

Alternative Education

By Mari Jo Mulligan

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When you hear the phrase “Alternative Education,” what comes to mind? For most people, it is not a positive connection and includes statements such as, “Where the bad kids go.” As I move toward the completion of my third year as administrator at the Round Table Program, I can tell you that these students are anything but “the bad kids”. They are students who don’t fit into the typical school environment for a variety of reasons that can be addressed in an alternative setting.



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What makes the Round Table Program “alternative” is a shortened day, a smaller environment and three 90 minute classes at a time. These three factors enable students who have not been successful in a traditional school environment to find success. I’ve witnessed some amazing changes in students who come with histories including attendance problems, lack of motivation and discipline issues. By simply changing their school environment these “problems” disappear with many students. What leads to the change may be different for each student, and many times can’t really be identified. What can be identified is the success the student

feels, sometimes for the first time in years. This, in turn, leads to more success as the student’s positive sense of self worth increases.

The key factor in this transformation is that students begin to make different choices that lead to their success. It is important to understand that if students continue the behavior that led them to an alternative setting they will get the same results. A student who comes to school daily, on time and works while he/she is there will experience success.

The Wisconsin Department of Education refers to a quote which sums up the challenge faced by schools and communities. H.G. Wells stated that our challenge is not to educate the children we used to have or want to have, but to educate the children who come to the schoolhouse door. Because the large and/or traditional school environment does not meet the needs of all students, alternatives must be developed.

This sums up the challenge that education systems are faced with today as students “come to the schoolhouse door” with a plethora of challenges. Offering an alternative for these students is imperative to the success of not only the students, but our school system as well if we are really in the business of meeting the needs of all students.