

COLLEGE READINESS AND DUAL CREDIT PARTICIPATION OF  
ALTERNATIVE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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The purpose of this study was to explore the extent to which alternative schools add value to the college readiness of their students, as well as to measure the capacity of alternative school students to successfully complete dual credit courses while enrolled at the alternative school. This mixed methods study utilized an exploratory approach with a descriptive research design to explore the extent to which alternative schools produce college-ready students. The Texas Success Initiative Assessment was used to measure participants' academic readiness levels in mathematics, reading, and writing. Additionally, participants had the opportunity to provide their own perspectives on their college readiness levels through a student survey and semi-structured face-to-face interview. The results of this study reveal that the college readiness levels of alternative high school students varied across academic areas. Of the tested participants, 41.1% were college ready in reading, 52.1% in writing, and 16.7% in mathematics. Additionally, the findings reveal that dual credit course participation was not a viable option because of course prerequisites and the amount of time needed to complete dual credit courses. Results of this study expand on the literature to provide a better understanding of the effectiveness of alternative school programs, the college readiness levels of alternative high school students, and the capacity of alternative high school students to successfully complete college coursework while in high school.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2015) revealed that 6.5% of persons 16 through 24 years of age were identified as having dropped out of high school in 2014. While there is no acceptable dropout percentage, states and local districts have worked to reduce the percentage of students who drop out of high school by introducing alternative education settings within school districts. These alternative schools are designed to meet the individual educational needs of students who are at risk of dropping out of high school, or who already dropped out. States and school districts also utilize another type of alternative education program to address the disciplinary needs of students. These programs are commonly referred to as Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs (DAEPs) (Carver, Lewis, & Tice, 2010; Porowski, O'Connor & Luo, 2014). While both DAEPs and alternative schools are designed to return students to a traditional campus setting or prevent students from dropping out of high school, they serve vastly different student populations. The focus of this study concentrated on students who attend alternative schools as a program of choice, rather than DAEPs where students are required to attend for disciplinary reasons.

Alternative schools like those that were the focus of this study and that emphasize academic performance look different across the nation; however, the key component is they are programs of choice that focus on the academic needs of the students they serve (Carver et al., 2010; Porowski et al., 2014). Alternative school programs may be classroom based, entirely computer based, or utilize a blended learning model for delivering instruction in core content and elective areas. In addition, many alternative school programs supplement academic instruction

with social services programs to meet the needs of the at-risk students they serve (Lange & Sletten, 2002).

Successful alternative school programs should decrease dropout rates and ultimately increase graduation rates (Carver et al. 2010; Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009). Notably, examination of NCES data reveals that dropout rates are declining. In 1999, 11.2% of persons 16 through 24 years of age were identified as having dropped out of high school. In 2004, the rate reduced to 10.3%; the rate reduced again to 8.1% in 2009; and, as referenced earlier, in 2014, 6.5% of persons 16 through 24 years of age were identified as having dropped out of high school (NCES, 2015). However, graduation rates are difficult to analyze as there are multiple methods of determining what makes a high school graduate. Some methods include general equivalency diploma (GED) in the calculations, while others do not; some methods only include four-year completers, while others include five- or even six-year completers (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009). Regardless of which method you utilize to define a high school graduate, whether looking at graduation or completion rates, with or without the GED, NCES (2015) reported that the rates have shown improvement since 1999.

#### Statement of the Problem

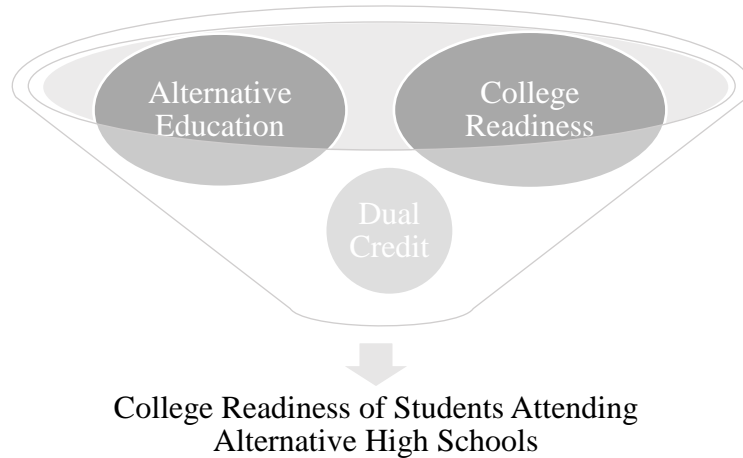
There is a current outcry about assuring that high school graduates are college ready. Being college eligible and college ready are two completely different things. Students are eligible for college if they have graduated from high school; however, that does not always mean that they are ready for college. Conley (2008) defined college readiness as “the level of preparation a student needs in order to enroll and succeed – without remediation – in a credit-bearing general education course” (p. 24). However, the NCES indicates that “nearly 70 percent

of students beginning at public 2-year institutions and 40 percent of those beginning at public 4-year institutions took at least one remedial course during their undergraduate careers” (Chen, 2016, p. 55).

There is a clear disconnect between being a high school graduate and being a college-ready student. This disconnect is amplified when comparing students from traditional high school campuses with alternative campuses which serve our most at-risk student populations. This study not only explored college readiness for alternative high school students but also explored opportunities for students in alternative schools to participate in dual credit courses while in high school, courses which are typically limited to those attending traditional high school campuses.

### Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study focuses on establishing college readiness outcomes for alternative school students. Current research in the area of college readiness and alternative education is highly segmented, as indicated by the framework elements in Figure 1. Conley (2008) outlined the four key facets of college readiness as cognitive strategies, content knowledge, academic behaviors and contextual skills and knowledge. Each of these facets is applicable to alternative school students, just as they are to traditional high school students. When alternative school students are equipped with these key facets, they have the potential to achieve their postsecondary goals. Each of Conley’s four facets are important components of college readiness; however, this study focused on the content knowledge facet in addition to the contextual skills and knowledge facet for students attending alternative high schools.



*Figure 1.* This conceptual framework depicts how the combination of alternative education, dual credit, and college readiness while in high school come together to impact the college readiness of students who attend alternative high schools.

While there is an abundance of research on college readiness and on alternative education programs, there is no reported interaction between the two. Current college readiness and dual credit research emphasize traditional high school students; however, college ready and dual credit outcomes should be a reality for alternative school students as well. This study attempted to intertwine these two segmented areas of research to assess the college readiness outcomes for alternative high school students

This study utilized the Texas Success Initiative Assessment (TSI-A) as an instrument to assess college readiness. Students participating in the study who met readiness benchmarks on the TSI-A, those that are established by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB), were provided an opportunity to participate in dual credit to further demonstrate readiness. Students who did not meet readiness standards continued to receive instruction and support throughout their time at the alternative school. Upon completion of the program, or completion of the academic year, students were reassessed to measure growth.

## Purpose of the Study

This study explored the extent to which alternative schools add value to the college readiness of their students, as well as the capacity of alternative school students to successfully complete dual credit courses while enrolled at the alternative school.

## Research Questions

The following research questions guided the focus of this study:

1. To what extent are students who graduate from alternative high school campuses ready to take college level courses, as measured by the Texas Success Initiative Assessment?
2. To what extent do students who do not meet readiness standards achieve growth on the Texas Success Initiative Assessment during their time at the alternative campus?
3. To what extent do alternative high school students who meet eligibility requirements participate and be successful in offered dual credit courses?

## Significance of the Study

This research is significant to the field of education because of its concentration on the college readiness of alternative high school students, an area lacking in current educational research. Current practice at alternative high school campuses focuses attention on credit completion and graduating students. Little or no attention is given to providing opportunities for students at alternative high school campuses to enroll in dual credit course work while they are in high school, yet alone to ensure that they have the content and background knowledge to enter college credit-bearing coursework upon graduation. While academic practice focuses on graduation, current research on alternative schools revolves around three overarching themes. These themes include 1) the impact alternative schools have in helping prevent at-risk students

from dropping out of high school, 2) characteristics of effective alternative schools, and 3) the reasons why students choose to pursue their education at alternative campuses.

Ultimately, the primary goal of education is to create lifelong learners who graduate from the public-school system and are ready for the next phase of their life. Postsecondary readiness must be a focus of all schools, not just the traditional schools serving traditional students. Findings from this study may provide a better understanding of the effectiveness of alternative school programs, the college readiness levels of alternative high school students, and the capacity of alternative high school students to successfully complete college coursework while in high school.

#### Delimitations

There were certain delimitations in this study, including the fact that the study focused on the college readiness outcomes of students attending an alternative high school in only one north Texas school district. The sample for the study was limited to students enrolled at the alternative high school during the 2016-2017 school year. Additionally, while there are multiple methods to identify college readiness, this study limited the college readiness indicator to student performance on the TSI assessment.

#### Assumptions

The primary assumption of this study was that participants would perform to the best of their ability on the TSI in order to get an accurate assessment of their readiness. Participants were informed that, by law, their TSI results will be valid for five years and the results are transferable to institutions of higher learning. This assumption is based on students identifying

that successful performance on the TSI would eliminate the need for future testing to demonstrate eligibility for college level coursework.

### Definition of Key Terms

To provide readers a clear understanding of the study, the following terms are utilized throughout this study and have been defined as follows.

- **Alternative school.** Alternative school refers to accelerated instructional opportunities provided by districts with the vision of helping students who have already dropped out of school, or are at risk of dropping out, to earn their high school diploma (Texas Education Code, 2009). Alternative schools provide students the opportunity to complete courses in English, mathematics, science, and social studies, as well as a variety of electives. Such schools often allow students to utilize a flexible school day schedule.
- **College readiness.** College ready or college readiness is defined as “the level of preparation a student needs in order to enroll and succeed – without remediation – in a credit-bearing general education course” (Conley, 2008, p. 24).
- **Dual credit.** Dual credit is defined by Rule 4.83 of the Texas Administrative Code as “a process by which a high school student enrolls in a college course and receives simultaneous academic credit for the course from both the college and the high school” (p. 1).
- **Institution of higher education.** Chapter 61.003 of the Texas Education Code defines institutions of higher education (IHEs) as “any public technical institute, public junior college, public senior college or university, medical or dental unit, public state college, or other agency of higher education” (para. 8).
- **Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.** The Texas Higher Education



Coordinating Board (THECB) is defined by Chapter 61.002 of the Texas Education Code as a state agency that provides “leadership and coordination for the Texas higher education system, institutions, and governing boards, to the end that the State of Texas may achieve excellence for college education of its youth” (par. a).

- Texas Success Initiative Assessment. The Texas Success Initiative Assessment, frequently referenced as the TSI or TSI-A, is defined by rule 4.53 of the Texas Administrative Code as THECB’s “approved assessment instrument... for use by institutions of higher education for assessing a student’s readiness to enroll in an entry-level freshman course” (para. 24).

### Organization of the Remainder of the Study

Chapter 1 provides an introduction and background information, problem statement, conceptual framework, purpose, research questions, significance, delimitations, assumptions and definition of terms for this study on college readiness of alternative school students. Chapter 2 presents a review of the relevant literature that relates to college readiness, alternative education, and dual credit programs. Chapter 3 describes the methodology and research design for the study. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study. Chapter 5 concludes with the results of the study, implications and recommendations for practice, and recommendations for future research.

### Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore the extent to which alternative schools add value to the college readiness of their students, as well as the capacity of alternative school students to successfully complete dual credit courses while enrolled at the alternative school. Existing

college readiness and dual credit research concentrates on traditional high school students; however, college ready and dual credit outcomes should be a reality for alternative school students as well as students from traditional campuses. This chapter provides an introduction and background to the study.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) identifies the average freshman graduation rate each year. This figure reflects the percentage of students who entered high school and graduated in four years with a regular high school diploma. The NCES revealed that the average freshman graduation rate in 2011-12 was 81%. Since only 6.6% of persons 16 through 24 years of age were identified as having dropped out during this academic year, which leaves approximately 12% of the population finding alternative routes to graduation (NCES, 2014).

Smith and Thompson (2014) identified several options for students who struggle in traditional high school environments. These include Graduate Equivalency Diploma (GED) programs, alternative school programs, early/middle college high school programs, and alternative or minimum graduation plan programs. While each of these is perceived by many as inferior to the traditional high school diploma, they each provide an option for students to help them reach their personal goals without dropping out from high school.

The purpose of this study was to explore the extent to which alternative schools add value to the college readiness of their students, as well as to examine the capacity of alternative school students to successfully complete dual credit courses while enrolled at the alternative school. For this study, an alternative school is a campus that provides accelerated instructional opportunities to assist students who have already dropped out of school, or are at risk of dropping out, in earning their high school diploma (Texas Education Code, 2009). The following literature review explores college readiness and dual credit as they relate to alternative high schools.

## Alternative Education

Alternative education is not a new phenomenon in America and traditionally is considered as any educational deviation from the traditional K-12 system (Aron, 2006; Hegener & Hegener, 1988). Families unhappy with the curriculum of their public school sought alternative education methods for decades (Conley, 2002; Raywid, 1994). Conley (2002) illustrated that alternative education movements correlate with political contexts and that they change according to the societal demands of the time. Conley described the 1960's as the "period of innovation;" the 1970's as "the age of accountability and improvement;" the 1980's as "the excellence movement;" the 1990's as the time for restructuring; and the 21st century as "the era of competition, school choice and reprivatization" (p. 3). Throughout these decades, several national reports were published which arguably supported a push away from public schools. Aron (2006) noted that the 1983 *A Nation at Risk* report "sounded alarms about the quality of the nation's schools" (p. 1). In 1990, the *America's Choice: High Skills or Low Wages!* report indicated that America's inability to educate students for the 21<sup>st</sup> century and The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 reemphasized the need to improve American public schools.

