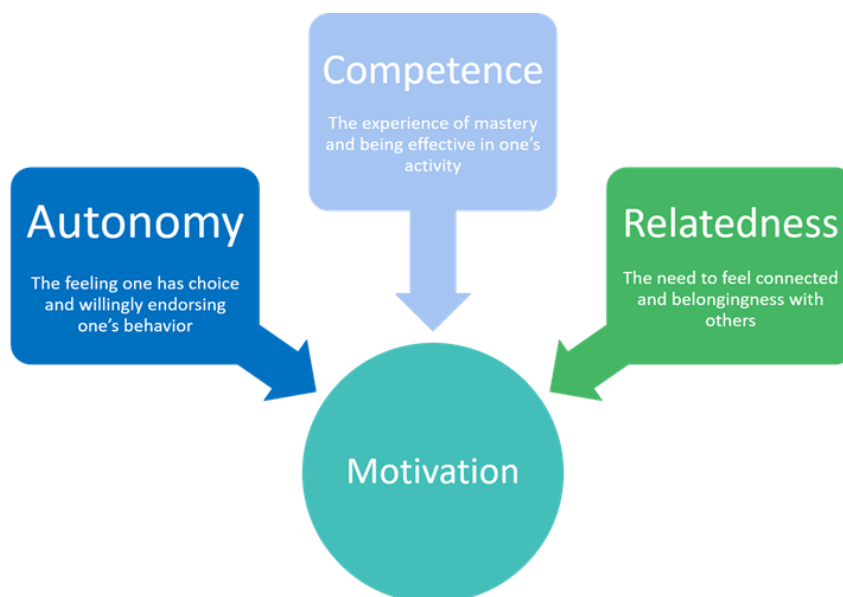
(Mayo et al., 2022; Ntoumanis et al., 2021)

Autonomy is focused on one's ability to choose and, in a school environment, can look like allowing someone to have control over their own choices. Competence is a feeling of mastery and, in a school setting, it is evident when there are a variety of choices and chances for students to find success and try new, challenging things. Relatedness is a student's sense of connection, and in a school, how well a student connects with students and teachers shows evidence of relatedness (Mayo et al., 2022; Ntoumanis et al., 2021). SDT and the three focused elements of autonomy, relatedness, and competence are an appropriate framework to use to better understand the alternative school population because most alternative school students show disengagement from public schools and increased social and emotional challenges, potentially more so now because of the impact on motivation for students since COVID-19 (Ewing et al., 2021; Flores & Brown, 2019; Glavan, 2019; Vera et al., 2016; Zeinalipour, 2022). In previous studies, student voice in alternative education has been one of the more commonly used lenses for understanding the effectiveness of alternative schools. (Afacan & Wilkerson, 2019; Cantey, 2022; Ewing et al., 2021; Glavan, 2019; Zeinalipour, 2022). Recent dissertations on alternative schools have used a qualitative approach to gauge what the students in these alternative school's view as effective (Cantey, 2022; Farrelly & Daniels, 2014; Fortner, 2022). Furthermore, research indicates that the level at which students are engaged in their own learning and education has an impact on their success, which shows that there is a connection between students being motivated, feeling heard, and being engaged in alternative settings (Conner et al., 2022; Flores & Brown, 2019). Students who are attending alternative schools are at risk of leaving school for reasons that can be directly tied to a disconnect from education (Amitay & Rahav, 2020; Cockerill, 2019). Self-Determination Theory as the theoretical framework could

provide a base understanding of alternative schools through a lens of autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

Research Questions

The purpose of this quantitative study is to understand if 18- to 21-year-old students in attendance at alternative schools have a sense of autonomy, relatedness, and competency. Additionally, this study aims to understand the relationship between the demographics of students attending alternative schools and the components of Self-Determination Theory. While there has been previous research done on alternative schools from the student perspective, the literature indicates a need for further research on a larger, more diverse sample size and from the quantitative perspective (Cantey, 2022; Doll et al., 2013; Farrelly, 2013; Glavan, 2019; Huerta & Hernández, 2021; Morrissette, 2018; Tierney, 2020). The following research questions were developed with the goal of understanding the profile of students who are currently attending alternative schools in the Pacific Northwest, but more importantly, how they perceive their experience at alternative schools through the lens of Self-Determination Theory.

1. Do 18- to 21-year-old students attending Pacific Northwest alternative schools have a strong sense of autonomy, relatedness, and competence?

2. Do demographic factors gender, free and reduced lunch, special education services and ethnicity have an impact on self-determination factors; autonomy, relatedness, and competence for 18- to 21-year-old students at Pacific Northwest alternative schools?

Description of Terms

The author has provided definitions of several terms that will aid in the understanding of the study. The following terms are reflective of what is found in the literature on this topic, as well as others that are important for the understanding of this study:

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES). Adverse childhood experiences, or ACEs, are potentially traumatic events that occur in childhood (0-17 years). These traumatic events, depending on their level of severity and how many ACEs a child experiences, have a direct impact on brain development and affect how the body responds to stress, which could have detrimental long-term effects, including, but not limited to, medical issues and generational social and emotional issues (U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2024).

Alternative Education. Defined as a public elementary/secondary school that (a) addresses the needs of students who typically cannot be met in a regular school; (b) provides nontraditional education; (c) serves as an adjunct to a regular school, or (d) falls outside the categories of regular education, special education, or career/ technical education" (NCES, 2021b).

At-risk Youth. Students not experiencing success in school who are more likely to drop out of school (Donnelly, 1987).

Academic Focused Alternative Schools. Alternative schools designed to provide academic support to students who experience credit deficiencies or are behind in school (K. Wilkerson et al., 2016).

Autonomy. The need to feel that one's behavior and resulting outcomes are self-determined, or self-caused, as opposed to being influenced or controlled by outside forces (Johnston & Finney, 2010).

Basic Needs Satisfaction at Work Scale. This scale assesses the satisfaction of employees' basic needs in the workplace (Johnston & Finney, 2010).

Behavior Focused Alternative Schools. Alternative schools that serve students unsuccessful in other school settings due to low academic achievement coupled with significant behavior challenges (K. Wilkerson et al., 2016).

Completers. The term includes students who achieved a high school diploma or another form of high school equivalency (NCES, 2021a).

Competency. An individual's need to feel effective and capable of performing tasks at varying levels of difficulty (Johnston & Finney, 2010).

Dropout. Students who leave school before they complete their high school education (NCES, 2021a).

Event Dropout Rate. The event dropout rate is the percentage of 15- to 24-year-olds in grades 10 through 12 who leave high school between the beginning of one school year and the beginning of the next (NCES, 2021a).

Free and Reduced Lunch. During the school year, qualifying children can receive free and reduced-cost meals while at school (Idaho Department of Health and Welfare [IDHW], n.d.). Students qualifying for free and reduced lunch are an indicator of poverty and the inability to pay for their meals, and this provides an index for schools on low-income students (NCES, 2021b).

Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). Fair and equitable education is ensured through a variety of federal mandates and educational policies. FAPE is an education policy that ensures that students are provided education at public expense (free); are provided in conformity with an appropriately developed individualized education program, or IEP (appropriate); are provided under public supervision and direction (public); and include an appropriate preschool, elementary, and secondary education that meets the education standards, regulations, and administrative policies and procedures issued by the State Department of Education (Idaho State Department of Education [SDE], 2018).

Pacific Northwest. Commonly defined as Oregon, Washington, and Idaho (Misachi, n.d.).

Positive Behavior Incentive System. A function-based prevention and intervention approach that seeks to replace challenging, disruptive, and aggressive behaviors with prosocial skills (Griffiths et al., 2019).

Pull Out. Responsibilities that compete with students' education, such as caring for a relative or needing money to support their families (McDermott et al., 2019).

Push Out. Includes failing classes, suspension or expulsions, and teachers or school staff who pushed students out (McDermott et al., 2019).

Engagement. According to the National Association of Independent Schools (National Association of Independent Schools [NAIS], 2018), engagement is defined as meaningful student involvement through the learning environment (Stevenson et al., 2021).

School Climate. The National School Climate Center broadly defines school climate as the quality and character of school life and is a phenomenon strongly associated with student achievement (Perzigian & Braun, 2020).

Status Dropout Rate. Percentage of students who are 16 to 24 who have not completed high school or some other form of high school credential (i.e., GED) (NCES, 2021b).

Relatedness. The need to feel connected to, supported by, or cared for by other people (Johnston & Finney, 2010).

Significance of Study

Educators, administrators, and those involved with educational policy aim to meet the needs of all students. Currently, there are students in the Pacific Northwest that are not finding success in school, both in the traditional and alternative settings, as evidenced by the graduation rates of the last four years (see Table 1).

Table 1

All Student Graduation Rates in the Pacific Northwest 2019-2022

	2018-2019 SY	2020-2021 SY	2021-2022 SY
Idaho	80.5%	82.1%	79.9%
Washington	80.9%	82.9%	82.3%
Oregon	82.6%	80.6%	81.3%
National Average	94.8%	94.7%	94.8%

Note. This table illustrates the dropout rates from the Pacific Northwest from 2018-2023. All data was collected from the State Department of Education website for each state (Came, 2019; SDE, 2018; Oregon Department of Education, 2023)

This study will provide districts in the PNW with crucial information on alternative school students, and the data collected will also illuminate if self-determination is a successful strategy in aiding student motivation and retention. This is an important step in the process toward ensuring all students complete high school. Current research exists on who high school dropouts are, what are some of the social, economic, and personal challenges they face are, and how that impacts their ability to be successful in school (Amitay & Rahav, 2018; Hoge & Rubinstein-Avila, 2014; Nada et al., 2020; Tierney, 2020). Additionally, there are several emerging studies focused on traditional schools and the potential choice to have a student placed in an alternative school and potential pitfalls of recent education-impacting events. Specifically, students are facing new challenges due to COVID-19 (Antoni, 2021; Bera et al., 2022; Bouter et al., 2022; Colao et al., 2020). Currently, no research has specifically focused on the Pacific Northwest alternative school population from a quantitative perspective. In addition, the majority of the current research on alternative schools is focused singularly on the qualitative approach to alternative student success. These factors, aligned with the percentages of high school dropouts and at-risk students and states using alternative education as an option for students falling into

these categories, indicate a need for research on Pacific Northwest alternative schools. This will allow for an overarching understanding of practices that are effective with this population from the current attendees who are finding success in these programs. This could lead to a greater understanding of alternative education and its ability to support at-risk youth and inform future implementation of effective interventions for this population. These findings can also impact traditional school approaches to at-risk youth within their settings, by informing if SDT in alternative school aided in their retention and in their potential completion of school. The findings of this study would benefit students, parents, administrators, and policymakers.

Overview of Research Methods

This current research examined Pacific Northwest alternative 18- to 21-year-old students who have are on currently attending alternative schools. The researcher sought and gained approval from the Institutional Review Board at Northwest Nazarene University (see Appendix A). The researcher used representative sampling for this study, which allows for a greater understanding of the larger population of students attending alternative schools (Urdan, 2016). To gain participants for this study, the snowballing method was used. Snowballing is the practice of involving others in the collection of participants, specifically superintendents or principals aiding in student identification (Creswell, 2019). The researcher contacted 45 districts in the Pacific Northwest to gain access to their schools (see Appendix B). Once permission was granted, the researcher traveled to or put in place an in-person liaison to administer the electronic survey, which housed the informed consent and collected demographic data. To answer the research questions, quantitative data was collected through an adapted version of the Basic Needs Satisfaction at Work Scale (BNSW-S) survey (see Appendix C). The researcher has permission to use this survey (see Appendix D). This adapted BNSW-S survey assesses the

student's perceived satisfaction of autonomy, relatedness, and competence in their school setting. The instrument used in this study was previously developed, validated, and used in a similar study using Self-Determination Theory (Cantey, 2022; Farrelly & Daniels, 2014). Demographic data was collected to further understand the population of students attending alternative schools. All the data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and one-way MANOVA to assess the relationships between all demographic factors and student perceptions from the survey. The questions on the survey are scored utilizing the quantitative Likert style approach to numerically quantify students' feelings about school and provide specific information about the subscales associated with SDT. The students' Likert median scores were then compared to the demographic data to understand the relationships between each of the demographic variables and the students' school experience. This allowed for an analysis of the demographic variables and how they had an impact on the students' alternative school experience. The study was designed to analyze from a large-scale quantitative perspective what retains and aids in the success of at-risk youth in school at alternative schools in the Pacific Northwest. This study reveals if relatedness, competence, and autonomy have a positive impact on alternative school students. All these findings will add to the primarily qualitative literature on students' experiences in alternative schools as well as provide updated demographic data on current potential dropouts and alternative school attendees.

Conclusion

Dropout rates have decreased, but the decrease has not been consistent, which indicates a need for further research on dropout prevention programs (Amitay & Rahav, 2020; Hickman & Anderson, 2019; Staff et al., 2020). Historically, alternative schools have been one of the main dropout prevention programs in the United States and in other countries (Joslyn et al., 2019;

Newton et al., 2017; Trauth & Harris, 2019). While studies have been conducted in these schools, there is a need for further research on these schools in areas yet to be studied, such as the Pacific Northwest. This quantitative study aimed to better understand the perspective of current students, all 18 years of age or older, of alternative education programs in the states of Idaho, Oregon, and Washington. This sample has not been specifically studied and will provide valuable insight into alternative schools in these states and others. There is a wide breadth of literature focusing on who high school dropouts are and what internal and external factors lead to potential dropouts, covered in Chapter Two of this dissertation. This chapter shows the research that illustrates and supports the concepts that students at risk of dropping out of high school are often disengaged from school and struggle with social and emotional issues (Conner et al., 2022; Howard et al., 2021; Zeldin et al., 2018). Additionally, the chapter details how a student dropping out of school negatively impacts the student and society (Cavaco et al., 2021; Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011). Chapter Two will be followed by an overview of the study conducted in Chapter Three, which will detail the participants and site selection of this study, as well as provide information on the instrument utilized to gather quantitative data. Following this will be an in-depth explanation of the analytical methods used in this study to better understand the effectiveness of alternative schools from the student's perspective through a lens of Self-Determination Theory. Chapter Four will illustrate this analysis's findings, including the specific demographics of students currently attending alternative schools in the Pacific Northwest and the result of the quantitative survey Likert response. Finally, in Chapter Five, the study will address the connection between the research questions, theoretical framework, and the findings of the study and explain the overall importance of the study and how these findings add to the literature available on high school dropout, alternative schools, and at-risk youth.

Chapter II: Review of the Literature

In 2021, the United States' dropout rate for high school students was 5.2%, and that year, there were 2.0 million dropouts between the ages of 16 and 24 (NCES, 2021a). Dropout is defined as students who leave school before they complete their high school education, which is the opposite of a completer, who is someone who has successfully completed their high school path through traditional, alternative, or GED pathways (NCES, 2021a; Runkle, 2022; Zengin, 2021). The age of dropout varies by state, but in some states, students can drop out as early as age 16 (NCES, 2021a). Students who are at risk of dropping out of school struggle with a variety of internal and external factors, and certain populations are more susceptible than others (Foreman-Murray et al., 2022; Morrissette, 2018; Ramsdal & Wynn, 2022). Studies have shown that students at risk of dropping out of high school are often disengaged from school and struggle with social and emotional issues (Conner et al., 2022; Howard et al., 2021; Zeldin et al., 2018). If a student drops out of school, it negatively impacts the student and society (Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011). Students who do not successfully complete school can experience a variety of health, financial, and emotional issues that impact the people around them and put stress on the community they live in (Cavaco et al., 2021). Since the early 1900's, alternative schools have been used to support students who are not successful in the traditional school setting (Cantey, 2022; Fortner, 2022; Hofer et al., 2021). Alternative schools are programs tailored to meet the unique needs of at-risk students through credit recovery, social and emotional programs, and flexible scheduling (Foley & Pang, 2006; Franklin et al., 2007; Mills et al., 2017). Alternative education and the student's experiences at their schools have been qualitatively assessed in sections of the United States and other countries to understand what makes these students and schools successful (Cantey, 2022; Foley & Pang, 2006; Fortner, 2022; Glavan, 2019;

Morrissette, 2018). There is a gap in the literature focusing on the alternative school experience from a quantitative perspective. There is a need for further research on the near-completer perspectives on the effectiveness of alternative schools in the Pacific Northwest due to their experience in schools and nearness to successful completion. The following review of literature will provide a description of Self-Determination Theory, the theoretical framework for this study, a profile of students who commonly drop out, and an overview of alternative schools.

Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework is considered the blueprint for inquiry and provides a guide and direction for research design (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). For this study, the theoretical framework is the Self -Determination Theory with a specific focus on the Basic Psychological Needs Theory. Psychologists Richard Ryan and Edward Deci are the authors of the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) of motivation. Self-Determination Theory is a social cognitive theory focused on behaviors and whether they are chosen or forced, specifically if they are intrinsic or extrinsic (Hofer et al., 2021). Self-Determination Theory has adapted and grown to encompass six mini theories: Cognitive Evaluation Theory, Organismic Integration Theory, Causality Orientation Theory, Basic Psychological Needs Theory, Goal Contents Theory, and Relationship Motivation Theory (Krettenauer & Curren, 2020). Self-Determination Theory, when applied to education, focuses on students' engagement in learning, students' value of education, and the students' confidence in their ability to succeed in school (Deci et al., 1991) (see Figure 3). SDT consists of behavior regulation, human needs, intrinsic motivation, and an understanding of extrinsic motivation. SDT differs from other motivation theories in behavior regulation (Ryan & Deci, 2009). While most motivation theories focus on what motivates a person to do things, SDT focuses on the nuances of intentionality versus motivation (Deci et al., 1991). Specifically, the

theory separates self-determined and controlled intentional regulation; self-determined is a choice to regulate, whereas controlled is often a choice to defy or comply (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Figure 3

Self-Determination Theory
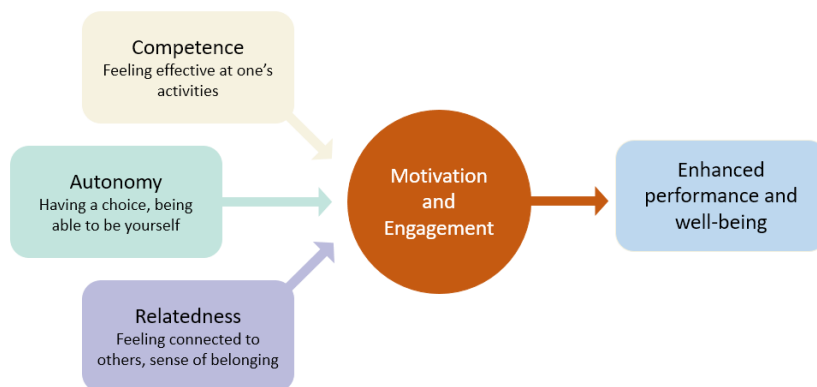
Note. Ryan & Deci, 2017

There are several types of motivation, both intrinsic and extrinsic, that are relevant to this theory (Deci et al., 1991). For this theory's purpose, intrinsic motivation is the desire to accomplish something for one's satisfaction. Furthermore, these ideals are the basis of SDT because it explicitly states that some motivations are internal and that they come from a self-imposed place (Alivernini & Lucidi, 2011). Extrinsic motivation was not originally a part of SDT; after further research, four types of extrinsic motivation are pertinent in the understanding of SDT: external, introjected, identified, and integrated forms of regulation (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009; sp& Deci, 2009). External regulation is the concept of students doing things because of an outside reward, making it the lowest form of SDT. Identified regulation is the idea that if something is valued and there is meaning to the action and direct results, someone is motivated to do it. This directly applies to Self-Determination Theory as it is an extrinsically applied motivation, but it causes an internal motivation to occur (Ryan & Deci, 2009). Lastly, integrated

forms of regulation are two types of extrinsic motivators that tie together to form a more inherent, almost internal motivation. Internal and integrated still differ in how internal is self-imposed, whereas the base of integrated is extrinsic (Deci et al., 1991).

