RACE AND ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

Traditional mainstream public schools are not for everyone. Some students are unable to function in traditional schools, though they might have the aptitude to do so. Other students have special needs (e.g., emotional problems, marriage, children), and still others have been retained for one or more years and may feel out-of-place in traditional environments. Then there are those students who are placed in alternative schools in lieu of expulsion or suspension. One issue that has taken on greater urgency in recent years concerns the discipline of racial and ethnic minorities in school. There is mounting evidence that Black and Hispanic students are disciplined at rates greater than their representation in school. It is quite reasonable to assume that alternative schools might be used to house ethnic/racial minority students. Moreover, if this is the case what is the focus of these schools, academic, vocational, or disciplinary? The purpose of our paper is to explore some of these issues by (1) examining the relationship between the percent minority in a school district and the presence of at least one alternative school, and (2) examine the traits/focus of these schools.

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I. Introduction

Traditional mainstream public schools are not for everyone. Some students are unable to function in traditional schools, though they might have the aptitude to do so. Other students have special needs (e.g., emotional problems, marriage, and children), still others have been retained for one or more years and may feel out-of-place in traditional environments. Then there are those students who are placed in alternative schools in lieu of expulsion or suspension. Alternative schools exist for a variety of reasons, and their focus also varies depending on their mission and the kind of students they serve.

One issue that has taken on greater urgency in recent years concerns the discipline of racial and ethnic minorities in school. There is mounting evidence that Black and Hispanic students are disciplined at rates greater than their representation in school (Skiba et al 2000, p. 14):

> "…ethnographic studies have reported that students consistently perceive that students of color and those from low-income backgrounds are more likely to experience a variety of school punishments… Unfortunately, results both in this study and in previous research going back at least 25 years are consistent with those perceptions."

If race and ethnicity are related to school discipline, are they also related to being sent to alternative school environments? And what kind of alternative schools are they being sent to? Are they being sent to alternative schools where the focus is on discipline rather than on education? The purpose of our paper is to examine the extent to which race is associated with alternative school environments; especially those alternative schools whose focus is discipline rather than academic or vocational. Using data from the US Department of Education's alternative school survey, we examine the following hypothesis: the greater the percent minority students in a school district, the greater the likelihood they are sent to alternative schools whose focus is on.

II. Background

A. The Demography of Alternative Schools

1. Number of School Districts with Alternative Schools

Nearly forty percent (39%) of all US school districts have alternative schools. There are, however, some important urban and regional differences. (See Table 1.)

Table 1 about here

Not only are alternative schools an urban phenomenon, but it also seems that most districts in the southeast have at least one alternative school. About two-thirds of urban schools (66%) have alternative schools. Compare this figure to the 41% and 35% of suburban and rural school districts, respectively. Moreover, it also appears that a large number of school districts in the southeastern part of the country have at least one alternative school--about 80 percent. In contrast, only 28 percent of school districts in the central United States have alternative schools and 31 percent of northeastern school districts have alternative schools. In addition, Kleiner et al (2002) indicate that nationally there are 10,900 public alternative schools, with an enrollment of about 612,900 students.

What should be of interest is whether alternative schools will proliferate in years to come. There are at least two issues that may drive up the creation of such schools. First, there is the national concern with school safety. Many alternative schools have been established to handle disruptive students, and we can see the creation of such schools to handle what many believe is a growing problem. Second, the academic achievement of U.S. students is a major policy topic, for both white and ethnic-racial minorities. Alternative schools can be established to create non-traditional environments to handle the specific needs and issues of low achieving students. Time will tell whether alternative schools will be an option for dealing with both these important educational issues.

2. Alternative Schools by Grade Level

At what level are alternative schools best suited? Are they needed or best suited for elementary school students or for students in secondary school? The empirical data

suggest that educational decision makers believe they are best suite for students in the upper grades.

The percent of school districts with alternative school programs increases as the grade level increases. Data in Figure 1 corroborates such a statement--from a low of one percent for PK, and seven percent for Kindergartners, to about ninety percent for high schools.

<u>Figure 1 about here</u>

Is this particular pattern sound educational policy? Given the many current educational crises surrounding the American educational system, we believe some additional thinking needs to be introduced. Certainly one strategy would be to introduce alternative schools in districts with significant number of students who are chronically disruptive, who fail to fit into traditional school environments, or whose career choices or interests simply cannot be met by traditional schools. Alternative schools are one way of addressing many of the challenges currently facing the American public school system.

3. Enrollment

In terms of student enrollment, alternative schools do not have a significant proportion of students in school districts. This is as it should be because alternative schools were never meant to replace public schools, but to ease the challenges of educating a small percentage of students who, for one reason or another, do not fit traditional school environments. Forty-three percent of school districts have alternative schools that enroll less than 1 percent of their total student enrollment. In contrast, sixteen percent of school districts have alternative schools that enroll three percent or more. These data may be found in Table 2.

<u>Table 2 about here</u>

B. Types of Alternative Schools

There are to be at least three types of alternative educational environments (Raywid 1994). A listing and brief descriptions of each may be found in Table 3.

Are these programs effective? Type I, programs are less costly than Type III because they operate with the same student-adult ratio as traditional schools (Raywid 1982). These schools also tend to be effective, and there is evidence that their effects are long lasting (Wehlage et al. 1989; Wood 1989; Schwartz 1993). They tend to generate long-lasting effects because they have many of the traits of quality schools (see Verdugo et. al. 1997).