The reality is that alternative education programs served vastly different groups of students over the last several decades, and there has not been a commonly accepted definition of alternative schools or programs in the literature (Lange & Sletten, 2002; Porowski, O'Connor & Luo, 2014). Under Hegener and Hegener's (1988) definition, voucher programs, charter schools, and magnet schools which provide options for students who are generally successful in public K-12 classrooms are considered alternative education programs because they are a deviation from the traditional system. However, more recent definitions of alternative education programs

identified a focus on serving at-risk students away from the traditional school setting to help ensure they do not drop out of high school (Lehr & Lange, 2003; Lehr, Tan & Ysseldyke, 2009).

State policies and legislation on alternative education grew significantly since NCLB. In a study on state statutes and policies, Lehr and Lange (2003) found several definitions for alternative schools. They concluded that most states consider schools and programs in nontraditional settings to be alternative schools that serve at-risk students in addition to students who have been suspended or expelled. In a subsequent study, Lehr et al. (2009) noted that while 22 states had alternative school legislation in 1998, 48 states had such legislation in 2009, a clear indication of “attention paid to alternative education at the state level” (p. 24). Additionally, Lehr et al. reported that 34 states had a formal definition for alternative education, stating that “most states with formal laws or policies defined alternative schools as being for at-risk students who are served in settings separate from the general education classroom” (p. 24). By 2014, Porowski et al. (2014) identified that 43 states and the District of Columbia had defined alternative education, though there still was not a common definition among the states.

While there is a clear variety in defining alternative education at the state level, the federal government has a more concise definition. The U.S. Department of Education (2002) defines alternative education schools as the following:

...a public elementary/secondary school that addresses the needs of students which typically cannot be met in a regular school and provides nontraditional education which is not categorized solely as regular education, special education, vocational education, gifted and talented or magnet school programs. (p. 55)

While the definition for alternative schools is not consistent, reports suggest that the number of alternative school campuses has grown significantly. The NCES Common Core of Data (CCD) report, which provides annual data on public school in the United States, reported that there were 2,606 public alternative schools in the 1994 school year. With the increased

focus on alternative school programming brought about by NCLB, the first national study on alternative schools was conducted by the NCES. This study identified that there were 10,900 alternative schools in the 2001 school year, accounting for an alternative school in 39% of the public schools across the nation (NCES, 2002). Results from this survey were based on a national representative sample of 1,534 school districts and the report defined alternative schools as schools or programs that were geared towards students at risk of education failure and where students spent at least 50% of their instructional time (NCES, 2002).

### Focus of Alternative School Literature

Existing alternative school literature concentrates on three overarching themes. These themes include 1) the impact alternative schools play in helping prevent at-risk students from dropping out of high school, 2) characteristics of effective alternative schools, and 3) the reasons why students choose to pursue their education at alternative campuses.

Tyler and Lofstrom (2009) stated that students who are not successful in traditional learning environments find that a complex set of relationships between student, family, school, and community is involved in students' decisions to drop out of school. Additional research suggests that dropouts are more likely to come from families with low socioeconomic status, those living apart from one or both parents, and those that have poor records of attendance and academic performance in school (Blount, 2012; Catterall & Stern, 1986). At-risk factors are also cited as dropout predictors and include poor school performance, low test scores, course failure, grade retention, absenteeism, and discipline problems (Catterall & Stern, 1986). Blount (2012) added pregnancy, drug abuse, illness or disability, low self-esteem, and a dysfunctional home life to the list of factors which influence students as they consider dropping out of school.

Since alternative schools focus on meeting the educational needs of at-risk students, dropout prevention components are considered to be a central component of their purpose. An alternative school that is going to focus on dropout prevention needs to establish a common purpose, target a specific group of students, and incorporate interventions to combat the underlying reasons students are not successful in their traditional schools. Tyler and Lofstrom (2009) suggested that alternative schools need to focus on “increasing school attendance, increasing student school engagement and learning, building student self-esteem, and helping students cope with the challenges and problems that contribute to the likelihood of dropping out” (p. 89). To reduce the dropout rate and meet the at-risk students’ needs within their community, alternative schools must establish interventions that include counseling and monitoring; flexibility with non-traditional school scheduling; instructional delivery options, like virtual learning; financial assistance for student and families; and community partnerships designed to alleviate environmental factors that can negatively affect school achievement and success (Johnston, Cooch, & Pollard, 2004; Lind, 2013).

Once alternative schools identify the target student population they want to serve and the appropriate intervention systems, there are best practice characteristics that need to be incorporated in the school core operational documents and school culture to best meet the needs of the students and staff within the organization. Howell, Laws, Bryant, and Williams (2005) said that the most effective alternative school program features characteristics which include accreditation (perceived reliability and trustworthiness from outside stakeholders), affordability (the costs required for participation are reasonable for the targeted student population), and quality of the curriculum (accepted learning standards recognized by school districts and postsecondary institutions). Additionally, small pupil-teacher ratio, the quality of teachers in

these environments, overall school size, and specific academic interventions are important characteristics that effective alternative schools embed in their practices (Gilson, 2006; Smith & Thompson, 2014; Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009).

Additionally, the theme of relationships was an important one revealed by several researchers (Johnston, Cooch, & Pollard, 2004; Lind, 2013; Morrissette, 2011; Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009). Hansen (1998) stated that “in order to promote learning, teachers must develop certain kinds of relationships with students, and they must construct certain kinds of environments in the classroom” (p. 392). Classroom learning environments must focus on clearly stated and enforced rules, while creating an environment where small learning outcomes are celebrated so students see that their teachers and the staff within the alternative school not only believe in their ability to achieve small goals, but also to persist through the program and ultimately graduate (Smith & Thomson, 2014).

There is no better way to know if what a school is doing is working than to ask the students it serves. Students who are at-risk of dropping out are often disengaged in traditional high school experiences, have limited flexibility in the pacing of the curricular content, and are assigned teachers who are not able to relate to them (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009). On the contrary, Morrissette (2011) conducted a phenomenological study that interviewed students and gathered their responses about their experiences within an alternative high school setting. This researcher found five themes that students identified as reasons for their positive experiences in an alternative school setting. First, programs that are non-intimidating and have a supportive atmosphere create a welcoming ambiance for students. Another theme was that students found comfort in programs that provided a sense of belonging or a place of their own. The third theme was that the programs focused on positive teacher-student mentoring relationships and left a



lasting impression with students. The fourth theme to emerge revealed programs that were flexible in structure, expectations, and instructional delivery and that were admired by students. The final theme was self-awareness. Students at the school felt the structure of the alternative campus allowed them to reflect and grow mentally and emotionally as they went through the program. By concentrating on these four areas, alternative schools make a difference in the lives of at-risk students whose needs are not being met by traditional campuses (Morrissette, 2011).

While none of the previous studies addressed college or postsecondary readiness in alternative schools, Bond (2015) engaged in a qualitative study which examined perceptions of postsecondary preparedness for alternative high school students. Bond found three themes, which included factors leading to postsecondary plans, progress made toward postsecondary plans, and perceptions of preparedness regarding postsecondary plans. In this study, the majority (10 of 12) of students had plans to pursue a degree or other vocation program; however, only one student had begun the application process and the majority had not explored the financial options for their postsecondary plans. Additionally, the majority of students in this study felt prepared for postsecondary success; however, few were able to provide examples of their preparation. Furthermore, this study indicated that many participants felt that the alternative program focused on completing graduation requirements rather than preparing students for their postsecondary goals.

### What is College Readiness?

Being college eligible and college ready are two different things. Generally speaking, students are eligible for college if they graduated from high school; however, that does not always mean that they are ready for college. Conley (2008) defined college readiness as “the

level of preparation a student needs in order to enroll and succeed – without remediation – in a credit-bearing general education course at a post-secondary institution that offers a baccalaureate degree or transfer to a baccalaureate program” (p. 24). Conley outlined the four key facets of college readiness as cognitive strategies, content knowledge, academic behaviors, and contextual skills and knowledge. The foundation of college readiness is cognitive strategies, such as analysis, interpretation, precision, problem solving, and reasoning. Being strong in these areas allows students to learn content from a variety of disciplines; however, the content knowledge required to be successful in each discipline varies. As a result, students must meet different readiness standards for English language arts, social science, mathematics, and science courses to be identified as college ready.

Nationally, the ACT, SAT and various state tests are utilized to assess cognitive areas of college readiness. As an example, if a student scores a 19 on the mathematics section of the ACT and has a composite score of a 23, or if the student receives a combined critical reading and mathematics score of 1070 on the SAT with a 500 on the mathematics section, then that student may enroll directly into a credit-bearing college course without having to take a remedial level class. If students do not meet the standard on the ACT or SAT, there are generally benchmark scores which correlate to their state test, scores which allow them to bypass the remedial course. Additionally, many states allow students to demonstrate mastery on an Accuplacer or assessment such as the Texas Success Initiative Assessment (TSI-A) test to directly enroll into credit bearing courses.

While cognitive skills are certainly important, Conley (2008) suggested that academic behaviors such as self-awareness, self-monitoring, and self-control are actually more important. Like traditional college students, dual credit students can have the academic capacity; however,

if they do not have good study skills and the ability to manage themselves effectively, they will struggle with college coursework.

### What is Dual Credit?

The Texas Higher Education Board (as cited by Young, Slate, Moore, & Barnes, 2014) defines dual credit as “a process that allows high school juniors and seniors to enroll in and receive high school and college credit for completed coursework” (p. 204). Many scholars and practitioners also use the term dual enrollment, which Jones (2014) defined as “any college-level course taken while a high school student” (p. 25). While these terms are closely related, dual enrollment typically occurs when students pursue college level work outside of the school day, which may or may not be considered for credit by their high school. For the purposes of this study, dual credit serves as the terminology of choice, except when the term dual enrollment is the terminology utilized by the cited scholar.

Many scholars argue that the senior year of high school is pointless. In fact, the 2001 National Commission of High School Senior Year (as cited by Andrews, 2004) identified that students’ academic preparation through grade 11 “will largely determine whether or not they attend college, and if so, which college” (p. 417). This commission and other similar studies questioned the value of the senior year of high school in the public education system. Dual credit programs provide a viable option for students to have a more meaningful senior year while potentially shortening the amount of time they spend in college before earning their degree.

Acquiring college credits while in high school and potentially shortening the amount of time spent in college are just two of the benefits identified for dual credit. Of course, the financial benefit of decreasing the costs of college for parents and students is a huge bonus, but

there are additional academic benefits, which include improving retention rates in high school and in college, increasing academic rigor in the classroom, reducing curricular redundancies between programs, and easing the transition from high school to college (Jones, 2014; Young et al., 2014).

While there are many benefits, dual credit programs certainly have their share of critics as well. Jones (2014) illustrated that “two of the main concerns expressed of dual enrollment programs by faculty at both the college and K-12 levels are the quality of instruction and the rigor of the courses” (p. 26). While high schools and institutions of higher education (IHEs) partner together in dual credit programs, many believe that the limited oversight of these programs results in a decrease in the instructional quality and rigor of the courses. Because of these concerns, just like all IHEs do not accept Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate scores, many private schools do not accept dual credit courses as transfer hours into their institution. To help address these concerns, many states establish policies or legislation to improve dual credit programs.

### State Policies Relating to Dual Credit Programs

IHEs and school districts worked together for years to offer college courses to high school students prior to the states getting involved with policy guidelines to mandate and/or monitor the practice; however, today, every state in our nation has policy, regulations, or direction regarding dual credit. Taylor, Borden, and Park (2015) examined state dual credit policies, which revealed interesting findings in the areas of the course offerings, student eligibility, instructor eligibility, and quality assurance of the programs within their respective state. The only states that were excluded from their study were Rhode Island and Utah, due to

those states' failure to respond to the inquiry, and Pennsylvania, whose program had been defunded.

Taylor et al.'s (2015) research revealed that 72% of states had policy regulating the types of dual credit courses that were available in their state. Some states limit their offerings to programs leading toward a degree or certificate, while others prohibit developmental courses from being a component of the state's dual credit program. These authors also found that several states have requirements on transferability of courses, such as requiring courses to be identified in a state transfer system or be part of articulation agreements. Furthermore, while most states make dual credit options voluntary for students, five states require colleges to offer dual credit and ten states place the requirement on high schools to offer dual credit programs. Whether voluntary or mandatory, it is clear that state policy illustrates the value states place on partnerships between institutions of higher learning and school districts.

While many argue that dual credit programs are great opportunities for all students, Taylor et al. (2015) found that nearly 80% of the states regulated participation in dual credit, through their policies. "This ranged from policies dictating high school students' class level (33 states), to exam requirements (25 states), to GPA requirements (16 states)" (pp. 13-14). Most states required that high schools and colleges utilize the same requirements for dual credit participation as are in place for college students. Additionally, 20 states had provisions in place which allowed for an exception or waiver for established criteria, with recommendation from the campus administration and approval of the IHE.