Basic Psychological Needs Theory (BPNT), which is a theory associated with SDT, illustrates motivation through the SDT subscales of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Krettenauer & Curren, 2020). Autonomy is a crucial element of Self-Determination Theory due to its direct connection to intrinsic motivation; SDT theorizes that students who have autonomy in schools are more likely to be successful because they are intrinsically motivated to succeed (Hofer et al., 2021; Krettenauer & Curren, 2020). Competence is defined as feeling confident in one's ability, specifically, a student feeling that they can participate in the educational environment and succeed in it (Howard et al., 2021; Krettenauer & Curren, 2020; Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). Relatedness in SDT and BPNT suggests that students make a connection with the school and the material taught (Van Ryzin et al., 2009). Relatedness and belonging are used interchangeably in the literature due to the similarities in their definitions (Cockerill, 2019; Keyes, 2019).

SDT suggests that these human needs are essential to students' motivation in schools. Specifically, the theory supports that the needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness must be met for students to be appropriately motivated and successful in school (Howard et al., 2021; Krettenauer & Curren, 2020). Many studies have used Self-Determination Theory or theories based on the analysis of the principles present in SDT to assess students' perceptions of schools, and a few were utilized to look exclusively at how they relate to motivation (Krettenauer & Curren, 2020; Van Ryzin et al., 2009). Studies have found that student achievement and outcomes were positively correlated with Self-Determination Theory (Howard et al., 2021;

Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). Other studies indicated that students reporting high levels of self-determination had better GPAs at the university level and were more successful in online learning settings (Brockelman, 2009; Chiu, 2022). These findings indicate that a study utilizing Self-Determination Theory to understand students attending alternative schools' perspectives on their educational experience could help in understanding the overall effectiveness of those schools and their students' success. A few studies have also utilized Self-Determination Theory to look at alternative schools and their students and have indicated that the participants experienced many connections to competence, autonomy, and relatedness, and that it helped them to complete their education or find success during their time at an alternative school (Farrelly & Daniels, 2014; Hofer et al., 2021; Statos, 2022). These studies were conducted on one or two alternative high schools, which indicates a need for a study to be conducted on multiple alternative schools to increase generalizability in relation to the effectiveness of SDT in alternative school settings.

Autonomy

Autonomy is a form of intrinsic motivation and refers to performing an activity for the sake of doing it and the positivity it may bring (Ryan & Deci, 2009). Autonomy refers to a person feeling as though they have a choice. The opposite experience is feeling controlled in your decisions and choices (Mayo et al., 2022; Ntoumanis et al., 2021). Autonomous types of extrinsic motivation, as well as intrinsic motivation, lead to positive outcomes for students; SDT autonomous motivation is seen as a precursor to students' mastery and performance. The more students take pleasure in or value learning activities, the more they experience positive outcomes at school (Guay, 2022). Perceived autonomy is another element of improving student behavior and motivation. More precisely, the expected relations between autonomy support and autonomous motivation, and between autonomous motivation and outcomes, have been

supported in a variety of contexts. Environments that have a culture of autonomy support provide students with choices and the freedom to act on their own (Statos, 2022). Researchers have shown that autonomous motivation predicts if students will work towards individual mastery by working on their own skills, and a lack of autonomy can indicate mastery avoidance, in which the student strives to avoid learning (Ciani et al., 2011). Positive examples in schools of autonomy include teachers praising signs of improvement and mastery and creating opportunities for students to work in their own way. Students with autonomy-focused teachers not only show increases in autonomy, but also heightened levels of classroom engagement, school persistence, creativity, psychological well-being, deep learning, and self-regulated learning (Hofer et al., 2021).

Relatedness and Belonging

Belonging or relatedness refers to the need to feel connected to others (Ryan & Deci, 2009). This need for relatedness includes a feeling of closeness with significant others and a desire to feel a part of a group (Ryan & Deci, 2017). The human need to belong has been identified as one of the most important human motivations, and fulfilling this need can have a major impact on how people think and behave (Cockerill, 2019). Belongingness becomes especially important to overall well-being as students enter their adolescent years. At this age, the ability to establish and maintain positive peer relations is directly connected to higher levels of sociability, perceived competence, and self-esteem, and reduced hostility, anxiousness, and depression (Van Ryzin et al., 2009). Belongingness in school can also help students to adjust to new surroundings and have a general sense of well-being. One way teachers can accomplish this is by encouraging students to: work with one another to achieve goals; help each other with tasks; and reflect on and talk about one another's experiences. (Dubow et al., 1991). Another

example could be when a student has a gift for mathematics, and when taught or raised in an environment where a sense of belonging or relatedness is present, the natural mathematical ability will flourish rather than diminish (Deci et al., 1991). Belonging need satisfaction is correlated with many positive outcomes, many of which are supportive of at-risk youth in schools (Hofer et al., 2021).

Competence

A sense of efficacy, otherwise known as competence, is an integral part of the process of becoming internally motivated (Statos, 2022). Competence refers to a student's perception that they can impact outcomes and achieve goals (Ryan & Deci, 2009). The need for competence is defined as the desire to interact productively with one's environment (Guay, 2022). When individuals feel competent, they are more likely to feel self-determined because they have experienced the link between what they do and what they are able to accomplish (Ryan & Deci, 2009).

Guay (2022) conducted a study that indicated elementary school children who perceive themselves as competent at school accomplish a higher level of education later in their lives. Students are more likely to participate in activities if they feel that they can do well in (Deci et al., 1991). Classrooms that promote competence allow students' opportunities for their choices, interests, and needs to be a part of their classroom activities as opposed to being structured with inflexibility, intimidation, and control (Hofer et al., 2021). Students' sense of competence is maximized when teachers' expectations are structured around students' abilities and students are provided with clear direction about classroom expectations, consequences, and how to be successful in activities (Hofer et al., 2021). Competence in the classroom is supported by educators' bringing in learning activities that are challenging, to allow students to test and to

increase and strengthen their academic capabilities (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). Students need to feel able to be successful in their environment for competency to exist in the school setting (Krettenauer & Curren, 2020).

Due to the alignment of this theoretical framework with student engagement and success, Self-Determination Theory was chosen as the theoretical framework for this study. The primary focus of this study is to better understand alternative school students' experiences, and by using the theoretical framework of Self-Determination Theory, more information will be gathered on the crucial elements that alternative school students are finding present in these alternative settings. Students who attend alternative schools are often dropouts from traditional schools or were at risk of dropping out (Glavan, 2019; Zengin, 2021). The exclusive lens of the Self-Determination Theory, being focused on engagement through the components of autonomy, relatedness, and competence allows for a deeper understanding of what specifically is retaining students in alternative school settings.

Demographics of Recurring High School Dropouts

Understanding who drops out of high school is crucial to understanding alternative schools' clientele. Specifically, one of the qualifications for attending alternative schools is to be at risk, which is defined as students who are potentially at risk of dropping out of school (Amitay & Rahav, 2020; Donnelly, 1987). Students can qualify as at risk for multiple reasons, including but not limited to credit deficiency, attendance issues, and legal issues, and are often the students who will be the least able to succeed in a traditional school setting (Ahn & Simpson, 2013; Szlyk, 2020). Current literature on students attending alternative schools suggests that many of the students are either male, special needs, minorities, or students who qualified for free and reduced lunch (Afacan & Wilkerson, 2019; Frank, 2019). Further research needs to be conducted

to fully understand how demographic data contributes to a better understanding of which students are unsuccessful in schools and which students are being placed in alternative schools (Rubens et al., 2019; Staff et al., 2020). Understanding why students are not successful in general education is also informative for the work being done in alternative schools to help all students complete their high school education (Nada et al., 2020). The following sections review the literature around gender, special needs, and minorities to better understand the demographics of the populations attending alternative schools and isolate how these factors may contribute to a student not being successful in school.

Gender and Ethnicity

Gender is not an all-encompassing factor that indicates if a student will be at risk or not, but current literature suggests that gender can be an informative factor in understanding the challenges faced by students in school (Cavaco et al., 2021; Poyrazli et al., 2008). Males are more likely than females to face in-school disciplinary issues that lead them to drop out of school; males have been cited for more school suspensions, and participating in behavior that would lead to expulsion (Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Dameron et al., 2019). Male students are also indicated to have more issues with classroom disruptions, poor attendance, and disengagement from educational settings (McDermott et al., 2019; Rubens et al., 2019; Zengin, 2021). Research indicates that females at risk of dropping out are impacted by experiencing nonacademic issues such as bullying and family problems but are less likely to drop out of school (McDermott et al., 2019; Walker & Graham, 2019). Females who drop out of school struggle with teen pregnancy, attendance tied to taking care of other family members, or social issues with friends that negatively impact their educational experiences (Dupéré et al., 2019; Zengin, 2021). Current literature suggests that gender can be a predicting factor regarding dropout and alternative school

placements; further research would add to the understanding of the success of both genders in alternative schools (Cavaco et al., 2021; Dameron et al., 2019). While data is limited on the gender differences for dropout in Idaho, Washington, and Oregon collectively these states report over a one percent difference between male and female dropout numbers, with the males being on the higher end (ODE, 2023)

In 2020, the dropout rate nationally was higher for males, specifically, dropout rates were higher for males than for females for Hispanic and Black students, but there was not a noticeable difference between students who were classified as white, two or more races, or Asian (NCES, 2021a). As shown in Table 2, in 2021, males were more present in dropout statistics than females across all races (NCES, 2021a).

Table 2

Status Dropout Rates of 16- to 24-Year-Olds, by Race/Ethnicity and Gender: 2021

Race/Ethnicity	Male	Female
Total	6.1 (0.07)	4.2 (0.06)
American Indian/Alaskan Native	12.1 (1.05)	8.2 (0.84)
Asian	2.5 (0.22)	1.7 (0.16)
Black	7.2 (0.24)	4.5 (0.19)
Hispanic	9.5 (0.17)	6.0 (0.16)
Pacific Islander	7.4 (2.11)	7.8 (1.86)
White	4.6 (0.09)	3.5 (0.08)
Two or more races	5.9 (0.31)	3.8 (0.27)

Note. This table illustrates the demographic data for status dropouts in 2021. No permission required (NCES, 2021a).

High school dropout and alternative school's enrollment rates show a disproportionate number of minorities, specifically Hispanic and Black students who are attending these schools (Frank, 2019; Huerta & Hernández, 2021; Long et al., 2018).

As is indicated in Table 2, studies have been able to isolate that the ethnicities experiencing the lowest dropout rates are Asian and white, and all the other races are overrepresented in the dropout population, as well as alternative school enrollment (Perzigian, 2018; Vanderhaar et al., 2014). Understanding the ethnic demographic of students who drop out of school and attend alternative schools is crucial to support these populations in their educational journey (Bianchi et al., 2021; Trinidad, 2022). Additionally, students who are attending alternative schools due to being pushed out of traditional schools or dropping out are more commonly Hispanic, Native American, or Black (Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Perzigian, 2018). Included in this are the issues faced by first- and second-generation dropouts; students who have parents that have immigrated to the country and did not complete school struggle to find success in education and have a higher likelihood of dropping out (Archambault et al., 2017). Research indicates there is a higher population of students of color dropping out due to negative bias from educators, as well as a fear in public education of white parents and retaliation if their students are not successful in school, as well as low resources in schools that serve predominantly students of color (Sarette, 2022).

Special Education Population

Schools in the United States are required federally to provide a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) for all students. This is defined as students being provided at public expense (free); being provided in conformity with an appropriately developed Individualized Education Program (IEP) and including an appropriate education that meets the education standards, regulations, and administrative policies and procedures issued by the State Department of Education (SDE, 2018). By law, schools are to provide students with access to education regardless of the limitations or challenges they may experience. Students attending

school experience various challenges that make access to educational material challenging, such as ADHD, emotional disturbance, mobility issues, and other impairments (Ballard & Bender, 2022; Hoge & Rubinstein-Avila, 2014; Ohrt et al., 2020). A disproportionate number of special needs students end up unsuccessful in traditional schools and are placed in alternative school settings due to their behavior challenges in traditional education settings (Afacan & Wilkerson, 2019; Flores & Brown, 2019; Foreman-Murray et al., 2022; K. L. Wilkerson et al., 2018). The dropout rate for students with the previously mentioned disabilities is 10.7%, which is more than twice that of the dropout rate of students without disabilities, 4.7% in 2019 (NCES, 2021a). Alternative schools and dropout students often fall into the category of emotional behavior disorder/disturbance and students with specific learning disabilities (Foreman-Murray et al., 2022; Hoge & Rubinstein-Avila, 2014; K. Wilkerson et al., 2016). Students at risk of dropping out are placed in alternative schools to support their academics and help with behavior concerns (Ahn & Simpson, 2013; K. Wilkerson et al., 2016; Zengin, 2021). The most common disabilities seen in alternative schools relating to special education are emotional disturbance, anxiety, or Other Health Impairments (OHI), which translate to issues with traditional educational attainment (Afacan & Wilkerson, 2019; Ahn & Simpson, 2013). These students have often struggled to be successful in the traditional school setting and, therefore, are placed in alternative school settings to assist them with the completion of their education, indicating a need for further research on how alternative schools are assisting these students successfully from the student perspective (Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Hoge & Rubinstein-Avila, 2014).

Poverty and Free and Reduced Lunch

Students qualifying for free and reduced lunch is an indicator of poverty and an inability to pay for their meals, and it provides an index for schools on low-income students (NCES,

2023). This indicator is used in the literature available on dropout and alternative education to better understand how poverty impacts students who are not finding success in school. More specifically, extensive literature indicates that alternative schools serve a high population of students who qualify for free and reduced lunch (Churchill et al., 2021; Long et al., 2018; Rubens et al., 2019; Young-sik et al., 2018). This indicates that alternative schools serve students living in homes at or near the poverty level. Students who grow up in poverty often do not have access to the resources needed to succeed in school and are overall more at risk (Churchill et al., 2021)In both rural and urban areas, students who come from families that do not value education, struggle with poverty, and have limited access to social resources, struggle with completing school (Jordan et al., 1994; Mokoena & van Breda, 2021; Nita et al., 2021)

Internal and External Influences on Dropout

While a student's success in school can be predicted by looking at demographic information, the understanding of the external and internal influences that students have to navigate to succeed in school is even more enlightening. A student is at elevated risk of leaving school if they have been in close contact with someone who has dropped out of school in the last year, and students who experienced school-related stressors, family conflict, peer, and legal issues are also at risk (Dupéré et al., 2018, 2021). Specifically, students who struggle with social pressure and issues, substance exposure and use, having to work while in school, as well as challenging societal limitations to educational access, are more likely to not complete their education (Antoni, 2021; Johnson et al., 2019). These findings are significant because they allow school leaders to target students who have friends, romantic partners, or siblings who have dropped out, as well as understand the relationship between school, society, and students choosing to drop out (Staff et al., 2020).

A student is at an elevated risk of leaving school if they have been in close contact with someone who has dropped out of school in the last year, because the negative impacts of dropping out are not instantly apparent (Dupéré et al., 2021; Paraman & Hussain, 2022). Additionally, research shows that parents who do not value education or did not complete school themselves create a higher chance for dropout (Nita et al., 2021; Stacy et al., 2019). On the other hand, strong peer relationships and supportive families aid in the retention of students and their overall success in schools (Bianchi et al., 2021).

Another contributing factor to dropout can be a student who needs to have a job outside of school. Research supports that students who come from homes with a high level of poverty may be more likely to work while they attend school and be at higher risk for dropping out (Moro Egido & Navarro, 2023; Staff et al., 2020). Studies have shown that students who work intensively (more than 20 hours a week) while attending school may experience lower GPAs and that their odds of dropping out increase significantly (Doll et al., 2013; Staff et al., 2020; Warren & Cataldi, 2006).

Moreover, research shows that students who engage in illegal activities in high school are at a higher risk of dropping out (McDermott et al., 2019; Paraman & Hussain, 2022; Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009). Studies indicate that many alternative schoolteachers believe that students who attend alternative schools participate in criminal activities in rural and urban populations (Dupéré et al., 2019; Kennedy & Soutullo, 2018). In a 2020 study of three National Guard Youth Challenge residential alternative schools in Michigan, Georgia, and South Carolina ($n = 905$), it was revealed that 44% of students had court-related issues prior to attendance (Berk et al., 2020).

Substance abuse contributes to student dropout and is a common reason a student can be expelled from school or placed in an alternative program (Davis & McCaul, 1990; Goulet et al.,

2020; Johnson et al., 2019; Weybright et al., 2017). One study found that 47% of the 515 students at one alternative high school were considered low users of substances, and a fifth to a quarter of those students admitted to using alcohol, vapes, and marijuana (Johnson et al., 2019). Students attending alternative schools have been cited as being more likely to engage in substance abuse behaviors, putting themselves at risk of legal implications that may take them out of school or cause disengagement from school (Arpawong et al., 2015; Goulet et al., 2020; Johnson et al., 2019; Weybright et al., 2017). One study of 366 students found that rural populations were 2.5 times more likely to be impacted by peer-related events compared to the urban population, who were three times more likely to be impacted by legal events (Dupéré et al., 2019). The study indicated that rural students are more impacted by social relationships and are often exempt from delinquency due to the nature of their environment, such as family connections, and less punitive legal nature, while their urban peers were more impacted by delinquent behaviors and environments that were less forgiving, leading to long-term legal issues (Dupéré et al., 2019).

Stressful Life Events and Mental Health

The experience of stressful events can impact and influence a student's decision to drop out of school (Dupéré et al., 2018; McDermott et al., 2019). Stressful life events and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) can include family issues, peer issues, abuse, neglect, moving, and society-wide stressful events, which can lead to poor mental health, school disconnect, and overall student dropout or placement at alternative schools (Iachini et al., 2016; McDermott et al., 2019; Sahle et al., 2022).

