Juvenile Structured Day Programs for Suspended and Expelled Youth: An Evaluation of Process and Impact

Douglas L. Yearwood and Jibril Abdum-Muhaymin

ABSTRACT: In this study, the authors present the findings of an evaluation of North Carolina's juvenile structured day programs (JSDP), a type of alternative learning program for suspended or expelled court-involved juveniles. A 36-item questionnaire was mailed to each of North Carolina's 41 juvenile structured day programs. The authors surveyed issues surrounding the process of operating these programs and the perceived impact that these programs have had on the participants' academic performance and subsequent delinquent behavior. They also conducted follow-up site visits to several programs to generate additional and richer qualitative information. Although respondents reported relatively smooth and successful operations, results indicated that staffing, transportation, and financing were 3 significant concerns that could impede program operation. Statistical analyses suggested that these programs are making a difference as approximately 1 in 4 JSDP attendees made improvements in school attendance and had no further contact with the juvenile court system. The authors offer policy recommendations to alleviate, or at least minimize, the major programmatic obstacles that were encountered by juvenile structured day program staff and educators.

KEYWORDS: *alternative learning programs, juvenile structured day programs, suspended and expelled youth*

ALTERNATIVE LEARNING programs have been instituted as a supplement to many public schools across the nation. Many public school systems have utilized these specific programs to address problems such as academic failure, grade retention, negative school attitudes, and school dropout because traditional methods of discipline (i.e., out-of-school-suspension and student expulsion) have exacerbated poor academic performance and contributed to higher dropout rates among numerous students.

Nichols and Steffy (1999) reported that a growing number of educational researchers maintain that out-of-school suspension is strongly linked to school failure, nonpromotion, continued disciplinary problems, and eventual school dropout. Alpert and Dunham (1986) indicated that out-of-school suspension can contribute to delinquent behavior in the community and can be ineffective in changing disruptive behavior. Oppenheimer and Zeigler (1988) suggested that the community loses by becoming responsible for the many students out of school each day without proper supervision, with their eventual return to the school setting presenting even more serious academic and reintegration problems. As a result, the institution of alternative learning programs has become the remedy to address these issues.

Alternative Learning Programs

Alternative learning programs (ALPs) are defined as services for students at risk of truancy, academic failure, behavior problems, or dropping out of school, and they meet the needs of individual students (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2000). ALPs have two distinct components: (a) alternative schools and (b) alternative programs. Alternative schools are funded through ADM funds (average daily membership of students attending the school during the first 2 months of school) and a principal is assigned to the school if it has at least seven teachers or at least 100 students. Moreover, alternative schools have a transportation system and are located in separate buildings (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 1998).

Alternative programs, however, are different in nature than alternative learning programs. These programs are housed within a school setting and their funding is pro-

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vided by the host school. Funding for alternative programs includes grants or other sources. Students in alternative learning programs are included in the accountability results of the school in which the program resides (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 1998).

Evaluation of Alternative Learning Programs

Many alternative learning programs throughout the United States have been evaluated to determine program effectiveness. These evaluations have been diverse in nature and focused on various dimensions of the programs. For example, Nichols and Steffy (1999) conducted an evaluation of an alternative learning program in the central region of the United States. They examined the effect of an alternative learning program on student motivation and self-esteem. They also assessed whether classroom size and individualized programs that center around systematic, or self-paced and noncompetitive academic growth, rather than the traditional, sometimes competitive, educational environment increases self-regulation and learning goals (Nichols & Steffy). Also, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (1998) has developed its evaluations on the basis of student outcome and achievement data (i.e., end-of-grade and end-of-course tests), student opinion data about regular schools and alternative learning programs, and school-related outcome data (i.e., promotion, graduation, dropout, and discipline). Evaluations that are based on these specific dimensions have produced invaluable findings regarding the failures and successes of alternative learning programs.

Evaluative research on the efficacy and impact of alternative schools documents substantial and significant improvements in the academic performance of those students enrolled in alternative learning programs (Cox, 1999). Because many alternative school students report that they do not want to return to their home schools, it is not surprising that attendance rates at the alternative schools have been found to be higher among such children, with truant behavior being less problematic than when the children attended traditional public schools. Lawrence, Litynsky, and D'Lugoff (1982) found increased attendance rates among alternative school students enrolled in a Maryland alternative school. Cox employed an experimental design within an alternative school and found a similar finding with attendance substantially improving among the treatment group. King, Silvey, Holliday, and Johnston (1998), employing a case study method, reported an increase in the average daily attendance rate for alternative school students climbing from 65% to 80% by the end of the school year.

Many alternative school students are enrolled in the program because they have been suspended or expelled from the traditional public school. Research suggests that suspensions and expulsions from alternative schools are significantly less frequent when compared to the rate at which students are suspended or expelled from the traditional schools. Brewer, Blackwelder, Aragon, Langmeyer, and Cobb (1998) studied over 50 alternative schools in North Carolina with a total of 14,821 students and found that less than 2% were expelled from an alternative learning program. Hadderman (2000) reported reduced disruptive incidents and suspensions in a Passaic, New Jersey alternative school compared with the students' prior behaviors in their traditional middle school before entering the alternative setting.