Type II programs do not appear to be effective. In one study of Type II schools in Florida, researchers found that such programs had no effect in dropout or referral rates, corporal punishment, suspension, or expulsion. Type II alternative schools are mainly concerned with discipline and with maintaining order. Their ability to nurture and educate students is thus severely hampered.

In contrast, Type III schools also tend to be effective in terms of attendance and the accumulation of credits (Gold and Mann 1984). Despite their success, Type III programs tend to be costly. First, Type III schools are costly--they maintain low teacher--to-student ratios that increases operating costs. Second, their success is short term, and when students return to their main school many tend to revert to their initial problematic behaviors (Frazer and Baenen 1988). There are at least two reasons why students return to their old behaviors. First, the attention and care they receive at type III alternative schools is absent in traditional schools. They become just another student in their old school (and probably are stigmatized for being placed temporarily in an alternative school). Second, they return to an environment and peers that are not conducive to their continued academic achievement.

It should be pointed out that in the alternative schools literature there is no consensus about what is meant by effective. School systems have used a variety of indicators or goals to assess the success of their programs. Examples of such indicators are graduation rates for students sent to alternative environments, school performance, and rates at which students are returned to their home-based schools. Clearly, one important topic for further research would be to relate this body of research to the effective schools research.

C. Race, Discipline, and Alternative Schools

   A disproportionate percentage of minority students are punished by school officials (Children's Defense Fund 1975). Although the CDF study is 25 years old and its data are even older, Skiba and his colleagues substantiate these results (Skiba et al. 1997). For example, while African American students are overrepresented among those receiving corporal punishment and expulsions, they are less likely to receive milder sanctions (Skiba et al. 1997; Skiba et al. 2000). Race and ethnicity appear to be key factors in zero tolerance policies.

   An important way to examine the issue is by studying expulsions and suspensions by race and ethnicity. These data may be found in Table 4. Black and Hispanic students are more likely than White students of being expelled or suspended from school. For example, in 2000 Black students comprised 17 percent of total enrollment in K-12 public schools, yet they were 38.6 percent of total corporal punishments, 34 percent of out-of-school suspensions, 29.6 percent of expulsions, and 29 percent of expulsions with no educational services. In 2002, the percent facing corporal punishment remained the same, out-of-school suspensions climbed to 36.3 percent,, expulsions rose to 31.6 percent, and expulsions with no educational services rose to 34.3 percent. The similar data for whites in 2000 were 62 percent of enrollment, 53.1 percent corporal punishment, 47.6 percent out-of-school suspensions, 49.1 percent expulsions, and 56.5 percent expelled with no educational services. In 2002, the figures were 59.4 percent enrollment, 52.9 percent corporal punishment, 44.2 percent out-of-school suspensions, 44.3 percent expulsions, and 50.5 percent expelled with no educational services. For Hispanic students, the figures aren't as dramatic, but they also appear to be overrepresented in terms of expulsions. Thus, in 2000, Hispanics represented 16 percent of the total student population but 17.6 percent of expulsions; and by 2002 they represented 17 percent of enrollment but 19.9 percent of expulsions.

<div align="center">Table 4 about here</div>

   Critics offer two arguments about the relation between race/ethnicity and zero tolerance policies. First, the argument is made that race and ethnicity are not as important as socioeconomic status, and, second, that the higher rates of punishment for

minorities are due to their higher rates of inappropriate behavior. On the first issue, research has shown that after controlling for socioeconomic status, race is still related to such discipline as suspension (Shi-Chang C. Wu et al. 1982). Secondly, research has found that when comparing rates of misbehavior for African American and other students differences are minor. Student misbehavior has a weak effect on the observed discrepancies in suspension/expulsion rates between Black and White students (Shi-Chang C. Wu et al. 1982; McCarthy and Hoge 1987). Race not only continues to be related to discipline even after controlling for other important factors, but there are race-biased differences in the disciplining of students.

Minority overrepresentation in school punishment is by no means a new issue. Extensive investigations of school punishments over the past 25 years have consistently raised questions about socioeconomic and racial disproportionality in the administration of school discipline (e.g., Children's Defense Fund, 1975; McCarthy & Hoge, 1987; Skiba, Peterson, & Williams, 1997; Thornton & Trent, 1988; Wu, Pink, Crain, & Moles, 1982). The meaning of those statistics remains unclear, however. Despite extensive documentation of the existence of racial, socioeconomic, and gender disparities in school discipline, there has been little systematic exploration of possible explanations for this disproportionality.

1. Socioeconomic Status and School Discipline

Studies of school suspension have consistently documented disproportionality by socioeconomic status (SES). Students enrolled in free school lunch programs are at greater risk of being suspended from school (Skiba et al., 1997; Wu et al., 1982). Wu et al. (1982) also found that students whose fathers did not have a full-time job were significantly more likely to be suspended than students whose fathers were employed full-time.

In a qualitative study of student reactions to school discipline, Brantlinger (1991) interviewed adolescent students from both high- and low-income residential areas about their views on about school climate and school discipline. Both low- and high-income adolescents agreed that low-income students were more likely to be unfairly disciplined. There also appeared to be differences in the kind of punishment given to students of different social classes. While high-income students more often reported receiving mild-

to-moderate sanctions (e.g., teacher reprimand, seat reassignment), low-income students reported receiving more severe sanctions, sometimes delivered in a less than-professional manner (e.g., yelled at in front of class, made to stand in hall all day, search of personal belongings).