After experiencing a stressful or traumatic event, a person may have difficulties with anxiety, depression, or other mental health issues, which may lead to decreased ability to attend

school and student dropout (Ramsdal & Wynn, 2022; Sahle et al., 2022). Students struggling

with suicidal ideation and mental health are at risk of dropping out of school or worse. Due to

factors that lend themselves to poor mental health and suicidal ideation among students who

attend alternative schools, further research is needed on their impact on these students and what

schools can be doing to support them (Jordan et al., 1994; Szlyk, 2020).

Adverse Child Experiences, otherwise known as ACEs, also contribute to student dropout

(Iachini et al., 2016; Morrow & Villodas, 2018). ACEs are defined as potentially traumatic

events that impact a child between the ages of 0-17, including but not limited to experiencing

violence, abuse, or neglect, witnessing violence in the home or community, having a family

member attempt or die by suicide, growing up in a home where a parent or guardian struggles

with substance use problems, mental health problems, or instability due to parental separation, or

household members being in jail or prison (CDC, 2024). Experiencing this type of trauma during

childhood development years can impact a person's health and ability to be successful in

education, and students who experience ACEs are more likely to drop out of school (Bae, 2020;

Morrow & Villodas, 2018). A study conducted on 211,376 adults across 34 states indicated that

ACEs were more prevalent among multiracial individuals and those with lower educational

attainment and income (Giano et al., 2020). A study conducted by the CDC and Kaiser

Permenante (2024) indicated that ACEs have a profound impact on student learning and

behavior in the classroom. Specifically, students with three or more ACEs are five times more

likely to have attendance issues, six times more likely to have behavior problems, and three

times more likely to experience academic failure. Based on the literature available on the

demographics of students attending alternative schools and the literature supporting that students

who attend alternative schools struggle with attendance and behavior problems, it can be inferred that students who attend alternative schools have one or more adverse childhood experiences.

COVID-19 Pandemic

There is estimated to be a three percent increase in secondary students not returning to school due to COVID-19 (Antoni, 2021). Some emerging studies are available on COVID and its impact, but there is room for further research due to upcoming data from the 2024 graduation year and beyond (Antoni, 2021). COVID impacted the most vulnerable (minorities, free and reduced, and special education) populations significantly. Specifically, in the case of academic performance, COVID will have a negative impact on students who were already at risk for dropout (Outhwaite & Gulliford, 2020; Panagouli et al., 2021). It is important to understand the impact of COVID on at-risk populations because, as has already been illustrated, these populations were already at higher risk of dropout and alternative school placement due to social and emotional factors, and potentially are at an increased risk due to academic deficiencies that were caused by COVID (Bera et al., 2022; Bouter et al., 2022). It is possible that the potential impact of COVID could increase dropout and alternative school enrollment, but further research will need to be conducted to understand the full impact of COVID school closures on at-risk populations (Colao et al., 2020).

School Issues that Contribute to Dropout

Traditional schools and alternative schools struggle to keep students for many reasons. Students who are at risk of dropping out of school have poor attendance and difficulty behaving in school, and for these reasons, are pulled or pushed out of traditional schools and placed in alternative school settings (Afacan & Wilkerson, 2019; Marlow & Rehman, 2020). Many students placed in alternative schools have encountered behavior or disciplinary issues in

traditional schools (Ahn & Simpson, 2013; Flores & Brown, 2019; Free, 2014; Griffiths et al., 2019; Vinas-Forcade et al., 2021). More specifically, students who attend alternative schools may have been suspended or expelled from traditional schools because of behavior issues, leaving them with limited options for education outside of alternative schools (Dameron et al., 2019; Novak, 2019; Vanderhaar et al., 2014; Welsh, 2022). The behaviors that led to these expulsions or suspensions can include classroom disruptions, fighting, defiance, gang activity, and using illegal substances in school (Stevenson et al., 2021; Vanderhaar et al., 2014; K. Wilkerson et al., 2016).

Attendance in school is an indicator of student success (Marlow & Rehman, 2020). Students who have a higher rate of attendance perform better in school (Lohmeier et al., 2022; Stevenson et al., 2021). Furthermore, it was found that students who have a positive family process are less likely to drop out of school due to attendance issues (Glavan, 2019). Attendance issues have been directly correlated with school connectedness, because students who have significant relationships with other students and teachers are more likely to regularly attend school (Yavrutürk et al., 2020). Students who are pushed out of school and ultimately become dropouts state that this was directly tied to issues the school had with their attendance (Flores & Brown, 2019). Other research has been conducted on what causes dropout or success in school, but the results have been inconclusive because the students being studied often have attendance issues, which indicates a trend in at-risk students and attendance (Lohmeier et al., 2022; Ohrt et al., 2020). It is clear in the literature that there is a strong relationship between absenteeism, school climate, and a student's decision to dropout (Churchill et al., 2021; Vanderhaar et al., 2014)

School Push out vs. Pull out.

Dropout and alternative school placement can be due to what are considered push-out and pull-out factors. Push-out is defined as a student who experiences challenging situations within the school and ultimately receives consequences that push the student out (Rouse, 2019). This can potentially include tests, attendance, and discipline policies, and even consequences of poor behavior. Adversely, students can be pulled out when factors within the student cause them to be unable to complete school. Factors that are contributors to school pull-out include financial worries, out-of-school employment, family needs, or even family changes, such as marriage or childbirth. Often, when students put a greater value on something outside of school, they do not complete school (Doll et al., 2013; Flores & Brown, 2019).

Students at risk of push-out are over-aged, have few credits, behavioral issues, absences, and a variety of personal issues (Lukes, 2012). Students indicate they have been pushed out of traditional schools because those schools felt that their issues outside of school were more than they could take on or make excuses for about attendance or behavior (Duke & Tenuto, 2020; Flores & Brown, 2019; Tierney, 2020).

Pull-out is defined as issues such as teenage pregnancy, family finances, illness, and student mobility among other outside of school factors that "pull" students out of school (Rouse, 2019). Pull-out has become a more prevalent reason for dropping out since COVID-19 (Barnum, 2023).

School Engagement, Connectedness, and Belonging

While understanding the demographics and social and emotional factors behind high school dropout and the need for alternative schools, it is imperative to isolate what is happening in schools to cause this dropout risk to occur (Ahn & Simpson, 2013; Dameron et al., 2019; Doll et al., 2013). When considering high school dropouts, it is essential to understand the school's role in a student's decision to leave education (Conner et al., 2022; Glavan, 2019). School engagement, connectedness, and belonging are the ideas that students feel connected to their school. Factors that play into school belonging include school climate, relationships, and a school's ability to provide autonomy for students (Flores & Brown, 2019; Lohmeier et al., 2022; Long et al., 2018; Ramsdal & Wynn, 2022). There is a positive relationship between school connectedness and academic performance (Novak, 2019; Yavrutürk et al., 2020; Zeinalipour, 2022). Low enrollment size of schools was a positive element contributing to school climate and connectedness, and it attributed personalized instruction and one-on-one advising as crucial elements of alternative school success (Flores & Brown, 2019; Perzigian & Braun, 2020).

Relationships with teachers contribute more to school connectedness than peer relationships and family relationships (Yavrutürk et al., 2020). Teachers are an important part of the connection between student engagement and trust (Keyes, 2019; Zeinalipour, 2022). Relationships between students and teachers and outside mentors are crucial parts of students' success, and that teacher care is an essential element of the engagement of students (Conner et al., 2022; Henderson et al., 2018; Williams, 2019). Importantly, a recent study conducted on traditional and alternative schools in the Pacific Northwest indicated that there is a significant relationship between school success and student and teacher relationships (Pham et al., 2022). Other studies found that students who had no adult connection faced more tardiness and higher

absentee rates, as well as had more failed courses, issues with mental health, and often did not complete their education (Churchill et al., 2021; Holen et al., 2018). These findings are crucial in assisting traditional schools and helping alternative schools be successful by isolating the need for strong relationships between students and teachers to prevent dropouts (Flores & Brown, 2019; Glavan, 2019; Huerta & Hernández, 2021; Walker & Graham, 2019).

Alternative Schools

Many studies have detailed the negative impact of dropouts on society. Specifically, studies have shown that being a high school dropout has a negative impact on the individual and the community in which they live (Lau et al., 2021; Mokoena & van Breda, 2021; Trinidad, 2022). Students who drop out of school often struggle with physical and mental health, social conflicts, and unemployment (Ramsdal & Wynn, 2022). Those who do not complete high school earn less on average than those who do complete their education (Foreman-Murray et al., 2022). Incarceration is also common among those who drop out of school before completion (Runkle, 2022). From a societal perspective, those who drop out of school are considered a deterrent to social development and economic growth (Zengin, 2021). To combat these societal and individual challenges, students are often placed in or elect to attend alternative schools prior to dropping out.

Historically, alternative schools were considered an option for solving racial inequity in education, but alternative education settings have developed significantly in the last several decades (Duke & Tenuto, 2020; Lange & Sletten, 2002). Specifically, in 1965, funding was solidified for alternative education settings through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Alternative schools have developed to include a wide variety of types, including but not limited to: self-contained schools, residential facilities, psychiatric facilities, and juvenile justice

facilities (Afacan & Wilkerson, 2019; Ahn & Simpson, 2013; Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Hoge & Rubinstein-Avila, 2014; Kennedy & Soutullo, 2018; Novak, 2019; Stevenson et al., 2021; K. Wilkerson et al., 2016). Placement or a student's ability to attend these schools has also varied due to the specific needs of the students and differing state requirements. Foundationally, Kumm et al.'s (2020) study utilizes the U.S. Department of Education definition of Alternative schools:

"public elementary/secondary school that (a) addresses the needs of students who typically cannot be met in a regular school; (b) provides nontraditional education; (c) serves as an adjunct to a regular school; or (d) falls outside the categories of regular education, special education, or career/ technical education" (p. 1).

While this provides a broad definition, it is noted in the literature that there is no one definition of an alternative school (Lange & Sletten, 2002).

Types of Alternative Schools and Students

Studies have been conducted on why and how students are placed in alternative school settings, including substance abuse, illegal activity, academic difficulties, behavior issues. Additionally, research exists on what the diverse types of alternative schools look like, including academic and behavior remediation, residential, disciplinary, and others that are more in alignment with vocational and artistic pathways (Glavan, 2019; Johnson et al., 2019; Kumm et al., 2020; K. Wilkerson et al., 2016; Xia et al., 2015). Academic alternative schools are defined as schools that provide academic remediation, credit recovery, and social and emotional support. Behavior alternative schools focus on behavior remediation. Disciplinary schools are similar to behavior alternative schools but serve to correct or manage students with behavior issues (Afacan & Wilkerson, 2019; Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Hoge & Rubinstein-Avila, 2014; K. Wilkerson et al., 2016).

Alternative schools are focused on behavior or disciplinary issues are designed for students who exhibit social or behavioral difficulties, and schools are designed to provide academic support to students who experience credit deficiencies or are otherwise struggling to stay on track for high school completion (K. L. Wilkerson et al., 2018). Recent literature has identified juvenile justice facilities as a form of alternative education (Kumm et al., 2020). Other literature indicates that some of these school types overlap, and school can play one or all of these roles (Berk et al., 2020; Kumm et al., 2020). There is no one-size-fits-all for alternative school students and attendance varies by state. In some states, students can be placed in alternative school settings while in other states, students can choose to attend alternative schools but must meet certain qualifying factors, which often include being at risk of dropping out of school. Four main ways that lead to placement in alternative education include IEP meetings, expulsion, legal consequences, or mental health referral, and indicate that alternative schools are often relied on to support schools in managing difficult behavior students as an alternative to expulsion (Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Cockerill, 2019; Kumm et al., 2020; Welsh, 2022).

Alternative schools have become the option for students unsuccessful in traditional education, indicating they are at risk of dropping out of school (Donnelly, 1987; Ewing et al., 2021; Vinas-Forcade et al., 2021). Alternative schools have worked to develop interventions at the school and classroom level to support these students (Griffiths et al., 2019; Long et al., 2018; Szlyk, 2020). Many of these schools have focused on social and emotional learning interventions and classroom management techniques that have been effective in other school settings (Perzigian, 2018; Yavrutürk et al., 2020).

Alternative Educational Interventions

Emerging studies have begun to look at the social and emotional and behavioral interventions in place in alternative schools, both effective and ineffective. Identified in the literature is the support for Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) programs in mediating behavior issues, and that alternative school settings have better outcomes with these interventions than their traditional education peers (Aspiranti et al., 2021; Ballard & Bender, 2022; Ohrt et al., 2020). Studies have begun focusing on mindfulness as a practice in alternative schools to provide behavioral and social and emotional support; these studies indicated positive findings in relation to mindfulness practices in alternative school settings (Long et al., 2018; Wisner & Starzec, 2016). The students indicated increased emotional regulation, stress management, self-awareness, and better relationships with peers, parents, and teachers (Ohrt et al., 2020; Walker & Graham, 2019; Wisner & Starzec, 2016).

Social and emotional support is also embedded in school-wide programs. Current literature surrounding Positive Behavior Incentive systems (PBIS) as behavior support shows that as a Tier I, which are school-wide culture-focused supports; elements of the structure can help avoid what might be viewed as punitive and physical restraints that are currently used in the alternative education setting for students who have an Emotional Behavior Disorder (Balenzano et al., 2019; Frank, 2019; Griffiths et al., 2019). The findings further indicated that PBIS could effectively lower suspension rates and truancy but concluded that the research on PBIS in alternative education is still lacking due to the small number of high-quality studies previously conducted (Grasley-Boy et al., 2021). Adversely, schools that tried to use extrinsic motivation through the Good Behavior Game, an in-class reward system that gave students incentives for

good behavior through providing rewards for good behavior, saw little success in deterring poor behavior in alternative schools (Joslyn et al., 2019).

Another emerging alternative school approach is restructuring schools to include the community and parents. This was done through community-school partnerships, parent education courses, and activities that involved students in the community (Hogan & Forbes, 2021; Lohmeier et al., 2022). Primarily, the findings indicate that connection to their community and finding a reason school was meaningful were successful practices. Students and parents indicated that duration in both the school and provided programs positively correlated with credit attainment. Lastly, involving parents in schools helped them to understand how to support their students (Newton et al., 2017; Stacy et al., 2019).

Whether it is emerging curriculum or diverse structures, alternative schools are working to create a different environment for at-risk students to be successful. Further research is needed on alternative school best practices, as well as how these practices are helping students who are not successful initially to find their place in education.

Teacher and Administrative Perspectives on Alternative Education

Alternative schools are unique in their structure, which lends itself to further understanding of those who are working in these schools (Kennedy & Soutullo, 2018). Studies have been conducted to analyze the perspectives of alternative school administrators to identify effective practices for creating a supportive community for students and staff alike (Bascia & Maton, 2016; Duke & Tenuto, 2020). Findings of recent studies revealed intentional actions on the administrator's part to create communities of support in their alternative settings, such as creating a culture of high standards, establishing a vision that is shared by leadership, teachers, and parents is key to the initial charge of a school (Duke & Tenuto, 2020; Hsieh et al., 2021).

Staff professional development and cultural awareness were essential to the school's success, and innovative approaches to past curriculum and educational ideals are crucial to school adaptation (Duke & Tenuto, 2020; Hsieh et al., 2021). Contrasting studies have been done on teachers' perspectives of alternative schools and their students. More specifically, some studies found that teachers enjoyed the flexibility and challenge that alternative schools presented and felt a strong connection with their students, while others found the work of supporting at-risk youth overwhelming (Bascia & Maton, 2016; Cavaco et al., 2021). Limited literature is available from the administrative and the teacher perspectives on alternative schools and their students.

Student Voice on Alternative School Experiences

Present in the literature is the idea that student voice could clarify what elements of alternative education are the most impactful, and student perspective is essential for understanding alternative schools' effectiveness (Farrelly & Daniels, 2014; Tierney, 2020; Welsh, 2022). Universally, qualitative studies on students' perspectives on alternative education indicate that suspension and expulsion are ineffective in creating a positive school culture, and that school leaders must evaluate other options that keep students in school (Szlyk, 2020; Vanderhaar et al., 2014). Importantly, many of the students' issues began in middle school, and their experiences in the middle level alternative schools were positive, including teacher interactions (Afacan & Wilkerson, 2019; Churchill et al., 2021; Kennedy & Soutullo, 2018). Specifically, teachers and administrators were vital in placing these students in alternative settings (Cantey, 2022; Cockerill, 2019). Previous research indicates that grade performance, attendance, and disruptive behavior were all identified factors for student placement in alternative settings. Many students attributed a significant portion of their high school success to being placed in an alternative setting and did not have an adverse reaction to being placed in the

alternative setting (Flores & Brown, 2019). Some shared benefits that contributed to students'

success included implementing transformational leadership, strong relationships, and increased

social and emotional support. All the students interviewed indicated that to improve their

experience, the schools could have done more to assist with transitional services post-attendance

at the alternative school (Glavan, 2019). Similarly, present in the literature was the idea that one

size fits all education does not work, and that a flexible structure is needed for students to work

and complete school and address familial concerns (Moffatt & Riddle, 2021). Notably, another

idea presented was that if a school identifies ineffective elements of traditional education and

uses them to help students redefine their view on education and adult relationships, they will

have more success in helping students to adapt to alternative education (Ramsdal & Wynn, 2022;

Tierney, 2020). Students felt they were placed in alternative school settings due to already

feeling displaced in traditional schools, and that school belonging was a crucial part of their

success in alternative school settings, and that they left alternative schools feeling empowered

(Fortner, 2022).

Studies have found that students who attended alternative school programs experienced

better forms of basic need satisfaction, more support, and a greater sense of belonging (Anderson

& Baggett, 2020; Cockerill, 2019). Other studies indicated that students attending alternative

schools felt greater autonomy, belonging, and competence and, therefore, higher motivation,

which aligns with and supports the Self-Determination Theory (Farrelly & Daniels, 2014; Hofer

et al., 2021; Statos, 2022). Additionally, intrinsic motivation and an autonomous approach to

education and students were successful predictors of student achievement. Notably, it was found

that extrinsic motivation was the most harmful to student motivation and was bad for student

well-being (Conner et al., 2022; Hofer et al., 2021; Howard et al., 2021; Van Ryzin et al., 2009).

Overarchingly, it is indicated that student perspective studies and Self-Determination Theory can be beneficial for the research on alternative education. However, based on the current literature, there is a need for more quantitative approaches to gathering this data to ensure the validity of the information collected and provide generalizability across the population.

Conclusion

The purpose of this literature review was to inform about the demographics related to dropouts and provide context on alternative schools, all to frame the idea that further research is needed on alternative schools from the quantitatively assessed student perspective. From the review of the literature, several things can be concluded. While dropout is impacting all students, there is a concerning trend with males, special needs, minorities, and students who qualify for free and reduced lunch (Afacan & Wilkerson, 2019; Frank, 2019; McDermott et al., 2019; Rubens et al., 2019; Staff et al., 2020). Several studies indicated the potential need for updated research on alternative education due to the transient nature of schools, the work world, and the original implementation of alternative education being more than fifty years ago (Doll et al., 2013; Staff et al., 2020; Welsh, 2022). Due to the focus on the number of qualitative studies focused on student voice, more research on alternative education is needed from a quantitative perspective to validate and generalize the findings.