Transitioning alternative school children back to their respective home schools is a crucial phase because the children return to the same environment in which they had prior difficulties and academic and behavioral problems. Hayes (1997) studied an alternative school in Virginia and commented that long-term follow-up on the transitioning of students to their home schools appeared to be successful with 50% of the alternative school students making the transition and going on to graduate. Lawrence, et al. (1982) found a 50% successful transition rate as well.

Many researchers of alternative schools have found improvements in academic performance as measured by student grades, standardized tests, and aptitude tests. Sowell (2000) noted that reading scores among students at an inner-city Brooklyn alternative school were the second highest in the state and concluded that alternative schools produce higher test scores than do the traditional public schools. Turpin and Hinton (2000) surveyed staff of 58 alternative schools in Kentucky and reported that 91% of the respondents noted significant improvements in student grades. Lawrence et al. (1982) found substantial improvements in reading and math test scores among their alternative school study's population. Cox, Davidson, and Bynum (1995) conducted a meta-analysis of prior research studies on the effects of alternative schools and concluded that the literature suggests that alternative school education has a small positive effect on academic performance. Dugger and Dugger (1998) found significant improvements in the reading, English, and math scores of alternative school students, whereas King et al. (1998) noted that a third of the alternative school students in their sample obtained district wide honor roll status. Brewer et al. (1998) reported that by the 12th grade 72% of the alternative school students had passed nearly all of their courses and that 88% had passed the state competency examination successfully.

Longitudinal studies of alternative school students indicate positive successes in both graduating from high school and attending college or holding steady employment. Fix (2000) studied an alternative school in South Carolina and discovered a 76% graduation rate. Cantelon and LeBoeuf (1997), commenting on a study of communities in schools, of which some were alternative learning programs, found a

low 7% drop-out rate with a high proportion of the students remaining in school until graduation. Paglin and Fager (1997) highlighted numerous successful alternative schools in the Northwest United States and reported graduation rates as high as 80%–90%. High employment rates also were reported for the alternative school graduates with one school sending 50% of their graduates on to a 4-year college or technical school. Brewer et al., (1998), commenting on the status of their alternative school students at the end of the school year, noted that 70% of the high school students graduated or went to college.

Research findings on how alternative school education affects current and future disruptive or delinquent behavior are mixed, with most noting significant short-term effects that dissipate over time. Hadderman (2000) found reduced disruptive behavior among alternative school students in New Jersey and reported that 50% of alternative school students in a Missouri alternative school demonstrated improved behavioral measures and had fewer disciplinary infractions once they returned to their respective home schools. Boss (1998), likewise, found reduced disciplinary problems among the alternative school students in her study. Lawrence, et al., (1982) reported significant reductions in delinquency as measured by declining juvenile court appearances. Mann and Gold (1981) suggested that the alternative school environment is more effective at starting the maturation process, which in turn helps to lower delinquency rates. However, Cox et al. (1995) noted that the literature on the ability of alternative schools to reduce delinquency does not offer support that these programs can significantly reduce delinquent behavior.

Research on the impact of alternative schools documents significant improvements in cognitive and affective improvements in students. Nichols and Utesch (1998) studied the effects of a midwestern alternative school on student motivation, goal orientation, and self-esteem. Pre- and posttesting on a 66-item Likert scale indicated significant increases in extrinsic motivation and self-esteem among those students who completed the alternative school program. Peer self-esteem and home self-esteem were also significantly improved among these students.

Other researchers have also reported the significant progress that alternative school programs have for raising student self-esteem (Cox, 1999; Cox et al., 1995). Castleberry and Enger (1998) discussed the numerous positive effects that alternative schools impart to their students. Johnston and Wetherill (1998) added that these programs improve the social skills of their attendees. The development of extrinsic motivation and the sense of belonging and community that pervades the alternative school classroom not only have a direct and profound impact on shaping the child's academic performance but also teach the child new cognitive skills and coping methods (Dugger & Dugger, 1998).

Fix (2000) commented on the cost benefit and cost effectiveness of alternative schools and noted that for every $1,750 invested in alternative school, students produce a cost saving of $18,300 which would have been spent on juvenile incarcerations or welfare programs. Each student that is saved from repeating a grade saves $5,623 and each hour that is conducive to learning (i.e., free of disruptive behavior) saves $23,429 per class (American Teacher, 1997). Thus, alternative schools appear to be better investments than the alternative of juvenile court and correctional system involvement, substance abuse programs, and unemployment and welfare assistance.

Participation of alternative school students in community programs also reintegrates them into the community as productive and responsible citizens. The sense of belonging and giving back profoundly shapes the students and their lives. Community involvement also imparts an important message to community organizations and their members that alternative school students are not delinquents, misfits, outcasts, and throw-away children (Hawes, Dillard, Brewer, Cobb, & Neenan, 2000).

Juvenile Structured Day Programs (JSDP)

One specific type of alternative learning program is the *juvenile structured day program* (JSDP). Structured day programs are designed to offer education to expelled and suspended youth and are sanctioned by the courts. These programs are part of a community corrections and juvenile rehabilitative effort. Structured Day Programs offer academic and life skills to the students much like the ALPs and they also offer many more services to the students and their families (e.g., counseling, anger management, problem solving, substance abuse education, referrals to other community programs, plans for transitioning back into the traditional school).

In accordance with North Carolina General Statute §7B-2506(16), the State Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention defines structured day programs as nonresidential programs that provide intervention and prevention services to juveniles in a closely supervised, safe environment. The target population of these programs is juveniles that are adjudicated delinquent or undisciplined, intake diverted, or at risk. A structured day program has many components and serves youth in a community-based setting. These programs should be highly structured and provide accountability for the students.