2. Minority Group Status and Discipline

The overrepresentation of minorities, especially African American students, in the use of exclusionary and punitive consequences is of great concern. In one of the earliest studies of school suspension, the Children's Defense Fund (1975) studied national data on school discipline provided by the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR), and reported rates of school suspension for black students that exceeded white students on a variety of measures. Indeed, rates of suspension for black students were two and three times higher than suspension rates for white students at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. Also, while 29 states suspended over 5 percent of their total black enrollment, only 4 states suspended 5 percent or more of white students. Finally, black students were more likely than white students to be suspended more than once. It should be noted, though, that there were no racial differences in the length of suspension.

Since that report, racial disproportionality in the use of school suspension has been a consistent finding (Costenbader & Markson, 1994; Costenbader & Markson, 1998; Glackman et al., 1978; Gregory, 1997; Kaeser, 1979; Lietz & Gregory, 1978; Massachusetts Advocacy Center, 1986; McCarthy & Hoge, 1987; McFadden, Marsh, Price, & Hwang, 1992; Skiba et al., 1997; Streitmatter, 1986; Taylor & Foster, 1986; Thornton & Trent, 1988; Wu et al., 1982). African American students are also more likely to receive harsher discipline sanctions, such as corporal punishment (Gregory, 1996; Shaw & Braden, 1990), and are less likely to receive mild disciplinary sanctions for some school infraction (McFadden et al., 1992). The overrepresentation of African American students in school suspension and expulsion appear to increase as those sorts of punishments are more frequently used (Advancement Project, 2000; Massachusetts Advocacy Center, 1986). Finally, recent studies of recently desegregated schools have found that disproportionality in school suspension appears to increase immediately after

schools have been desegregated, especially in high socioeconomic status schools (Larkin, 1979; Thornton & Trent, 1988).

It has been suggested that the interpretation of disproportionality data depends upon how the data are presented (MacMillan & Reschly, 1998; Reschly, 1997). Reschly (1997) notes that disproportionality data are often reported in two different ways. The first method compares the baseline distribution of the target group in the population with the distribution of that group in the category under study (e.g., African Americans represent 16% of general enrollment, but 24% of the enrollment in classes for students with mild mental retardation); the second strategy is to use the absolute proportion of a population being served in a category (e.g., of the entire population of African American students, 2.1% are enrolled in programs for students with mild mental retardation). Reschly goes on to note that studies of disproportionality have used different criteria in assessing over-or-under representation. The lack of clear reporting leads to much confusion. However, it is not clear whether changing how data are reported will affect the conclusions made from the data.

Many scholars have studied the overrepresentation of minorities in school suspension and expulsion decisions since the Children's Defense Fund (1975) report (Costenbaqder and Markson 1998; Gordon, Della, Piana, and Kelher 2000; Massachussetts Advocacy Center 1986; Mc Fadden, Marsh, Price, and Hwang 1992; Taylor and Foster 1986; Thornton and Trent 1988; Kaeser 1979; Wu, Pink, Crain, and Moles 1982).[1] This body of work has used "ten percent of the population" standard in determining whether a group is over-represented in such disciplinary decisions (Reschly, 1997). A subpopulation may be considered over-or-underrepresented if its proportion in the target classification exceeds its representation in the population by 10% or more. Thus, if Hispanic students constitute 10% of the population, they will be considered to be over-represented in terms of suspended disproportionately if more than 22% or less than 18% of students who were suspended were Hispanic. Nearly all studies comparing proportion of population and proportion of students suspended report disproportionality statistics that meet or exceed this standard. These studies find overrepresentation of African Americans, regardless of the statistical criteria used, yet fewer investigations have explored disciplinary disproportionality among students of other ethnic

backgrounds. While there appears to be overrepresentation of Latino students in some studies, the finding is not universal across locations or studies (see Gordon et al., 2000).

Gender is also a factor in school discipline decisions. The evidence of boys being overrepresented in school disciplinary decisions is universally consistent (Lietz & Gregory, 1978; McFadden et al., 1992; Shaw & Braden, 1990; Skiba et al., 1997; Taylor & Foster, 1986). Indeed, research has found that boys are four times more likely than girls to be referred to the office, suspended, or subjected to corporal punishment (Bain & MacPherson, 1990; Cooley, 1995; Gregory, 1996; Imich, 1994). There appears to be a gender-race interaction in the probability of being disciplined. Using U.S. Office for Civil Rights data from 1992, Gregory (1996) found that black males were 16 times more likely than white females to be subjected to corporal punishment. At both the junior and senior high school levels, Taylor and Foster (1986) reported the following ranking in the likelihood of suspension from most to least: black males, white males, black females, white females.

These results on race-based over-representation of minorities in school discipline decisions and the use of alternative schools as a strategy for dealing with disruptive students suggests to us the following hypothesis:

H_1: *The greater the percent minority in a school district, the greater the likelihood of an alternative school being present in the school district.*

In addition to examining this hypothesis, we conduct some exploratory analysis of alternative schools in districts with high percentages of minority students. The two questions we examine are: (1) Is the focus of alternative schools with high percents of minorities disciplinary, vocational, or educational?; and (2) are alternative schools with high percentages of minorities more likely to form collaborations with police and the juvenile justice system?