Additionally, further research on alternative schools as a form of dropout prevention, explicitly looking at how students perceive alternative education as an effective form of dropout prevention based on their firsthand experiences from a large-scale quantitative approach, is needed (Cantey, 2022). More research conducted on alternative schools could add to the literature on alternative schools to aid in their effectiveness and support the work being done in traditional schools regarding their work with at-risk students (Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011; K. L.

Wilkerson et al., 2018). Finally, a study that utilizes Self-Determination Theory to analyze a sample of students to determine how autonomy, competence, and relatedness in a school impacts current alternative schools' students would allow for a better understanding of what specifically in those schools is effectively retaining students (Farrelly & Daniels, 2014; Nada et al., 2020).

Chapter III: Design and Methodology

The purpose of this quantitative study was to better understand alternative school effectiveness from the student perspective, utilizing a lens of Self-Determination Theory and its subscales of autonomy, relatedness, and competence. This study investigated the perspectives of current 18- to 21-year-old students attending alternative schools in the Pacific Northwest. Using the students' perspective, the goal was to add to the literature on the effectiveness of alternative schools as a form of high school dropout prevention. This information is crucial because students who drop out of school have a negative impact on society and themselves, including but not limited to health issues, incarceration, and unemployment (Foreman-Murray et al., 2022; Runkle, 2022; Trinidad, 2022). Alternative schools have been a popular option for students who have not found success in the traditional school and are at risk of or have already dropped out (Afacan & Wilkerson, 2019; Cantey, 2022; Fortner, 2022). This study was designed to gather quantitative data on demographics of alternative school students as well as the impact of competence, relatedness, and autonomy on the student's experience and retention in school, as this is a current gap in the literature available on alternative schools. Many of the studies on the topic of alternative education conducted in the last few years were qualitative and indicate a need for further research on similar or the same populations to be able to better understand the students attending these schools (Balenzano et al., 2019; Castagno, 2021; Hickman & Anderson, 2019; Hsieh et al., 2021; Huerta & Hernández, 2021). This current study was conducted in the Pacific Northwest, a combination of rural and urban demographics. The goal of this chapter is to elaborate on the selected design, participants, sites, data collection, and analysis conducted on the findings of this study.

Research Questions

This study will address the following research questions:

1. Do 18- to 21-year-old students attending Pacific Northwest alternative schools have a strong sense of autonomy, relatedness, and competence?

2. Do demographic factors gender, free and reduced lunch, special education services, and ethnicity have an impact on self-determination factors; autonomy, relatedness, and competence for 18- to 21-year-old students at Pacific Northwest alternative schools?

Research Design

This quantitative study was a descriptive research design, which is the process of describing relationships without defining the cause (Vera et al., 2016). Descriptive research aims to describe a chosen variable. Studies with this design provide information about a sample by describing the distribution of one or more variables, without attempting to determine causation (Aggarwal & Ranganathan, 2019). This type of research design was specifically selected for this study due to this study's aim to understand the sample population of alternative school students through their demographics and their levels of self-determination. The variables included the demographics of alternative school students attending Pacific Northwest alternative schools between 18- to 21-years of age and the components of Self-Determination Theory. Each demographic variable was evaluated to better understand which students demographically were attending alternative schools. The SDT scores were also evaluated for each student and separate demographic groups to better understand which elements of the Self-Determination Theory: autonomy, relatedness, and competence are present in alternative schools. These variables were compared to better understand the relationship between students attending alternative schools

and their levels of self-determination, and if there was a relationship between individual demographic groups of alternative school students and their levels of self-determination.

Specifically, this study focused on current 18- to 21-year-old students who are attending alternative schools in the Pacific Northwest. Due to the literature available on alternative schools being primarily qualitative, this quantitative approach was utilized to add and expand upon the current studies (Amitay & Rahav, 2020; Ewing et al., 2021; Jordan et al., 1994; Ramadas, 2023). Importantly, a need was indicated by recent studies for a quantitative approach to understanding alternative schools to add to the currently available qualitative data. Quantitative research allows for a concrete numeric interpretation of the sample (Ballard & Bender, 2022; Runkle, 2022).

Participants and Research Sites

Selected participants were 18- to 21-years old current attendees of Pacific Northwest alternative schools intentionally to isolate what specifically impacted these students' retention. These students were selected for convenience due to proximity, as well as to add new data from a sample that had not collectively been studied previously. This form of sampling is utilized when the sample is conveniently available to the researcher (Andrade, 2021). For the researcher, it was convenient to study the Pacific Northwest, which includes the states of Idaho, Washington, and Oregon, due to accessibility and professional connections that would allow ease of contact with the students and sites selected. The Pacific Northwest is diverse in geographical locations, as well as less diverse demographically than other areas of the United States. There are 65 alternative schools in Idaho, 33 programs in Oregon, and 16 alternative schools in Washington. To conduct this study, the lists of alternative programs were assessed to determine the site's "gatekeeper" to determine who to contact for site permission (Creswell, 2019). The researcher used representative sampling for this study, which allows for a more in-depth understanding of

the larger population by focusing on a specific sample of that population. Representative

sampling is the selection of participants to represent a specific sample of a population (Urdan,

2016). In this case, the population for this study was students who attend alternative schools, and

the representative selection was focused on students who attended alternative schools in the

Pacific Northwest which includes the state Idaho, Oregon, and Washington.

School Selection and Identification

Oregon and Idaho house an updated repository of the most current alternative schools for

each year and both are publicly available on their websites; the researcher utilized lists from the

states of Idaho (Appendix E) and Oregon (Appendix F) for selecting sites. Washington does not

keep a complete list, so alternative schools in this state were located through searching

"alternative schools in Washington." Once the list of schools was compiled, their school districts

were contacted, followed by the schools being contacted using a uniform email and letter

regarding the study and its purpose. This initial contact was made to connect with the district

contact to secure permission for the study (see Appendix B). After approval, contact was made

with the principal of the alternative school to set up a time to administer the study in person or

remotely (see Appendix G). Table 3 indicates the number of schools from each state who gave

permission for the study by state:

Table 3

Number of Schools and Students Participating by State

States Included	Number of Schools in Study	Students
Idaho	9	127
Washington	0	0
Oregon	0	0
Totals	9	127

As can be seen in Table 3, data was not collected in Washington or Oregon despite the researcher's best efforts to include schools from these states in this study. Contact was made with multiple Washington and Oregon schools, but of the schools who agreed to participate from these states, none followed through with survey administration. Research approval was also denied by several schools in both states due to lack of time and resources as stated by the districts. The participating schools were a combination of traditional alternative schools, an online/ hybrid program, and a residential program. A traditional alternative school functions similarly to a traditional high school, with the differentiating factors including class size, flexible schedules, and alternative approaches to credit attainment and instruction. Residential alternative schools house students for a specific period and provide social and emotional instruction outside of the school day. Online/hybrid alternative schools allow their students to complete some of their course work online and only require minimal time inside a classroom setting. Only one of the schools was residential, one was an online/hybrid program, with the other seven being traditional alternative schools. Two of the seven can be considered rural schools, while the others were all in urban areas.

Participants

Since this study focused on the experiences of students attending alternative schools, all participants included in the study were attending an alternative school. Students' current enrollment made the questions about the schools relevant and timely to their lived experience. Students who attend alternative schools are defined as at-risk, which indicates that they are at risk due to social, emotional, or societal reasons for dropping out of school (Cantey, 2022; Donnelly, 1987). Additionally, students who attend alternative schools are considered at risk due to their exposure to trauma, poverty, and challenges in academics, which led to the choice to

only include students who are 18- to 21-years-old to help provide a layer of protection to the overall sample while still maintaining the integrity of the collected data due to their recent attendance (Aspiranti et al., 2021; Flores & Brown, 2019) Intentionally, the nature of the survey questions was focused on the positive interactions students have with school and did not address the reasoning for their placement in alternative education other than the collection of demographic data, which allowed for data collection that did not negatively impact the potentially vulnerable population. All students 18- to 21-years old at participating schools were given the opportunity to complete the survey either remotely or in person, and all students had to give informed consent to participate.

Data Collection

Instrumentation

Basic Psychological Needs Theory, which is a sub theory of SDT, was utilized to create a survey instrument that is entitled the Basic Needs at Work Scale, which has expanded since its inception from a purely work satisfaction assessment tool to a way to assess students' overall satisfaction and success in schools. For this descriptive quantitative research study, the researcher utilized the updated instrument that originated from the 2014 study "Understanding Alternative Education: A Mixed Methods Examination of Student Experiences" conducted by Farrelly and Daniels. Permission to use this instrument was given by the primary researcher (Appendix D). The original survey was created to measure the participant's perceived satisfaction of autonomy, relatedness, and competence in an alternative school setting. Farrelly and Daniels (2014) adapted the Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction at Work Scale from a 21-question survey that utilized a 7-point Likert scale to assess work conditions through the lens of Self-Determination Theory. The Basic Needs At Work Scale had eight autonomy items, six

competence items, and seven relatedness items. Farrelly and Daniels (2014) adjusted the survey

to be a five-point Likert scale and reworded the language to fit a school setting. Farrelly and

Daniels (2014) piloted this study with 122 alternative school students. A reliability analysis was

conducted and indicated that three items for each subscale appeared to best measure basic

psychological needs satisfaction in this context. Farrelly and Daniels (2014) made this

adjustment based on the piloted study's results on a factor analysis and new reliability analysis

for each subscale and the total scale showed acceptable Cronbach alphas at .92 for the entire

survey (Farrelly & Daniels, 2014). The fully adapted survey included three questions developed

by the researcher, but for this study, only the Likert-style validated questions were included. The

instrument utilized by the researcher included the collection of informed consent, demographic

data, and survey questions from the modified version of the Basic Needs at Work survey

(Appendix C) to assess student perspectives on their alternative school experience in alignment

with Self-Determination Theory.

The instrument was comprised of 9 questions with three questions each being directly

aligned with the different elements of Self-Determination Theory: autonomy, competence, and

relatedness. Table 4 illustrates the questions from the survey and which area of Self-

Determination Theory they addressed.

Table 4

Instrument Questions and Self-determination Categories

Autonomy	Competence	Relatedness
I am free to express my ideas and opinions at this school.	People at this school tell me I am good at my schoolwork.	I really like the people at this school.
My feelings are taken into consideration at this school.	I have been able to learn new and interesting things at this school.	I consider the people at this school to be my friends.
I can pretty much be myself at this school.	Most days I feel good about the work I do at this school.	People at this school are friendly to me.

Note. Farrelly & Daniels, 2014; Mayo et al., 2022; Ntoumanis et al., 2021

All these questions were answered on a five-point Likert Scale giving the students an opportunity to answer 1=not at all true for me, 2= not true for me, 3= somewhat true for me, 4= true for me, and 5= very true for me.

Data Collection

The sample was collected through gaining site permission from Pacific Northwest alternative schools and a combination of in person and remote data collection. Both in-person and remote data collection was conducted through a digital survey provided to the students by either the researcher or the on-site designee through a letter explaining the study and a QR tied directly to the survey (see Appendix H). Data was collected in person for three of the schools, and remote data collection took place for the rest. As a part of the survey, students provided informed consent and indicated they met the age requirements before accessing the survey questions.

Analytical Methods

After informed consent was collected, data was collected remotely or in person with the digital survey. The data was then cleaned to remove incomplete responses and to adjust any non-digitally collected data that was incorrectly inputted. Data analysis began by exporting all responses from Qualtrics and formatted into SPSS data. No names were collected as a part of this survey, but the school names were collected to be able provide individualized results to participating schools. The data was first analyzed to understand the demographic data collected on the sample to better understand which students are currently attending alternative schools. While this is not directly tied to a research question, it adds to the literature on alternative school students. Descriptive statistics were then run on the available data on the students' levels of Self-determination and the subscales. The data was then analyzed to be able to see if there were significant levels of self-determination for the sample, followed by analyzing through descriptive statistics if individual components of self-determination were more present than others with the sample. Then, demographic data was compared to the subscales of self-determination to better understand the relationship between levels of specific self-determination factors and isolated demographic groups. The process for each of these data collections, as well as their connections to these research questions, are explained in the upcoming sections.

Research Question One

To answer the research question one, descriptive statistics were conducted to understand the overall data regarding the self-determination scores, the subscales, and the demographics of the alternative school student. Specifically, the mean of all the students' responses was assessed to understand if students in this sample had a strong sense of self-determination as a whole. The 5-point Likert-style survey included 9 questions, which made the highest possible mean five. On

the scale, the three indicated "somewhat true for me" which would not indicate a significant level

of self-determination. For that reason, if the sample's overall average score was between 3.41-

5.0 from the Likert scale, this would indicate that the students stated that the questions were true

for them or very true for them, which would indicate a very high level of self-determination. But

if the students did not answer less than 3.40 on any questions, there could still be a moderate

level of self-determination. Based on these numbers, if the overall mean for all students was

greater than 3.40, students attending alternative schools would have a positive level of self-

determination. This classification of Likert responses analysis was supported by previous

research conducted on evaluating and determining Likert scale responses. Table 5 below

illustrates the Likert scale interval with the Likert scale descriptions from this study (Pimentel,

2010).

Table 5

Likert Interval Scale

Likert Scale Description	Likert Scale	Likert Scale Interval
Not at all true for me	1	1.00-1.80
Not true for me	2	1.81-2.60
Somewhat true for me	3	2.61-3.40
True for me	4	3.41-4.20
Very true for me	5	4.21-5.00

Descriptive statistics allow for all the students to be assessed on their level of self-

determination but also allow for further understanding of the specific factors related to self-

determination. To better understand the individual sub scales, descriptive statistics were

conducted by gathering the mean of the responses to the questions which were directly tied to

autonomy, relatedness, or competence to understand if one element of self-determination was

more present in alternative school students. More specifically, descriptive statistics were run to

collect the overall mean on the three questions that were tied to each component of self-

determination to be able to see if one element was more prevalent than the other two. This was done by grouping the responses for the three questions tied to autonomy, relatedness, and competence and analyzing the mean. If the overall mean was higher than 3.40, it could be determined that the students had a strong sense of that specific component of self-determination. For example, if the sample overall mean for the questions related to autonomy was between 3.41-5.0, then the data would indicate that Pacific Northwest alternative school students have high levels of autonomy.

Research Question Two

For research question two, the goal was to understand if there was a relationship between specific groups of 18- to 21-year-old alternative school students and self-determination. A one-way MANOVA for each demographic category was used to compare the overall self-determination score with the demographic category to understand if self-determination was more present with specific demographic groups. Participants were classified into gender (Male/Female), Ethnicity (Black, Caucasian, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, Native American), receiving special education services or not, and qualifying for free and reduced lunch or not. Once sorted, descriptive statistics were conducted to gather the mean self-determination scores by individual groups. These scores were then compared within groups using one-way MANOVA to see if there was a significant relationship between the demographic groups and their self-determination scores. For example, if either gender showed high levels of SDT more so than the other. Outliers were assessed by boxplot, data was assessed for normality of distribution for each group, by Shapiro-Wilk test, and homogeneity of variances, was assessed by Levene's test of homogeneity of variance. One-way MANOVA for each individual group was chosen because the dependent variable in this study, the self-determination scores, is continuous and there are more

than two groups being compared. By keeping the groups separate, we ensure that the data meets the assumptions needed to conduct an MANOVA, which requires that the groups have the independence of observation, which ensures that there is no overlap of participants in groups. For example, male students' scores were compared with female students' scores and ethnicity groups were compared with other ethnicity groups but not with gender. The MANOVA test shows significant differences in the means of each demographic group's scores (Laerd Statistics, 2015). Further analysis was conducted through identical descriptive statistics collection on specific demographic groups and the SDT subscale responses to see if demographically there was more a more significant presence of autonomy, competence, and relatedness for specific demographic groups. One-way MANOVA was also conducted with the means of each of the elements of self-determination and the specific demographic groups separately to understand if there was a relationship between gender, special education services, ethnicity, free and reduced lunch, and autonomy, relatedness, and competence. For example, did students receiving special education services indicate a higher level of relatedness than those students who did not? Due to the purpose of this study being focused on demographic group relationship with self-determination factors specifically, the data was not analyzed to assess how multiple demographic factors influenced a self-determination score, but this could be done to better understand this population.

Limitations

While the researcher took every precaution to ensure validity in the study, limitations are unavoidable in any study.

- This study's original intent was to have the sample represent three states in the Pacific Northwest. Despite the effort of the researcher, only Idaho schools completed the data collection phase of this study. While this impacts the generalizability of the data for

Pacific Northwest schools, due to the number of participants in Idaho schools, there is a gap for future research to include more Pacific Northwest schools to better understand the population.

- While the focus on 18- to 21-year-old students was put in place to protect the population and focus the study, it may have narrowed the study's perspective.

- Conducting this study in schools far away from each other and in various locations, on-site research was not able to be conducted at all those locations, making follow-up, and administering reliability difficult.

Chapter IV: Results

Dropout rates have fluctuated over the last several decades and remain a prominent issue within the United States (Amitay & Rahav, 2020; Hickman & Anderson, 2019). Alternative schools have become one of the most common options to support students at risk of dropping out of school (Flores & Brown, 2019; K. Wilkerson et al., 2016). While alternative schools are increasing in popularity, the research on their effectiveness is still limited and inconclusive (Hofer et al., 2021; Shapiro, 2023). Prior research conducted on alternative schools has been primarily qualitative with an emerging number of mixed methods studies. Many of these studies have been conducted in large urban areas, but no purely quantitative studies have been conducted in Pacific Northwest alternative schools. One lens used to study these programs is Self-Determination Theory (SDT) due to its focus on motivation and engagement. SDT indicates that schools that include elements of autonomy, relatedness, and competence have higher student engagement and motivation (Chiu, 2022; Howard et al., 2021). Research has been conducted on high school dropouts as well as alternative education, but limited research has been conducted on overall alternative school effectiveness through the lens of Self-Determination Theory from the student perspective (Anderson & Baggett, 2020; Cockerill, 2019). This quantitative study's purpose was to use Self-Determination Theory to better understand elements leading to motivation and engagement of students attending alternative schools in the Pacific Northwest. By analyzing 18- to 21-year-old students in this population, a targeted picture of self-determination in alternative schools is presented and a gap in the literature is closed for the schools in this geographical area. This quantitative descriptive research study aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. Do 18-to 21-year-old students attending Pacific Northwest alternative schools have a strong sense of autonomy, relatedness, and competence?

2. Do demographic factors gender, free and reduced lunch, special education services, and ethnicity have an impact on self-determination factors; autonomy, relatedness, and competence for 18- to 21-year-old students at Pacific Northwest alternative schools?

Through a Likert survey, quantitative data was collected on a student's overall self-determination score and for each of the self-determination factors: autonomy, relatedness, and competence. Data was also collected on all students' demographic factors including race, gender, free and reduced lunch status, and special education services. This chapter details the findings of the descriptive statistics available on the studied population and the data analysis conducted to answer this study's research questions.