Soon after his inauguration in 2001, Governor Michael Easley charged the North Carolina Governor's Crime Commission (GCC) with addressing the issue of providing continuing education for students who are either suspended or expelled from the state's public school system. The commission accepted Governor Easley's challenge and eagerly solicited grant proposals from state and local agencies.

Given the federal limitations on how Edward Byrne and other grant funds, which are administered by the Crime Commission, can be awarded, these grants focused specifically on those students who were either suspended or expelled, or have had prior involvement with the juvenile justice system. Juvenile structured day programs (JSDP) best match the intent of the governor's charge and the more restrictive federal funding requirements.

In the following discussion we present the findings from a study in which we sought to evaluate the process of operating and maintaining a juvenile structured day program and to assess the impact that these programs have had on their participants.

Method

Participants

The study was conducted as a collaborative effort between members of the North Carolina Criminal Justice Analysis Center, juvenile justice planners and grants managers, and two graduate student interns. The group met periodically to determine survey questions, review draft documentation, conduct site visits, and to propose relevant policy implications and recommendations on the basis of the study findings. Using this divergent group membership proved to be beneficial and helped to improve the validity of the study and its findings by gaining the proper job-specific perspective of researchers, planners, grant managers, and independent objective student parties. Respondents for the survey and the six site visits were juvenile structured day program administrators who were either serving as the program principal or acting in a vice principal capacity.

Design and Procedure

A 36-item questionnaire was mailed to each of North Carolina's 41 juvenile structured day programs. The survey contained a combination of both closed and open-ended questions and addressed issues such as the helpfulness and supportiveness of local and state agencies in terms of the programs' operations and questions pertaining to the most beneficial and challenging aspects regarding the process of establishing and maintaining a structured day program for at-risk youth.

Other questions sought to elucidate the impact of these programs on their participants by asking the survey respondents to rate the effectiveness and utility of juvenile structured day programs for improving various prosocial behaviors, such as school attendance, and for minimizing undesirable behaviors such as delinquency and truancy. Survey respondents also were queried on basic statistical program data and services, issues involving staff training, and fiscal information such as operating budgets and funding sources.

The survey items were derived from a general evaluation survey protocol, which was developed by the first author, for assessing both the operational processes and impact of public sector programs. This protocol has been successfully used to evaluate other juvenile justice programs, such as the communities that care model and programs that provide services to victims of crime. We used discussions with educators and alternative school administrators and the existing literature to make the protocol instrument specific for evaluating the state's juvenile structured day programs. The authors conducted pilot testing of the survey instrument with evaluators from the state's Department of Public Instruction and several alternative school administrators, in an effort to ensure a greater degree of clarity, content validity, and inter-rater reliability.

A 32-item site visit and telephone interview protocol also was developed and administered to six different structured day program educators and administrators at six juvenile structured day programs. These programs were selected on the basis of discussions with program evaluators, from the state's Department of Public Instruction, who identified two exemplary programs, two average programs, and two below-average programs. Although their perceptions were more subjective than preferred, this selection method proved beneficial for examining the entire spectrum, or continuum, of structured day programs as opposed to conducting in-depth interviews with only members from those programs perceived as exceptional. Gathering data from programs perceived to be less than ideal permitted analysis of problem areas and assist in identifying program weaknesses. The interviews were conducted in an effort to obtain qualitative comments and observations from the field, to probe for more in-depth facts, and to receive a greater degree of insight and clarification on the information that was obtained from the general mail-out survey.

Results

Of the 41 surveys, which were mailed to the state's JSDP program directors, 24 (58.5%) were completed and returned to the Crime Commission. Of those that were returned, 10 (41.7%) came from programs in the western portion of the state and 5(20.8%) reported on programs from the central region of the state with the remaining 9 (37.5%) being submitted by JSDPs that were operational in eastern North Carolina.

A geographical comparison between the location of those juvenile structured day programs, whose directors completed the survey and the statewide geographical distribution of the 41 JSDP (22% in the piedmont, 39% in the eastern or coastal region, and 39% in the mountain region) reveals that the distribution was almost proportionate on a statewide basis. Responses from the piedmont and the eastern or coastal regions were slightly underrepresentative whereas

responses from the mountain programs were slightly higher than their representation in the JSDP population. Given this near identical distribution data, findings should not reflect a geographical bias. As a result, plausible statewide generalizations can be drawn from the survey data.

Program Statistics and Attributes

Program data, provided by the respondents, indicated that a total of 1,803 suspended or expelled students were served during 2001. Service provision ranged from 0 to 488 students with an average of 85.9 students being served per year by the participating JSDPs. The average daily attendance during this period was 13.8 students per program. Data for the first quarter of 2002 indicated that 851 children attended those JSDPs represented in the survey with an average of 38.7 kids per program during the first quarter of this year. It is anticipated that enrollment figures will rise as several of the new JSDPs become fully operational and begin offering services to more suspended and expelled youth.

The number of full-time staff ranged from 0 to 14 with an average full-time staff representation of 4.3 per JSDP. Volunteer staffing patterns ranged from 0 to 10 with an average of only 1.3 volunteers per program.