Another common policy component Taylor et al. (2015) found was instructor eligibility. Nearly 80% of the states had a policy dictating who can instruct dual credit courses. Just as was the case with student eligibility, most of these states required that the instructors of dual credit

courses meet the same requirements that are in place for instructors at the IHE granting credit for the course. While most states have professional development requirements for training and professional development of teachers, only one-third had policies pertaining to these areas for their dual credit teachers. Specifically, 14 states had training requirements that had to be met prior to teaching a dual credit course and only 17 required professional development to continue as a dual credit teacher.

Interestingly, Taylor et al. (2015) reported that “30 states have annual reporting requirements on dual credit, but only 16 states have policies requiring or encouraging monitoring student outcomes” (p. 15). We all know that which gets measured, gets done and until more states put stricter data tracking measurements in place for dual credit, dual credit programs will be another example in our schools of a program that has high rates of student participation but is information poor.

### Texas Policies Relating to Dual Credit Programs

In Texas, there are two main policies which dictate dual credit practices. Texas Education Code (TEC) 28.009 states that “each school district shall implement a program under which students may earn the equivalent of at least 12 semester credit hours of college credit in high school” (TEC, 28.009, para. 1). Additionally, this code dictates that International Baccalaureate, advanced placement, dual credit, and articulated postsecondary courses may be utilized in any combination to meet the requirements of the law. The second policy, Texas Administration Code (TAC) 4.85, had recent revisions which increased the availability of dual credit classes to Texas students. Prior to the 2015 legislative session, TAC 4.85 only allowed students enrolled in the eleventh and/or twelfth grade to take dual credit classes, and they were

only allowed to enroll in two dual credit courses per semester. However, House Bill 505, passed by the 84<sup>th</sup> Legislature of Texas, eliminated the grade requirement for dual credit courses and declared that there would be no limit to the grade level at which a student enrolled in dual credit courses, as long as the student met the readiness criteria for the course.

While there is certainly room for improvement in Texas and throughout the nation, the fact that states are implementing policies and legislation about dual credit course offerings, student eligibility, instructor eligibility, and quality assurance will continue to improve the existing dual credit programs and will ultimately help increase college readiness levels for the students who take dual credit courses.

### Impact of Dual Credit Programs on College Readiness

I examined a wide variety of literature illustrating how students who participated in dual credit programs while in high school performed once they got to college. The groups reflected in my investigation ranged from small sample sizes at community colleges to over 20,000 students at the City University of New York (CUNY). While most of the authors did not specifically identify the program of study of their student sample groups, I was able to find some program-specific studies in the areas of technical, medical, and agricultural post-secondary programs. The authors of the articles utilized various data points; however, I concentrated my attention on the area of first-year cumulative grade point averages (GPA) and first-year persistence, which identifies the likelihood that a student will return to continue coursework.

### Dual Credit and First Year Cumulative GPA

From the time students begin high school, they are compared to one another by their GPA

so it is no surprise that first year cumulative GPAs would be a tool to utilize when comparing the performance of college students who had previously participated in dual credit programs with those who did not. Studies consistently found that the performance levels of dual credit students, as measured by first year cumulative GPA, were higher than their peers who had not participated in dual credit programs (Allen & Dadgar, 2012; An, 2013; Gazert, 2014; Jones, 2014; Smith & Garton, 2008; Young, Slate, Moore & Barnes, 2014).

Ganzert (2014) investigated 15,527 students who graduated and enrolled in North Carolina community colleges in 2003. Roughly 21% of these students had completed one or more dual credit or Huskins Bill courses prior to entering the community college. Huskins Bill courses are North Carolina’s version of career and technology articulated credit courses, similar to dual credit courses in Texas, where credit may be earned in college for taking a high school course. Ganzert further broke this group of students down into technical and medical groups to assess achievement of different types of students. Regardless of the program area, dual credit students outperformed both Huskins Bill and non-dual credit/Huskins Bill students, as reflected in Table 1.

Table 1

*Ganzert Study - 1st Year GPA Comparison by Study Type*

Student Type	Enrollment	1st Year GPA		
	All Students	All Students	Technical	Medical
Dual Credit	7%	2.178	2.00	2.41
Huskins Bill	14%	1.934	1.91	2.29
Non-DC/HB	79%	1.623	1.62	1.92



Additionally, Ganzert investigated the impact that the number of dual credit or Huskins Bill courses students completed prior to entering the community college had on their first-year GPA, which revealed that students who took more dual credit courses had higher GPAs (Table 2).

Table 2

*Ganzert Study – 1<sup>st</sup> Year GPA by Dual Credit or Huskins Bill Courses Completed*

	0 Courses	1 or 2 Courses	3 to 5 Courses	6 + Courses
1st Year GPA	1.63	1.92	2.08	2.19

In another study, Jones (2014) analyzed GPAs after college students completed their first year at either a community college or a research institution of higher education, campuses located in close proximity to each other. The students in this study came from the same group of high schools, resulting in increased reliability for the study. After controlling to ensure the students in the dual enrollment and non-dual enrollment sample groups had the same characteristics (high school attended and high school GPA/class rank), the results Jones discovered are reflected below in Table 3.

Table 3

*Jones Study – 1<sup>st</sup> Year GPA at Neighboring Community College and Research Institution*

Student Type	Community College GPA	Research Institution GPA
Dual Enrollment	2.91	3.10
Non-Dual Enrollment	2.65	2.91

When examining the academic performance of both groups, the students who participated in dual enrollment outperformed the non-dual enrollment students at both institutions. The

community college revealed a variance of 0.26, while the research institution had a variance of 0.19.

In a Texas study, Young et al. (2014) investigated the differences in GPAs of students who had and had not completed a dual credit course prior to enrolling in a large Texas community college. The researchers examined four consecutive cohorts of students and consistently found that, regardless of gender or ethnicity, those who participated in dual credit programs had higher GPAs after two semesters of coursework than those who did not.

Allen and Dadgar (2012) examined 22,962 first-time freshmen who graduated from a New York City (NYC) public high school and enrolled in one of 17 CUNY campuses in 2009. This study is significant because the student group reflects nearly two-thirds of all college-attending students from NYC public schools. The researchers examined the effectiveness of the College Now program, which is the largest dual credit program in the nation. Allan and Dadgar acknowledged early in their investigation that the College Now participants came in with relatively higher academic achievement levels and, as a result, “failing to control fully for preexisting differences could result in overestimating the program effect” (p. 14). Prior to controlling for these such factors, the investigation revealed that the College Now program accounted for “almost one additional credit earned during the first semester, 0.16 points higher GPA in the first semester, and 5 percentage points greater likelihood of reenrolling in the third semester” (p. 15). Even after controlling for preexisting student characteristics and academic achievement, Allan and Dadgar discovered similar results for the effect of the College Now program on first semester hours completed and on first semester GPA; however, they were not able to identify a program effect in the area of retention.

Allan and Dadgar (2012) were not the only researchers to consider control components in their study. Smith and Garton (2008) entered control variables for high school core GPA and ACT score into their regression analysis for students who entered the University of Missouri's College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources in 1998. While Smith and Garton found that dual credit students achieved higher cumulative GPAs than their peers, when they looked at the other controlling factors, they found that high school core GPA and ACT scores accounted for 39% of the variance in the GPA, while dual credit participation only added one more point, resulting in 40% of the overall variance in GPA. While the 1% change was statistically significant, this study provided evidence that other factors, specifically high school core GPA and ACT scores, may play a more crucial role than prior college credit through participation in dual credit programs.

An (2013) had similar findings in his investigation of over 13,000 students who entered college in 2004. Initial investigation revealed that dual credit students earned a first-year GPA that was 0.23 points higher than non-dual credit students. However, when he examined the contribution components of dual credit, SAT score, high school GPA, and the level of mathematics completed while in high school, An found that dual credit participation had less than 4% of an impact on the results while other academic achievement areas, such as SAT scores and high school GPA, accounted for the majority of the performance levels.

### Dual Credit and Remediation

A significant component of Conley's (2008) definition of college readiness is being eligible for college courses without needing to take remedial classes. Kim (2014) investigated over 600 college students from Florida and Oregon who had participated in dual credit and tech

prep programs while in high school to determine if there were interaction effects between the programs, regarding college readiness. To assess college readiness, Kim looked at whether students participating in the programs had to take remedial reading, writing and mathematics courses. While there was little consistency in the population of the Florida and Oregon consortia groups, this study confirmed that students participating in both consortia groups were more likely to be college ready in mathematics. This study raised additional questions that were unanswered, as one would expect that students participating in dual credit would be more likely to be college ready, as college readiness is typically a requirement for dual credit participation.

#### Dual Credit and Persistence

Persistence is when students continue with a postsecondary program and enroll at the institution in additional courses for another semester or year. Although persistence is not incorporated into Conley's (2008) definition of college readiness, persistence is essential to degree completion. Smith and Garton (2008) concluded that students were more likely to return for their second year and that they were more likely to complete their degree program within five years when they entered with prior credit.

When Jones (2014) examined the persistence values for students at the community college and research institution in her study, she found that there were minor differences between groups at the two institutions. There was no significant difference found at either institution after the first semester. The only significant variance was revealed at the research institution, where dual enrollment students were nearly 9% more likely to continue with the program. Complete results can be found in Table 4.

Table 4

*Jones Study – 1<sup>st</sup> Year Persistence at Neighboring Community College and Research Institution*

Student Type	1 <sup>st</sup> Semester Persistence		1 <sup>st</sup> Year Persistence	
	Community College	Research Institution	Community College	Research Institution
Dual Enrollment	89.86%	96.27%	74.19%	95.48%
Non-Dual Enrollment	86.23%	93.17%	73.95%	86.67%

Jones (2014) was not the only researcher to find that persistence rates were not consistently in favor of the dual credit students. Earlier, it was identified in the Allen and Dadgar (2012) study that CUNY College Now participants had “5 percentage points greater likelihood of reenrolling in the third semester” (p. 15). Although this initially seems to favor dual credit programs, further investigation revealed that the increased likelihood for persistence was more directly related to preexisting student characteristics and academic achievement rather than dual credit participation.

When it comes to increasing GPA, decreasing the need for remediation and increasing the likelihood of persistence, the literature is rather mixed in its findings. While no examined studies found dual credit participation to cause negative results in these three areas, most reveal that dual credit students typically perform at a higher level than those who do not participate in dual credit programs. However, it is significant to note that several researchers concluded that the higher performance outcomes of dual credit students are likely more attributed to the fact that dual credit students are already higher achieving academically than those who do not participate. Thus, these factors which drive selection into dual enrollment also may drive the results (Allen & Dadgar, 2012; An, 2013; Smith & Garton, 2008).

The final facet Conley (2008) identified regarding college readiness is contextual skills and awareness, which Conley described as “privileged information necessary to apply successfully to college, gain necessary financial aid, and then, subsequent to matriculation, understand how college operates” (p. 26). Conley clearly identified that this set of knowledge is not distributed equitably in our public-school system. Educational leaders and post-secondary institutions must do a better job of getting this information out to all students so that everyone has an opportunity to pursue college, not only post-graduation from high school, but while they are in high school as dual credit students.

### Summary

The college readiness and dual credit studies referenced above were primarily conducted with populations of students from traditional high school campuses. However, students attending alternative schools not only have desire to continue to college after graduation, but they also have the potential to participate in dual credit courses while they are in high school. With the exception of Bond’s (2015) postsecondary preparedness study, the review of current literature simply does not address college readiness or dual credit success rates of alternative school students. The next chapter will discuss the methodology of this study, which will utilize the TSI-A to monitor growth of alternative school students, as well as their capacity to participate and be successful in dual credit course work while in high school.