Participant Profile

In this study, all participants were part of a representative sampling of 18- to 21-year-old alternative school students who are a part of the larger population of alternative school students (Urdan, 2016). Students are either placed or choose to attend these schools because they are at risk of dropping out of school or are facing some barriers to school completion including poverty, attendance issues, disciplinary issues, legal issues, or are behind in credits (Glavan, 2019; Johnson et al., 2019; Kumm et al., 2020).

The Pacific Northwest is made up of the states Idaho, Washington, and Oregon. The Pacific Northwest has 100 alternative programs in rural and urban areas. Students attending these programs are at risk of or have already dropped out of schools in these states. All of these states house students that are representative of minority groups as well as students that experience a variety of external and internal factors that create barriers to school completion. Specifically,

20.8% of the students dropping out of Washington schools are American Indian/Alaska Native.

Hispanic, Black, and Native Hawaiian, as well as those students who have two or more races are

also represented in the dropout pool, with each race ranging between 9.8-12.9% while only 9.7%

of students are white. Similarly, Oregon has a higher percentage of American Indian/Alaska

Native dropouts than other demographics sitting at 7.83 % of all Oregon dropouts and 11.8% of

Oregon dropouts indicating homelessness (ODE, 2023). With an overall completion rate of

81.3%, Oregon is behind Washington, who has a completion rate of 82.3% (Miller, 2023; Velez,

2023). Students were also classified by belonging to certain state identified student groups

including foster care, homeless, low income, migrant, multilingual learner, and special education

students (Came, 2019). For this specific study, the participants came from alternative schools in

Idaho. School locations and names will remain confidential to protect the identity of the

participants. Idaho falls behind both Oregon and Washington with an overall completion rate for

2022 of 79.9%. The dropout demographics are like those we see in the other Pacific Northwest

states and students who are economically disadvantaged, with disabilities, in foster care,

experiencing homelessness, English learners, or migratory had graduation rates below the state

average. This was also true for students who are American Indian or Alaskan Native, Black,

Hispanic or Latino, two or more races, or male (Flandro, 2023). The participating schools were

representative of all of the geographical areas of Idaho as well as the different types of

alternative schools present in all of the Pacific Northwest. All schools were coded numerically to

protect the study's participants. Table 6 indicates the nine schools as well as the number of

students who participated from each location.

Table 6

Participating Schools

School	n	%
School 1	20	15.7
School 2	3	2.4
School 3	4	3.1
School 4	12	9.4
School 5	19	15.0
School 6	34	26.8
School 7	6	4.7
School 8	13	10.2
School 9	16	12.6
Total	127	100.0

Survey Participants

This study utilized a quantitative survey to better understand students' levels of self-determination utilizing a five-point Likert scale. The survey was digitally administered both in person and remotely by the researcher or a school-designated official. The students who responded to the survey were 53.5% male and 44.1% female with varying races including white 43.3%, Hispanic 37.8%, Native American and Asian Pacific Islander 3.1%, Black 2.4% and 10.2% who preferred not to share their race (see Table 7). The sample also indicated that 74% of the students did not receive special education services and that 73% qualified for free and reduced lunch services. All these students were between 18- to 21-years-old and attended an alternative school in Idaho.

Table 7

Participant Demographics

		n	%
What is your race?	Black	3	2.4%
	Hispanic	48	37.8%
	Caucasian	55	43.3%
	Asian/Pacific Islander	4	3.1%
	Native American	4	3.1%
	Prefer not to say	13	10.2%
What is your gender?	Male	68	53.5%
	Female	56	44.1%
Did you receive special education services while in school?	Yes	25	19.7%
	No	94	74.0%
	Prefer not to say	8	6.3%
Did you qualify for free and reduced lunch during high school?	Yes	93	73.2%
	No	26	20.5%
	Prefer not to say	8	6.3%

Data Collection Instruments

Survey Instruments

The instrument utilized by the researcher included the collection of informed consent, demographic data, and survey questions from the modified version of the Basic Needs at Work survey (Appendix C) to assess student perspectives on their alternative school experience in alignment with Self-Determination Theory. This survey was adapted from a 2014 study entitled "Understanding Alternative Education: A Mixed Methods Examination of Student Experiences" conducted by Farrelly and Daniels. The original survey was created to measure the participant's perceived satisfaction of autonomy, relatedness, and competence in an alternative school setting and was adapted from the Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction at Work Scale, a 21-question survey that utilized a seven-point Likert scale to assess work conditions through the lens of Self-

Determination Theory. Farrelly and Daniels (2014) adjusted the survey to be a five-point Likert scale and reworded the language to fit a school setting.

Survey Validity and Reliability

Farrelly and Daniels (2014) piloted this study with 122 alternative school students. A reliability analysis was conducted and indicated that three items for each subscale appeared to best measure basic psychological needs satisfaction in this context. Farrelly and Daniels (2014) adjusted the 21 question Basic Needs at Work Scale based on the piloted study's results to a nine-question survey that passed factor and reliability analysis for each subscale with a Cronbach alpha of .92 for the entire survey (Farrelly & Daniels, 2014). A reliability analysis was conducted and indicated that three items for each subscale appeared to best measure basic psychological needs satisfaction in this context. Farrelly and Daniels (2014) made this adjustment based on the piloted studies results on a factor analysis and new reliability analysis for each subscale, and the total scale showed acceptable Cronbach alpha of .92 for the entire survey, which indicates high internal consistency between the survey questions (Farrelly & Daniels, 2014). Table 8 shows the alignment between questions and which area of Self-Determination Theory they addressed.

Table 8

Instrument Questions and Self-determination Categories

Autonomy	Competence	Relatedness
I am free to express my ideas and opinions at this school.	People at this school tell me I am good at my schoolwork.	I really like the people at this school.
My feelings are taken into consideration at this school.	I have been able to learn new and interesting things at this school.	I consider the people at this school to be my friends.
I can pretty much be myself at this school.	Most days I feel good about the work I do at this school.	People at this school are friendly to me.

All of the questions were answered on a five-point Likert scale giving the students an opportunity to answer 1=not at all true for me, 2= not true for me, 3= somewhat true for me, 4= true for me, and 5= very true for me. See Appendix C for the list of 9 questions and see Appendix D for the permission granted to use this instrument within this research.

Results for Research Question 1: Demographics and Sense of Self-determination

To isolate if the specific school had a significant impact on the students' SDT scores or the subscale scores, a MANOVA was conducted to understand the PNW alternative school students' sense of self-determination (see Table 9).

Table 9

School Specific SDT Results

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	Autonomy	6.280[a]	8	.785	1.006	.436
	Competence	6.840[b]	8	.855	1.736	.097
	Relatedness	9.492[c]	8	1.186	1.853	.074
	SDT Score	5.075[d]	8	.634	1.375	.214
Intercept	Autonomy	1042.575	1	1042.575	1335.835	<.001
	Competence	1048.000	1	1048.000	2127.595	<.001
	Relatedness	941.845	1	941.845	1471.094	<.001
	SDT Score	1009.934	1	1009.934	2189.162	<.001
School	Autonomy	6.280	8	.785	1.006	.436
	Competence	6.840	8	.855	1.736	.097
	Relatedness	9.492	8	1.186	1.853	.074
	SDT Score	5.075	8	.634	1.375	.214
Error	Autonomy	92.095	118	.780		
	Competence	58.124	118	.493		
	Relatedness	75.548	118	.640		
	SDT Score	54.437	118	.461		
Total	Autonomy	1974.806	127			
	Competence	1836.556	127			
	Relatedness	1708.000	127			
	SDT Score	1814.316	127			
Corrected Total	Autonomy	98.375	126			
	Competence	64.964	126			
	Relatedness	85.039	126			
	SDT Score	59.513	126			

[a.] R Squared = .064 (Adjusted R Squared = .000)

[b.] R Squared = .105 (Adjusted R Squared = .045)

[c.] R Squared = .112 (Adjusted R Squared = .051)

[d.] R Squared = .085 (Adjusted R Squared = .023)

The researcher collected overall SDT scores and descriptive statistics. These were used too for the analysis of SDT levels and to better understand if the sample had a strong sense of SDT and ultimately answer the first research question: Do 18- to 21-year-old students attending

Pacific Northwest alternative schools have a strong sense of autonomy, relatedness, and competence?

For analysis of the Likert scale responses, Table 10 below was used from previously conducted research on Likert scale intervals (Pimentel, 2010).

Table 10

Likert Interval Scale

Likert Scale Description	Likert Scale	Likert Scale Interval
Not at all true for me	1	1.00-1.80
Not true for me	2	1.81-2.60
Somewhat true for me	3	2.61-3.40
True for me	4	3.41-4.20
Very true for me	5	4.21-5.00

The results for the overall SDT score and the subscales of this framework, which include autonomy, competence, and relatedness are reported in Table 11 with the corresponding identifying Likert scale description. The table below indicates what the overall mean for each category was, the standard deviation of the responses, and what the numbers translate to in correspondence with the pre-identified interval range defined in previous studies (Pimentel, 2010).

Table 11

Likert Interval Scale Results

Scale Item	*M*	*SD*	Likert Scale Description	Likert Scale Interval
SDT Score	3.717	.685	True for me	1.00-1.80
Autonomy	3.844	.880	True for me	1.81-2.60
Competence	3.735	.715	True for me	2.61-3.40
Relatedness	3.575	.818	True for me	3.41-4.20
				4.21-5.00

Based on Table 11, students who attend alternative schools included in this sample have positive levels of self-determination. Specifically, students who attend alternative schools

indicated they had a mean overall SDT of 3.717 with a standard deviation of .685. The SDT component of autonomy had the highest mean of 3.844 with a standard deviation of .880, followed by competence, which had a mean of 3.735 with a standard deviation of .715. The lowest self-determination component for this sample was relatedness with a mean of 3.575 and a standard deviation of .818.

Results for Research Question 2: Impact of Demographic Factors on SDT

For research question two, the goal was to understand if there was a relationship between demographic categories of survey participants and self-determination levels. A one-way MANOVA for each demographic category was used to compare the overall self-determination score with the demographic category to understand if self-determination was more present with specific demographic groups. Participants were classified into gender (Male/Female), ethnicity (Black, Caucasian, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, Native American), receiving special education services or not, and qualifying for free and reduced lunch or not. Once sorted, descriptive statistics were conducted to gather the mean self-determination scores by individual groups. These scores were then compared within groups using one-way MANOVA to see if there was a significant relationship between the demographic groups and their self-determination scores.

In order to conduct a one-way MANOVA, certain assumptions must be met. The first assumption required by a one-way MANOVA is to have two or more dependent variables that are measured at the continuous level (Laerd Statistics, 2015). In this data set, the dependent variables are the overall SDT score and the individual scores for autonomy, relatedness, and competence. The next assumption required by a one-way MANOVA is to have one independent variable that consists of two or more categorical variables. For this analysis, the independent

variables of gender, race, special education status, and free and reduced lunch status, which each have two or more categorical levels, were compared with the dependent variables of SDT and the aforementioned subscales. The last assumption to be able to conduct a one-way MANOVA was independence of observations, which was considered in the analysis of this data, and when data was analyzed no two groups were compared against each other.

Results for Race and SDT

Race demographics were collected for all the sample's participants to see if there was an impact of race on self-determination factors. A one-way multivariate analysis of variance was run to determine the impact of race on self-determination factors (see Table 12). Four measures of self-determination were assessed: overall SDT Score, autonomy, relatedness, and competence. Six different racial groups were considered: Black, Caucasian, Hispanic, Native American, Asian/Pacific Islander, or Prefer not to Say. The "Prefer not to say" category was removed from the data set due to n=17 and there was no significant difference in the analysis with its removal.

Table 12

Race and SDT Categories - Multivariate Tests[a]

Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Intercept	Pillai's Trace	.886	268.544[b]	3.000	104.000	<.001	.886
	Wilks' Lambda	.114	268.544[b]	3.000	104.000	<.001	.886
	Hotelling's Trace	7.746	268.544[b]	3.000	104.000	<.001	.886
	Roy's Largest Root	7.746	268.544[b]	3.000	104.000	<.001	.886
Race	Pillai's Trace	.079	.954	9.000	318.000	.478	.026
	Wilks' Lambda	.923	.948	9.000	253.259	.484	.027
	Hotelling's Trace	.083	.941	9.000	308.000	.489	.027
	Roy's Largest Root	.058	2.056[c]	3.000	106.000	.111	.055

[a.] Design: Intercept + Race

[b.] Exact statistic

[c.] The statistic is an upper bound F that yeilds lower bound on the significance level.

The differences between the groups on the combined dependent variables was not statistically significant, $F(9, 253.259) = .948$, $p = .484$; Wilks' $\Lambda = .923$; partial $\eta 2 = .027$

Results for Gender and SDT

This survey collected data on students' gender to better understand if there was a significant difference in self-determination for males versus females. A one-way multivariate analysis of variance was run to determine the impact of gender on self-determination factors in 18- to 21-year-old alternative school students (see Table 13). Four measures of self-determination were assessed: overall SDT score, autonomy, relatedness, and competence. Gender was divided into two sections: male and female. The original results included a Prefer not to say category, but these answers were removed due to low sample size (n=3).

Table 13

Gender and SDT Categories - Multivariate Tests[a]

Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.
Intercept	Pillai's Trace	.970	974.094[b]	4.000	119.000	<.001
	Wilks' Lambda	.030	974.094[b]	4.000	119.000	<.001
	Hotelling's Trace	32.743	974.094[b]	4.000	119.000	<.001
	Roy's Largest Root	32.743	974.094[b]	4.000	119.000	<.001
Gender	Pillai's Trace	.080	2.580[b]	4.000	119.000	.041
	Wilks' Lambda	.920	2.580[b]	4.000	119.000	.041
	Hotelling's Trace	.087	2.580[b]	4.000	119.000	.041
	Roy's Largest Root	.087	2.580[b]	4.000	119.000	.041

[a.] Design: Intercept + Gender

[b.] Exact statistic

The differences between the genders on the combined dependent variables was statistically significant, $F(4, 119) = 2.580$, $p < .041$; Wilks' $\Lambda = .920$, partial $\eta 2 = .080$) (see Table 14).

Table 14

Differences Between Gender and SDT Subscales – Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	Autonomy	5.526[a]	1	5.526	7.482	.007
	Competence	2.942[b]	1	2.942	5.906	.017
	Relatedness	.690[c]	1	.690	1.030	.312
	SDT Score	2.662[d]	1	2.662	5.860	.017
Intercept	Autonomy	1815.531	1	1815.531	2458.268	<.001
	Competence	1716.469	1	1716.469	3445.715	<.001
	Relatedness	1574.202	1	1574.202	2351.941	<.001
	SDT Score	1699.977	1	1699.977	3741.704	<.001
A5	Autonomy	5.526	1	5.526	7.482	.007
	Competence	2.942	1	2.942	5.906	.017
	Relatedness	.690	1	.690	1.030	.312
	SDT Score	2.662	1	2.662	5.860	.017
Error	Autonomy	90.102	122	.739		
	Competence	60.774	122	.498		
	Relatedness	81.657	122	.669		
	SDT Score	55.429	122	.454		
Total	Autonomy	1908.806	124			
	Competence	1782.556	124			
	Relatedness	1665.000	124			
	SDT Score	1761.020	124			
Corrected Total	Autonomy	95.628	123			
	Competence	63.716	123			
	Relatedness	82.347	123			
	SDT Score	58.091	123			

[a.] R Squared = .058 (Adjusted R Squared = .050)

[b.] R Squared = .046 (Adjusted R Squared = .038)

[c.] R Squared = .008 (Adjusted R Squared = .000)

[d.] R Squared = .046 (Adjusted R Squared = .038)

The Bonferroni Post Hoc tests showed that Autonomy scores ($F (1, 122) = 7.482$, $p < .007$; partial $\eta2 = .058$), Competence scores ($F(1, 122) = 5.906$, $p < .017$; partial $\eta2 = .046$.) and overall SDT scores ($F(1, 122) = 5.860$, $p < .017$; partial $\eta2 = .046$.) were statistically

significantly different between different genders, using a Bonferroni adjusted α level of .025 (see

Table 15).

Table 15

Significant Differences between Gender and SDT – Multiple Comparisons Bonferroni

Dependent Variable	(I) What is your gender?	(J) What is your gender?	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Autonomy	Male	Female	-.4242*	.15439	.021	-.7989	-.0495
		Prefer not to say	-.1.0343	.50474	.128	-2.2593	.1906
	Female	Male	.4242*	.15439	.021	.0495	.7989
		Prefer not to say	-.6101	.50702	.693	-1.8406	.6204
	Prefer not to say	Male	1.0343	.50474	.128	-.1906	2.2593
		Female	.6101	.50702	.693	-.6204	1.8406
Competence	Male	Female	-.3095*	.12687	.048	-.6174	-.0016
		Prefer not to say	-.6389	.41477	.378	-1.6455	.3677
	Female	Male	.3095*	.12687	.048	.0016	.6174
		Prefer not to say	-.3294	.41664	1.00	-1.3405	.6818
	Prefer not to say	Male	.6389	.41477	.378	-.3677	1.6455
		Female	.3294	.41664	1.000	-.6818	1.3405
Relatedness	Male	Female	-.1499	.14881	.948	-.5110	.2113
		Prefer not to say	-.1618	.48649	1.000	-1.3424	1.0189
	Female	Male	.1499	.14881	.948	-.2114	.5110
		Prefer not to say	-.0119	.48869	1.000	-1.1979	1.1741
	Prefer not to say	Male	.1618	.48649	1.000	-1.0189	1.3424
		Female	.0119	.48869	1.000	-1.1741	1.1979
SDT Score	Male	Female	-.2944	.12146	.050	-.5892	.0003
		Prefer not to say	-.6123	.39709	.377	-1.5760	.3514
	Female	Male	.2944	.12146	.050	-.0003	.5892
		Prefer not to say	-.3179	.39888	1.000	-1.2859	.6502
	Prefer not to say	Male	.6123	.39709	.377	-.3514	1.5760
		Female	.3179	.39888	1.000	-.6502	1.2859

Based on observed means.

The error term is Mean Square (Error) = .453

*The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

Specifically, when comparing means, we can see that females have higher levels of autonomy, competence and overall SDT. There was not a statistically significant difference between the genders and relatedness scores ($F(1, 122) = 1.03$, $p < .312$, partial $\eta2 = .008$).

Results for Special Education and SDT

The survey collected data on if participants received special education services during their time attending alternative schools to be able to isolate if there was a significant number of special education students attending these schools and to illuminate areas of strength and weaknesses for this population in self-determination. A one-way multivariate analysis of variance was run to determine the impact of special education services received on self-determination factors (see Table 16). Four measures of self-determination were assessed: overall SDT score, autonomy, relatedness and competence. Three different special education categories were considered: Yes (receiving services), No (not receiving services) and Prefer not to say.