Survey respondents were asked to provide statistics on the number of their 2001 students who had no further court contact and truancy and the number of students who improved their academic performance and school attendance. Of the 1,803 suspended or expelled students who attended the JSDPs in 2001 at least 521 (28.9%) reportedly had no further contact with the juvenile courts after leaving the program. At least 200 of these students (11.1%) were reported to have had no further truancy incidents and at least 477 (26.5%) JSDP students reportedly improved their school attendance. Improvements in academic performance were reported for at least 383 (21.3%) students.

Only one half of the JSDPs currently have automated data collection systems; however, 95.8% of the programs currently track their students once they leave the juvenile structured day program. A variety of program statistics, data, and documentation are being collected by these JSDPs to monitor student progress and to facilitate program evaluation and improvement. JSDPs are compiling the following data and program statistics to achieve these objectives.

Court records and conversations with court counselors along with relevant academic data including individualized student plans, attendance, standardized tests, and client tracking forms are all being used by program staff to monitor and assess student progress. Behavioral improvement plans, home visitations, intradepartmental case reviews and the documentation of daily observations, issues, potential problems, and successes are also compiled and analyzed by JSDP staff.

Respondents reported a wide range of services offered by their respective JSDPs. Most JSDPs offer a similar set of services and programs; the percentages of JSDPs that offer a particular type of service or program are substantially high. Individual counseling and conflict or anger management were the most common services offered (95.8%) followed by life or social skills training and meals or snacks (91.7%). At least 75% of the JSDPs reported offering all of the services, which were included in the questionnaire, with the exception of faith-based initiatives. Only 14.3 % of the JSDPs offered faith-related programs and services (see Table 1).

Operating and Maintaining a Juvenile Structured Day Program (Process Evaluation)

Survey respondents were asked to rate the nature of their respective JSDP's interactions with numerous state and local agencies. Overall, the interactions were best described as positive with an average of 67.3% of the respondents reporting helpful interactions across the nine different state and local agencies on which they were asked to comment. Specifically, the most helpful interactions existed between the JSDPs and the state department of juvenile justice and delinquency prevention (DJJDP) and the local juvenile crime prevention councils (JCPC).

TABLE 1. Services Offered in Juvenile Structured Day Programs

Service item	*n*	%
Individual counseling	23	95.8
Conflict or anger management	23	95.8
Life or social skills training	22	91.7
Meals or snacks	22	91.7
Group counseling	21	87.5
Recreation	21	87.5
Drug or alcohol education	19	82.6
Transportation	19	82.6
Parental involvement	18	78.3
Faith-based initiatives	3	14.3

Juvenile structured day program staff reported similar information regarding the extent to which these agencies offered support for assisting the JSDPs with their operations and with the process of maintaining these structured day programs. Respondents were asked to assess support levels on a 4-point scale (1 = *no support*; 2 = *little support*; 3 = *acceptable support*; 4 = *great support*). The majority of the respondents reported that these state and local agencies offered either acceptable, or greater, levels of support. The survey participants reported that the most support was obtained at the local level with the JCPCs and the local juvenile courts contributing greatly. The Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and the Governor's Crime Commission were described as the most supportive state agencies.

Commenting on the most beneficial aspect of operating and maintaining a JSDP, 31.8% of program staff noted that the programs offered a viable and much-needed form of structured supervision for at-risk juveniles. Twenty seven percent of those responding to the survey suggested that the rich, collaborative, and supportive relationships, which developed between JSDP personnel and staff from the local schools and juvenile courts, were the most beneficial process-related aspects of their programs. Other process-related benefits of JSDPs included: (a) the supportive and nurturing environment that is created and maintained by program staff, (b) the individualized attention that the children receive, and (c) the fact that these factors interact and coalesce to produce heightened student accountability.

Nearly one-quarter of the survey participants reported transportation as the most difficult and challenging aspect of operating a JSDP. The lack of transportation or an inability to use conventional public school buses was commonly noted as a significant challenge. Challenges, which inhibit the process of running a more effective and efficient structured day program, tend to cluster around two primary focal areas: (a) staffing and financial issues and (b) interagency relationships.

Numerous responses were obtained that delineated staffing patterns and funding concerns as significant challenges that JSDP educators and administrators face on a daily basis. Staffing issues centered around higher turnover rates among part time temporary workers, finding the right staff that have the discipline and tolerance to work with at-risk students and less than ideal staff-to-student ratios with a need for more personnel. Funding issues revolved around low pay for staff with long tenures (i.e., no automatic pay raises at fixed yearly intervals) and on finding permanent funding during very tight and tenacious fiscal times.

Maintaining and culturing open and positive relationships between JSDP staff and other key stakeholders was also noted as a substantially challenging aspect of operating a JSDP. Specific comments were directed toward the lack of parental involvement and accountability and an absence of support from the public school system.

Maintaining contact with the student's school of origin for follow-up and data, and convincing school systems to be team players without having a great degree of control over the program were repeatedly mentioned as posing significant operational challenges.

Twenty-eight percent of the JSDP staff did not have any significant concerns or problems regarding the process of operating and maintaining their structured day programs. Continuation funding was cited as the most pressing and frequent concern among the respondents with the provision of transportation also being expressed as a problem for the juvenile structured day programs. Other responses were varied with many representing unique concerns and issues that were, in several cases, site specific and perhaps not globally reflective of JSDPs in general.