## CHAPTER 3

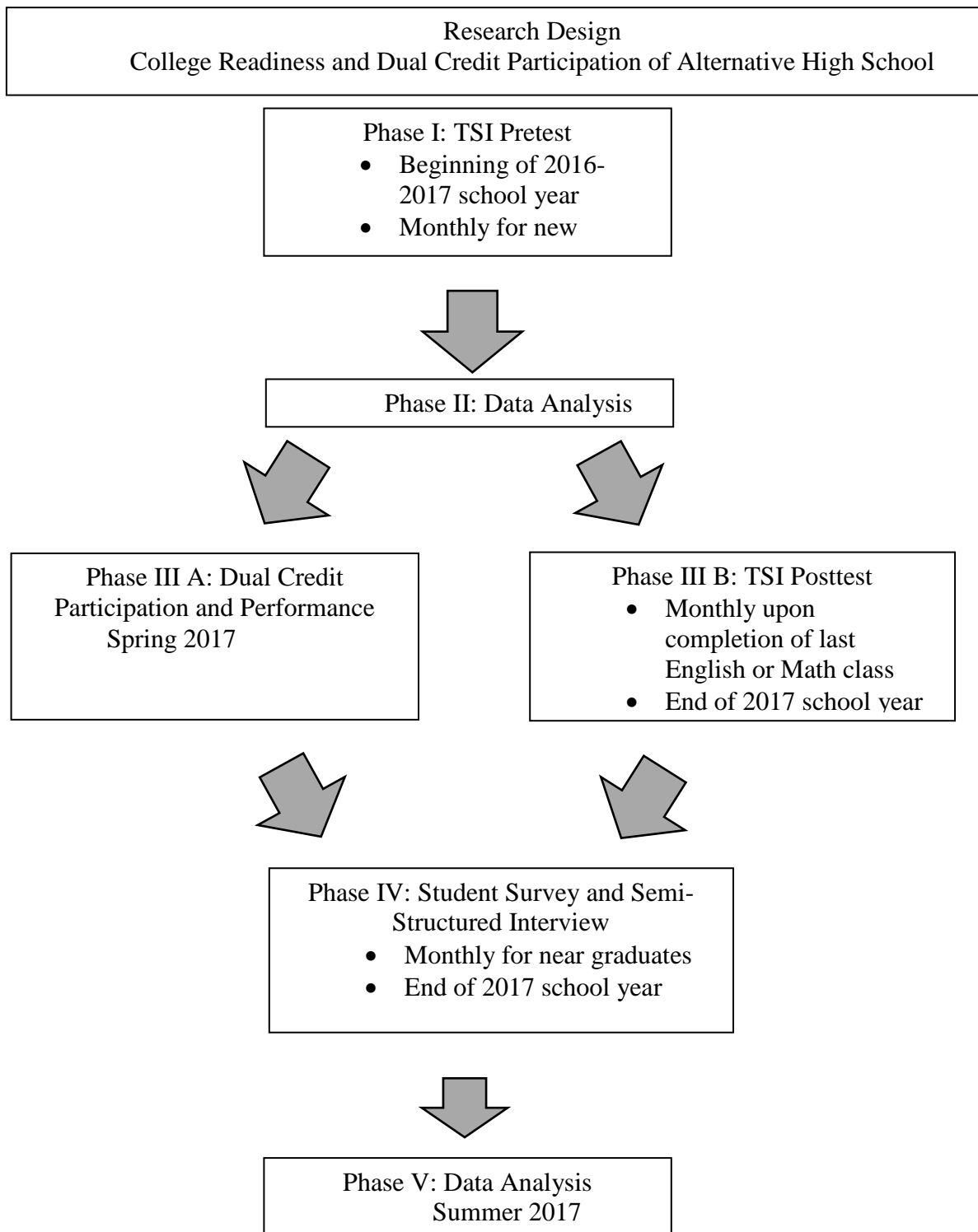
### METHODOLOGY

Chapter 3 presents the methodology and research design utilized to investigate college readiness levels and dual credit outcomes of alternative high school students. The research questions, population, sampling procedures, instrumentation, data collection procedures, data analysis, and limitations of the study are discussed within the chapter. The purpose of this study was to explore the extent to which alternative schools add value to the college readiness of their students, as well as the capacity of alternative school students to successfully complete dual credit courses while enrolled at the alternative school. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. To what extent are students who graduate from alternative high school campuses ready to take college level courses, as measured by the Texas Success Initiative Assessment?
2. To what extent are students who do not meet readiness standards achieving growth on the Texas Success Initiative Assessment during their time at the alternative campus?
3. To what extent will alternative high school students who meet eligibility requirements participate and be successful in offered dual credit courses?

#### Research Design

As illustrated in the literature review (chapter 2), there is a gap in research on college readiness of alternative school students. Thus, this study utilized an exploratory approach with a descriptive research design to determine the college readiness and dual credit participation levels of alternative high school students. Exploratory research is utilized when there is little to no prior literature in a field of study. This descriptive design allows for thorough analysis of the research questions in the study (Creswell, 2014). Figure 2 depicts the research design for this study and is further explained in the data analysis section of this chapter.



*Figure 2.* This figure provides a graphical representation of this exploratory descriptive study. The study utilized a pretest posttest design to measure student readiness and growth. Dual credit student participation and performance data were analyzed for additional evaluation of readiness.



## Population and Sample

The population for this study included all students enrolled in Texas alternative high school programs. A convenience sample was obtained from the alternative high school that is part of the north Texas school district where the study was conducted. This alternative high school campus is designed for students who are at-risk of dropping out of high school, as well as for those students who already dropped out and decided they wanted to return to continue their education. The campus serves as a campus of choice for students, which means the students attend on their own accord and are not placed or assigned to the campus by their home school for disciplinary or other reasons. While students assigned to the district's Disciplinary Alternative Education Program (DAEP) for disciplinary reasons are housed at the same facility, it is important to note that students assigned to the district's DAEP were not included in this study. This alternative high school campus of choice provides a flexible, self-paced environment for students. Classes are held five days a week from 8:00 am to 3:30 pm; however, students have the flexibility to attend for four hours in the morning or in the afternoon, as allowed by Texas Education Agency's Optional Flexible School Day Program (Texas Education Code, 2015, 29.0822). Upon completion of coursework and successfully passing all state exams, students graduate from the campus with a traditional high school diploma, which bears the same benefits as the diploma their peers receive at traditional campuses.

The 2016 Texas Education Agency's (TEA) Texas Academic Performance Report indicates that there were 62 students enrolled at the selected alternative campus of choice during the 2015-2016 school year. The alternative school campus population consisted of 46.8% seniors, 38.7% juniors, 11.3% sophomores, and 3.2% freshmen, while 6.5% of the students were African American, 16.1% Hispanic and 74.2% White. There was 22.6% of the students

identified as economically disadvantaged and 100% identified as at-risk. At the beginning of the 2016-2017 school year, 48 students were enrolled at the alternative high school of choice; however, as students graduated or withdrew, additional students enrolled throughout the year. Data were collected and analyzed monthly on students enrolled at the alternative campus during the 2016-2017 school year. Throughout the year, there were 130 students enrolled at the campus; however, since some students graduated or withdrew between the monthly visits of the study, only 96 students had data collected for use in this study.

### Instrumentation

The primary instrument for this study was the Texas Success Initiative Assessment (TSI-A). The TSI-A is one of several instruments utilized by colleges and universities in Texas to determine if a student is eligible to enroll in college-level credit-bearing course work. This instrument utilizes multiple-choice questions and an essay to assess students in reading, writing and mathematics and is aligned to the Texas College and Career Readiness Standards (College Board, 2014). Rule 4.54 of the Texas Administrative Code outlines exemptions, exceptions, and waiver options available to students. These options include the following:

- ACT – A composite score of 23 with at least a score of 19 on mathematics for a mathematics exemption and a score of 19 on English for an exemption in reading and writing.
- SAT – On the new SAT, students need at least a score of 530 on mathematics for an exemption in mathematics and at least a score of 489 on the evidence-based reading and writing for an exemption in reading and writing.
- Additionally, exemptions are available for veterans, transfer students, and students who have earned an associate or baccalaureate degree.

The TSI Assessment is Internet based and consists of three placement tests in reading, writing and mathematics. Each placement test contains 20 to 25 multiple-choice questions in a

variety of disciplines within each subject area. In addition to being Internet based, the tests are computer adaptive and students who do not demonstrate mastery in the discipline area are directed into an additional diagnostic test containing 12 questions on each discipline area, to further assess student readiness in that subject area. Table 5 below reflects the discipline areas and number of questions for each placement test.

Table 5

*Components of TSI Placement Tests*

Discipline Area	Questions on Placement Test	Questions on Developmental Education Diagnostic Test
TSI Mathematics Test		
Elementary Algebra and Functions	6	12
Intermediate Algebra and Functions	9	12
Geometry and Measurement	2	12
Data Analysis, Statistics and Probability	3	12
Total	20	48
TSI Reading Test		
Main Idea and Supporting Details	5	12
Author's Use of Language	7	12
Inferences in a Text or Texts	8	12
Literary Analysis	4	12
Total	24	48
TSI Writing Test		
Sentence Structure	5	12
Agreement	3	12
Sentence Logic	4	12
Essay Revision	8	12
Total	20	48

Source: College Board TSI Assessment Manual, 2014

Each of the three placement tests produces a numeric score ranging from 310 to 390. To demonstrate writing readiness, students must complete the multiple-choice writing placement test and the WritePlacer. The WritePlacer consists of a 300- to 500-word persuasive essay that “demonstrates clear focus, the logical development of ideas in well-organized paragraphs, and the use of appropriate language that advances the author’s purpose” (College Board, 2014, p.

24). Like the placement tests, the WritePlacer is evaluated by the computer and students are provided feedback in the areas of purpose and focus, organization and structure, development and support, sentence variety and style, mechanical conventions, and critical thinking.

Ultimately, the WritePlacer provides a numeric score from 0 to 8. A 0 score reflects an essay that is “either a blank page, incoherent/illegible, insufficient (too short to assess), is written in a foreign language, or is off topic” (p. 25). The remaining scores reflect essays with (1) no or very little mastery, (2) little mastery, (3) developing mastery, (4) adequate mastery, (5) reasonably consistent mastery, (6) consistent mastery, (7) clear and consistent mastery, or (8) on-demand essay writing (College Board, 2014).

The second instrument utilized in this study was student transcripts. Student transcripts outline the courses students take and the grades they earn in the respective course while in high school. The transcript illustrates whether the student took a dual credit class as well as the level of success in the course, as reflected by the course grade the student received from the university faculty member. While the TSI test helps demonstrate hypothetical readiness for college coursework, examining the participation and grades in the dual-credit course helps substantiate the student’s readiness for college level coursework.

A readiness survey (Appendix A) was administered to provide an opportunity for students to self-assess their level of college readiness as well as provide an additional means for gathering student postsecondary plans. Additionally, the survey provided an opportunity for students to self-reflect on their individual levels of engagement on the TSI assessments during the year. The survey utilized multiple-choice and Likert-scale questions to gather student perceptions. The last question on the readiness survey provided an opportunity for students to choose to participate in a follow-up semi-structured face-to-face interview (Appendix B) on

college readiness. The purpose of this interview was to collect information directly from alternative school students regarding their perceptions of their own readiness for attending college. Questions on the survey were developed by myself as the researcher, while the interview questions were modeled after the semi-structured interview questions utilized in the Bond (2015) postsecondary preparedness study. While additional questions were added to those in the Bond study, written permission was obtained from Kenzie A. Bond to use and reproduce the questions for this study.

Questions on the survey and interview were field-tested by a small group of education practitioners to ensure the questions effectively captured college readiness levels. The education practitioners who participated in the validation were alternative campus leaders and postsecondary leaders. Additionally, a small sample of at-risk students who do not attend the alternative campus reviewed the questions to help further validate the survey and interview questions. The survey and interview were optional for student participants and confidentiality was assured to encourage open and honest responses.

#### Data Collection Procedures

Students at the alternative school routinely are administered the TSI assessment in a controlled testing environment on campus throughout the year. Testing begins in September for all enrolled students, with additional monthly administrations throughout the year for new enrollees. The initial TSI assessment was given as the pretest for each student. Additionally, posttest data were gathered for students as they completed their last English or mathematics class, as well as at the end of the school year, to ensure that posttest data were captured for all students. Students who demonstrated college readiness in one or more area on the initial TSI

administration were not administered the posttest as it is likely that the additional assessment would be unethical. While the posttest would allow for measurement of student growth, administering a college readiness assessment to a student who has already demonstrated college readiness on the instrument would not be appropriate.

The collection of dual credit participation and performance data occurred at the end of the school year. Student transcripts were gathered for those participating in dual credit courses then dual credit grades were examined. While students graduate from the alternative high school at various times throughout the school year, transcripts only need to be analyzed for those enrolled at the end of the academic year because those are the only students who would have an opportunity to complete a dual credit class prior to graduating or completing the school year.

Since students may graduate/complete their course work at any point in the year, it was important to gather student survey (Appendix A) data as appropriate throughout the school year. Small group meetings and a few one-on-one meetings occurred at various points throughout the year to administer the survey. Student participation in this survey was completely optional and confidentiality was strictly adhered to for those who chose to participate.

Finally, one-on-one semi-structured interviews (Appendix B) were conducted at the end of the year with students who expressed an interest in participating in a follow-up interview regarding their perceptions of their own readiness levels for college. Interviews were recorded on an Olympus VN-721PC digital voice recorder and later transcribed by Rev.com into Word documents for further analysis. Like the readiness survey, participation in the interview was completely optional and confidentiality was strictly adhered to for those who chose to participate.

## Data Analysis

Pretest and posttest performance data were analyzed to measure student performance levels at the beginning and end of the program or school year. As referenced in the instrument section, each TSI placement test is scored on a numeric scale ranging from 310 to 390 and the WritePlacer on a 0 to 8 scale. The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) identifies cut scores for college readiness in reading, writing and mathematics. Since the TSI is a fairly new assessment, created in 2013, the readiness scores have a phase-in model, as reflected in Table 6.

Table 6

### *College Ready Phase-in Cut Scores*

Discipline	Phase 1 Freshmen entering higher education Fall 2013	Phase 2 Freshmen entering higher education Fall 2017	Phase 3 Freshmen entering higher education Fall 2019
Mathematics	350	356	369
Reading	351	355	359
Writing	Essay score of 5 or Essay score of 4 and multiple choice of 363		

Source: College Board TSI Assessment Manual, 2014

For purposes of this study, phase one scores were utilized to assess college readiness levels on the administered TSI tests throughout the year. Additionally, these test scores measured student growth for students who do not meet readiness standards on their first assessment.

Additionally, student transcripts were analyzed to assess student participation and performance in dual credit courses while at the alternative campus. Data were reported based on the percent of students meeting eligibility requirements who chose to enroll in a dual credit

course as well as percentage of enrolled students who were ultimately successful in their dual credit course.