Table 16

Special Education and SDT Categories – Multivariate Test[a]

Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Intercept	Pillai's Trace	.927	372.126[b]	4.000	118.000	<.001	.927
	Wilks' Lambda	.073	372.126[b]	4.000	118.000	<.001	.927
	Hotelling's Trace	12.614	372.126[b]	4.000	118.000	<.001	.927
	Roy's Largest Root	12.614	372.126[b]	4.000	118.000	<.001	.927
Special Education	Pillai's Trace	.032	.478	8.000	238.000	.871	.016
	Wilks' Lambda	.969	.475[b]	8.000	236.000	.873	.016
	Hotelling's Trace	.032	.472	8.000	234.000	.875	.016
	Roy's Largest Root	.025	.747[c]	4.000	119.000	.562	.024

[a.] Design: Intercept + Special Education

[b.] Exact statistic

[c.] The statistic is an upper bound F that yeilds lower bound on the significance level.

The differences between the groups on the combined dependent variables was not statistically significant, $F(8, 236) = .475$, $p = .873$; Wilks' $\Lambda = .969$; partial $\eta2 = .016$.

Results for Free and Reduced Lunch and SDT

Understanding how students attending alternative schools represent students impacted by poverty allows for a more in-depth awareness of how to serve these students. A one-way multivariate analysis of variance was run to determine the impact of free and reduced lunch status on self-determination factors (see Table 17). Four measures of self-determination were assessed: overall SDT score, autonomy, relatedness, and competence. Three different free and reduced lunch categories were considered: Yes (qualified for free and reduced lunch), No (did not qualify for free and reduced lunch) and Prefer not to say.

Table 17

Free and Reduced Lunch Status and SDT Categories - Multivariate Test[a]

Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Intercept	Pillai's Trace	.927	372.908[b]	4.000	118.000	<.001	.927
	Wilks' Lambda	.073	372.908[b]	4.000	118.000	<.001	.927
	Hotelling's Trace	12.614	372.908[b]	4.000	118.000	<.001	.927
	Roy's Largest Root	12.614	372.908[b]	4.000	118.000	<.001	.927
Free Reduced Lunch	Pillai's Trace	.022	.334	8.000	238.000	.952	.011
	Wilks' Lambda	.978	.332[b]	8.000	236.000	.953	.011
	Hotelling's Trace	.023	.330	8.000	234.000	.954	.011
	Roy's Largest Root	.019	.577[c]	4.000	119.000	.680	.019

[a.] Design: Intercept + Free Reduced Lunch

[b.] Exact statistic

[c.] The statistic is an upper bound F that yeilds lower bound on the significance level.

The differences between the groups on the combined dependent variables was not statistically significant, F(8, 236) = .332, p = .953; Wilks' Λ = .978; partial η2 = .011.

Conclusion

This descriptive quantitative study was conducted to have a better understanding of who are the students currently attending alternative schools in the Pacific Northwest, what level of self-determination is present for students in these schools, and how their demographic factors impact their levels of self-determination. The five-point Likert-style survey, which was a school adapted version of the Basic Needs at Work Scale, collected data on these alternative school students' perceptions of their own self-determination and provided data on their levels of autonomy, relatedness, and competence. The survey results indicated that the overall mean of

Self-determination in alternative school students attending alternative school in Idaho is high, with a mean of 3.717. Students from this sample also indicated high levels of autonomy, relatedness, and competence. The results also indicated that there was a significant difference between levels of autonomy, competence, and overall self-determination, but not relatedness, between males and females (p=.041). Females overall had higher levels of autonomy (p=.021) and competence (p=.048) which caused their overall self-determination levels to be higher, with a p value =.05. When analyzing that data, there was no indication of a significant difference between race and the SDT score and subscales, (p=.484). Additionally, there were no significant differences between the groups of special education recipients regarding self-determination, (p=.873). Lastly, there were also no significant differences between the groups receiving or not receiving free and reduced lunch services (p=.953).

Chapter V: Discussion

Despite the downward trend of high school dropouts in the United States, the percentage of students not completing high school continues to be an issue in education today (NCES, 2021a). Dropout is defined as students who leave school before they complete their high school education (NCES, 2021b; Runkle, 2022; Zengin, 2021). Students who are at risk of dropping out of school struggle with a variety of internal and external factors, which are more prevalent in minority groups, males, and students receiving special education services (Foreman-Murray et al., 2022; Morrissette, 2018; Ramsdal & Wynn, 2022). Dropping out of school can adversely affect the individual and society in financial, social, and emotional ways. (NCES, 2021a). Understanding the causes of student dropouts is critical to continuing to reduce the dropout percentage, which will positively support students and the economy (Cavaco et al., 2021; Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011).

One specific strategy in place to reduce dropouts and aid in students' completion of high school is enrolling students in alternative schools. Numerous studies have been conducted on the reasons leading to students dropping out of high school. However, there is a lack of data indicating the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of alternative programs that have been put in place to prevent dropout (Antoni, 2021; Duke & Tenuto, 2020; Flores & Brown, 2019). These schools are an alternative to dropout for students who are struggling to find success in the traditional school setting. Current literature on students attending alternative schools suggests that many of the students are either male, special needs, minorities, or students who qualify for free and reduced lunch (Afacan & Wilkerson, 2019; Frank, 2019). The combination of the inconsistent decline of high school dropouts, and the volume of alternative schools housing a disproportionate number of marginalized communities, and emerging social issues suggests research adding to the

literature of the ineffectiveness of effectiveness of alternative schools as a form of dropout prevention is needed (Dupéré et al., 2021; McDermott et al., 2019; Szlyk, 2020; Yavrutürk et al., 2020; Young-sik et al., 2018). This study was designed to narrow the gap in the literature by focusing on the following research questions:

    1. Do 18- to 21-year-old students attending Pacific Northwest alternative schools have a strong sense of autonomy, relatedness, and competence?

    2. Do demographic factors gender, free and reduced lunch, special education services, and ethnicity have an impact on self-determination factors; autonomy, relatedness, and competence for 18- to 21-year-old students at Pacific Northwest alternative schools?

    This study focuses on the effectiveness of alternative schools through Self-Determination Theory (SDT). SDT is the theory that utilizes the Basic Needs at Work Scale to gauge levels of engagement and motivation through the elements of autonomy, relatedness, and competence. SDT suggests that these human needs are essential to students' motivation in schools. Specifically, the theory supports that the needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness must be met for students to be motivated and successful in school (Howard et al., 2021; Krettenauer & Curren, 2020). Studies have found that student achievement and outcomes are positively correlated with Self-Determination Theory in both alternative and traditional settings (Howard et al., 2021; Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). A few studies have also utilized Self-Determination Theory to look at alternative schools and their students and have indicated that the participants experienced many connections to competence, autonomy, and relatedness and that it helped them to complete their education or find success during their time at an alternative school (Farrelly & Daniels, 2014; Hofer et al., 2021; Statos, 2022). This study adds to the current literature on alternative schools and SDT, but also expands on SDT in the school setting.

Summary of the Results

This quantitative study was a descriptive research design, which is the process of describing relationships without defining the cause (Vera et al., 2016). Specifically, this study aimed to isolate if there were levels of self-determination present with alternative school students in the Pacific Northwest but not what caused those levels. While this study focused on two specific research questions, there were findings throughout the study that were outside of the research questions but closed the gap in literature on Pacific Northwest alternative schools. This study's findings provide insight into who is attending alternative schools and a more in-depth understanding of Self-determination Theory in the alternative school setting. Specifically, there are new findings on Idaho alternative school students and new insights on what elements are contributing to their students' engagement and motivation. Demographic information was collected through this study, expanding on the research that exists regarding students who are at-risk of dropping out of school, as well as students who are attending alternative schools who were at-risk of dropping out prior to enrollment.

Results of Research Question One

The instrument in this study collected Likert responses for nine questions relating to Self-Determination Theory and the subscales of autonomy, relatedness, and competence. The data collected was sorted into an average SDT score for each respondent as well as mean scores for each of the SDT subscales. Studies have found that student achievement and outcomes are positively correlated with Self-Determination Theory (Howard et al., 2021; Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). Previous literature indicated that alternative schools and their students who have high levels of SDT were able to complete their education or find success during their time at an alternative school (Farrelly & Daniels, 2014; Hofer et al., 2021; Statos, 2022). These studies

were conducted on one or two alternative high schools, which indicated a need for a study to be

conducted on multiple alternative schools to increase generalizability in relation to the

effectiveness of SDT in alternative school settings. To expand and better understand the research

on alternative schools in the state of Idaho, the nine participating schools' results (n=127) were

compared. In the analysis of the school results, there were no significant difference between SDT

scores or any of the subscales, and all the schools that participated indicated high levels of SDT

and the subscales. Table 18 illustrates the significance levels between schools by overall SDT

and the subscales.

Table 18

SDT and School Differences

SDT Category	Significance between Schools
Autonomy	.436
Competence	.097
Relatedness	.074
Overall SDT	.214

Research question one was focused on if 18– to 21-year-old students attending Pacific

Northwest alternative schools have a strong sense of autonomy, relatedness, and competence.

This research question is answered with the overall mean of SDT (m=3.717) indicating high

levels of self-determination for the sample. Students in these schools feel that they have high

levels of autonomy (m= 3.848) and competence (m= 3.735) with somewhat lower, but still

significant, levels of relatedness (m=3.575).

The component with the highest overall mean was autonomy with a score of 3.844.

Autonomy is a type of intrinsic motivation in which a person feels ownership in their decision-

making (Mayo et al., 2022; Ntoumanis et al., 2021). Environments that have a culture of

autonomy provide students the freedom to act on their own (Statos, 2022). Autonomous types of

intrinsic motivation lead to positive outcomes for students, which stipulates that students attending these schools are more likely to be successful in this setting due to the high levels of autonomy present (Guay, 2022). In this study, students in this sample of Idaho alternative schools have high levels of autonomy, feeling more control over their own educational decisions. Even though some of the students in this study are older than traditional high school ages, their strong sense of autonomy may help them graduate from their chosen alternative school.

With an overall mean of 3.735, competence is considered at a high level for students attending alternative schools in this sample. Competence indicates that students believe that they can impact outcomes and achieve goals (Ryan & Deci, 2009). When individuals feel competent, they are more likely to feel self-determined because they can make a connection between what they do and what they are able to accomplish (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Students' sense of competence is heightened when teachers' expectations are structured around students' abilities, and clear directions about expectations and consequences are present (Hofer et al., 2021). Students who attend alternative schools are often at risk of dropping out due to feeling a lack of competence in schools as this is evident through credit deficiencies and low academic achievement. If this is true, then Idaho alternative school students who experience a high sense of competence, like those in this study, should be more likely to persist in their current school settings.

While relatedness is the lowest scoring component of the SDT (m=3.575), it is still in the "true for me "range (3.41-4.20) indicating that there is a presence of relatedness in alternative schools in Idaho. Relatedness, also known as belonging in literature, is the connection students have with the people they attend school with and the teachers by whom they are taught (Cockerill, 2019). Relatedness benefits well-being as students enter their adolescent years, as it

helps maintain positive peer relations which can be connected to higher levels of sociability, perceived competence, and self-esteem, and reduced hostility, anxiousness, and depression (Van Ryzin et al., 2009). Students who attend alternative schools often struggle to feel connected to the school they were attending prior, which could be for reasons relating to friendships, teacher relationships, or lack of belonging in the school setting. This study shows that Idaho alternative school students do feel connected to the material or people within their current school, which should help students to stay enrolled in Alternative school settings.

Research Question Two Summary of Results and Discussion

The demographic data collected in this sample was similar to the currently available research on the demographic data of students who are attending alternative schools in some areas but differed in others. Previous research indicates that students who attend alternative schools are primarily male, minorities, receive special education services, and qualify for free and reduced lunch (Afacan & Wilkerson, 2019; Frank, 2019). This study found that of the nine schools that participated, the 18–21-year-old students were 53.5% male and 44.1% female with varying races including white 43.3%, Hispanic 37.8%, Native American and Asian Pacific Islander 3.1%, Black 2.4% and 10.2% who preferred not to share their race. The sample also indicated that 74% of the students did not receive special education services with 6.3% preferring not to respond, but 73% qualified for free and reduced lunch services.

As previously noted, the current literature indicates that there is a higher percentage of male students attending alternative schools than females (NCES, 2021b). The findings of this study found that 55% of the respondents were male which would correlate with previous literature. Important to note is the minimal difference between the male and female populations in the current study with only a 7% difference between the two genders. According to the Idaho

Department of Education 51.1% of students in Idaho are male and 48.9% are female. Similarly in

Oregon, 49% of students are female, and 50% of students are male and in Washington 48% are

females and 52% are male. These findings compared to the different states data would suggest

that in the Pacific Northwest there is not a disproportionate number of male students attending

alternative schools. Conversely the percentage of students receiving special education services,

19.7%, was significantly less than the data found in other studies on alternative school students.

But when this study's findings are compared to the percentage of special education students

currently in the state of Idaho, which is 11.6% of the population, it is slightly higher. The

national average for students receiving special education nationally is 15% (NCES, 2023). All of

the available data compared with the sample and previous research indicates that while the

findings of this study indicate lower levels of special education students than other studies, it

may be due to Idaho having less students receiving special education services than other states in

the nation.

For this sample, 37.8% of students indicated they were Hispanic and 43.3% indicated

they were Caucasian. Demographically the students in this sample were representative of the

population of students attending schools in the Pacific Northwest as students in Idaho are

primarily Caucasian at 73.8% with the highest minority group being Hispanic at 19.2% (SDE,

2018). In this study, a much higher concentration of Hispanic students is being educated in

alternative schools than in comprehensive high schools in Idaho. In Oregon and Washington

schools, the primary ethnicities are Caucasian with the Hispanic population also being the most

prevalent minority, which would indicate that if they data was collected in these states they

would be consistent with the findings of this study (ODE, 2023). Outside literature has also

indicated that there are high levels of Hispanic students in alternative school settings (Frank,

2019; Huerta & Hernández, 2021; Long et al., 2018), and the sample in this study supports this. Students qualifying for free and reduced lunch is an indicator of poverty and provides an index for schools on low-income students (NCES, 2023). With a percentage of 73.2%, the sample is consistent with previous studies' findings on students attending alternative schools experiencing poverty, but considerably higher than the Idaho and Washington percentages which sit at 43.8% and 49.7%. Which would indicate that this sample is consistent with the literature in serving high numbers of students at or near the poverty line (Churchill et al., 2021; SDE, 2023; Young-sik et al., 2018).

While the study provided important data on which student demographically attended alternative schools in Idaho as well as the Pacific Northwest, the goal of the study was to understand if there were specific demographic groups that had higher levels of self-determination, and if there were any connections between demographic groups and the subscales of Self-Determination Theory. The following research question was the basis of this research:

Do demographic factors gender, free and reduced lunch, special education services, and ethnicity have an impact on self-determination factors; autonomy, relatedness, and competence for 18- to 21-year-old students at Pacific Northwest Alternative schools?

Gender. The results of the study indicated that there was a significant difference between male and female students attending Pacific Northwest Alternative schools for SDT, autonomy, and competence (p= .017). The data indicated that females in these settings have higher levels of SDT overall. Having a higher level of SDT overall indicates that the female students attending alternative schools in Idaho are more engaged and motivated in their school setting than the males who attend those schools. Before attending alternative schools, these students needed to qualify as at-risk for dropping out. These findings would suggest that females attending

alternative schools in Idaho are less likely to drop out of school and should be more likely to

complete their education due to the presence of SDT. The findings indicate that there is a

significant difference in the levels of competence with females and males in this sample

(p=.017). Students need to feel able to be successful in their environment for competency to exist

in the school setting (Krettenauer & Curren, 2020), and these findings indicate the females in

Idaho alternative schools feel that they can be successful in their school environment. As

mentioned previously, there was a significant difference between males and females overall, but

also found in this study was that females attending alternative schools in Idaho have high levels

of autonomy which is illustrated by the overall mean for autonomy in the sample being m= 3.884

and the significance of the difference between males and females being p=.007. Positive

examples in schools of autonomy include teachers praising signs of improvement and mastery

and creating opportunities for students' choice. While the findings of this study are not specific

on what specially these school are doing, females attending Idaho alternative schools feel that in

their school settings, they are experiencing things that create a sense of autonomy. Overall, 18–

to 21-year-old females attending alternative schools in Idaho are more motivated and engaged in

the alternative school setting due to overall self-determination, their ability to have autonomy,

and feel competent in their schoolwork. There was not a significant difference between male and

female levels of relatedness in these settings. Relatedness being the only component of SDT that

is not statistically significant, this is an important finding. Students attending alternative schools

in Idaho have a high level of relatedness overall (m=3.575), but it was the lowest mean of all the

components.

   Race. High school dropout and alternative school's enrollment rates show a

disproportionate number of minorities, specifically Hispanic and Black students, who are

attending these schools (Frank, 2019; Huerta & Hernández, 2021; Long et al., 2018). In answering research question one, it was noted that for Idaho alternative schools, there is also a disproportionate number of minority students with 37.8% of students indicating they were Hispanic.The findings of this question indicate there is no statistically significant difference between the race of the participating students with overall SDT score or any of the three components. That said, the overall findings of this study indicate moderate to high levels of SDT and the subscales. Based on these findings, it can be determined that race does not significantly impact if students experience autonomy, relatedness, or competence in the Idaho alternative school settings.

   Special Education. In 2019, the dropout rate for students with disabilities is 10.7%, which is more than twice that of the dropout rate of 4.7% for students without disabilities. (NCES, 2021a). This study collected data on students attending alternative schools in Idaho were students with disabilities and if there was a significant difference between the experiences of those students with disabilities and those without through a lens of self-determination and the corresponding subscales. The findings of this study did not indicate a high volume of special education students with only 19% of the sample indicating they received services. But the findings also did not indicate a difference between SDT or the subscales scores for those students who identified as receiving services or not. So, while the pool of special education students is small, overall, the sample indicates high levels of SDT and the subscales which indicates that the student's perception of their autonomy. Relatedness, and competences are not impacted by their special education status. This finding may also indicate a lack of awareness or understanding of what qualifying for special education means within this sample, as during the survey

administration there were students inquiring about what "receiving special education services" meant and if it applied to them.

Free and Reduced. Extensive literature indicates that alternative schools serve a high population of students who qualify for free and reduced lunch (Churchill et al., 2021; Rubens et al., 2019). The state of Idaho has 43.8% of students receiving free and reduced lunch (NCES, 2023). Seventy- three percent the study participants qualified for free lunch and reduced lunch, but there was no statistically significant difference between the group that indicated they received free and reduced lunch than those who indicated prefer not to say or no they did not receive free and reduced lunch with $p=.953$. Due to the overall data indicating that there are high levels of SDT and the subscales, the lack of significance in the differences of this demographic population confirms that students in these settings do not have inequitable access to autonomy, relatedness, and competence for monetary reasons.