Survey participants were given the opportunity to freely comment on the process of operating and maintaining their respective JSDPs with an overwhelming number discussing the positive and beneficial features almost at the exclusion of mentioning negative program aspects; thus providing sound testimony on the strong utility of these programs and on the devotion that JSDP staff demonstrate. Numerous comments were made regarding the programs' warm and nurturing family atmospheres, their programs' flexibility and adaptability, and the remarkable level of community support that some JSDPs have experienced since they became operational. Although some people saw a lack of available guidelines or blueprints as a stumbling block, others noted that this turned out to be a blessing in disguise because the JSDP was allowed to exercise more creativity and to tailor its services to the specific needs of the community and its at-risk children.

Research demonstrates that successful alternative learning programs are heavily grounded in initial and continuing professional development and staff training. Working within the alternative learning environment requires knowledge beyond the traditional public school teacher curriculum with alternative learning program staff requiring detailed specialization courses that enable them to more adequately prepare for handling the special challenges of working with at-risk children.

Administrators from the state's juvenile structured day programs recognize this need and strongly encourage, and in some cases require additional and specialized staff training as a prerequisite for employment or as part of the alternative school educator's continuing professional development and education. First aid was the most common training course that was offered or encouraged as a part of the JSDP's staff development. Seventy-six percent of the juvenile structured day programs in the survey recommended this type of staff training with 65.2% encouraging crisis intervention and a comparable percentage of the schools offering or encouraging behavior management skills training. Over half of

the JSDP respondents offered or encouraged substance abuse education for their respective staff members whereas slightly less than half offered or encouraged peer mediation and technology training. Other specialized training, which was reportedly offered or encouraged included: cooperative learning, cultural diversity or sensitivity, gang education or awareness, search and seizure, medication administration, supervision of juveniles, and criminal thinking errors.

Assessing the Outcomes and Impact of Juvenile Structured Day Programs

Survey respondents were asked to rate their perceptions of JSDPs in terms of the extent to which these programs, for at-risk suspended and expelled children, affect the participants and a variety of societal, familial, community, and academic indicators. Respondents also were asked to rate the effectiveness and utility of these programs on the same factors and were asked to comment on both the most beneficial and disappointing outcomes of JSDPs. Questions were posed to elicit suggestions on how JSDPs can be improved to increase both their effectiveness and their future impact on at-risk children.

Respondents were asked to rate the impact of JSDPs on a scale from 1 (*no impact*) to 10 (*great impact*). As Table 2 shows, perceived impact was high with the greatest impact being reported on the participating at-risk children (M = 9.0, SD = 0.98), followed by delinquency rates (M = 8.32, SD = 1.17) and the local schools (M = 8.14, SD = 1.61). Impact on the youth's parents received the lowest average rating (M = 7.0, SD = 1.80) but still suggests a perceived significant contribution on the part of the JSDPs for beneficially affecting the parents of program participants.

Commenting specifically on the impact of juvenile structured day programs, the survey participants offered insight on the mechanics of how these programs produce such consistently high benefits or have such a profound impact on the students and their communities. The JSDPs are responsible for improving the at-risk students' self-esteem and self-image through counseling, which in turn positively impacts their academic behaviors, attendance, grades, and ultimately, their intrinsic motivation to remain in school. These programs also increase social awareness and a sense of belonging by allowing the children to participate in various community service projects that allow them to strengthen their community ties and give something back to the community versus preying upon it.

Survey participants consistently rated the perceived effectiveness of JSDPs as being substantially high on a variety of different academic and social behaviors. Respondents were asked to provide an effectiveness score for each of the listed measures ranging from 1 (*no effect*) to 10 (*great effect*). As Table 3 shows, JSDPs were perceived as having the most effect on improving students' self-esteem (M = 8.35, SD

TABLE 2. Perceived Impact of Juvenile Structured Day Programs (N = 22)

Attribute	Impact	
	M	*SD*
At-risk children	9.0	.98
Delinquency rate	8.32	1.17
Local school	8.14	1.61
Local community	8.0	1.51
Parent	7.0	1.80

TABLE 3. Perceived Effectiveness of Juvenile Structured Day Programs (N = 23)

Attribute	Effectiveness	
	M	*SD*
Improved self-esteem	8.35	1.67
Delinquency reduction	8.17	1.99
Improved relationships with authority figures	7.87	1.66
Improved school attendance	7.78	1.65
Truancy reduction	7.57	1.73
School dropout	7.27	1.72
Reduction of other behavioral problems	7.48	1.70
Improved graduation rates	6.42	1.98
Improved chance of attaining post secondary education	6.33	2.37

= 1.67) and on reducing delinquent behavior (*M* = 8.17, *SD* = 1.99). JSDPs were also perceived as highly effective programs for improving students' relationships with authority figures (*M* = 7.87, *SD* = 1.66), and improving school attendance (*M* = 7.78, *SD* = 1.65). Juvenile structured day programs were also rated as being fairly effective on two long term academic outcome measures. Respondents noted that JSDPs were somewhat effective for improving graduation rates (*M* = 6.42, *SD* = 1.98) and had a modest effect on improving students' chances of attaining a postsecondary education (*M* = 6.33, *SD* = 2.37).