III. Methods

A. Data

Data for this study are from the 2001 *public alternative schools and programs for students at risk of education failure survey*. The data refer to 1,540 schools districts with alternative educational environments and are representative of alternative schools in the United States. A short description of the districts may be found in Table 5.

Table 5 about here

B. Variables

1. Dependent Variables

The dependent variable throughout our analysis is the presence of alternative schools in a school district. In our QCA analysis, 1 = present, and 0 = absent.

2. Independent Variables

a. Urban. Three codes are used to identify urbanicity. These are urban, suburban, and rural areas. We collapsed the item to two statuses: suburban/urban combined, and rural.

b. Percent Minority. Percent minority is based on the following two categories: thirty-three percent or more, and less than 33 percent.

c. Poverty. The percent in poverty in a school district is based on the following two categories: if the percent at or below the poverty level is 20 percent or more, and less than 20 percent. The dichotomy is, of course, arbitrary.

C. Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA)

QCA's Boolean techniques analyze dichotomous data on specified outcomes (O) and the hypothesized preconditions (C) for them. Initially, data are arrayed in a Truth Table that consists of logical combinations of Cs and the corresponding value of the outcomes. Ideally, all theoretically possible combinations of Cs are included.

Next, the data are simplified into rows of Primitive Terms. Then if these terms are solvable (no contradictions, e.g., Cs lead to O and not-Os), the terms are reduced into the most parsimonious logical expression that equals O via the application of Boolean

algorithms. In this logic, "+" equals or, and "x" equals and. Also, in the QCA language, uppercase letters refer to the presence of a concept, while lowercase letters mean that the concept is absent. In our analysis, for example, we expect $A = U + P + V$. That is, suburban/urban residence (U), poverty (V), and percent minority in a district greater than 33 percent (P) to be linked to the presence of alternative schools (A).

IV. Findings

A. The Presence of Alternative Schools

Our hypothesis is that alternative schools are more likely to be present in districts with high percentages of minority students. School districts with higher rates of minority students also tend to have higher rates of alternative schools. Indeed, in districts where the percent minority is less than thirty-three percent, 47 percent have alternative schools. In contrast, in districts where minority students represent 33 percent or more, 76 percent have alternative schools. *(See Figure 2.)*

There is a relationship between a district's rate of poverty and the presence of alternative schools. Districts in which the percent below the poverty line is less then 20 percent have an alternative school rate of 52 percent. In contrast, where the poverty rate is 20 percent or more, the alternative school rate is 62 percent.

Alternative schools are only slightly more likely to be present in suburban/urban than in rural areas. In rural areas, the alternative school rate is 54 percent, and the rate in suburban and urban districts is 57 percent.

Table 6 presents the *truth table* for our QCA results. We will use the data from this table to generate a picture of how urban/suburban (U), poverty (V), and percent minority (P) are associated with the likelihood of an alternative school (A) being present in a school district.

Table 6 about here

Before continuing, note that in this particular truth table there are sixteen (16) possible outcomes and eight (8) profiles. As it stands, the additional eight rows are contradictions because logically, there should only be 2^k possible rows in a truth table

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using Boolean logic, where k = the number of predictor variables. In our case, there should only be $2^3 = 8$ rows. In reality, though, the same profiles can and do lead to different outcomes of the dependent variable, alternative schools (A). Ragin (1987) has suggests two solutions to such a problem, neither of which, we would argue, is completely satisfying. The first solution is to look for other variables to be included in the model. A second strategy is to model the contradiction into the QCA model. However, both suggested strategies add other variables to the equation which adds to the complexity of the analysis. Since the number of profiles increases at 2^k, it would be wise to keep the number of variables to a minimum. Our strategy computes probabilities for all sixteen profiles and uses them in making decisions about which profile to keep in the final analysis. Thus, consider the same profile with two different outcomes:

$$UVP = 0 \text{ and } UVP = 1$$

When A = 0 there are 19 cases, and when A = 1 there are 59 cases, for a total of 78 cases for the UVP profile ($F_{uvp,0} + F_{uvp,1} = 78$). In essence, the likelihood function of $\Psi(F_0) = 0$ is, $F_{UVP,0}/(F_{UVP,0} + F_{UVP,1}) = 19/78 = 24.4$, and the likelihood of $\Psi(F_1) = 75.6$ or $100 - \Psi(F_0)$. So, $F_{UVP,1} > F_{UVP,0}$. Theoretically, then, $F_{UVP,1}$ has a greater likelihood of an outcome of 1 than of 0. Since our concern is with theoretical development, we choose to accept those similar profiles (arguments) where P (A=1) with the greater likelihoods $\Psi(F_i)$.

The data below represent the outcome of 1 or the presence of at least one alternative school in a district.

Profile	Likelihood	Frequencies
uvP	68.3	44/64
uVP	77.4	154/199
Uvp	51.6	257/498
UvP	79.4	77/97
SVP	75.6	59/78

Thus, the primitive terms are: A = uvP + uVP + Uvp + UvP + UVP. We can further minimize these terms into something more manageable. Minimization is based on the notion that if two terms share two elements but not one and lead to the same outcome, then a new term would simply represent these two terms. For example, uvP and uVP can be minimized to uP because both terms lead to P(A= 1), and both terms share u and P, but not V. Thus, after further minimization we are left with—

$$A = uP + Uv + UP + VP$$

And further minimization leads to the final equation:

$$A = P + U$$

In other words, the presence of at least one alternative school in a school district is more likely to occur when the percent minority is greater than 33 percent (P), or when the district in an urban/suburban area (U).