Finally, an item analysis was conducted of the responses to student surveys and semi-structured interviews. A summary of responses was provided for each student survey question. The 14 semi-structured one-on-one interviews ranged from seven to 14 minutes in length per interview and totaled nearly two hours and 23 minutes of combined time. The 14 transcriptions totaled 80 pages of text. I created summaries from each student response to the semi-structured interview questions, then entered the summaries into Excel for review. Table 7 illustrates the general format of how the semi-structured interview Excel spreadsheet was utilized for analysis.

Table 7

*Semi-Structured Interview Spreadsheet General Format*

	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4	Summary
Question 1	(P1,Q1)	(P2,Q1)	(P3,Q1)	(P4,Q1)	Q1
	Response	Response	Response	Response	Summary
Question 2	(P1,Q2)	(P2,Q2)	(P3,Q2)	(P4,Q2)	Q2
	Response	Response	Response	Response	Summary
Question 3	(P1, Q3)	(P2, Q3)	(P3, Q3)	(P4, Q3)	Q3
	Response	Response	Response	Response	Summary
Question 4	(P1, Q4)	(P2, Q4)	(P3, Q4)	(P4, Q4)	Q4
	Response	Response	Response	Response	Summary

Table 7 shows how responses for each participant were placed in individual columns and responses for each question were placed in designated rows. Once all responses were entered into the spreadsheet, individual rows were analyzed to develop a summary for each interview question. Each question summary was then analyzed for themes within and between questions.

Limitations

There are multiple limitations to this research study, the first of which is the fact that it is



an exploratory study. Exploratory studies are utilized when there is a lack of controlled studies available in a field and, as a result, there is little to no way to confirm the results of the study. The second limitation is selection. Since this study was limited to a unique alternative campus and the fact that the campus is a campus of choice for students dramatically limits the sample size of students for the Texas alternative school population. Additionally, student reliability may be a limitation. While TSI data, transcripts and student surveys were utilized for triangulation, by the nature of the alternative school environment, it is possible that not all students took the tests and survey seriously, which can negatively impact the results. Another limitation is potential human error. While every effort was made to maintain fidelity of the research, there is a possibility that some student test or survey data were not complete due to failure to collect the data by campus personnel. The final limitation is researcher bias since I am an employee of the district. While I am employed in the district as a central office employee, I do not consistently work directly with the students participating in the study, nor do the students or staff have any performance-related connections to me as an employee.

### Summary

This chapter discussed the research methodology utilized for this study, which was exploratory descriptive by design. Also discussed were the population, sampling procedures, instrumentation, data collection procedures, data analysis, and limitations. Research and analysis of this topic may result in valuable information about college readiness outcomes for alternative high school students, a topic that is currently lacking in the existing literature.

## CHAPTER 4

### DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

As described in Chapter 1, the purpose of this research study was to explore the extent to which alternative schools contribute to the college readiness of their students, as well as to analyze the capacity of alternative school students to complete dual credit courses successfully while enrolled at the alternative school. This chapter reveals the findings of this study. The topics that will be discussed include a summary of the research design and an overview of the research findings. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. To what extent are students who graduate from alternative high school campuses ready to take college level courses, as measured by the Texas Success Initiative Assessment?
2. To what extent are students who do not meet readiness standards achieving growth on the Texas Success Initiative Assessment during their time at the alternative campus?
3. To what extent will alternative high school students who meet eligibility requirements participate and be successful in offered dual credit courses?

#### Research Design

This mixed methods study utilized an exploratory approach with a descriptive research design to explore the extent to which alternative schools produce college-ready students. All participants' academic readiness levels in mathematics, reading, and writing were assessed using the Texas Success Initiative Assessment. Additionally, participants had the opportunity to provide their own perspectives on their college readiness levels through a student survey and face-to-face semi-structured interview. Finally, transcripts were evaluated to determine if participants were successful in dual credit classes. Data from these four sources were utilized to quantitatively and qualitatively assess the research questions, based on the alternative high

school students who participated in the research study. Quantitative statistical analyses were conducted on SPSS statistical software, version 24.

## Findings

The participants in this study all attended an alternative high school in north Texas during the 2016-2017 school year. Throughout the year, 130 students were enrolled at the campus. Ninety-six students completed the pre- and/or post- TSI assessment. Some enrollees did not complete the TSI assessment because they graduated or withdrew prior to the study, while others were only enrolled on the campus for a brief period of time and they enrolled and withdrew between TSI administrations, thus they did not qualify for the study. Demographic data were not analyzed for the 36 students who were enrolled at the campus, but did not participate in the study. The only way to examine the demographic data for these 36 students would be to utilize the district's student information database; however, use of the information database was not requested for the study. Of the 96 students who completed a TSI assessment and thus qualified for the study, 49 students participated in the student survey and 14 participated in the face-to-face semi-structured interviews. Since the TSI assessment and student survey were administered during different sessions, 47 students completed the TSI assessment, but never completed the survey. These 47 students graduated or withdrew between TSI assessment and survey dates. If this study gets replicated in the future, I suggest conducting the student survey and TSI administration during the same setting to ensure the same sample size for each instrument.

### Findings from the TSI Instrument

Descriptive statistics were utilized to characterize the demographic components of the

student sample. Tables 8, 9, and 10 provide details of the findings for each group of participants. The demographics reflected in these tables were collected from background questions that are embedded within the TSI, which asks students to self-report a variety of information, including demographic information.

Table 8

*Gender*

Response	TSI Tested		Student Survey		Interview	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Female	49	51.0	26	53.1	8	57.1
Male	47	49.0	23	46.9	6	42.9

Examination of the gender demographic data reflected in Table 8 revealed that female participation was slightly higher on each of the three instruments used in the study. This aligns with the campus enrollment numbers which reflected slightly higher female enrollment throughout the school year.

Table 9

*Grade Level*

Response	TSI Tested		Student Survey		Interview	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
9 <sup>th</sup> Grade	1	1.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
10 <sup>th</sup> Grade	11	11.5	8	16.3	2	14.3
11 <sup>th</sup> Grade	37	38.5	27	55.1	10	71.4
12 <sup>th</sup> Grade	47	49.0	14	28.6	2	14.3

Examination of the grade level of participants for each data source showed that students in the 12<sup>th</sup> grade were the largest group that completed the TSI; however, students in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade comprised the largest group participating in the student survey and semi-structured interview. This discrepancy occurred because of participants graduating or withdrawing between TSI and survey administrations.

Table 10

*Self-Defined Ethnicity*

Response	TSI Tested		Student Survey		Interview	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
American Indian or Alaska Native	1	1.0	1	2.0	0	0.0
Asian, Asian American or Pacific Islander	3	3.1	2	4.1	1	7.1
Black or African-American	6	6.3	4	8.2	1	7.1
Mexican or Mexican American	5	5.2	2	4.4	1	7.1
White	58	60.4	27	55.1	6	42.9
Multicultural	10	10.4	8	16.3	3	21.4
Other Hispanic, Latino, or Latin American	11	11.5	5	10.2	2	14.3
Other	1	1.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
I choose not to answer	1	1.0	0	0.0	0	0.0

One of the background questions on the TSI provides an opportunity for test takers to identify their self-defined ethnicity. Responses to this question are identified in Table 10. Responses from this TSI question were further used to show the self-defined ethnicity of those who participated in the student survey and semi-structured interview.

In addition to inquiring about participant demographic information, the TSI background questions also provide information on the education levels of the parent/guardian(s) of the test taker. Table 11 provides a summary of participants' parent/guardian(s) education level.

The information provided within the TSI background questions was then coded to identify whether the parent/guardian attended an institution of higher education or not. Participants who responded that their parent/guardian's highest level of education was either grade school, some high school, or high school diploma or equivalent were coded as No IHE, while responses that identified that parents completed some college, an associate's/two-year

degree, a bachelor’s four-year degree, or a graduate or professional degree were coded as IHE.

Table 12 reflects a summary of the coded education levels of the parent/guardian.

Table 11

*Education Level of Parent/Guardian*

Response	Father		Mother	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Grade school	3	3.1	3	3.1
Some high school	10	10.4	9	9.4
High school diploma or equivalent	17	17.7	21	21.9
Business, trade or vocational/technical school	5	5.2	2	2.1
Some college	18	18.8	17	17.7
Associate's/two-year degree	2	2.1	3	3.1
Bachelor's/four-year degree	23	24.0	22	22.9
Graduate or professional degree	8	8.3	10	10.4
I choose not to answer	10	10.4	9	9.4

Table 12

*Coded Education Level of Parent/Guardian*

Response	English		Mathematics	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
No IHE	30	31.3	33	34.4
IHE	56	58.3	54	56.3
I choose not to answer	10	10.4	9	9.4

Another interesting TSI background question was the number of years test takers studied a particular subject area. Table 13 reveals the number of years participants in this study identified as having studied English and mathematics in high school. The participant data for years studied English and mathematics in high school was further coded to identify participants who indicated that they studied the subject areas four or more years versus those who studied those subjects less than four years. The coded data are reflected in Table 14.

Table 13

*Years Studied English and Mathematics in High School*

Response	English		Mathematics	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
1 year	1	1.0	2	2.1
2 years	16	16.7	14	14.6
3 years	44	45.8	56	58.3
4 years	30	31.3	21	21.9
More than 4 years	4	4.2	2	2.1
I choose not to answer	1	1.0	1	1.0

Table 14

*Coded Years Studied English and Mathematics in High School*

Response	English		Mathematics	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Less than 4 years	61	63.5	72	75.0
4 or more years	34	35.4	23	24.0
I choose not to answer	1	1.0	1	1.0

The demographic, parent education level, and course completion information taken from the TSI is certainly important; however, since this study focused on the college readiness levels of alternative high school students, it was essential to investigate the postsecondary aspirations of the participants. Each component of the study inquired about the postsecondary plans of the participants. Table 15 identifies participant postsecondary plans reflected on a TSI background question, which indicated that 71.2% of responding participants had plans to attend a four-year, two-year, or trade school institution of higher learning.

## Findings from the Student Survey and Semi-Structured Interview

Additionally, the student survey questioned participants on whether they were planning to take classes at a community college or a four-year college immediately after graduation, within two years of graduation, or sometime in the future. Their responses are in Table 16.

Table 15

*Participant TSI Postsecondary Plans*

Response	Frequency	Percent*
Enroll in a bachelor's/four-year degree institution	21	24.1
Enroll in an associate's/two-year degree institution	33	37.9
Enroll in a business, trade or vocational/technical school	8	9.2
Enter the military	7	8.0
Enter the workforce	18	20.6
Not Asked	9	-

\*Percent calculated from response on the TSI

Table 16

*Student Survey Postsecondary Plans*

Response	Immediately After Graduation		Within Two Years of Graduation		Sometime in the Future	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Yes	25	51	27	55	34	69
No	24	49	22	45	15	31

Nine participants were identified as Not Asked on Table 15 because they were administered a TSI exam that did not include this question. Seven of these participants also participated in the student survey; five indicated they planned to attend a community college or a four-year college immediately after graduation, and two said they had no plans to continue their education. These data were previously omitted because these participants sat for an exam that included a survey that did not have this question. As soon as this was identified, a solution was implemented to ensure that the remaining participants received the question.

The final instrument was the semi-structured face-to-face interview protocol. Table 17 provides a summary of demographic and postsecondary plans of the 14 interview participants.



Table 17

*Interview Summary Responses*

Participant	Gender	Age	Ethnic Group	Coded Semesters Until Graduation	Post Grad Plans	Major/Course of Study
1	Male	18	Asian Island Pacific	1	Community College	Information Technology
2	Male	17	Caucasian	1	Navy; College	Political Science
3	Female	17	Hispanic	1	Community college then 4-year university	Science; Law enforcement
4	Male	17	Caucasian	1	Work; take a few classes at Community College	Photography
5	Female	18	Hispanic	2	Full time job; start classes at Community College	Nursing
6	Male	17	Caucasian	2	IT Technician then College or mission trip	Computer Tech; Nursing
7	Female	17	Caucasian	2	Community College or University	Education; Early Childhood
8	Female	19	Caucasian	1	College	Architecture; Journalism; Marketing; Design; International Business
9	Male	17	Caucasian	2	Community College	Auto Mechanics
10	Female	18	Bi-Racial	1	Community College	Social Work
11	Female	16	Caucasian	1	Work a year then trade school	Cosmetology
12	Female	16	Caucasian	1	Community then 4-year University	Psychology
13	Female	17	African American	2	Community College Community College - any type of school	Unknown
14	Male	18	Mexican	1	beyond here	Unknown

Interestingly, when asked “What are your plans immediately after graduation?”, 100% of the interviewed participants identified that they planned to go to college in some capacity. While 100% of the 14 interviewed participants planned to go to college, 12 participants (86%) identified that they were “adequately prepared to enroll in and attend either a community college or four-year university,” but only one participant (7%) identified that they had completed an application and only four participants (29%) had explored financial options. Similar results were also found in the Bond (2015) perceptions of postsecondary preparedness study. When asked “Do you feel there is adequate focus on life after graduation at this campus?” nine participants (64%) in the current study provided an affirmative response. A general theme to the responses of this question was that the smaller campus provided a better opportunity to have individualized conversations with teachers and the counselor, but that there were not any specific programs focusing on college readiness. Participant 2 stated,

... You just have better conversations with teachers and I feel like they prepare you for life better than just a whole classroom, giving each student a generic talk, you can actually talk to you face-to-face.