Juvenile structured day programs have not been immune to unintended, and in some cases even deleterious, consequences during the course of their operations. Survey responses indicated that problems have arisen surrounding the transitioning of at-risk suspended or expelled students from the JSDP back into the original public school. JSDP staff noted that much of their hard work and progress could be undermined once the children returned to their original public schools because staff at these schools hold preconceived negative stereotypes that are based on the children's prior antisocial and disruptive behaviors. In many cases, this reverse halo effect interacts with the loss of individualized attention and contributes to a desire, on the part of JSDP participants, to not want to return to the public school.

Survey respondents also reported the lack of parental support and, in some cases, a lack of support from the local schools also was reported as an unexpected outcome. Admission guidelines and criteria also were seen as problematic with some JSDPs reporting that they were inundated with referrals because the courts and schools erroneously ignored their eligibility and screening criteria whereas other JSDP educators complained about the lack of referrals because the local juvenile justice system personnel were not aware of the JSDP's existence and program mission. Disappointment was also expressed when standardized reading and math test scores did not rise to expected levels and when JSDP staff failed to turn around some of their students. Disappointment was also voiced with local school administrators who were critical of the JSDP and its failure to become a boot camp as they originally envisioned the program when it was first proposed to them.

Respondents were asked what could be done to improve the efficacy of the state's JSDPs. The following suggestions were offered as a means for further intensifying the positive impact of these programs and for producing even more beneficial results and successful program outcomes. A need for increased funding was expressed with an emphasis on minimizing competition for this funding. Numerous comments were offered regarding the need for stakeholders to improve their working relationships and to share more resources. Some survey participants suggested mandated cooperation with strictly enforced statewide guidelines and standards to guide this proposed edict. A suggestion for a statewide and standardized JSDP assessment and evaluation protocol also was cited as a means for improving program impact.

Fiscal Analyses

Total annual operating budgets varied considerably between the 24 JSDPs in the study sample with a range from $46,266 to $800,000. The average annual operating budget was $266,978. The average budgetary expenditure, per student, also varied considerably and ranged from a low of $561 to a survey high of $27,864. The reported mean annual expenditure per child was $5,599, which is slightly less than the average per pupil expenditure for public school students of $6,280 (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2001). An additional analysis indicates that the respondents reported cost per child is higher than the cost obtained by adding the JSDP budgets and dividing by the number of children served in 2001 ($2,533).

Respondents indicated a variety of funding sources exclusive of the Governor's Crime Commission (GCC) for their programs with county and local school system funds being the most commonly reported sources. JCPC funds and DJJDP and other state funds were also commonly cited as providing revenue for the JSDPs. City block grants, private and corporate donations, and fundraising activities were also listed as sources for project income. On average, the JSDP's resident county government(s) contributed 20.2% of the JSDP's total operating budget. On average, funding from other sources accounted for 51.7% of the JSDP's annual operating budget. Assuming full disclosure, this implies that the GCC contributes 48.3% of the typical JSDP's annual operating budget. Because the GCC is the state administrative agency, for federal criminal and juvenile justice funds, this finding implies that nearly one half of the JSDPs' operating budgets are supported through federal funds.

Discussion

Survey findings indicated that North Carolina's JSDPs provide services to a growing number of suspended or expelled students and it is anticipated that this number will increase during the coming years as more of the newer JSDPs become fully operational and expand their enrollment figures. Despite this fact, JSDP average daily attendance statistics and the numbers of full-time staff and volunteers remain low. Program statistics provided by JSDP administrators suggest that these programs make a difference because approximately one in four JSDP attendees makes improvements in school attendance and has no further contact with the juvenile court system. A fewer number of students experience academic improvements, but successful reintegration into the mainstream public classroom appears promising with roughly 60% of the students

returning to public school. Although only half of the JSDPs are fully automated, nearly all programs compile qualitative and quantitative data on their students to assess current progress academically and behaviorally. A comparable number also track their former students once they leave the program, which should facilitate future longitudinal research on the long-term effects of JSDPs. Programming activities and services appear to be highly similar across the JSDPs, which implies a great degree of statewide consistency in program curricula.

As a general rule, the JSDP survey respondents reported helpful and supportive interactions with relevant local and state agencies; however, difficult and less than ideal relationships were reported for the JSDPs interactions with the state department of public instruction, some parents, and some of the local public schools. Staffing, transportation, and financing were three significant concerns among the JSDP respondents with numerous suggestions centering on the need for increased support in these areas. The structured and supportive atmosphere of the juvenile structured day program was seen as a positive feature as was the emphasis on encouraging staff development and training.

JSDP educators' comments and perceptions of program impact demonstrate the efficacy of these programs with perceptions of effectiveness and utility also being rated consistently high. JSDPs seem to have desired and beneficial effects on program participants primarily by strengthening their self-image, reducing delinquent acts, and involving the children in community affairs. Difficulties in transitioning the JSDP attendees back into the mainstream public classroom and confusion over JSDP admission guidelines and criteria were described as areas in need of improvement.

On the basis of the study findings and comments from JSDP educators and administrators, the following policy recommendations are offered in an effort to strengthen existing programs, expand the JSDP concept, and to provide guidance for improving the effectiveness and efficiency of these programs on attaining their goals and objectives. We recommend exploring federal, state, local, and private foundation funding sources for the purpose of providing increased and continued funding for JSDPs. Further exploration should be conducted to ascertain the feasibility of pursuing and obtaining appropriation funding from Congress or the state general assembly.

