

## Examining the Provision of Social Services Through a Cost-Benefit Analysis

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Utilizing the seven questions structuring the cost-benefit analysis framework (Keilty, 2001), RCSD administrators identified 16 non-monetized benefits and cost of out-of-school versus in-school alternative placements (See Table 2). Administrators indicated 13 out of 16 benefits for in-school programming as compared to 9 out of 16 out-of-school placements. Benefits of both in and out-of-school placements were decreased behavior problems, suspensions, and expulsions. Other shared benefits included individualized teaching instruction, more cohesive classroom environments, and increased program structure and control. In addition, in-school placements were more favorable due to the increased parent involvement, communication, and crisis response. More specifically, RCSD administrators recognized that in-school alternative placements lend themselves to academic control resulting in improved attendance, graduation rates, and state standard examination scores. Costly indicators of in-school placements included a lack of building space, group think due to centralized location of at-risk students, and less intensive mental health services.

Table 2: Qualitative Analyses: Out-of-School Versus In-School Placement

Benefit/Costs	Out-of-School Placements	In-School Placements
Academic control	-	+
Parent involvement	-	+
Graduation rates increased	-	+
Space in-school building	+	-
Passing of state standard exams	-	+
Suspension decreased	+	+
Individualized instruction	+	+
Group think	-	-
Mental health service	+	-
Communication	-	+
Crisis response	-	+
Cohesive classroom environment	+	+
Attendance increased	+	+
Expulsion decrease	+	+
Decrease in behavior problems	+	+
Control Program structure	+	+

\*symbols used (+ benefit; - cost)

As a result of the CBA analyses, RCSD administrators considered the cost and non-monetized findings and created an in-school alternative program called Trailblazer (See Table 3). This program serves 90 high school students that are at-risk of dropping out due to multiple non-academic barriers to learning (i.e. expulsions, behavior problems, teenage pregnancy, etc.). The Trailblazer program provides students a distinctive learning environment due to its individualized academic planning, instruction, and apprentice training. Along with academic instruction, a full-time school social worker is staffed to provide mental health services and community resources for students and parents.

RCSD administrators determined that the initial implementation investment of \$528,845 for Trailblazer would have long-term advantages for students. The annual cost per pupil for RCSD's in-school alternative program is \$5,320 in comparison to the \$6,169 cost per pupil for out-of-district alternative education placements. RCSD's consideration of the CBA for the in-school alternative education placement has proven to be beneficial. There has been an increase in inquiries and in student enrollment within the Trailblazer Program. Also, from the inception of the program, the RCSD graduation rate has increased (90.3%) and its attendance rating (95.6%) has exceeded State of Ohio Report Card Standards (Ohio Department of Education, 2003).

In summary, examination and implementation of the CBA has allowed RCSD to consider creating additional alternative programs throughout the district. It is evident that the investment in in-school alternative education programs may indeed be an effective strategy to address the multiple academic, emotional, and social needs of students. It also appears to be a cost-effective one. Future CBA analyses should be considered within educational and social service systems to facilitate decision making processes related to in-school versus out-of-district placements.

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