Participant 14 stated, “You are the only guy that’s come, I think, to talk about it. Actually, I think maybe one time before you, so I don’t know if it’s adequate or not. It’s there.” Once again, this further supports Bond’s (2015) finding that alternative programs primarily focus on completing graduation requirements rather than preparing students for their postsecondary goals.

### Research Question 1: College Readiness

The first research question focused on the extent to which alternative high school students are ready to take college level courses, as measured by the Texas Success Initiative

Assessment. A summary of participants' college readiness levels in reading, writing and mathematics is shown in Table 18.

Table 18

*College Readiness as Measured by the Texas Success Initiative Assessment by Discipline*

Response	Reading		Writing		Mathematics	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
College Ready	39	40.6	49	51.0	16	16.7
Not College Ready	56	58.3	45	46.9	80	83.3
Did Not Test	1	1.0	2	2.1		

Of the 96 participants in the study, 95 tested in reading, 94 in writing and all 96 completed the mathematics test. Of the tested participants, 41.1% were college ready in reading, 52.1% in writing, and 16.7% in mathematics. Another way to look at this same college readiness data is to examine the number of discipline areas in which participants were successful in meeting the readiness standard. Table 19 reflects this information.

Table 19

*College Readiness as Measured by the Texas Success Initiative Assessment*

College Ready	Frequency	Percent
One Discipline	19	19.7
Two Disciplines	23	24.0
All Three Disciplines	13	13.5
No Discipline areas	41	42.7

Combining results for participants meeting readiness standards reveals that 55 (57.3%) participants were college ready in one or more discipline areas.

With an abundance of data available through the TSI questionnaire, student survey, and the face-to-face interviews, several questions quickly developed regarding the college readiness levels for various subsets of the participant group. The first such question that quickly came to

the forefront was the following: Does the college ready status vary by parent/guardian education level? These results can be found in Table 20.

Table 20

*Parent/Guardian IHE Cross College Ready Status*

Parent IHE Status		College Ready Reading		College Ready Writing		College Ready Mathematics	
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
No IHE	Count	7	15	14	18	2	5
	Expected Count	11.9	13.1	15.1	16.7	5	5.5
	% within Guardian IHE	24.1%	46.9%	48.3%	56.3%	6.7%	15.2%
	% within Combined College Ready Writing	17.9%	38.5%	28.6%	36.7%	12.5%	31.3%
	% of Total	7.4%	15.8%	14.9%	19.1%	2.1%	5.2%
IHE	Count	27	21	29	29	12	9
	Expected Count	23	22.2	29.2	28.1	9.3	9
	% within Guardian IHE	48.2%	38.9%	51.8%	53.7%	21.4%	16.7%
	% within Combined College Ready Writing	69.2%	53.8%	59.2%	59.2%	75.0%	56.3%
	% of Total	28.4%	22.1%	30.9%	30.9%	12.5%	9.4%
I choose not to Answer	Count	5	3	6	2	2	2
	Expected Count	4.1	3.7	4.7	4.2	1.7	1.5
	% within Guardian IHE	50.0%	33.3%	66.7%	25.0%	20.0%	22.2%
	% within Combined College Ready Writing	12.8%	7.7%	12.2%	4.1%	12.5%	12.5%
	% of Total	5.3%	3.2%	6.4%	2.1%	2.1%	2.1%
Total	Count	39	39	49	49	16	16
	Expected Count	39	39	49	49	16	16
	% within Guardian IHE	41.1%	41.1%	52.1%	52.1%	16.7%	16.7%
	% within Combined College Ready Writing	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	% of Total	41.1%	41.1%	52.1%	52.1%	16.7%	16.7%

Chi-squared tests of independence were used to evaluate the level of influence the education level of parent/guardians had on participant college readiness outcomes. The chi-

square test was not significant in any of the discipline areas for the male or female parent/guardian. The test for the male parent/guardian resulted in reading [ $X^2 (2, N = 95) = 4.946, p = .084$ ], writing [ $X^2 (2, N = 94) = 0.937, p = .626$ ], and mathematics [ $X^2 (2, N = 96) = 3.154, p = .207$ ]. The test for the female parent/guardian resulted in reading [ $X^2 (2, N = 95) = 0.774, p = .679$ ], writing [ $X^2 (2, N = 94) = 2.631, p = .268$ ], and mathematics [ $X^2 (2, N = 96) = 0.255, p = .207$ ]. Thus, the test provides no evidence that parent/guardian education levels influenced college readiness outcomes.

Furthermore, the influence of the depth of study in the respective content area on the outcome of college readiness levels in reading, writing, and mathematics was explored. Years studied English data were compared with the reading and writing readiness results, while the years studied mathematics was compared with the mathematics college readiness results, which can be found in Table 21. Chi-squared tests of independence were used to evaluate the level of influence years studied within the discipline area had on the respective college readiness outcomes.

The chi-square test was not significant in any of the discipline areas. The test for years studied English resulted in reading [ $X^2 (2, N = 96) = .0866, p = .649$ ] and writing [ $X^2 (2, N = 96) = 1.486, p = .476$ ] while the test for years studied mathematics resulted in mathematics [ $X^2 (2, N = 96) = 0.726, p = .696$ ]. Thus, the test provides no evidence that years studied within the discipline area influenced college readiness outcomes.

Another component I chose to investigate further was the college readiness levels of participants who identified on the student survey they were planning to attend an institution of higher learning immediately after graduation. These data are reflected in Table 22.

Table 21

*Years Studied Cross College Ready Status*

		College Ready Reading		College Ready Writing		College Ready Math	
		Not College Ready	College Ready	Not College Ready	College Ready	Not College Ready	College Ready
Less than 4 years	Count	35	26	28	33	61	11
	Expected Count	36.2	24.8	29.9	31.1	60	12
	% within Years	57.4%	42.6%	45.9%	54.1%	84.7%	15.3%
	% within College Ready	61.4%	66.7%	59.6%	67.3%	76.3%	68.8%
	% of Total	36.5%	27.1%	29.2%	34.4%	63.5%	11.5%
Years Studied 4 Years or more	Count	21	13	18	16	18	5
	Expected Count	20.2	13.8	16.6	17.4	19.2	3.8
	% within Years	61.8%	38.2%	52.9%	47.1%	78.3%	21.7%
	% within College Ready	36.8%	33.3%	38.3%	32.7%	22.5%	31.3%
	% of Total	21.9%	13.5%	18.8%	16.7%	18.8%	5.2%
Choose not to answer	Count	1	0	1	0	1	0
	Expected Count	0.6	0.4	0.5	0.5	0.8	0.2
	% within Years	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%
	% within College Ready	1.8%	0.0%	2.1%	0.0%	1.3%	0.0%
	% of Total	1.0%	0.0%	1.0%	0.0%	1.0%	0.0%
Total	Count	57	39	47	49	80	16
	Expected Count	57	39	47	49	80	16
	% within Years	59.4%	40.6%	49.0%	51.0%	83.3%	16.7%
	% within College Ready	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	% of Total	59.4%	40.6%	49.0%	51.0%	83.3%	16.7%

Chi-squared tests of independence were used to evaluate the level of influence the participants' immediate plans after high school had on college readiness outcomes. The chi-square test was not significant for college readiness in reading [ $X^2(1, N = 48) = 3.021, p = .082$ ] or for college readiness in mathematics [ $X^2(1, N = 49) = 0.091, p = .763$ ]. This test provides no evidence that immediate plans after high school influenced reading or mathematics college readiness outcomes. However, the chi-square test was significant for writing [ $X^2(1, N = 47) = 3.845, p = .05$ ], indicating that immediate plans after high school influenced writing college readiness outcomes.

Table 22

*Immediate College Cross College Ready Status*

		Reading		Writing		Mathematics		
		Not College Ready	College Ready	Not College Ready	College Ready	Not College Ready	College Ready	
Immediate College After High School	No	Count	16	8	13	11	20	4
		Expected Count	13	11	9.7	14.3	19.6	4.4
		% within Immediate College After High School	66.7%	33.3%	54.2%	45.8%	83.3%	16.7%
		% within College Ready	61.5%	36.4%	68.4%	39.3%	50.0%	44.4%
		% of Total	33.3%	16.7%	27.7%	23.4%	40.8%	8.2%
	Yes	Count	10	14	6	17	20	5
		Expected Count	13	11	9.3	13.7	20.4	4.6
		% within Immediate College After High School	41.7%	58.3%	26.1%	73.9%	80.0%	20.0%
		% within College Ready	38.5%	63.6%	31.6%	60.7%	50.0%	55.6%
		% of Total	20.8%	29.2%	12.8%	36.2%	40.8%	10.2%
Total		Count	26	22	19	28	40	9
		Expected Count	26	22	19	28	40	9
		% within Immediate College After High School	54.2%	45.8%	40.4%	59.6%	81.6%	18.4%
		% within College Ready	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	54.2%	45.8%	40.4%	59.6%	81.6%	18.4%

Additionally, I chose to compare data collected in the student survey regarding participants' perceptions of their own college readiness in each discipline area with their actual college readiness levels, as measured by the TSI. Participant perception information for each discipline area was gathered from the student survey. A summary of this analysis is shown in Table 23.

Table 23

*Perceived College Readiness Cross College Ready*

		Reading		Writing		Mathematics		
		Not College Ready	College Ready	Not College Ready	College Ready	Not College Ready	College Ready	
Perceived College Ready	No	Count	10	0	11	2	28	1
		Expected Count	5.4	4.6	5.3	7.7	23.7	5.3
		% within Perceived College Ready	100.0%	0.0%	84.6%	15.4%	96.6%	3.4%
		% within College Ready	38.5%	0.0%	57.9%	7.1%	70.0%	11.1%
		% of Total	20.8%	0.0%	23.4%	4.3%	57.1%	2.0%
	Yes	Count	16	22	8	26	12	8
		Expected Count	20.6	17.4	13.7	20.3	16.3	3.7
		% within Perceived College Ready	42.1%	57.9%	23.5%	76.5%	60.0%	40.0%
		% within College Ready	61.5%	100.0%	42.1%	92.9%	30.0%	88.9%
		% of Total	33.3%	45.8%	17.0%	55.3%	24.5%	16.3%
Total		Count	26	22	19	28	40	9
		Expected Count	26	22	19	28	40	9
		% within Perceived College Ready	54.2%	45.8%	40.4%	59.6%	81.6%	18.4%
		% within College Ready	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	54.2%	45.8%	40.4%	59.6%	81.6%	18.4%

Chi-squared tests of independence were also used to evaluate the level of influence participants' perceptions of their college readiness had on college readiness outcomes. The chi-square test was significant for all three discipline areas with reading [ $\chi^2(1, N = 48) = 10.688, p = .001$ ], writing [ $\chi^2(1, N = 47) = 14.571, p < .001$ ], and mathematics [ $\chi^2(1, N = 49) = 10.547, p = .001$ ]. This test provides evidence that participants' perceptions of their college readiness influenced college readiness outcomes in each discipline area.

Close examination of the data in Table 23 reveals that participants who identified they were not college ready in a discipline area were much more accurate predictors of their readiness



levels, as measured by the TSI, than those who indicated they were college ready. Figures 3, 4, and 5 provide a visual representation of the achievement expectancy gap for each discipline area. Figure 3 identifies that in reading, 10 participants perceived themselves as not college ready and all 10 of these participants measured not college ready in reading on the TSI. However, 38 participants perceived themselves as being college ready in reading, but only 22 of these 38 participants actually measured college ready on the TSI in reading.

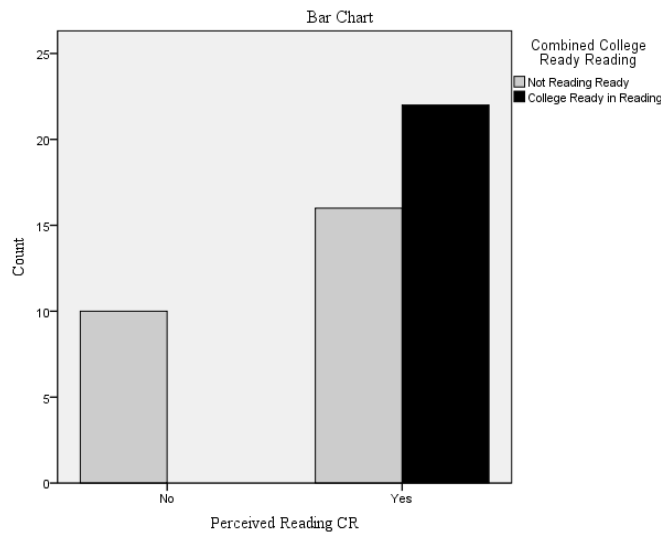


Figure 3. Perceived reading readiness data.

