



Policy And Emerging Research Of Evidence-Based Academic Interventions In Alternative High Schools

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For nearly a decade, educational policy advocates, researchers, practitioners, state and local leaders, and organizations engage at the annual Reaching At-Promise Students Association (RAPSA) Forum to discuss relevant accountability systems for schools serving students at-promise. In 2015, The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) presented an opportunity for RAPSA Forum participants to advance ongoing efforts to design and improve accountability measurement systems for alternative schools. However, alternative schools vary in purpose, size, students served, curriculum, instruction, type and length of programs, and supports available. The flexibility allowed in state's ESSA plans empowered states to identify meaningful indicators to evaluate high-quality alternative schools. Schools that do not meet indicators on state accountability plans are required to implement interventions that meet the ESSA evidence-based intervention definition of "demonstrates a statistically significant effect on improving student outcomes or other relevant outcomes" based on "well-designed and well-implemented" studies. Schools identified for school improvement (e.g., Targeted Support and Improvement [TSI], Additional Targeted Support and Improvement [ATSI], and Comprehensive Support and Improvement [CSI]) must include evidence-based interventions demonstrating the highest three levels of evidence defined in ESSA, necessitating identification of evidence-based interventions that qualify.

Along with additional focus of the RAPSA Forum on teaching and learning within the past years, researchers sought to identify academic interventions implemented in alternative high schools. To date, no systematic review that addresses the effectiveness of academic interventions with students who attend alternative high schools is available. Therefore, researchers conducted a systematic review of the available research of academic interventions implemented in alternative high schools.

A comprehensive search of academic interventions implemented in alternative high schools from 1970 to 2020 identified studies that relate to computer skills, biology, mathematics, fluency and comprehension. Academic interventions ranged from 10 to 75 min delivered up to 10 weeks by special education teachers, general education teachers, and university partners. Findings were limited to the inconsistent reporting of intervention characteristics. Measures of achievement, content knowledge, accuracy of proficiency and understanding, and computation resulted in favorable academic outcomes. However, the studies did not meet high-quality indicators for experimental research studies. Low methodological quality was due to the type of research design and infrequent reporting of fidelity of implementation which limits our understanding if the intervention was delivered with quality as it was intended. Additionally, few authors administered standardized measures which minimizes our generalizability of broader academic achievement impact.

Furthermore, when considering the ESSA definitions of evidence, the available reviewed research is determined to qualify as Level 3 Promising Evidence based on the low-quality study design, study sample size, and number of settings. The findings of the few available studies of low methodological quality have important implications for educational leaders of alternative high schools as leaders are accountable for improving outcomes of all students.

As researchers, practitioners, and policymakers seek to identify evidence-based interventions to target the unique needs of students served in alternative high schools, considerably more research is needed. Future research must align to ESSA's evidence-based definition of well-designed and well-implemented studies to address the absence of currently available research. Interventions must be implemented school-wide in alternative high schools to achieve the number of participants and multisite requirement to meet ESSA's evidence-based definition for Level 1 Strong Evidence and Level 2 Moderate Evidence. Intense time, effort, and research expertise is required to generate rigorous evidence in alternative high schools. Thus, a collaborative approach of partnerships between alternative high schools and researchers may be ideal to investigate interventions of high methodological quality that meets ESSA's definition.