B. Alternative Schools, Race, and Other Factors

In this section we examine a selected number of traits associated with alternative schools, especially as these traits are related to the percent minority in a school district. The model we use in helping us with our analysis is presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3 about here

By reasons (R) we mean the reasons students are sent to alternative schools in the first place. Program (P) refers to the sort of education, training, and curriculum available to students in alternative schools. Some alternative schools collaborate (C) with a number of community organizations, such as juvenile justice, child care, police, business, etc., and we examine the kind of community organizations with whom alternative schools collaborate. Finally, many alternative schools send students back to their home schools after some criteria are met. We examine (1) if students are sent back,

and if they are (2) what benchmarks must be met in order for students to be sent back. We also examine these topics by the percent minority in a district.

1. Reasons Students are Sent to Alternative Schools

Students are sent to alternative schools for a number of reasons. Some are based on life styles, some on the academic needs of students, and others are based on discipline issues. School officials were asked to list the number of reasons students are sent to alternative schools in their districts. Data are also presented by percent minority. Table 7 presents these data.

Table 7 about here

There are eleven listed reasons for sending students to an alternative school environment. Of these eleven reasons, the top three are: the use/distribution of drugs or alcohol, fighting or assault, use of a weapon, and continual truancy. The least likely reasons are: mental health, pregnancy/parenthood, and arrest or involvement in the juvenile justice system.

Percent minority in a school district appears to affect the reasons students are sent to an alternative school environment. We only discuss those differences that are 10 percent or greater. Of the eleven reasons listed for sending a student to an alternative school six meet the 10 percent standard: possession of a firearm, other weapons possession, drug/alcohol possession, an arrest, fighting/assault, and verbal abuse. Of these differences, drugs/alcohol, other weapons possession, and verbal abuse are the most significant. In all six cases, districts in which minorities are 33 percent or more of the total student population, the more likely are they to be sent to alternative schools.

2. Programs Available in Alternative Schools

Table 8 presents data on the programs alternative schools have available for students. Alternative schools offer a variety of programs for students. The top three programs are: (1) a curriculum leading to a regular high school diploma; (2) academic counseling; and (3) small classes. The least offered programs include—offering evening/weekend classes, extended day or year school, and preparation for the GED.

Table 8 about here

Since alternative schools are often used for disruptive students, the question we ask is "what percent of alternative schools offer programs addressing disruptive students?" Data in table 8 exhibit information on programs that might address such issues: psychological counseling (59.8%); crisis/behavior intervention (79.4%); social work services (54.6%); and peer mediation (36.3%).

Once students are sent to an alternative school, how likely are they to receive academic and other services? And are there differences in services when the district's student population is thirty-three percent or more minority? While percent minority accounts for only small differences in the programs offered in alternative schools, two are significant. Alternative schools in districts where the percent minority is 33 percent or more are more likely to offer social work services, and are more likely to have security personnel on site.

3. Collaboration with the Community

Collaboration with community organizations is an important factor in making schools safer. These collaborations are indicators of the concerns and services being provided by alternative schools, so they are important windows for viewing what alternative schools are actually doing. We suspect that most alternative schools work with many community organizations. Data in Table 9 present such information.

Table 9 about here

The top three organizational types with whom alternative schools collaborate are: (1) juvenile justice agencies; (2) the police; and (3) child protective services. Alternative schools are least likely to collaborate with (1) parks and recreation, (2) job placement centers, and with (3) family planning agencies.

Percent minority does not generally appear to affect the kinds of collaborations being sought by alternative schools. There are, however, three collaborations that are significantly different. Alternative schools where the percent minority in a district is

equal to or greater than thirty-three percent are more likely to form collaborations with family planning organizations, community organizations, family organizations, and with parks and recreations. Note, also, that such alternative schools are more likely to form collaborations with police departments—eight percent more likely than alternative schools in districts with less than thirty-three percent minority.

4. Alternative School Exits

Finally, in many alternative schools students are allowed to return to their home schools. These "exit" plans, however, tend to be contingent on a number of factors, such as improved grades, better behavior and attitudes. What kinds of standards do alternative schools use in determining how students are sent back to their home schools, if, in fact, they are allowed to do so. Generally, though, about ten percent of alternative schools do not allow students to return to their home school.

Table 10 presents data on the criteria alternative schools set for returning students to their home schools. A majority of these standards are based on behavior/attitude, and academic improvement.

Table 10 about here

The most important reasons for sending students back to their home schools are: student wants to return (93%), approval of alternative school administrator/teachers (92%), and improved attitude/behavior of student (88%). The two least important criteria are the availability of space at the home school (5%), and a student's score on a standardized readiness assessment (38%).

Based on the percent minority (PM) in a school district, there is considerable variation in the criteria alternative schools use for sending students back to their regular schools. An examination of these differences is very informative. To begin with, grades are somewhat important for alternative schools in districts where minorities are less than thirty-three percent of the student population, but very important in alternative schools in districts where the minority population is equal to or greater than thirty-three percent. There are also differences in terms of a student wanting to return to his/her regular school: somewhat important when PM is less than thirty-three percent, and very important when PM is equal to or greater than thirty-three percent. Other important

factors, though they are not as significantly different, are improved behavior, a readiness assessment, and the approval of the home school administrator or counselor. In the first case, an assessment is somewhat important when PM is equal to or greater than thirty-three percent. Secondly, the approval of the regular school administrator or counselor is both somewhat and very important in districts when PM is thirty-three percent or less.