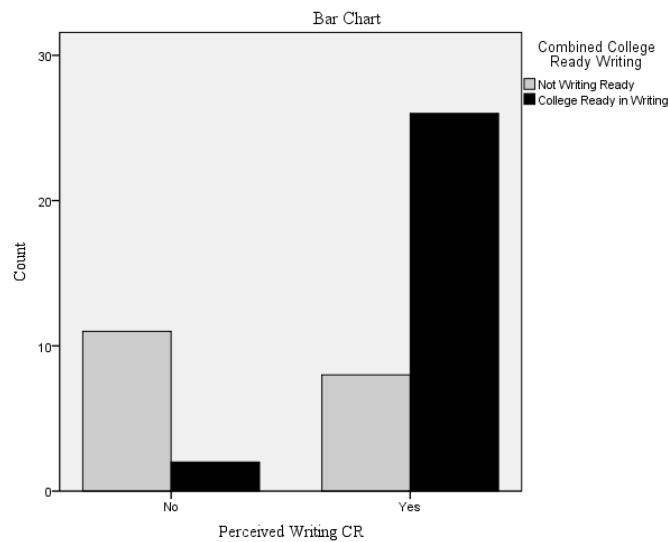


Figure 4. Perceived writing readiness data.

Similarly, Figure 4 illustrates that in writing, 13 participants perceived themselves as not college ready in writing and 11 of these 13 participants measured not college ready on the TSI. However, 36 participants perceived themselves as being college ready in writing, but only 26 of these 36 participants actually measured as college ready on the TSI in writing.

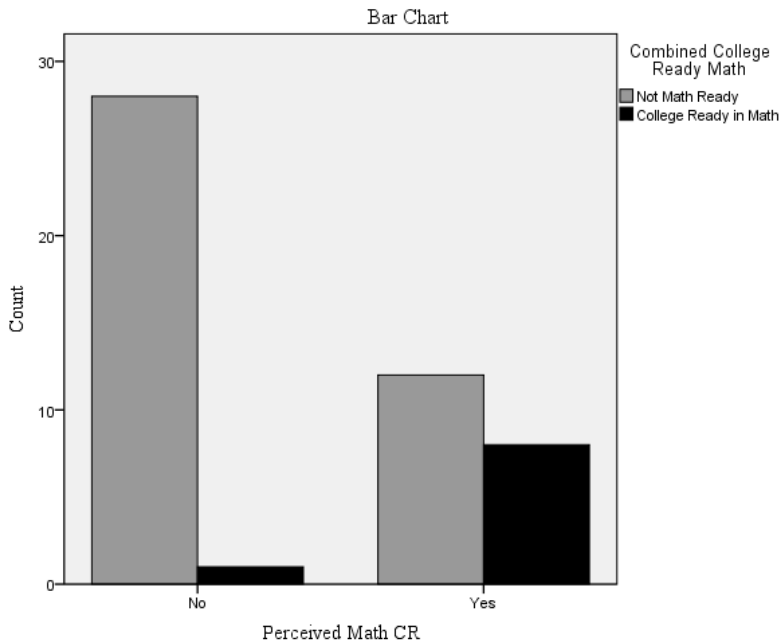


Figure 5. Perceived mathematics readiness data.

Furthermore, in mathematics, 29 participants perceived themselves as not college ready in mathematics and 28 of these 29 participants measured not college ready on the TSI. However, 20 participants perceived themselves as being college ready in mathematics, but only eight of these 20 participants actually measured as college ready on the TSI in mathematics.

During the interviews, participants were also asked if they felt they would be successful in college-level coursework in each of the discipline areas. The findings revealed that 93% felt they would be successful in college-level reading coursework and 71% felt they would be successful in writing coursework, while only 43% felt they would be successful in college-level mathematics coursework. Seven of the 13 participants (54%) who indicated during the interview

that they would be successful in a reading course actually tested as TSI ready in reading. Similarly, eight of 10 participants (80%) correctly identified they were college ready in writing, while three of the four participants who identified they would not be successful in a writing course on the interview actually tested TSI ready in writing. On the other hand, only two of the six students (33%) correctly identified during the interview they were college ready in a mathematics course and actually tested TSI ready in mathematics, while all seven participants who said they were not ready during the interview correctly identified that they were not TSI ready in mathematics.

Additionally, the interview participants were asked to provide additional feedback on why they felt prepared or unprepared for college level coursework in each discipline. The themes that emerged in their responses were the same regardless of the discipline area. The main theme for students who felt ready for coursework was interest in the discipline. Responses were similar to the response of Participant 4 on writing, who stated “It actually interests me. Like, the structure and everything that goes into it. And so, when I am actually interested in a subject I am a lot more focused in on it.” Participants struggled to identify why they felt they were not ready to be successful in college level work, but the one theme that emerged in their responses was that they lacked the basic skills in the area. Some participants cited specific areas that needed more work while others simply stated they needed remediation.

### Research Question 2: Student Growth

The second research question explored the amount of growth participants who do not meet readiness standards on their first TSI assessment had in the areas of mathematics, reading, and writing while at the alternative campus. As discussed in Chapter 3, those who demonstrate

college readiness in one or more area on the initial TSI administration were not reassessed, because they had already demonstrated readiness and reassessing them would have been unethical. Table 24 below reflects the number of participants who retested on each portion of the assessment and whether the participant experienced growth between the initial and the post TSI test. Growth or no growth labels were used, depending on the difference between the initial and post TSI scores. Since the writing college readiness component is determined by both the WritePlacer and a multiple-choice writing test, both components are included.

Table 24

*College Readiness Growth*

	Reading		Writing (Multiple Choice)		WritePlacer		Mathematics	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Retested	30		24		21		49	
Growth	16	53.3%	14	58.3%	11	52.4%	30	61.2%
No Growth	14	46.7%	10	41.7%	10	47.6%	19	38.8%

Because of the retests in the study, six additional participants were identified as college ready in reading, while nine were college ready in writing, and only two in mathematics. Additional statistical information is provided in Table 25, regarding specific measures for each growth indicator. The data presented in Table 25 illustrates components of the primary assumption for this study, which was related to participants performing to the best of their ability on the assessments. Based on the variance in students' pretest and posttest scores, it is evident that some participants did not give their best effort on their pretest or their posttest, as is likely evident by those participants who had a 20- or more point difference in their assessment. Though there really is no way to confirm this assumption, participants scoring 20 points less or 20 points more on their posttest may not have performed their best on the assessments.

Table 25

*Growth Statistics*

	Reading	Writing (Multiple Choice)	WritePlacer	Mathematics
Mean	0.6	-0.4167	0.8571	2.5714
Std. Error of Mean	3.03489	2.44054	0.50373	1.33121
Median	2	1.5	1	2
Mode	-2, 2, 3, 8	0	0	7
Std. Deviation	16.62279	11.95614	2.30837	9.31844
Variance	276.317	142.949	5.329	86.833
Skewness	0.496	-1.544	0.192	-0.586
Std. Error of Skewness	0.427	0.472	0.501	0.34
Kurtosis	0.557	4.256	0.883	1.919
Std. Error of Kurtosis	0.833	0.918	0.972	0.668
Range	70	61	10	51
Minimum	-28	-38	-4	-30
Maximum	42	23	6	21

During the interviews, participants were asked if they felt they became stronger in each discipline area during their time at the campus. Analysis of the responses revealed that 71% felt they were stronger at reading and 64% felt they were stronger at writing, but only 43% of the participants felt like they improved in mathematics. When participants elaborated on their growth responses, themes that emerged were relationships with staff, class size, and delivery methodology. Participant 7 stated,

When I was at my regular campus, I could never really understand where they were in our lessons. But since we have a smaller class, our teacher can actually come and show me and she can help me until I actually understand it. She's not just scribbling something down and hope I understand what she just wrote down. She stays there until I can answer it myself.

Similarly, Participant 12 responded,

It's honestly easier just to sit at the computer and learn it, because then you can go back and relearn it if you don't understand it fully other than being ... because I went to two different high schools. Both of them moved really fast. You couldn't focus, and if you

had a question your teacher was busy with other students and didn't really have the time, and it was just a lot harder to grasp the concept. It definitely helped a lot.

Overall, the themes which emerged from the interviews in this study were similar to those from Morrissette's (2011) phenomenological study. While interest in the discipline areas was not a theme in Morrissette's study, both studies revealed that relationships with staff, class size, atmosphere, and delivery methodology positively affected alternative student outcomes.

### Research Question 3: Dual Credit Participation

The final research question examined the extent to which alternative high school students who meet eligibility requirements participate and are successful in dual credit courses. After the initial TSI test, 33 participants were college ready in reading, 40 participants were college ready in writing, and 14 were college ready in mathematics. Four participants expressed initial interest in completing a dual credit course; however, none of the participants chose to initiate dual credit coursework while at the alternative campus.

During the study, one participant who was already enrolled in dual credit coursework transferred to the alternative campus. This participant continued the dual credit courses at the campus; however, the student had to transition from a face-to-face to an online delivery model. After reviewing the participant's transcript at the completion of the semester, it was found that this student was not successful in dual credit classes.

### Summary

Chapter 4 describes the results of the analysis used to answer the research questions that guided this study. College readiness levels of alternative high school students varied across academic areas. Of the tested participants, 41.1% were college ready in reading, 52.1% were in

writing, and 16.7% in mathematics. Chi-squared tests of independence for college readiness levels by parent education levels and participants' immediate college plans after graduation failed to yield consistent statistically significant findings. However, participants' perceived readiness levels yielded statistically significant findings with chi-squared tests of independence for each discipline area. The findings reveal that 53.3% of retested participants experienced growth in reading, 58.3% in multiple-choice writing, 52.4% on the WritePlacer writing assessment, and 61.2% experienced growth in mathematics. Additionally, the findings reveal that dual credit course participation was not a viable option for the participants in the study. The implications of these findings are discussed in Chapter 5.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study sought to explore the extent to which alternative schools add value to the college readiness of their students as well as the capacity of alternative school students to successfully complete dual credit courses while enrolled at the alternative school. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. To what extent are students who graduate from alternative high school campuses ready to take college level courses, as measured by the Texas Success Initiative Assessment?
2. To what extent are students who do not meet readiness standards achieving growth on the Texas Success Initiative Assessment during their time at the alternative campus?
3. To what extent will alternative high school students who meet eligibility requirements participate and be successful in offered dual credit courses?

This chapter provides discussion, implications, and recommendations for future research.

#### Discussion

As discussed in Chapter 1, alternative schools are designed to meet the individual educational needs of students who are at risk of dropping out of high school, or already have dropped out (Carver et al., 2010; Porowski et al., 2014). While there are many different types of alternative schools, this study concentrated on students who attend alternative schools as a program of choice. Participants chose to attend the alternative campus to finish high school instead of dropping out or attempting to finish at a traditional high school campus.

Chapter 2 revealed that current literature on college readiness primarily focused on populations of students attending traditional high school campuses. The primary focus of existing alternative high school literature is on how the alternative programs decrease dropout rates and ultimately increase graduation rates (Carver et al. 2010; Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009). College readiness or dual credit success rates of alternative school students simply are not



addressed in the current literature. However, results from the TSI embedded questionnaire, the student survey, and the one-on-one semi-structured interviews conducted in this study all revealed that alternative school students have a desire to continue on to college like their peers at traditional campuses. Since students at alternative schools have aspirations similar to their peers to continue their educational endeavors, research on college readiness of students attending alternative high schools is needed.

### College Readiness Discussion

While this study revealed that alternative high school students had a desire to continue with college after graduation, there were mixed results on whether participants from the alternative campus were ready to face the rigor of college level coursework. Results from this study show that 19.7% of participants demonstrated they were already college ready in one discipline area on the TSI, 25% in two discipline areas, and 13.5% percent in all three discipline areas. Combining these results reveals that 57.3% of the participants demonstrated the capacity to transition directly into college-ready course work in one or more discipline areas. The predominant postsecondary institution of choice in this study was community college, and findings from this study align with those from The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). The NCES (2014) report found that 70% of community college students take at least one non-credit-earning remedial course. Similarly, the findings reveal that 86.5% of the participants in this study would need to take at least one remedial course. While 86.5% is certainly greater than 70%, when one considers that many of the participants in this study had yet to graduate from high school and with an examination of the background of the alternative high school participants, these results are impressive.

A closer examination of discipline-specific data in the study found that 41.1% of participants were college ready in reading, 52.1% were college ready in writing, and 16.7% were college ready in mathematics. Comparing this to the district-wide data, data for this district in the Texas Education Agency (2016) Texas Academic Performance Report (TAPR) indicated that 61% of graduates were college ready in English and 55% were college ready in mathematics. It is important to note that these two data points are not direct comparisons. While the TSI is one component of the College Ready Graduates in the TAPR data, the TAPR also includes performance levels on SAT and ACT in their College Ready indicator calculations. That said, most suspect that College Ready performance levels between alternative high school students and those from the district as a whole would differ greatly. While there certainly was a significant difference in the mathematics readiness levels (55% district vs. 16.7% school), the gap was not as prevalent in English where district wide, 61% were college ready on the TAPR report. According to the TSI assessment, 41.1% were college ready in reading and 52.1% were college ready in writing. Comparison of the results from this study with traditional high school student data reflected in the TAPR report, or the community college student data reflected by the NCES, reveals that the alternative high school data in this study are comparable to participants' district-wide peers and comparable to data of the community college where many participating students hope to attend.