1. Expand the number of JSDPs across the state with an emphasis on placing new programs in public school districts with excessively higher than average suspension or expulsion rates.

2. Increase the number of full time JSDP staff and recruit more volunteer staff to include college interns, retired educators and juvenile justice system personnel, parents, and members of the JSDP's community organizations.

3. Expand program capacity to enable more suspended or expelled students to have the opportunity to attend juvenile structured day programs. A 1999 report by the state Department of Public Instruction found that only 52% of long term suspended students actually received placement within an alternative learning program (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 1999). Coupled with the fact that long-term suspensions grew by 22% from 1999 to 2001, the need for more JSDPs is even more imperative (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2002). Efforts should also be directed to fully automating the data collection and student tracking systems for those JSDPs that lack this technological capability. The issue of transporting suspended or expelled students to and from JSDPs needs further inquiry with an emphasis on identifying promising strategies and cost-effective means of providing this service.

4. Increase and strengthen both parental accountability and involvement in these programs. Emphasis should be directed toward strengthening the collaborative efforts between the state Department of Public Instruction and the local JSDPs.

5. Clarify and expand existing procedures for transitioning JSDP students back into the mainstream public classroom.

Given this study's small sample size and the relatively low response rate, further research should be conducted to assess the reliability and validity of the current findings using a larger survey universe. The study could be replicated across the nation or a region of the country. Finally, detailed longitudinal research studies and program evaluations should be conducted to assess the long-term benefits of JSDPs with an emphasis on tracking former students through the educational and criminal justice systems.

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APPENDIX

Part 1: Process-related questions

1. What type of structured day program do you operate? (Circle the one most appropriate type)
   a. Afterschool b. Day reporting center
   c. Day treatment center d. Other, please list: _____

2. What county (counties) does your program serve? _____

3. How helpful have the interactions, of each of the groups or agencies listed below, been in terms of your juvenile structured day program's (JSDP) contact with them? Use the following scale: 1 = *no interaction*, 2 = *helpful interactions*, 3 = *both helpful and nonhelpful*, 4 = *nonhelpful interactions*

North Caroline Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention	_____
North Carolina Department of Public Instruction	_____
Local schools which your students either attend or attended	_____
Local juvenile courts	_____
Local school system administrators or board of education	_____
Parents or guardians of program participants	_____
Juvenile crime prevention council	_____
Governor's crime commission (GCC)	_____
Department of social services (DSS)	_____

(appendix continues)

APPENDIX (*Continued*)

4. Please rate the same groups or agencies on the level of support that they have provided. Use the following scale: 1 = *no support*, 2 = *little support*, 3 = *acceptable support*, 4 = *great support*
   - North Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention _____
   - North Carolina Department of Public Instruction _____
   - Local schools which your students either attend or attended _____
   - Local juvenile courts _____
   - Local school system administrators or board of education _____
   - Parents or guardians of program participants _____
   - Juvenile crime prevention council _____
   - Your program's children _____
   - Governor's crime commission (GCC) _____
   - Department of social services (DSS) _____

5. What is the most beneficial aspect of your JSDP? (In terms of process, i.e., starting, running the program) Example: community volunteers. How is it beneficial? Who does it benefit?

6. What has been the most challenging aspect of this program, and why? (Process only) Example: Meeting transportation needs.

7. Are there any concerns or problems that you have regarding the process of managing and operating your JSDP?

8. Comment on your process of starting, maintaining, and operating a JSDP? What is good about the process?

9. Conversely, what have been the most demanding challenges about the process? In other words, if you could develop a new JSDP what would you do differently?

10. Does your program offer or encourage staff training? Yes No

11. If yes, please indicate those areas in which staff training is offered or financed (circle all that apply).
   - cooperative learning
   - mastery learning
   - conflict resolution
   - cultural diversity or sensitivity
   - physical restraint techniques
   - technology
   - behavior management
   - gangs
   - first aid
   - child development
   - peer mediation
   - substance abuse issues
   - crisis intervention
   - Other, if yes, list _____

12. What types of staff training are required by your program's policies and procedures? (Circle all that apply)
   - cooperative learning
   - mastery learning
   - conflict resolution
   - cultural diversity or sensitivity
   - physical restraint techniques
   - technology
   - behavior management
   - gangs
   - first aid
   - child development
   - peer mediation
   - substance abuse issues
   - crisis intervention
   - Other, please list _____

Part 2: The next set of questions will deal with the impact (i.e., a measurable effect of JSDPs)

13. How would you rate the impact of JSDPs on the following scale: (from 1 = *no impact* to 10 = *great impact*)
   - Impact on local communities _____
   - Impact on participants' delinquency rates _____
   - Impact on at-risk youth that participated _____
   - Impact on youth's parents _____
   - Impact on local schools _____

   Are any other groups or people or organizations affected by JSDPs? (If so list, then add impact rating 1–10).

14. What do you see as the most beneficial outcomes of JSDPs? How are they beneficial in terms of their impact?

15. Conversely, have there been any unexpected and disappointing negative outcomes?

(appendix continues)

APPENDIX (*Continued*)

16. How can the state increase the efficacy of JSDPs? In other words, what improvements should be made to produce an even greater impact and to make structured day programs produce even more beneficial results or positive outcomes?