Conclusions

Self-Determination Theory suggests classrooms that support autonomy, competence, and relatedness are more likely to engage students in learning (Chiu, 2022). Students who attend alternative schools in the Pacific Northwest are attending these schools due to being at risk of dropping out of school (SDE, 2023; ODE, 2023). This study's findings indicate that 18- to 21-year-old students attending alternative schools the Pacific Northwest have a strong sense of self-determination and the subscales autonomy, relatedness, and competence. However, due to the study design, causation is not indicated. Furthermore, this study's findings can conclude that the Self-Determination Theory is an effective lens for assessing alternative school students' levels of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Since all the schools that participated in this study are geographically different parts of Idaho, it could be stated that alternative schools in Idaho have

significant levels of self-determination as well as notable levels of autonomy, relatedness, and competence. Prior studies have been conducted at one or two alternative high schools at a time and in different geographical regions (Farrelly & Daniels, 2014; Hofer et al., 2021; Statos, 2022). While the data collected is limited to Idaho, the findings of this study and its conclusions can be applied to the Pacific Northwest for a variety of reasons. Idaho, Washington, and Oregon serve similar demographic populations. The aforementioned states also have similar challenges regarding graduation rates, specifically with their rates falling between 79-82% over the last three years. Additionally, the PNW states are aligned in how they define at-risk youth and place students in alternative school settings. All of these schools seek to support students who were not able to be successful in a traditional school setting due to a variety of internal and external factors that qualify them as at-risk of dropping out of school. While the findings of this study are generalizable across the PNW, there are findings and conclusions within this study that are specific to Idaho.

Students in Idaho attending alternative schools need to qualify as "at risk." These findings, combined with previous literature, allow for the assumption that Idaho alternative schools are aiding in improving student achievement and outcomes for students who might not otherwise graduate high school. Based on this data and previous literature, we can generalize that students attending these schools are more motivated and engaged in their alternative school settings due to the self-determination factors present in these settings.

Students attend alternative schools due to a lack of motivation or engagement in traditional schools but in this setting, are more likely to complete school due to autonomous factors. Students in alternative schools in Idaho have the freedom to make choices and have strong decision-making abilities within their school setting. Previous research indicates that

competency can be developed through clear expectations, student choice, and challenging tasks (Hofer et al., 2021). The findings of this study, intertwined with previous literature, suggest that Idaho alternative schools are implementing practices that allow students to have choices within their education, to be challenged, and to be provided with clear expectations. The results show high levels of competence and confirm that students in the Idaho alternative schools feel more competent in this setting. Previous studies have indicated that students who experience competency are more likely to be successful in school (Guay, 2022; Hofer et al., 2021). This study's findings combined with previous research suggest that Idaho alternative schools' students are potentially more likely to complete school due to this factor. Alternative schools in Idaho show a significant level of relatedness, meaning that these schools may have better retention and completion success rates for students who previously felt disconnected from other school settings. With no statistically significant difference between groups and a lower overall mean, it can be concluded that while students attending alternative schools in Idaho indicated some level of relatedness, it is not the most impactful component of the alternative school student experiences, therefore, may not be one of the contributing factors in dropout prevention. Autonomy, competence, and relatedness are crucial elements to infuse into Idaho alternative schools because students who are attending these schools now feel they have a say in their education as well as the skills to complete the work, which in turn could indicate a higher chance of successful completion of school, reducing the number of dropouts in Idaho.

Also, this study adds to the literature with demographic information on who attends alternative schools in Idaho. The findings from the study indicate that over 45% of the sample was a member of a minority group. This percentage is an important finding due to the expansive literature on dropouts within minority populations. It can be concluded from the high levels of

SDT, and the percentage of minorities represented in this study that alternative schools in Idaho aid minority students in Idaho completing high school. The percentage of students receiving special education services in Idaho alternative school is 19.7%. The findings of this study add to the literature on alternative schools regarding special education students and specifically relates to the alternative schools in Idaho, indicating that Idaho's placement of special education students in alternative school settings may be more equitable than in other states. The results of this study are also important as it can be concluded that students attending alternative schools in Idaho have high levels of SDT regardless of special education service status, indicating that there is equity in these settings for all students and that students experiencing disabilities perceive their experience to be the same as those without disabilities.

Students who qualify for free and reduced lunch are experiencing poverty in the home, which increases the chance of high school dropout (Churchill et al., 2021). With 73% of the sample stating they qualify for free and reduced lunch, it can be concluded that there are a disproportionate number of students experiencing poverty in Idaho alternative schools, which matches the other available literature on alternative schools. However, the findings of this study, which indicate high levels of SDT, confirm that all students attending alternative schools in Idaho experience the positive impacts of having experiences that create autonomy, competence, and relatedness regardless of socio-economic standing. Students living in poverty experience barriers to school completion, and the alternative schools in Idaho are working to provide opportunities for success for all students (NAIS, 2018).

The findings of this study would support the suggestion that Self-Determination Theory and the subscales of autonomy, relatedness, and competence should be utilized in all school

settings to increase engagement and motivation for students who are struggling to find success in school.

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings from this study are a potential springboard for future research on Self-Determination Theory and alternative schools. Specifically, this study indicates that SDT is present in these settings but not the specific strategies or practices that lead to causation. Further, research could be conducted on what specifically causes high levels of self-determination and the subscales in the alternative school Setting. Understanding what causes high levels of SDT in Idaho alternative schools would be beneficial so that it could be applied to in the Idaho traditional settings to increase graduation rates. Conducting this research in traditional schools in Idaho could allow for comparative research to be done on the impacts of SDT for all students. Specifically, research should be conducted on what Idaho alternative schools are doing to increase the levels of autonomy and competence with their students and how these elements might be applied in the traditional school setting to retain at-risk students and prevent dropout. More research is needed to better understand the lower levels of relatedness in Idaho alternative schools and determine the impacts this may have on this student population.

Due to the similarities between Idaho, Washington and Oregon, and the limited research on the other states, a Pacific Northwest look at alternative schools through a lens of SDT would be beneficial. Research should also be conducted to include Oregon and Washington schools using the same instrument to better understand the Pacific Northwest alternative school students as a population and solidify the findings of this study. This study adds to the literature available on alternative schools and suggests that more research should be conducted on all alternative schools to better understand if there are high levels of SDT universally in these settings.

Echoing previous studies, there is a need for further research on the disproportionate levels of Hispanic students in alternative school settings. Further research needs to be conducted on what these schools are doing to create experiences that enhance autonomy and competence for those students coming from minority groups. Also, more research is needed on the disproportionate levels of students in poverty attending school in alternative school settings. These findings could be impactful in the alternative and traditional school setting to support minority students as well as students that face educational barriers due to poverty. Further research would also need to be conducted to understand the specific factors leading to differences in special education student presence in alternative schools in this sample versus the literature available. Research and the findings of this study indicate higher numbers of male students in alternative school settings. Research on why female students have higher levels of SDT, autonomy, and competence than males in these settings and what specially these practices are that are creating higher levels would aid other alternative schools in their attempts to support males at-risk of dropping out of school.

This study was also only conducted on 18- to 21-year-old students. More research is needed on students below that age bracket to better understand all students attending alternative schools. Due to the sample of students being older and closer to completion, that may impact their levels of self-determination. Specifically, students who are in the lower grades of schooling may struggle with competence due to failed courses and lack of positive school experiences. Additionally, the drop out age in Idaho is 16 which means the students in this sample have preserved through the drop out age and have made it to the end of their time in education. To understand how SDT in alternative schools can be beneficial for all ages further research on the younger student population would be needed.

Implications for Professional Practice

The findings of this research can be used to make recommendations for all levels of education. State entities, administrators, and teachers are all working to support students in alternative school settings and the findings of this study allows for guidance on how to support the students attending these schools through Self-Determination Theory.

Teachers can and should be using SDT at the classroom level to support students. There are many different strategies that teachers can use within the classroom to help support the development of SDT within their students. Based on the alternative school experience, the following suggestions are specific for alternative school teachers to help build SDT characteristics in their students. Teachers can support autonomy by creating opportunities for student choice and providing clear expectations. Students who have student choice and clear expectations are more personally vested in their education. Teachers can create competence by creating assignments that help to build mastery. Educators also need to personalize learning and use flexible approaches to the traditional curriculum (Cantey, 2022). When competence building strategies are used within the class, students'confidence grows and students feel more capable in those settings (Hofer et al., 2021). Goal setting for students is also a supported practice that helps create autonomy for students and potential building of competence in students (Farrelly & Daniels, 2014). Teachers can help students be more successful by building relationships with students. This can be done through working to create a safe place where students and faculty can interact in a way that forms positive relationships, which will help to retain students who feel disconnected to school (Fortner, 2022). Based on the findings of this study and the provided review of literature, it can be concluded that the concepts of autonomy, relatedness, and competence support students who are the most at risk of dropping out, making these changes and

practices valuable for all students. Due to the study's focus on 18- to 21-year-old students and findings that indicate high levels of SDT with these students, teachers should be intentional about exposing younger students to SDT supported strategies to proactively support students as they begin their schooling to prevent future dropout.

The research suggests that student perceived levels of self-determination specifically the basic psychological needs theory can predict well-being, engagement, and academic achievement which correlates to engagement and academic achievement (Farrelly & Daniels, 2014). For that reason, school principals should be aware of the levels of SDT in their school setting and utilize SDT supported strategies to support the students in their school who are struggling to stay in school. This could look like flexibility around attendance, controlling class sizes, and creating a welcoming environment for all students (Cantey, 2022; Hofer et al., 2021). Additionally, administrators can ensure that teachers are professionally trained in self-determination focused strategies to support students in their school setting (Close, 2001). Administrators could utilize the instrument in this study to better understand the current levels of SDT and its subscales in their current setting.

The demographic findings of this study as well as previous studies indicate a need for more focused attention of who is being placed in alternative schools. Disproportionate levels of minorities and free and reduced lunch students attending alternative schools should be a sign to states that a review of policies and procedures on alternative school placement should be done. This work should be conducted to better understand why these students are unable to find success in the traditional school setting as well as determine if there are harmful exclusionary placement practices in place.

The instrument from this study has proven to be an effective tool for measuring levels of SDT and the subscales but not the cause of those levels. Those involved at the state level for alternative schools should consider using SDT to better understand the students attending alternative schools, not just those who are 18- to 21-years-old. Specifically, state level officials should utilize the Self- Determination Theory tools such as this instrument with all grade levels in alternative schools to assess the levels of SDT across age groups. These findings would be beneficial for state level officials to better support all students in the state, by painting a clear picture of SDT and the subscales in alternative school settings. State level officials should also consider supporting SDT focused professional development opportunities for administrators and teachers, to equip them with skills that are proven to support at-risk youth.

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Appendix A: IRB Approval

Northwest Nazarene University <reply-to+520637ec-e7c4-4b7a-98fd-0f585cdfc73b@email.submittable.com>   Thu, Mar 23, 9:51AM   ☆   ↩   ⋮

to me ▾

Submittable

Dear Rebecca,

The IRB has reviewed your protocol: 0334. You received "Full Approval". Congratulations, you may begin your research. If you have any questions, let me know.

Northwest Nazarene University
Rick Boyes
IRB Member
623 S University Blvd
Nampa, ID 83686

REPLY   VIEW SUBMISSION

Submission ID: 35970751

Sent by Submittable.

111 Higgins Ave #300, Missoula, MT 59802

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Appendix B: Site Permission Request

NNU

Rebecca Kosinski <rkosinski@nnu.edu>

Site Permission for Doctoral Research
23 messages

Rebecca Kosinski <rkosinski@nnu.edu>   Tue, Feb 21, 2023 at 5:40 AM
Bcc: kzeller@sd273.com, marianne.southwick@cdaschools.org, kelly.fisher@lposd.org, gkramasz@lewistonschools.net, scheppers.nicole@westada.org, carpenterr@cossaschools.org, wayarbrough@nsd131.org, bimel@mdsd.org, gcorrigan@msd134.org, kcheney@caldwellschools.org, dalelyn.allen@vallivue.org, adaangel@cassiaschools.org, drichardson@buhlschools.org, janet.stockton@frco.k12.va.us, johnsore@sd25.us, mpauley@sd251.org, d91zone2@sd91.org, leslielehnertz@pathwaysedu.org, ktibbitts@minidokaschools.org, Daniel.M.Radabaugh@omd.oregon.gov, pjordan@coic.org, info@portlandoic.org, School.Board@camas.wednet.edu, Schoolboard@spokaneschools.org, belcherj@cersd.org, kellyg@wapatosd.org, board@tacoma.k12.wa.us, pecchivj@puyallup.k12.wa.us, InfoWYA@mil.wa.gov, "mwhite@elevate208.org" <mwhite@elevate208.org>, lorri.prescott@jeromeschools.org, kootenaibridgeacademy@gmail.com, Woolstes@93.k12.id.us, shanjame@sd91.org, kresb@d55.k12.id.us, dfryberger@sd251.org, lance.harrison@psd201.org, pat.charlton@jeromeschools.org, david.carson@buhlschools.org, milsandr@cassiaschools.org, dickinsonbr@tfsd.org, jramsey@minidokaschools.org, coby.dennis@boiseschools.org, lisa.boyd@vallivue.org, mgee@msd134.org, epingrey@mdsd.org, grussell@nsd131.org, bub.derek@westada.org, lhansen@lewistonschools.net, becky.meyer@lposd.org, DNaccarato@sd273.com, lsexton@lakeland272.org

To Whom it May Concern:

My name is Rebecca Kosinski and I am a current Northwest Nazarene University doctoral student hoping to do research on the effectiveness of Alternative Schools from the Pacific Northwest students' perspective. As a current Alternative School Principal at the Idaho Youth Challenge Academy I believe this research will help all who work in Alternative Education to be able better serve their students as well as provide crucial information on how to support At-Risk students in the traditional setting. I have attached a one page synopsis of my research if you are interested in further details on the study.

In order to conduct this work I will need permission from the school districts/programs in which these schools are housed.

That is where you come in. If you are receiving this email you have been identified as a person in your district who could provide me with more information on how to secure permission in the district or program you are a part of.

Please let me know the specific process for obtaining this permission or forward this to the person who would best be able to assist me.

If you are the person able to grant permission and are comfortable with me conducting my study with your current and former students please see and fill out the attached letter template or respond to this email stating I would be allowed to conduct my study at Alternative Schools in your district.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions you have.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Kosinski, Ed.S.

Idaho Youth Challenge Academy Principal

rkosinski@nnu.edu

1-208-464-1463

Appendix C: Basic Needs Satisfaction at Work Scale (BNSW-S) Survey

Please read each question. Think about how true it is for you. Put an "X" in the box that seems to match what you think.	RATING				
	1 not at all true for me	**2** not true for me	**3** Some-what true for me	**4** true for me	**5** very true for me
1. I really like the people at this school.					
2. People at this school tell me I am good at my school work.					
3. I am free to express my ideas and opinions at this school.					
4 I consider the people at this school to be my friends.					
5. I have been able to learn interesting new things at this school.					
6. Most days I feel good about the work I do at this school.					
7. My feelings are taken into consideration at this school.					
8. I can pretty much be myself at this school.					
9. People at this school are friendly towards me.					

Note. Screenshot of the instrument used in the study. Reprinted from, *Understanding alternative education: A mixed methods examination of student experiences* by S. G. Farrelly, 2013. Used with permission – see Appendix D.

Appendix D: Permission to Use Instrument

Susan Glassett Farrelly <sglassett@gmail.com>   Mon, Mar 13, 2023 at 10:37 AM
To: Rebecca Kosinski <rkosinski@nnu.edu>

Rebecca,
You have my permission to use the instrument I used in my dissertation study. Please let me know if you need anything else.