V. Conclusion

There is an emerging sense that ethnic/racial minority students are more likely than non-minority students to be disciplined. In addition, it appears that alternative schools are becoming an important strategy for dealing with disruptive students. It is, therefore, somewhat reasonable to expect that alternative schools might be places that school districts send minority students at greater rates than non-minority students. In this paper we attempted to examine the association between minority group status and alternative schools. We also sought to identify the traits of alternative schools with a high likelihood of minority students.

Our results indicate that race is a factor in the presence of alternative schools. We found that the likelihood of such presence is related to the percent minority in a school district. In addition, we found that alternative schools are more likely to be present in suburban/urban areas. Note that these are also areas with high concentrations of minority students.

We then embarked on an analysis of alternative schools. Our examination focused on four topics based on a model of entrance and exit from alternative schools. These topics were: the reasons students are sent to alternative school environments, the kind of programs available in alternative schools, the collaborative efforts alternative schools make with community organizations and the criteria for sending students back to their home schools. Our results indicate that most students are sent to alternative schools for weapons, drugs/alcohol, fighting, and chronic truancy; in other words, for detrimental behavior. A variety of programs are provided in alternative schools for students, and it would appear that most alternative schools make important adjustments for their students. For example, alternative schools offer smaller classes, academic counseling, remedial instruction, and various other sorts of counseling and programs that attempt to educate students in alternative school environments.

In terms of collaborations, there appears to be an emphasis on collaborating with protective agencies (e.g., juvenile justice, the police, and with mental health services). In contrast, there is less collaboration with organizations that can help students with life after school or organizations that lead to greater community involvement, e.g., family planning, community organizations, and job placement centers.

There are two conclusions that can be drawn from our analyses. First, race and ethnicity appear to be related to the presence of alternative schools and it may be that such environments are being used to house minority students. Second, we need better data to get a more detailed sense of what alternative schools with high percents of minority schools look like.

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Table 1. Selected traits of alternative schools in the U.S.	
Trait	*School districts with at least one alternative school (percent)*
Urbanicity	
Urban	66
Suburban	41
Rural	35
Region	
Northeast	31
Southeast	80
Central	28
West	44

Source: Kleiner et al. (2002).

Figure 1. Districts with alternative school programs by grade (percent)
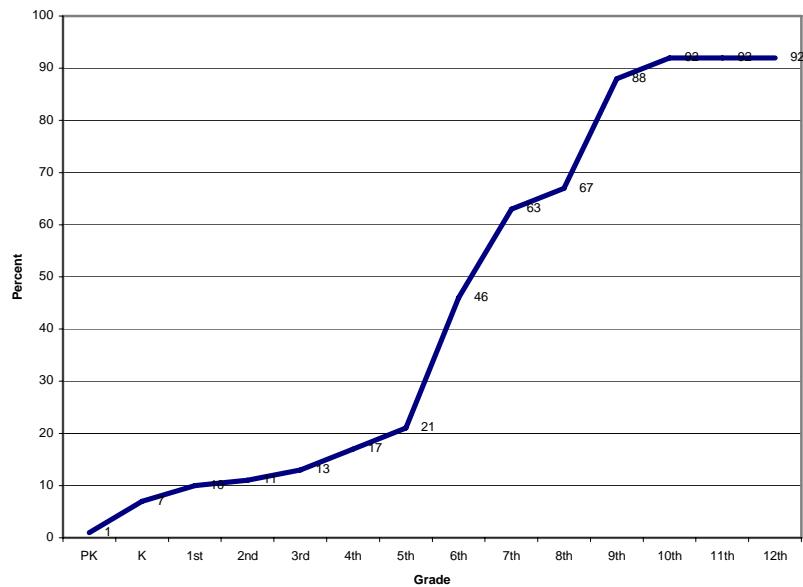
	Less than 1 percent of district enrollment	1 to 1.99 percent of total district enrollment	2 to 2.99 percent of total district enrollment	3 percent or more of total district enrollment
Table 2. School districts reporting alternative school enrollment as a percent of total school enrollment.				
Total				
	43%	27%	14%	16%

Source: Kleiner et al. (2002).

Table 3. Types of alternative educational environments	
Type of Alternative Educational Environment	*Description*
Type I: Popular/Innovative	1. Seek to make education challenging and fulfilling. 2. Reflect organizational and administrative departures from traditional schools.
Type II: Last Chance	1. Students are sent there as an alternative to expulsion. 2. Could be in-school suspensions, cool-out rooms. 3. Focus on behavior modification, and little attention is given to pedagogy or curriculum. 4. Students do work not unlike the schools from which they came, and many focus on basics.
Type III: Remediation	1. Students need help with academics, social/emotional or both. 2. After successful treatment, students can return to their main school. 3. Focus on remedial work and on stimulating social and emotional growth, often by emphasizing the school as a community.