17. How effective do you feel your JSDP is in terms of assisting the state's at-risk juveniles? (1 = *not effective*, 2 = *little effectiveness*, 3 = *effective*, 4 = *very effective*)

18. Please rate the impact, or effectiveness of JSDPs, on the following attributes of at-risk children. (1= *no impact*, 10 = *greatest impact*).

Delinquency reduction	_____
Truancy reduction	_____
Reduction of other behavioral problems	_____
School dropout reduction	_____
Improved school attendance	_____
Improved academic performance	_____
Improved graduation rate	_____
Improved at-risk childrens' chances of obtaining postsecondary education	_____
Improved self-esteem	_____
Improved relationships with authority figures	_____
Reintegration back into mainstream classroom	_____

19. Please rate the utility, or usefulness of JSDPs, on the following measures: Please keep effectiveness and usefulness separate. Example: A screwdriver is useful for driving a nail but a hammer is more effective. (1 = *no usefulness*, 10 = *greatest utility*)

Delinquency reduction	_____
Truancy reduction	_____
Reduction of other behavioral problems	_____
Improved school attendance	_____
Improved academic performance	_____
Improved self-esteem	_____
Improved relationships with authority figures	_____
Reintegration back into mainstream classroom	_____

20. Do JSDPs produce any other beneficial outcomes, or have an impact, on at-risk children that are not listed above? (If yes, list all and then provide 1–10 ranking as above).
21. Please tell us your overall impressions of JSDPs.

Part 3: Program statistics and attributes

22. Please provide the following statistical information about your program. If the data are unavailable please indicate with UA.

Total number of children served during calendar year 2001	_____
Total number of children served during first quarter of 2002	_____
Average daily attendance or average number reporting daily	_____
Total number of full-time staff positions	_____
Total number of volunteer staff available today if needed	_____
Total number of attendees returned to regular school (2001)	_____
Percentage of students graduating from your program (2001)	_____

23. From the total number of children served during calendar year 2001. Please list the number for each:

Number with no further court contact	_____
Number with no further truancy	_____
Number with improved school attendance	_____
Number with improved academic performance	_____
Number reintegrated into mainstream classroom	_____

24. What percentage of your students are referred to your program by the:

Local law enforcement agencies	_____ %
Juvenile courts	_____ %
Local school administrators	_____ %
DSS	_____ %
Parents or legal guardians	_____ %
Other referral source (please list) _____	_____ %

(appendix continues)

APPENDIX (*Continued*)

25. Do you have an automated data collection system? Yes No

26. Do you track children once they leave the program? Yes No
27. If not, why? _____
28. How do you monitor or evaluate program success?
29. What other program statistics, documents or data are available?

30. Indicate which of the following services are offered at your JSDP. (Circle all applicable)
    a. Individual counseling
    b. Group counseling
    c. Drug or alcohol abuse prevention
    d. Conflict or anger management
    e. Student transportation
    f. Programs or services involving parents
    g. Faith-based initiatives
    h. Recreation
    i. Meals or snacks
    j. Academic instruction by a certified teacher
    k. Referral to other service providers, example: mental health, courts.
    l. Life or social skills training
    m. Grades or attendance accepted by student's school of record (i.e., credit given for SDP enrollment)
    Other, please list: _____

Part 3: Fiscal information

31. What is your total annual operating budget? $_____

32. What does this equate to per child? $_____

33. List other funding sources, beyond the Governor's Crime Commission, and what percent each contributes to your total budget. Example: private donations, 45%.
    a. _____ Percent _____
    b. _____ Percent _____
    c. _____ Percent _____
    d. _____ Percent _____
    e. _____ Percent _____
    Other sources, if needed: _____

34. What percentage of your total operating budget does the county provide? _____ %

35. How did your county generate these funds? (Circle all that apply)
    Created new budgetary line item
    Moved funds from another existing program
    Other, please list _____

36. What is the temporal relationship between the county provided funds and funds provided by the Governor's Crime Commission (GCC)? (Please circle the one most appropriate response).
    a. County funding occurred before our program received GCC funds
    b. County funding and GCC funding occurred simultaneously
    c. County funding occurred after our program received GCC funds
    d. Not applicable, our program does not receive GCC funds
    e. Not applicable, our program does not receive county funding
    f. Not applicable, our program does not receive county funds nor GCC funds

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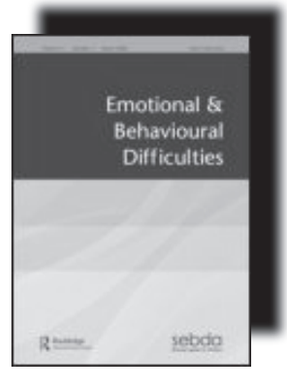

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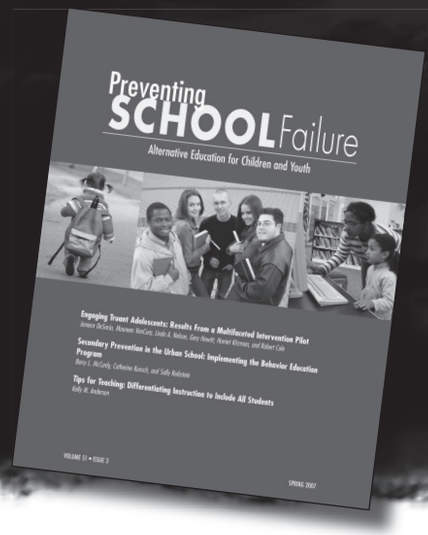

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