It is common in research to investigate the impact variables have on one another. For example, Ganzert (2014) and An (2013) investigated the impact dual credit courses had on first-year college grade point averages while Tyler and Lofstrom (2009) investigated how relationship variables between student, family, and community impact dropout rates. Since there is a gap in the research on alternative student college readiness, I was not able to find any studies to directly

compare with many of the findings in my study. However, an important component of this study was to examine the impact a variety of variables had on the college readiness levels of each discipline area and determine if that impact was statistically significant by means of chi-squared tests for independence. Closer examination of the college readiness levels by parent education level, participant immediate college plans after graduation, and participant perceived readiness levels resulted in mixed findings. Chi-squared tests of independence for college readiness levels by parent education levels and immediate college plans after graduation indicated no significant evidence of influence on college readiness outcomes. However, participant perceived readiness levels yielded statistically significant findings with chi-squared tests of independence for each discipline area.

#### Student Growth Discussion

This study found that 53.3% of retested participants experienced growth in reading, 58.3% in multiple-choice writing, 52.4% on the WritePlacer writing assessment, and 61.2% experienced growth in mathematics. Educators, administrators and the community as a whole expect growth from students who participate in the programs offered to students. Even the accountability system in Texas utilizes student growth as one of its four main areas of measurement for evaluating schools and districts. While the state sets standards of growth for state assessments, it was difficult to identify what level of growth was acceptable on the TSI assessment. I expected that by the end of the study all participants would not meet the readiness standard in each discipline area. However, I hoped that more participants would improve on their initial TSI assessment. While mathematics had the highest percent of participants showing growth at 61.2%, that still left 38.8%, or 19 of the 49 participants, who had scores that remained

the same or decreased from their initial assessment. Table 26 shows a frequency distribution for participants who did not experience growth in mathematics and Table 27 shows the distribution for participants who did experience growth in mathematics.

Table 26

*Frequency Distribution – Mathematics No Growth*

Variance	-30	-11	-10	-8	-6	-5	-4	-3	-1	0
Frequency	1	2	1	1	3	2	4	1	2	2
Percent	2	4.1	2	2	6.1	4.1	8.2	2	4.1	4.1

Table 27

*Frequency Distribution – Mathematics Growth*

Variance	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	10	11	13	15	17	19	21
Frequency	2	4	1	3	1	2	5	4	1	2	1	1	2	1
Percent	4.1	8.2	2	6.1	2	4.1	10.2	8.2	2	4.1	2	2	4.1	2

While 30 of 49 participants improved their score, only two ended up meeting the mathematics readiness standard on their second attempt. Table 27 identifies that seven participants had growth (variance) of 1, 2 or 3 points between assessments. In the strict sense of the term, these participants experienced growth; however, whether it was adequate or not remains a question. Without clearly quantifying what constitutes adequate growth, there is no way to know. Additionally, some participants took a mathematics course during the study, while others did not. Course completion was not a variable that was taken into consideration in this study; however, it is one that would likely influence the outcome of growth on the mathematics assessment. Clearly defining adequate growth and including course completion as a variable would help clarify growth in future studies.

## Dual Credit Discussion

This study revealed that many participants not only have desire to continue on to college after graduation, but some also met the criteria needed to participate in dual credit courses while in high school. However, when approached about participating in dual credit courses, not one participant decided to start a dual credit course while participating in the program. A few main reasons explain why dual credit options were not selected by participants and may not be viable in similar contexts. Prerequisites were a definite barrier for dual credit English courses. Most of the eligible participants had only English IV left to complete for graduation. In order to take the dual credit English IV course, they would have been required to complete English III as a dual course. None of the participants had taken dual credit English III, making them ineligible due to prerequisite requirements. Dual credit government and economics did not have a course prerequisite; however, participants still chose not to take these courses.

While prerequisites were a barrier for English, the primary concern expressed with dual credit government or economics courses was time. As discussed in Chapter 3, this alternative high school campus of choice provides a flexible, self-paced environment for students. Students have the flexibility to attend for as little as four hours and only take two classes at any given time while they are enrolled. I anticipated that time would be a concern, so arrangements were made with the IHE to allow participants to enroll in an eight-week course, as opposed to the traditional 16-week semester course. Even when presented with this shorter option, the participants still chose not to participate because even the eight-week course limited their opportunity to complete other courses at a faster pace. It is important to note that the financial component of tuition for a dual credit course could have been a barrier to enrollment; however, the district eliminated this potential by agreeing to cover the tuition expense for any participant in the study.

## Implications

The findings of this study suggest several implications for school districts and institutions of higher learning regarding effectively serving the educational needs of alternative high school students. This study revealed that many participants specifically, and possibly alternative students in general, not only have the desire to pursue college after graduation, but also have the capacity to demonstrate college readiness, resulting in the ability to enroll directly into credit-bearing courses. As a result, school districts should provide opportunities for students attending alternative high schools to demonstrate college readiness. Programs are clearly established in many school districts to implement and often pay for college readiness exam opportunities such as the TSI, SAT, and/or ACT assessments. These opportunities should be a point of focus at alternative high school campuses as well. In addition to administering the college readiness exams to alternative high school students, alternative high schools need to ensure they are putting systems in place to review the results of the exams with students and provide programs to alternative high school students to help them improve their scores.

Furthermore, districts should ensure that alternative high school campuses are being exposed to what Conley (2008) described as privileged information on accessing college. Specifically, this is the “information, formal and informal, stated and unstated, necessary for gaining admission to, and navigating within, the postsecondary system” (p. 17). Simply put, traditional high school campuses typically provide an abundance of information for students; these programs and discussions need to occur with alternative high school students as well. While this study found that alternative high school students do not choose to participate in dual credit courses like their peers at traditional campuses, institutions of higher learning should still

have an active presence at alternative campuses so students have ample opportunities to engage in conversations about preparing for their future.

### Recommendations for Future Research

The gap in current literature on college readiness of alternative high school students and the findings of this study lead to the need for further research on this topic. One recommendation is to replicate this study at multiple campuses within the region or even across multiple regions in Texas. Replicating the study with multiple campuses would help increase the knowledge base in the field and provide a means to compare findings across campuses and/or regions. If this study is replicated, I recommend the student survey be conducted at the beginning of the study or prior to the final TSI administration to help ensure that the sample sizes of the TSI and of the student surveys more closely align. This adjustment would help account for the withdrawals and graduations that occur throughout the year.

As student growth continues to be an area of focus in education, another recommendation for future research is to create a study to define what adequate growth looks like on the Texas Success Initiative. As more students begin taking the TSI assessment during high school, the need to monitor growth and progress, in addition to readiness achievement levels, will be essential for producing meaningful programs that are designed to improve student performance levels on the tests like the TSI.

Additionally, the findings of this study reveal that student perception has a significant influence on college readiness outcomes. While this study utilized a mixed methods approach, another recommendation is to conduct a qualitative study to critically analyze perceptions of

students at alternative high schools who perceive they are college ready and that actually are college ready versus those who perceive they are college ready and are not college ready.

### Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore the extent to which alternative schools add value to the college readiness of their students, as well as the capacity of alternative school students to complete dual credit courses successfully while enrolled at the alternative school. Ultimately, the primary goal of education is to create lifelong learners who graduate from the public-school system ready for the next phase of their life. Postsecondary readiness must be a focus of all schools, not just the traditional schools serving traditional students. Findings from this study provide a better understanding of the effectiveness of alternative school programs, the college readiness levels of alternative high school students, and the capacity of alternative high school students to successfully complete college coursework while in high school. The challenge is for researchers and educators to take action based on the findings of the study. Administration of the TSI, or a similar college readiness assessment, is the first step, but school leaders must also ensure that effective programs are implemented that achieve a positive impact on the learning environment for alternative high school students. I look forward to continuing that journey in the years to come.



APPENDIX A  
ALTERNATIVE STUDENT COLLEGE READINESS SURVEY

Participation in this survey on alternative student college readiness is entirely optional and your confidentiality is guaranteed. If you have any questions or concerns before, during, or after your completion of the survey, please contact Jeff Bradley at (email and phone number redacted). Your participation in this alternative school college readiness survey is greatly appreciated.

The purpose of this survey is to collect information directly from alternative school students regarding their perceptions of their own readiness for attending college. Students participating in this survey have already taken the Texas Success Initiative (TSI) assessment, which is designed to determine whether an individual has the academic content knowledge needed to enroll in an entry-level freshman college course for the academic areas of reading, writing and mathematics.

Please circle your responses for the Yes/No or Likert scale questions and answer all other questions as appropriate.

1. I am currently employed. Yes No

If you are employed, approximately how many hours do you work a week? \_\_\_\_\_ hours

2. I am a parent. Yes No

3. When do you expect to graduate from high school? Month \_\_\_\_\_ Year \_\_\_\_\_

4. I am planning on taking classes at a community college or 4-year college/university immediately after graduation. Yes No

5.	I am planning on taking classes at a community college or 4-year college/university within two years of graduation.	Yes	No
6.	I am planning on taking classes at a community college or 4-year college/university sometime in the future.	Yes	No
7.	Attending class on a regular basis is important to me.	Yes	No
8.	Arriving to class on time is important to me.	Yes	No
9.	I can focus on academic material or discussions for up to 45 minutes before needing a break.	Yes	No
10.	I can focus on academic material or discussions for up to 90 minutes before needing a break.	Yes	No
11.	I am self-disciplined enough to complete homework and/or assignments by their due date.	Yes	No

		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
12.	I did my best on the TSI assessment.	1	2	3	4
13.	I am ready for college.	1	2	3	4
14.	I am academically prepared for college mathematics.	1	2	3	4
15.	I am academically prepared for college writing.	1	2	3	4
16.	I am academically prepared for college reading.	1	2	3	4
17.	I will get a C or better in my first college mathematics class.	1	2	3	4
18.	I will get a C or better in my first college English class.	1	2	3	4
19.	I will get a C or better in my first college course that is reading intensive, like history or psychology.	1	2	3	4

20. I am confident in my ability to develop and apply strategies to solve problems.	1	2	3	4
21. I am confident in my ability to research evidence to defend arguments.	1	2	3	4
22. I continue working when I encounter a difficult or ambiguous task.	1	2	3	4
23. I manage my time effectively when working on academic projects and assignments.	1	2	3	4
24. I am comfortable communicating with teachers when I am struggling.	1	2	3	4
25. I can complete the college application process on my own.	1	2	3	4
26. Are you interested in participating in a face to face interview regarding readiness for college?		Yes		No

If yes, please provide your name on the card provided

APPENDIX B  
SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Participation in this interview on alternative student college readiness is entirely optional and your confidentiality is guaranteed. If you wish to stop the interview at any time you are welcome to do so. The purpose of this interview is to collect information directly from alternative school students regarding their perceptions of their own readiness for attending college. Your participation in this interview is greatly appreciated, however if you decide you do not want to be included in the research study, please let me know and you will be removed.

- 1) Please state your gender, age, and ethnic/group you identify with.
- 2) How many classes do you have to complete before graduation?
  - a) What is your expected high school completion date?
- 3) What are your plans immediately following graduation ( 0-6 months)
  - a) If stated work or find a job, probe as to field of work, and what education requirements the field has.
    - i) Have you applied for jobs in this field? If yes, where are you in the hiring process
    - b) If states go to college, probe as to what type of college (community/junior or 4-year university)
      - i) Have you selected the school?
      - ii) Have you completed the application process? If yes, have you received an admission decision?
      - iii) Have you decided on a major/course of study?
      - iv) Have you explored financial options?
- 4) Describe the factors that led you to this course of action? (work or school)
- 5) Do you feel that there is adequate focus on life after graduation at this campus (alternative high school)?

- a) If yes, please describe some examples
  - b) If no, what is lacking that could be beneficial.
- 6) Do you feel that you became stronger in your mathematics skills during your time at this campus (alternative high school)?
- a) If yes, please describe some examples
  - b) If no, what is lacking that could be beneficial.
- 7) Do you feel that you are ready to be successful in college level coursework in mathematics?
- a) If yes, why do you think so?
  - b) If no, in what areas do you think you need to improve?
- 8) Do you feel that you became stronger in your reading skills during your time at this campus (alternative high school)?
- a) If yes, please describe some examples
  - b) If no, what is lacking that could be beneficial.
- 9) Do you feel that you are ready to be successful in college level coursework in reading?
- a) If yes, why do you think so?
  - b) If no, in what areas do you think you need to improve?
- 10) Do you feel that you became stronger in your writing skills during your time at this campus (alternative high school)?
- a) If yes, please describe some examples
  - b) If no, what is lacking that could be beneficial.
- 11) Do you feel that you are ready to be successful in college level coursework in writing?
- a) If yes, why do you think so?
  - b) If no, in what areas do you think you need to improve?

- 12) Do you feel that you became stronger in social skills during your time this campus (alternative high school)?
- a) If yes, please describe some examples
  - b) If no, what is lacking that could be beneficial.
- 13) Did you take any dual credit or AP classes while in high school?
- a) If yes, were you successful and how do you know
  - b) If not, why did you choose not to take any?
- 14) Do you feel that you are adequately prepared to enroll in and attend either a community college or 4 year university?
- a) If yes, describe the factors and events that have prepared you. This may include parents, friends, school, or independent research.
  - b) If no, describe what you believe should have been done differently in order to better prepare you for postsecondary education.
- 15) Do you feel that your peers who are graduating from the traditional high school setting are more prepared for college?
- a) If yes, describe what factors are present that make them more prepared.

Thank you so much for your time today. I greatly appreciate it.



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