Table 4. Corporal punishment, suspensions, and expulsions: 2000 and 2002 by Race and Ethnicity					
		Percent			
Race/Ethnicity	Total Enrollment	Corporal Punishment	Suspensions	Expulsions	Expulsions: no Ed. Services
2000					
American Ind./Alaska Native	539374	1.55	1.36	1.71	1.88
Asian/Pacific Islander	1917432	0.15	1.82	2.00	1.32
Hispanic	7467873	6.57	15.02	17.58	11.23
Black, NH	7865407	38.61	34.18	29.58	29.04
White, NH	28516270	53.12	47.61	49.12	56.53
Total	46306355	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
2002					
American Ind./Alaska Native	568710	1.89	1.37	1.79	2.68
Asian/Pacific Islander	2074128	0.16	1.87	2.43	1.58
Hispanic	8358243	6.50	16.22	19.86	10.95
Black, NH	8057742	38.48	36.32	31.63	34.31
White, NH	27905339	52.97	44.22	44.30	50.48
Total	46964163	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Table 5. Description of districts in sample

Characteristic	District Sample		Estimate Of all Districts		Districts with alternative schools & programs in sample		National estimates of all districts with alternative schools and programs	
	No.	Percent	No.	Percent	No.	Percent	No.	Percent
Total	1,534	100	14,321	100	848	100	5,574	100
Metro Status:								
Urban	179	12	810	6	153	18	535	10
Suburban	717	47	5896	41	407	48	2390	43
Rural	638	42	7616	53	288	34	2649	48
District enrollment								
< 2,500	739	48	10423	73	215	25	2683	48
2,500-9,999	501	33	3090	22	351	41	2123	38
10,000+	294	19	808	6	282	33	768	14
Region	303	20	2908	20	129	15	895	16
Northeast	249	16	1588	11	221	26	1264	23
Southeast	493	32	5415	38	192	23	1490	27
Central	489	32	4411	31	306	36	1925	35
West								
Percent minority enrollment								
<= 5 percent	539	369	6422	45	181	22	1669	30
6–20 percent	380	25	3390	24	222	26	1448	26
21-50 percent	323	21	2489	17	225	27	1275	23
50+ percent	273	18	1840	13	212	25	1142	21
Poverty								
<=10 percent	483	32	4393	32	225	27	1383	25
11-20 percent	558	37	5109	37	333	39	2189	40
20+ percent	462	31	4366	31	285	34	1946	35

Note: Data on percent minority and poverty are for districts for which data were available.
Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Fast Response
Survey System, "District Survey of Alternative Schools and Programs, 2001."

| | | | Presence of alternative school | | |
Urban (U)	Poverty (V)	Percent Minority (P)	school	Frequency	Likelihood
0	0	0	0	228	55.2
0	0	1	0	20	31.3
0	1	0	0	83	58.9
0	1	1	0	45	22.6
1	0	0	0	241	48.4
1	0	1	0	20	20.6
1	1	0	0	30	68.2
1	1	1	0	19	24.4
0	0	0	1	185	44.8
0	0	1	1	44	68.7
0	1	0	1	58	41.1
0	1	1	1	154	77.4
1	0	0	1	257	51.6
1	0	1	1	77	79.4
1	1	0	1	14	31.8
1	1	1	1	59	75.6

Table 6. Truth table assessing the presence of an alternative school in a school district

Source: Original computations by the senior author from the US Department of Education's Survey of Alternative Schools.

Figure 2.

Presence of Alternative Schools

Percent Minority
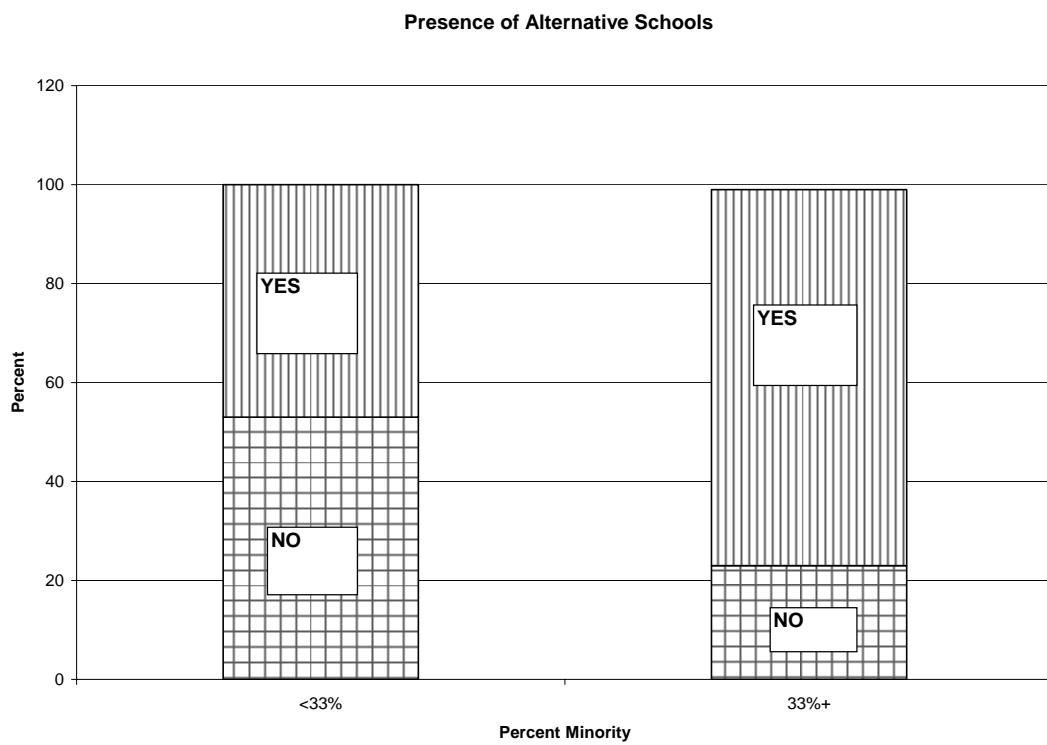
Figure 3. A Fully Recursive Model of the Process of Entrance and Exit From Alternative Schools

