

Relationships between Risk Factors, Perceptions of School Membership and Academic and Behavioral Engagement of Students Who Attend an Alternative School for Behavioral and Emotional Challenges

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The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationships between the perceptions of school membership, risk factors, and behavioral and academic engagement among a sample of alternative school students. The study subjects were 48 7th-9th graders who were at high risk for school failure because of their serious and chronic behavioral and academic problems. All subjects had an Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

A 25 item school membership questionnaire adapted from existing school membership surveys was used to assess students' perceived school membership. The study participants reported a moderately positive school membership score. The findings indicated that commonly known risk factors, such as being a male, minority, low SES, no participation in extracurricular activities, and a history of involvement with the juvenile justice system did not negatively affect study participants' perceptions of school membership. The relationships between students' school outcomes and the risk variables were also analyzed. The findings indicated that the above mentioned risk variables did not result in significantly negative effects on school outcomes (GPA, number of missed school days, hours spent for in-school suspension, and days spent for out-of school suspension). Instead, academic and behavioral school outcome variables were found to be closely related with each other, and also with some demographic factors, including race/ethnicity and grade levels. Implications for planning academic and behavioral interventions for students with emotional and behavioral challenges are discussed.

Keywords: (at-risk, alternative school, school membership, emotional and behavioral challenges, academic engagement, Individualized Education Plan)