Sincerely,
Susan Farrelly

Appendix E: Idaho List of Alternative Schools

												Separate Accountability	Own Diploma	Signatures	Accreditation on	Exp. Date	Need Own Accreditation on
						2022-23 Alternative Schools ~ Regular Session											
Building #	School #	School	Grades	Total Enrollment	Principal	Email	Superintendent	Email	Date Received	Date Approved	Letter						6/30/2024
491	1084	New Vision High School	9-12	180	Dawn MacKesy	dmackesy@sd273.com	Dena Neccarato	DNaccarato@sd273.com	5/17/2022	6/29/2022	x	y	y	y	Yes		Have
491	1104	Mountain View Alternative High	6-12	185	Paul Uzzi	puzzi@lakeland272.org	Lisa Arnold	lsexton@lakeland272.org	5/23/2022	6/29/2022	x	y	y	y	Yes	6/30/2026	Have
801	1232	Kootenai Bridge Academy	9-12	350	Charles Kenna	kootenaibridgeacademy@gmail.com	Charles Kenna	kootenaibridgeacademy@g	6/14/2022	7/28/2022	x	y	y	y	Yes	6/30/2023	Have
491	1037	Venture High School	6-12	180	Teresa Kaiser	tkaiser@cdaschools.org	Shon Hocker	shocker@cdaschools.org	6/21/2022	7/28/2022	x	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	6/30/2022	Have
491	1138	St. Maries Community Education	9-12	19	Christopher Asbury	Casbury@sd41.org	Alica Holthaus	Aholthaus@sd41.org	6/15/2022	7/12/2022	x	n	y	y	No		no
490	1471	Elevate Academy North	6-10	336	Marita Diffenbaugh	mdiffenbaugh@elevate-north.org	Monica White	mwhite@eleate208.org	6/9/2022	7/27/2022		y	y	y	not yet		Yes
491	1045	Lake Pend Oreille High School	9-12	100	David Miles	david.miles@lposd.org	Becky Meyer	becky.meyer@lposd.org	6/17/2022	7/28/2022	x	y	y	y	Yes	6/30/2026	Yes
491	612	Paradise Creek Regional High S	9-12	34	Brian Smith	Bsmith@msd281.org	Greg Bailey	gbailey@msd281.org	4/25/2022	4/27/2022	x	y	y	y	Yes	6/30/2025	Have
492/493	1362	Idaho Youth Challenge Academy	9-12	300	Rebecca Kosinski	rkosinski@idyouthchallenge.com	Dr. Mike Garrett	garrettm@jsd171.org	6/1/2022	6/29/2022	X	y	y	y	Yes	6/30/2026	Have
491	1034	Tammany High School	9-12	111	Greg Kramaz	gkramasz@lewistonschools.net	Lance Hansen	lhansen@lewistonschools.n	7/13/2022	7/28/2022	x	y	y	y	Yes	6/30/2022	Have
495	597	Central Academy High School	9-12	160	Donelle McNeal	mcneal.donell@westada.org	Dr. Derek Bub	bub.derek@westada.org	3/9/2022	3/22/2022	X	y	y	y	Yes	6/30/2026	Have
492	982	Eagle Academy	9-12	185	James Buschine	buschine.james@westada.org	Dr. Derek Bub	bub.derek@westada.org	3/14/2022	3/22/2022	X	y	y	y	Yes	6/30/2022	Have
491	1291	Cossa Academy	7-12	1125	Patricia Frahm	frahmp@cossaschools.org	Patricia Frahm	frahmp@cossaschools.org	4/9/2022	6/10/2022	X	y	y	y	Yes	6/30/2025	Have
491	1228	Meridian Academy	9-12	200	Dr. Eian Harm	harm.eian@westada.org	Dr. Derek Bub	bub.derek@westada.org	4/12/2022	6/13/2022	x	y	y	y	Yes	6/30/2025	Have
amics	1430	Empower Connections Academy	6-12	156	Kenny McAlister	kmcalister@inspire.connectionsacad	Kenny McAlister	kmcalister@inspire.connect	4/28/2022	6/29/2022	x	Y	N		Yes	3/2022	Have
495	1154	Union High School	6-12	220	Melisa LaPrath	mlaprath@nsd121.org	Gregg Russell	grussell@nsd131.org	5/9/2022	6/29/2022	x	y	y	y	Yes	6/30/2022	Have
492	1317	Bennett Mountain High School	9-12	100	d	tesar_sj@mtnhomesd.org	James Gilbert	Gilbert_jg@mtnhomesd.org	5/27/2022	6/29/2022	x	y	y	y	Yes	6/30/2025	Have
491	1264	Heartland High School	9-12	35	Phil Schoensee	pschoensee@mdsd.org	Eric Pingrey	epingrey@mdsd.org	6/2/2022	6/29/2022	x	y	n	y	Yes	6/30/21	Have
491	1168	Middleton Academy	6-12	154	Dr. Glen Croft	gcroft@msd134.org	Marc Gee	mgee@msd134.org	6/6/2022	6/29/2022	x	y	y	y	Yes	6/30/2024	Have
489	1297	Rebound School of Opportunity	6-12	167	Michael Hanneman	hanneman.michael@westada.org	Dr. Derek Bub	bub.derek@westada.org	6/7/2022	6/13/2022	x	y	n	y	Yes	3/8/2016	Have
491	1090	Canyon Springs High School	9-12	210	Christine McMillen	cmcmillen@caldwellschools.org	Shalene French	nfrench@caldwellschools.o	6/9/2022	7/27/2022	X	y	y	y	Yes	6/30/2026	Have
491	140	Vallivue Academy	9-12	140	Rafael CdeBaca	rafael.cdebaca@vallivue.org	Lisa Boyd	lisa.boyd@vallivue.org	6/9/2022	7/27/2022	X	y		y	Yes	6/30/2022	Have
490	1420	Elevate Academy	6-12	488	CJ Watson	cwatson@elevate2c.org	Monica White	mwhite@elevate208.org	6/9/2022	7/27/2022		Y	Y	Y	Yes	6/30/2026	Have
491	871	Richard McKenna Charter High	9-12	300	Dennis Wilson	dwilson@rmckenna.org	Dennis Wilson	dwilson@rmckenna.org	7/14/2022	7/28/2022	X	Y	N		Yes	6/30/2026	Have
494	675	Frank Church High School	6-12	291	Nate Dennis	NATHAN.DENNIS@BOISESCHOO	Coby Dennis	coby.dennis@boiseschools.org				y	y	y	Yes	6/30/2026	Have
492	1115	Initial Point High School	9-12	100	Jason Reddy	jjreddy@kunaschools.org	Wendy Johnson	wjohnson@kunaschools.org				y	y	y	Yes	6/30/2023	Have
491	1265	Black Canyon Jr/Sr High School	6-12	137	Stephen R. Joyner	sjoyner@isd221.net	Craig Woods	cwoods@isd221.net				y	y	y	Yes	6/30/2026	Have
493	1145	Crossroads Middle School	6-8	150	Joseph Palaia	palaia.joseph@westada.org	Dr. Derek Bub	bub.derek@westada.org	4/20/2022	6/13/2022	x	y	n	y	NA	NA	NA
490	594	Pathways Middle School	6-8	160	Eric Eschen	eschen.eric@westada.org	Dr. Derek Bub	bub.derek@westada.org	4/22/2022	6/13/2022	x	y	NA	y	NA		NA
491	1067	Indianhead Academy High Scho	9-12	19	Wendy Clark	clarkw@weiserschools.org	Wade Wilson	wilsonw@weiserschools.or	4/29/2022	6/29/2022	x	n	Y	Y	NO		No
491	1332	Fruitland Preparatory Academy	6-12	29	Gayle Van Weerdhui	gvanwee@fruitlandschools.org	Lyle Bayley	lbayley@fruitlandschools.o	6/3/2022	7/1/2022	x	y	n	y	Shared - Fruitland HS		No
491	1113	Midvale Alternative School	7-12	14	Jennifer Besel	beseli@msd433.org	KyLee Morris	morrisk@msd433.org	6/7/2022	7/1/2022	x	n	n	y	No		No
492	1453	Presidio High School	7-12	20	Jacob Williams	jawilliams@payetteschools.org	Robin Gilbert	rogilbert@payetteschools.o	4/4/2022	6/10/2022	X	Y	Y	y	No		Yes
491	1302	Insight School of Idaho	9-12	255	Amber Hatrock	ahotrock@k12.com	Kelly Edginton	kedginton@k12.com	5/11/2022	6/29/2022	x	y	y	y	??	April 2014	Yes
486	1417	iSucceed Academy	9-12	330	Clayton Trehal	ctrehal@isucceedvhs.net	Kathleen M. Allison	kallison@isucceedvhs.net	6/7/2022	6/29/2022	X	y	y	y	Need own		Yes
805	1462	Cardinal Academy	9-12	120	Jamie Garn	jgarn@cardinalacademy.org	Patricia Kempthorne	pkempthorne@twigafound	6/13/2022	7/27/2022	x	y	y	y	Yes	6/30/2026	Yes
490	1473	Elevate Academy Nampa	6-10	342	Jewels Carpenter	jcarpenter@elevatenampa.org	Monica White	mwhite@elevate208.org	6/13/2022	7/27/2022		y	y	y	not yet		Yes
491	1303	Idaho Connects Online Alternati	6-12	295	Vickie McCullough	vickie.mccullough@iconschool.org	Vickie McCullough	vickie.mccullough@iconsch	6/14/2022	7/28/2022	X	y	y	y	Need Own	6/30/2022	Yes
491	1494	TIGER Learn Program	7-8	30	Ryan Kuntz	kuntz_rm@mtnhomesd.org	James Gilbert	Gilbert_jg@mtnhomesd.org	5/9/2022	6/29/2022	x	n	NA	Y	NA		
491	1102	Silver Creek High School	9-12	60	Toni Boush	tboush@blaineschools.org	James Foudy	jfoudy@blaineschools.org	3/2/2022	3/8/2022	X	y	y	y	Yes	6/30/2023	Have
492	1046	Mt. Harrison High School	9-12	175	Maggie Fortner	mfortner@minidokaschools.org	James Ramsey	jramsey@minidokaschools.	6/1/2022	6/29/2022	x	y	n	y	Yes	6/30/2022	Have
491	1066	Magic Valley High School	9-12	175	Roger Keller	kellerro@tfsd.org	Dr. Brady Dickinson	dickinsonbr@tfsd.org	6/8/2022	7/27/2022	X	y	y	y	Yes	6/30/2024	Have
491	990	Cassia Jr/Sr High School	7-12	150	Jeanne Allen	alleanm@cassiaschools.org	Sandra Miller	millsandr@cassiaschools.or	6/13/2022	7/27/2022	x	y	y	y	Yes	6/30/2023	Have
491	1495	Mindoka Jr. High	7-8	50	Dyann Blood	dblood@minidokaschools.org	James Ramsey	jramsey@minidokaschools	4/27/2022	7/14/2022	x	Yes	NA	Yes	NA		NA
492	1147	Bridge Academy	7-8	64	Araceli Huicochea	huicocheaar@tfsd.org	Dr. Brady Dickinson	dickinsonbr@tfsd.org	5/16/2022	7/1/2022	x	y	NA	Y	NA	NA	NA
	1403	Wakapa Academy	9-12	46	Isaac Moffett	isaac.moffett@buhlschools.org	David Carson	david_carson@buhlschools	5/17/2022	6/29/2022	x	y	y	y	NO		Yes
491	1272	Falls City Academy (formerly No	6-12	83	Matt Coleman	matt.coleman@jeromeschools.org	Pat Charlton	pat.charlton@jeromeschoo	6/3/2022	6/30/2022	x	Y	Y	y	in review	Jerome	Yes
491	846	High Desert High School	6-12	36	Kelly Chapman	kelly.chapman@shoshonesd.org	Rob Waite	rob.waite@shoshonesd.org	6/13/2022	7/27/2022	X	y	y	y	Yes	6/30/2026	Yes
491	1078	Gooding Alternative Learning Ce	9-12	34	Ryon Pope	ryon.pope@goodingschools.org	Spencer Larsen	spencer.larsen@goodingsc	6/15/2022	7/28/2022	X	Y	Y	Y	Share		Yes
491	1478	Cornerstone High School	9-12	20	Risa Moffitt	moffitt@valley262.org	Eric Anderson	eanderson@valley262.org	6/15/2022	7/28/2022	X	y	y	y	Need		Yes
491	8844	Franklin County High School	9-12	54	Clint Peery	clint.peery@sd201.org	Lance Harrison	lance.harrison@psd201.org	4/14/2022	5/12/2022	x	y	y	y	7/1/2008	6/30/2022	Have
491	1002	Kinport Middle School	6-8	40	Amy Prescott	prescoam@sd25.us	Douglas Howell	howeldo@sd25.us	3/15/2022	3/22/2022	X	N	NA	y	NA		NA
491	261	American Falls Academy	6-12	50	Kelly Brannock	kellvb@sd3381.k12.id.us	Randy Jensen	randvj@sd381.k12.id.us	4/13/2022	6/13/2022	x	n	y	y	Shared		No
491	404	Clover Creek High School	9-12	20	Luke Kelsey	lkelsey@blsd.net	Gary Brogan	gbrogan@blsd.net	6/7/2022	7/14/2022	x	n	n	y	Shared		No
494	1141	New Horizon High School	9-12	260	Amy Prescott	prescoam@sd25.us	Douglas Howell	howeldo@sd25.us	3/15/2022	3/22/2022	X	y	y	y	Yes	6/30/2022	Yes
491	1479	Shelley Work Based Academy	9-12	40	Michael Messick	mmessick@shelleyschools.org	Chad Williams	cwilliams@shelleyschools.o	6/7/2022	7/13/2022	x	N	N	Y	no		Yes
s		CTE Prep School - Soda Spring	6-12	35	Jess McMurray	jessm@sodaschools.org	Scott Muir	muirscott@sodaschools.org	4/28/2022	6/29/2022	x	N	Y	Y	not yet		Possibly
491	1143	Jefferson High School	6-12	284	Don Fryberger	dfryberger@sd251.org	Chad Martin	cmartin@sd251.org	3/21/2022	3/22/2022	X	y	y	y	Yes	6/30/2026	Have
491	9015	Central High School	6-12	162	Mike Bennett	bennettm@msd321.com	Randy Lords	lordsr@msd321.com	3/31/2022	6/10/2022	X	y	y	y	Yes	6/30/2025	Have
491	9006	Independence Alternative High S	7-12	200	Josh Torngren	torni@d55.k12.id.us	Brian Kress	kresb@d55.k12.id.us	6/9/2022	7/27/2022	X	y	y	y	Yes	6/30/2026	Have
491	1048	Emerson High School	9-12	265	Michael Keyes	keyemich@sd91.org	James Shank	shanjame@sd91.org	6/13/2022	7/27/2022	x	y	y	y	Yes	6/30/2026	Have
491	875	Basin Alternative High School	6-12	33	Brian Ashton	bashton@d401.k12.id.us	Monte Woolstenhume	mrw@d401.k12.id.us	6/13/2022	7/28/2022	X	y	y	Y	Need		Have
491	9014	Salmon Alternative High School	9-12	14	Russ Bradshaw	russ.bradshaw@salmon291.org	Dr. Troy Easterday	troy.easterday@salmon291	4/15/2022	6/13/2022	x	n	y	Y	No		no
491	1053	Lincoln High School	7-12	170	Lance Miller	MillerL@d93.k12.id.us	Dr. Scott Woolstenhulm	Woolstes@93.k12.id.us	4/28/2022	6/29/2022	X	y	n	y	Yes	6/30/2026	Yes
492	874	Valley View Alternative High Sch	9-12	31	Jay Miller	jmiller@sugarsalem.com	Chester Bradshaw	cbradshaw@sugarsalem.co	6/8/2022	7/27/2022	X	y	y	y	No	6/30/2024	Yes
		Snake River Opportunities High	9-12	19	Scott Corgatelli	corgscot@snakeriver.org	Mark Kress	markkress@snakeriver.org	8/22/2022	10/6/2022		n	n	Y	Share		No

Note. Screenshot of the list of alternative schools in Idaho. Reprinted from, *Alternative Schools* by Idaho State Department of Education, retrieved 2023.

Appendix F: Oregon List of Alternative Schools

School / Program Name	Website	Head of School Name	Head of School Email address	
Alternative Youth Activities	http://www.aya-or.org/	Scott Cooper	educate@aya-or.org	
COIC Bend	https://www.coic.org/employment-training/alternative-education/	John Bouchard	jbouchard@coic.org	
COIC LaPine	https://www.coic.org/employment-training/alternative-education/	John Bouchard	jbouchard@coic.org	
COIC Prineville	https://www.coic.org/employment-training/alternative-education/	John Bouchard	jbouchard@coic.org	
COIC Redmond	https://www.coic.org/employment-training/alternative-education/	John Bouchard	jbouchard@coic.org	
COIC Skills Lab (DCJC)	https://www.coic.org/employment-training/alternative-education/	John Bouchard	jbouchard@coic.org	
CREATE	https://www.createservices.org/	Olivia Auclaire	olivia@createeducationservices.org	
Deer Creek	No website	Brandy Osborn / Thomas McGregor	bosborn@roseburgphoenix.org	tmcgregor@roseburgphoenix.com
DePaul Youth Treatment Program	https://depaultreatmentcenters.org/programs/youth/	Naomi Caster	Naomi.Caster@depaultc.org	
Fifth Corner Academy	https://fifthcorneracademy.business.site/	Roxanne Wilson	roxanne@fifthcorneracademy.org	
Graduation Alliance	https://www.graduationalliance.com/	Beth Baenen	beth.baenen@graduationalliance.com	
J Bar J Boys Ranch	https://www.jbarj.org/about-us/our-programs/	Crystal Mooney	cmooney@academyatsisters.org	
J Bar J Ranch at Sisters	https://www.jbarj.org/about-us/our-programs/	Crystal Mooney	cmooney@academyatsisters.org	
Kartini School	https://www.kartiniclinic.com/eating-disorder-resources/kartini-alternative-sch	Shanna Greene	sgreene@kartiniclinic.com	
Looking Glass Center Point School	https://www.lookingglass.us/services/#education	Lynda Whitener	lynda.whitener@lookingglass.us	
Looking Glass Riverfront School and Career Cent	https://www.lookingglass.us/services/#education	Cheryl Zwillinger	cheryl.zwillinger@lookingglass.us	
Looking Glass New Roads	https://www.lookingglass.us/services/#education	Erik Johnson	erik.johnson@lookingglass.us	
Mt Scott	https://mtscott.org/	Dara Christy	dara.christy@mtscott.org	
NAYA Many Nations Academy	https://nayapdx.org/services/many-nations-academy/	Lisa Otero	lisao@nayapdx.org	
OPEN School East	https://openschoolnw.org/programs/open-school-east/	Michelle Cardenas	michelle.cardenas@openschoolnw.org	
Oregon Outreach Molalla	https://oregonoutreach.org/	Rebecca Black	rblack@oregonoutreach.org	
Oregon Outreach Scappoose	https://oregonoutreach.org/	Rebecca Black	rblack@oregonoutreach.org	
Oregon Youth Challenge Program	https://www.oycp.com/	Cindi Krauger	Cindi.KRAUGER@mil.state.or.us	
Portland Youth Builders	http://pybpdx.org/	Jessica Burbach	jessica.burbach@pybpdx.org	
Rosemary Anderson High School EAST	https://www.portlandoic.org/students/rosemary-anderson-high-school	Franky Gomez	fgomez@portlandoic.org	
Rosemary Anderson High School LENTS	https://www.portlandoic.org/students/rosemary-anderson-high-school	Madison Liesinger	mliesinger@portlandoic.org	
Rosemary Anderson High School New Columbia	https://www.portlandoic.org/students/rosemary-anderson-high-school	Carl Reinhold	creinhold@portlandoic.org	
Rosemary Anderson High School NORTH	https://www.portlandoic.org/students/rosemary-anderson-high-school	Mykia Richards	mrichards@portlandoic.org	
Rosemary Anderson Middle School	https://www.portlandoic.org/students/rosemary-anderson-middle-school	Alvin Johnson	ajohnson@portlandoic.org	
Serendipity	http://www.serendipitycenter.org/	Megan Pine	meganp@serendipitycenter.org	
Wellsprings Friends	https://wellspringsfriends.org	Dante Zuniga-West	dante@wellspringsfriends.org	
YES House	http://www.milestonesrecovery.com/yes-house-residential-program/	Douglas Carter	douglascarter@milestonesrecovery.com	
Youth Progress	https://www.youthprogress.org/	Robyn Eaton	reaton@youthprogress.org	

Note. Screenshot of the list of alternative schools in Oregon. Reprinted from, *Alternative Education* by Oregon Department of Education, retrieved 2023.

Appendix G: Email Request for Administration

To Whom it May Concern,

My name is Rebecca Kosinski and I am a current NNU doctoral student approved to do research on the effectiveness of Alternative schools from the student perspective at your school. As a current Alternative school principal at the Idaho Youth Challenge Academy I believe this research will help all of us working in Alternative Education and to better serve our students.

I hope to conduct a study using information from former alternative school completers and current 18 year old students on track to finish their education. I plan to do so by having students complete a digital anonymous survey that asks the students about their experiences in alternative school and how it assisted in preventing them from dropping out. The instrument that will be used anonymously asks for students' perspectives on their alternative school experiences as well as details on their demographics. Although these students have a minimum age of 18, this particular group of students have some vulnerabilities that could result in being triggered by questions asking them to review their school experiences as well as their future plans. That being said I wanted to make you aware of the study and ask that you share with all of your 18 year old students that if they choose to participate you are available as a resource for their support. I have attached the survey being utilized for your review and awareness.

Thank you for your time and help with this study. I will reach out and let you and your Principal know the scheduled date for the survey. Please don't hesitate to reach out with any questions or concerns you may have.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Kosinski rkosinski@nnu.edu

208-816-6357

Appendix H: Instrument QR Code

Hello, my name is Rebecca Kosinski and I am currently researching what makes alternative schools effective. As a former alternative school principal and current public school principal it is important to me to fully understand what is helping students complete school. Today you are invited to participate in a survey focused on 18-21 year olds alternative school students. This data will help alternative schools and traditional schools better serve students. All of your responses will be anonymous.

Please use the following link to complete the survey :
https://nnu.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6mbb4uiAMzrWQVE

Or use the QR code to take the survey:

Thank you for your participation.

ProQuest Number: 31328782

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