Reasons (R) ———————▶   ———————————▶

          Programs (P)

          Collaborations (C)

                    Alternative Schools (A) ———————▶

                              Exits (E)
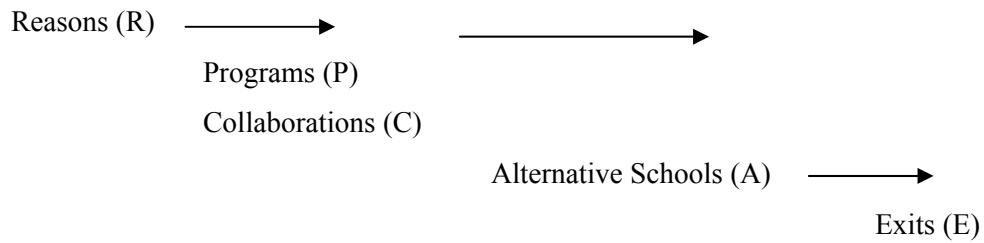
Table 7. Reasons for sending students to alternative school environments			
Reason	*Percent*	*PM < 33*	*PM >= 33*
Possession of a firearm	44.5	44.8	58.7
Other weapon	51.0	50.2	69.5
Drugs/alcohol	53.4	52.9	73.4
Arrest	38.7	38.7	52.1
Fight/Assault	51.1	50.2	68.6
Verbal abuse/disruption	44.3	43.6	54.8
Chronic truancy	51.0	49.4	52.1
Continual academic failure	49.3	49.6	49.4
Pregnancy/Parenthood	28.3	28.6	31.7
Mental Health Needs	22.6	23.9	20.4
Other Reasons	7.5	8.4	8.1

Source: Original computations by the senior author from the National Alternative
Schools Survey, 2000.

Table 8. Programs available in alternative schools			
Programs	*Percent*	*PM < 33*	*PM>= 33*
Small classes	84.7	85.4	90.1
Remedial instruction	82.7	83.1	89.2
Academic counseling	86.2	86.6	88.6
Career counseling	78.7	78.6	79.9
Psychological counseling	59.8	58.8	65.6
Crisis/Behavioral intervention	79.4	80.0	82.9
Social work services	54.6	53.3	66.8
Peer mediation	36.3	38.9	43.1
Extended day/year	27.8	29.4	36.5
Evening/weekend classes	24.1	27.8	25.8
Curriculum leading to H.S. diploma	89.9	91.8	91.0
Preparation for GED	40.5	39.5	47.9
Vocational skills	49.0	52.1	50.0
Classes at other schools/colleges	45.0	48.1	43.4
Security personnel on site	36.1	24.9	53.3
Self-paced instruction	83.5	81.9	85.9
Other	5.3	5.3	5.1

Source: Original computations by the senior author from the National Alternative
Schools Survey, 2000.

Table 9. Collaborations between alternative schools and community organizations			
Community Organizations	*Percent*	*<33*	*>=33*
Child protective services	72.3	71.2	74.0
Mental health agencies	79.6	77.8	82.3
Community organizations	64.7	60.1	71.9
Job placement centers	42.6	41.1	44.9
Crisis intervention centers	51.8	50.4	53.9
Drug/alcohol clinics	63.8	61.7	67.1
Family organizations	57.6	53.7	63.5
Family planning[a]	50.2	45.7	57.2
Health & human services	67.1	65.4	69.8
Juvenile justice	86.7	85.0	89.2
Parks and recreation	27.5	23.4	33.8
Police	72.8	69.7	77.5
Other	4.3	4.7	3.6

Source: Original computations by the senior author from the National Alternative
Schools Survey, 2000.
[a] Includes child care, and child placement agencies.

Table 10. Criteria for sending students back to their home school		
Criteria	*Somewhat Important* *(<33/>=33)*	*Very Important* *(<33/>=33)*
Improved grades	40.5 (44.0/35.0)	50.7 (46.5/57.2)
Improved: attitude/behavior	14.4 (16.0/12.0)	81.4 (79.6/84.1)
Student wants to return	19.3 (16.5/23.7)	77.1 (80.4/72.2)
Standardized readiness assessment	36.7 (34.8/39.5)	11.0 (10.5/11.7)
Space available: home school	10.6 (11.1/9.9)	3.5 (3.3/3.9)
Approval: home school administrator/counselor	42.8 (44.4/40.4)	34.8 (36.4/32.3)
Approval: alternative school staff/teachers	28.1 (28.6/27.3)	64.0 (64.2/63.8)
Other	1.0 (0.39/1.80)	11.1 (10.5/12.0)

Source: Original computations by the senior author from the National Alternative
Schools Survey, 2000.

Endnotes

[1] This specific discussion draws heavily from the work by Skiiba et al. (2000).